

An Analysis on J.R.R. Tolkien's Use of Religious Elements in The Lord of the Rings: Its Central Themes & How the Readers Have Been Influenced

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Abstract

This paper was written as an analysis on the use of religion in literature as there is limited academic literature on the topic. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is a complex work of fiction that incorporates mostly Christian concepts and beliefs yet is acknowledged to also use foreign religious elements out of necessity. As a result, it is capable of offering a rich tapestry of characters, themes, and world-building with its expansive discussions on good versus evil, sacrifice, and the corrupting influence of power that resonates with readers. *The Lord of the Rings* has proved to influence many of its readers in paving their own careers as novel writers as well, which led to commercial success. It is important to discern its limitations as a source of spiritual guidance. While it offers valuable insights, it should not be seen as a substitute for genuine religious practice or personal reflection.

Keywords: J.R.R Tolkien, Literary Symbolisms, Religion, Religion in Literature the Lord of the Rings

Introduction

Charles Samuel Braden (1952) argues that truly great literature offers a profound understanding of human nature. It reflects our deepest desires and celebrates our greatest accomplishments, while also acknowledging our failures and resilience that allows us to overcome them. Braden asserts that these portrayals of humanity, both positive and negative, serve not only to depict specific communities but also to inspire individuals to engage in deep introspection and self-reflection.

Markus Davidsen (2013) suggests that religion is often incorporated into literary works for two primary reasons. Firstly, authors may aim to convey specific religious beliefs or ideas, as exemplified in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1983). This novel explores the clashes between Christianity and paganism with the occasional hint of mutual understanding between the opposing sides, suggesting the possibility for understandings to occur despite tensions rather than a simplistic black-and-white portrayal.

Davidson (2013) also points out authors who may simply aim to create an engaging and intriguing narrative, as in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), which explores the controversial theory of a bloodline descended from Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. While the book achieved immense commercial success, it faced criticism for its inaccurate portrayal of Christianity and historical events (Goodstein, 2004).

The use of religion in literature serves multiple purposes. It reflects the prevailing norms of the time, while examining them to foster deeper understanding (Knight, 2018). It can also encourage readers to contemplate the potential consequences of their own actions. Religion in literary works has been used to explore various themes, including identity, religious beliefs, character development, and the rise of awe and wonder, given that human understanding is shaped by cognitive and experiential factors (Baharudin et al., 2025). Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) offers a modern perspective on the struggle to uphold moral and religious principles in a society filled with immoral characters. Jude is ultimately thwarted in his pursuit of academic success and social mobility by two manipulative and morally ambiguous women (Knowles, 2006, p. 226).

Religion, even in the face of rising secularism, remains a central theme in literature, reflecting readers' enduring desire for a higher power (Knight, 2018; Singh, 2008). Authors often incorporate divine beings into their fictional works, either by humanising them or projecting them onto human characters (Fiction: The Western Novel and Religion, n.d.). Herodotus attributed Homer and Hesiod with establishing the theology of the ancient Greek gods, who were often portrayed as fallible despite their supernatural abilities (Rabbi, 2020). This reflects the broader finding that values, beliefs and learning experiences continue to influence human perceptions and meaning formation in contemporary contexts (Moorthy et al., 2023).

Religious Literature vs Religious Fiction vs Literatures that Employ Religious Elements

Religious literature (e.g.; the Gospels, Koran, the Vedas) often present narratives on specific characters or messages to convey the core teachings of a particular belief system (Naudé & Miller-Naudé, 2018). While scholars debate their historical accuracy, these narratives are often treated as factual accounts, intended to inspire reverence and fear of the divine, ultimately guiding believers towards a moral life.

Religious fiction can be categorised into two main types. The first is based on history-based religions (e.g.; Christianity, Islam, Buddhism), often aiming to provide a clearer understanding of religious principles (Davidson, 2013). Dan Brown's aforementioned literary work is one such example. The second is based on fictional religions created by authors, without any historical foundation. These fictional religions may incorporate elements of history-based religions, as in the Bene Gesserit movement in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965).

Literatures that employ religious elements without explicitly referencing specific belief systems often emerge in response to the growing demand for literary secularism. To appeal to readers, authors often veil religious elements as superhuman or supernatural feats in a more enchanting and engaging manner (Singh, 2008). Readers' interpretations of these elements are often shaped by linguistic background, social exposure, and contextual understanding, which influence how meaning is constructed from the text (Ab Rahim, 2023).

As Laura Feldt (2016) posits, fantasy literature and many fictional narratives often become "religiously tinged titillating entertainment" (p.2) while struggling against literary secularism. This trend contributes to a shift in power dynamics, favouring individualistic spirituality over institutionalised religions (Davidsen, 2016). In the modern context, exposure to digital tools and various sources of information further shapes the way individuals interpret narratives and belief systems (Amdan et al., 2024).

Authors who explicitly reference history-based religions in their works often face vilification from readers (Fiction: The Western Novel and Religion, n.d.). Even if readers are open to exploring religious themes, they may prefer narratives that portray those religions negatively. This has led to scrutiny of fictional works with controversial religious undertones (Feldt, 2016). Philip Pullman's bestselling *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995 – 2000) depicts a treacherous and conniving Christian-inspired church, intentionally undermining Christian beliefs (Feldt, 2016).

The Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkien

The Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkien is a high fantasy adventure epic novel. Originally conceived as a sequel to *The Hobbit* (1937), it was eventually published in three parts: *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers* in 1954, and *The Return of the King* in 1955 (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2020). In 1968, these volumes were combined into a single publication (Tolkien Library, n.d.).

It chronicles a quest in the Third Age undertaken by nine members of various races that became known as the Fellowship to destroy the One Ring. This powerful talisman created by the titular Dark Lord Sauron was to aid him in dominating Middle-earth.

J. R. R. Tolkien's Use of religious Elements in the Lord of the Rings

Tolkien, a devout Roman Catholic, drew inspiration from Christian beliefs for his work, in a concealed manner^{* †} (Carpenter, 1981). He aimed to create a "monotheistic world of 'natural theology,'" emphasising the importance of nature and reason (Chignell & Pereboom, 2020; Madsen, 2004). Verlyn Flieger (2005) suggests that explicit depictions of Christian beliefs would have "killed" the literary value of the work, leading Tolkien to avoid allegory and preaching.

This section will discuss how Tolkien perceived mostly Christian imagery, beliefs, and notions in his literary work, which allowed him to create a compelling storyline even though there is no mention of any specific religion in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Christ-Like Figures

On the Old Testament's symbolism of the threefold Messianic office and its connection to the characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. Unlike a singular character embodying all three attributes, Tolkien appears to have divided these concepts among three distinct characters.

Prophet. In the Old Testament, Jesus Christ as the Messiah was to be regarded as the Prophet who would speak God's word, be God's intermediary, and interpret His will to become the

* Carpenter (1981), *Letters* #142, 2 December 1953.

† Carpenter (1981), *Letters* #165, 30 June 1955 to Houghton Mifflin.

cause of revelation to recipients[‡] (Letham, 1993). In *The Lord of the Rings*, the Wizard Gandalf can be regarded as the Prophet who appeared at crucial moments, offering guidance and wisdom that often influenced the story's direction (Schultz, 2002).

Priest. Priests were charged with being the representative of mankind to stand before God and to lead sacrificial rites[§]. Frodo Baggins, the Hobbit entrusted with bearing the One Ring, paralleled Jesus Christ as the priest (Schultz, 2002). Both carried a heavy burden – Frodo with the physical and emotional weight of the Ring, and Christ with the sins of humanity. Their weakened states during their respective journeys further strengthen this connection. Frodo's physical scars from the quest also mirror the wounds Christ endured on the cross when he was crucified.

King. As the High Priest who reconciled the sin of man to bring them back to God, Jesus Christ, in turn, obtained the rights to rule as king over the church and the world as well as to sit by God's right hand in heaven^{**}. The Man Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings* is seen as Jesus Christ the King by Schultz (2002). Aragorn was the last descendant of a royal bloodline that was destined to become the saviour of Gondor and restore it to its former glory, just as Jesus Christ was in his role to save mankind. Aragorn's true identity was also unknown except to a select few, but this number increased as the story progressed. Also reminiscent of Christ's attributes were his abilities to heal the wounded after the Battle of the Pelennor Fields and the Battle of the Morannon, as Christ did in Judea and Galilee, fulfilling his role as a healer and restorer of Gondor, echoing Mark 10:45^{††}.

Angelic Figures

Gandalf. Gandalf, a Maiar and Wizard, was sent to Middle-earth by the Valar to oppose Sauron's growing power. As a Maiar, he was a lesser divine being compared to the Valar, who are analogous to Christian archangels. The Valar are, in turn, inferior to the Creator Eru Ilúvatar (the Christian God). Gandalf's role mirrors that of a regular angel, serving a higher power and assisting those in need. He is also associated with the Secret Fire (or the Holy Spirit).

Sauron. A powerful Maiar like Gandalf, Sauron was once a servant of Aulë, the Valar's smith. Acquiring great knowledge from Aulë, Sauron joined forces with Morgoth, becoming his chief lieutenant. Sauron continued Morgoth's work of corrupting Middle-earth, often seen as a representation of Satan. or more accurately a depiction of one of Satan's chief demons, embodying the same level of evil and power.

Prayer

Frodo and Sam witnessed Faramir's men looking to the west before they began their meals. Faramir explained that they were looking towards the lost kingdom of Númenor and Valinor. The city of Gondor was established thousands of years prior by the former Númenorean

[‡] John 1:1-8; John 17:4; John 14:24; Luke 4:43.

[§] Hebrews 2:17; 3:1, 4:14; 4:1-16; 5:1; 6:20; 7:1; 8:3; 9:1-10:39; 13:11.

^{**} Ephesians 1:20-23 "that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

^{††} "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".

Isildur and his brother Anárion. Rutledge (2004) comments that this appears to echo the fall of man following their exile from the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were tempted by the disguised Satan.

Opposition to Christian Parallels in the Lord of the Rings

While Tolkien claimed that Christian beliefs were the primary inspiration for *The Lord of the Rings*, many scholars argue that pagan influences also played a significant role. Paganism often incorporates polytheism and animism, which is evident in Tolkien's work (Harvey, 2009). Paul Kocher (1972) suggests that using Christian contexts for mythical beings like Elves and Orcs would have been awkward^{‡‡}. Tolkien himself acknowledged that Gandalf was partly inspired by the Norse god Odin, known for his wandering nature, long white beard, staff, and pointy hat (Burns, 2005; Carpenter, 1981). Like Gandalf, Odin also took on a human form and possessed supernatural abilities.

The central themes of J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings

This section will discuss several central themes of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. As the Christian Bible appears to be the major influence of this literary work based on research done, the central themes will be compared to excerpts from the Bible.

Individualistic Development

Frodo

Initially a naive and inexperienced Hobbit, he underwent a significant transformation throughout his journey. Despite warnings from Gandalf, Frodo remained complacent until forced to confront the dangers of the One Ring. His rash decisions and near-succumbing to the Ring's temptation on Weathertop highlighted his initial naivety. However, this experience served as a turning point, marking his growth and increased sense of duty.

He offered to carry the One Ring, even when overwhelmed by its weight and the dangers it posed. His decision to separate from the Fellowship after Boromir's betrayal demonstrated his commitment to duty and the well-being of his companions. Frodo's journey mirrored the biblical concept of endurance leading to character-building and hope^{§§} whereas his compassion for Gollum reflected the biblical call to love one's enemies^{***}.

Frodo's quest took a heavy toll on him. His naivety was replaced by a wiser but scarred nature, reminiscent of a traumatised war veteran. He experienced immense suffering, mirroring the pain endured by biblical figures like Jeremiah, who was punished by his own people for carrying out his duties as a prophet^{†††}. Frodo could only find peace by leaving Middle-earth for the Undying Lands, a testament to the profound impact his quest had on him.

Samwise Gamgee

Samwise Gamgee was first introduced as the humble gardener and friend to Frodo who matured into a very courageous Hobbit. Sam's devotion to Frodo began when he agreed to

^{‡‡} Kocher's position reflects Flieger's thoughts that explicit depictions of Christian beliefs would have "killed" the literary work.

^{§§} 1 Peter 1:6-7; Romans 5:3-5.

^{***} Matthew 5:44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

^{†††} Jeremiah 15.

travel with him to Rivendell and then to Mordor even though Frodo insisted on continuing alone. Sam proved to be the more discerning voice during their solo journey. He challenges Frodo's pity for Gollum, recognising the danger Gollum posed. While Frodo's compassion for Gollum blinded him, Sam maintained his distance and distrust, ultimately preventing Gollum from gaining further control over Frodo. Sam's devotion reached its peak when he took on the mantle of Ring-bearer after believing Frodo to be dead. His quick thinking prevented the Orcs from discovering the Ring, demonstrating his resourcefulness. Sam's unwavering determination to complete the quest was evident as he carried Frodo up Mount Doom, even when Frodo was unable to continue.^{†††}

Fellowship

The races described were the Hobbits (child-sized humans), Men (humans), Elves, Wizards, and Dwarves that largely kept to themselves socially, politically, and economically. The Council of Elrond brought together representatives from the various races to discuss the dangers of the One Ring. During the course of the Fellowship's journey, the party began to bond with each other^{§§§}. Boromir took a liking to Merry and Pippin, selflessly carrying them on his back when they waded through dense snow on the mountain passes above Moria.

Gimli and Legolas formed a lifelong friendship. After the Battle of Helm's Deep, they made a pact to unfamiliar regions together. Gimli's love for Galadriel and friendship with Legolas earned him the title "elf-friend."^{****} Following the War of the Ring, Gimli established a new Dwarf settlement and became a valued ally to the Elves, Rohan, and Gondor. After Aragorn's death, Gimli and Legolas embarked on a final journey together to the Undying Lands.

Mercy and Pity

Mercy and pity have been regarded as one of the most central themes of *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo's initial belief that Gollum should be killed reflected his fear and lack of understanding. Gandalf cautioned him against hasty judgment, suggesting that redemption might be possible. Despite Frodo's initial antagonism, his pity for Gollum eventually prevailed, hindering his ability to kill Gollum. Gollum's actions, driven by the Ring's corrupting influence, created a complex dynamic between him and the Hobbits. Frodo's unwavering pity for Gollum, even in the face of Gollum's treachery, prevented him from carrying out his duty. Sam, initially distrustful of Gollum, eventually developed pity for the latter, recognising the Ring's negative power over its bearers^{††††}. This reflects a broader pattern in human behavior where values and ethical considerations influence judgment and decision-making (Moorthy et al., 2023).

Sacrifice

Boromir

Boromir demonstrated how strong the influence of the One Ring was on Men. Gondor had already been waning in influence under the House of Stewards^{††††}. As a result, Boromir took

^{†††} Therefore fulfilling Galatians 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

^{§§§} Hebrews 10:24 "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works..."

^{****} Romans 1:12 "...that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine."

^{††††} Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Frodo's mercy was being allowed to sail to The Undying Lands where he could be at peace from the trauma he had experienced during his quest.

^{†††††} The House of Stewards ruled Gondor as proxies after the line of kings was lost. This line of kings included Aragorn's ancestors, who eventually went into hiding. With no heir, the

it upon himself to search for any method possible to restore the reputation of his house. His determination to embark on the perilous journey towards Rivendell for the Council of Elrond and immediate recognition of Aragorn, the true heir, for the first time, exemplified his duty to his nation and the original responsibilities of his house.

Despite Boromir's unquestionable loyalties, the Ring's corrupting influence led him to attack Frodo to seize it for himself, desperately believing that he could restore Gondor. From this, one might argue that Boromir's intentions were never quite aligned with the true mission of destroying the One Ring, which brought about the failings of his loyalty^{§§§§}. Despite his betrayal, Boromir's ultimate sacrifice in defending the Hobbits from the Orcs, even while mortally wounded, redeemed him.

Boromir's act of sacrificing his life was to repent for betraying not only Frodo, the Fellowship as well. Even though the Fellowship was physically broken after Gandalf's death in Moria, Boromir's momentary betrayal served as the Fellowship breaking in duty.

Théoden

Théoden, the elderly king of Rohan, was manipulated by his advisor Gríma Wormtongue, who was under Saruman's control. Gríma's treachery left Rohan vulnerable to attacks by Orcs and wild men. Despite initial resistance, Théoden eventually realised Gríma's deception. Théoden was in much need of redemption despite his old age especially after many of his subjects had died in attacks. He first led his people to Helm's Deep, a refuge in a valley, to keep the civilians safe against a massive onslaught of Orcs and Dunlendings, leading to the Battle of Helm's Deep.

Théoden's redemption finally came at the Battle of the Pelennor Fields when he rallied his Rohirrim to aid Gondor as the armies of Mordor attacked. He personally threw an attacking force into disarray by killing the elephant-riding Haradrim cavalry chieftain. Seeing this, the Witch-king of Angmar, attacked him, tipping his horse over to mortally crush the king. Théoden's painful and violent death was symbolic of upholding his kingly oaths to fight the forces of evil. Through the manner of his death, he also enabled those he intended to help to have a greater chance of freedom away from conflict^{*****}.

Good vs Evil

Corruption / Evil Overcoming Good

When Isildur gave in to the One Ring instead of destroying it, he felt justified in keeping the Ring as a weregild^{†††††} in exchange for the deaths of his family who died fighting against Sauron. As an extension of Sauron himself and therefore aligned to him, the One Ring – as it had a will of its own – betrayed Isildur when he was ambushed by Orcs while travelling by slipping off his finger when he used it to disguise himself momentarily, leading to his death.

Stewards ruled until the rightful king returned and to prevent a civil war. Aragorn – descending from the line of Valandil, Isildur's youngest son – was kept hidden and raised in Rivendell.

§§§§ 2 Corinthians 6:14 "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

***** Galatians 6:9 "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

††††† Defined as the compensation awarded to someone who was injured or grieved in a confrontation; also known as man-price (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2011).

For two and a half millennia, the Ring remained dormant until it was discovered by the Hobbits Déagol and Sméagol, who later killed the former. Sméagol eventually became the twisted creature Gollum whose lifespan was extended by about 500 years. As a result, Gollum had developed a fractured personality that loved and hated his own existence simultaneously for the rest of his miserable life. Moving on, the Nazgûl, or Ringwraiths, were once mighty Númenorean kings and warriors who had blindly accepted the gift of power bestowed by the Nine Rings of Power for Men. As a result of becoming overly-dependent on these magical rings, the Nine were transformed into corrupted wraith-like beings that were eternally never at peace.

Good Overcoming Evil

The depictions of good overcoming the forces of evil in *The Lord of the Rings* were mostly shown in the final three large-scale battles in the War of the Ring. The Battle of Helm's Deep was to ensure the survival of the kingdom of Rohan. If survival was not an option, it would have been a display of defiance towards evil in the face of death. The Battle of the Pelennor Fields was to ensure the survival of one of the last strongholds for good that were at risk of being overrun by Mordor. For this to happen, all groups of Men had to come to Gondor's aid. Finally, the Battle of the Morannon was a desperate attempt to distract the remaining forces of Mordor and Sauron away from Frodo and Sam so that the two Hobbits – who were trekking through dangerous terrain in Mordor on foot – could successfully destroy the One Ring in the fires of Mount Doom.

Moral Conflict

Faramir. Faramir, like his brother Boromir, sought to restore Gondor's former glory. However, unlike Boromir, Faramir ultimately resisted the temptation of the One Ring. Despite his father's orders to seize the Ring, Faramir chose to release Frodo and Sam, prioritising the greater good over his own ambitions^{****}.

Gollum. Gollum's internal conflict between his good and evil personalities, is a central theme in *The Lord of the Rings*. While Sméagol desired to serve Frodo, Gollum's obsession with the One Ring ultimately prevailed. Gollum's actions, driven by greed and corruption, led him to betray Frodo and attempted to kill him.

Greed/Power And Control

The One Ring, described as an element that brought a “creeping corruption” (Shippey, 2002), was also a symbol of immense power and control, revealing the true nature of its bearers and exposing their hidden desires and vulnerabilities. Similarly, modern studies show that underlying values and motivations significantly influence human behavior and decision-making processes (Moorthy et al., 2023). Its ability to render its bearers invisible symbolised the ease with which those in power can evade consequences for their actions.

Gollum, initially named Sméagol, was profoundly corrupted by the One Ring. His possession of the Ring began with the murder of his relative Déagol in cold blood and therefore may not be like other good-natured Hobbits, leading to his exile and transformation into the

^{****} Romans 13:1-7 emphasises the importance of submitting to governing authorities as these authorities are established by God and are meant to maintain order and punish wrongdoers. The passage encourages obedience to governing authorities not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

creature known as Gollum. The Ring's influence made him isolated, suspicious, and filled with anger. Once he had lost the Ring at the hands of the unsuspecting Bilbo, Gollum also began to show signs of withdrawal as a result of being separated from that which he held dearly. Despite his Hobbit heritage, Sméagol-now-Gollum's prolonged exposure to the Ring rendered him incapable of resisting its temptations, leading to his downfall.

Shippey's observation of the Ring extended towards the portrayal of Bilbo. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, who also experienced the Ring's corrupting influence. Despite his initial resistance, the Ring's allure eventually grew stronger, leading to increased anger and frustration. However, Bilbo finally managed to relinquish the Ring voluntarily, a unique achievement among the Ring-bearers. Yet, his withdrawal from the Ring's influence was evident upon Frodo's arrival at Rivendell, as he displayed signs of desperation to take the Ring back into his possession.

As echoed in the Bible^{§§§§§}, the Ring's corrupting influence was not limited to directly possessing it. Denethor, the Steward of Gondor, allowed his greed and desire for power to cloud his judgment, nearly leading to the downfall of his kingdom. Even Shelob, a creature inherently evil, remained uninterested in the Ring, highlighting its selective influence on individuals. Saruman, a powerful Wizard, fell prey to Sauron's manipulation, demonstrating the Ring's potential to corrupt even those with great power and wisdom.

How the Readers of J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings have been Influenced

It is crucial to discuss how various readers had been influenced by Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. As to be discussed in the following section, the influence that Tolkien's writings of *The Lord of the Rings* had over those who read the book extended into their careers, thus allowing them to become commercially successful.

Future or Aspiring Writers

Tolkien's success with *The Lord of the Rings* has solidified his status as the "father of fantasy" (Schlagwein, 2022). While the genre of fantasy existed before Tolkien, his groundbreaking world-building and storytelling have had a profound impact on popular culture (Mähler, 2020). Elements from his works, such as character names, locations, and concepts, have become so ubiquitous that even those unfamiliar with his writings would recognise them.

The Forgotten Beasts of Eld by Patricia A. McKilip, 1974

A young adult fantasy novel centered around Sybel, whose life idyllic life with adopted son, Tamlor, come to an end when the latter's father claimed him. Sybel sought solace by journeying to find the legendary Liralen. However, her journey was fraught with danger. Despite her initial bitterness and vengefulness, Sybel found redemption. She used her connection with the Blammor to defuse a war instigated by her actions, showcasing growth and maturity.

One of the parallels between McKilip's novel and Tolkien's is the maturing of the main character after travelling beyond the boundaries of their idyllic homes. Furthermore, the

§§§§§ 1 Timothy 6:9; James 4:1-2.

name of Mithran was inspired by the name Mithrandir, Gandalf's Elvish name, although the two characters are far from similar. Mithran was a vile wizard, unlike the honourable Gandalf.

The Sword of Shannara by Terry Brooks, 1977

A fantasy novel set in a post-apocalyptic world devastated by a nuclear holocaust. Humanity evolved into various races, and magic reemerged. The story followed Shea Ohmsford, descended from Jerle Shannara, the wielder of the titular legendary sword. The sword was created to destroy Brona, a powerful warlock who sought to control the Four Lands. Shea's journey to obtain the Sword and defeat Brona involved a group of companions. Along the way, Shea faced numerous challenges and encountered familiar fantasy elements, such as a wise mentor (Allanon).

Several analogues could be pinpointed as well, such as Shea and Flick (the Hobbits), Allanon (Gandalf), Balinor (Aragorn/Boromir), Durin and Dayel (Legolas), Hendel (Gimli), Brona (Sauron), Orl Fane (Gollum), Menion (Aragorn), Mist Wraith (Barrow-wight), Skull Bearers (the Nazgûl), King of the Silver River (Tom Bombadil), Palance (Théoden/Denethor), and Stenmin (Gríma) (Shippey, 2000).

The Inheritance Cycle by Christopher Paolini, 2003 – 2011

A fantasy series of four books by Christopher Paolini. It followed Eragon, a farm boy who discovered a dragon egg and became a Dragon Rider. Eragon's journey took him across the land, battling the tyrannical King Galbatorix and his forces. He formed alliances with other races, trained under experienced Riders, and faced numerous challenges. Eragon's growth is central to the story, as he developed from a naive boy into a wise leader. The series culminated in a climactic victorious battle against Galbatorix, restoring peace.

The parallels between Paolini and Tolkien's work are in the various races and overall storyline. Humans live in large settlements or cities, elves live in enchanted forests, and dwarves live underground. Urgals are similar to Orcs albeit with good and bad factions and accorded the free will choose their master and allies. The next parallel is in the naming of characters and locations – although the good or evil nature may differ – namely; Eragon (Aragorn), Arya (Arwen), Isenstar (Isengard), Morgothal (Morgoth), Elessari (Elessar), Imiladris (Imladris), and Isidar (Isildur).

Spiritual Seekers

The term "spiritual seekers" was coined by Davidsen (2016) to describe readers who seek a religion to adhere to using religious fiction. These fictional religions often provide detailed descriptions of religious rituals and organisations, serving as models for real-world practice (Davidsen, 2016). This can be particularly appealing to those seeking a new or unconventional spiritual path.

Tolkien's writings on Middle-earth that includes *The Lord of the Rings* are collectively regarded as the Legendarium, which provide an extensive background in its fictional mythology (Davidsen, 2012). Despite this, Tolkien spiritualists***** believe it to be a real, albeit inaccessible, place (Davidsen, 2013). This misconception was further fueled by British

***** Tolkien spiritualists will be used here on to describe those who use Tolkien's writings as the foundation for any degree of a religious belief.

libraries mistakenly categorising his work as non-fiction in the 1950s, surprising and upsetting Tolkien.

Tolkien spiritualists differ from traditional Tolkien fans. The former incorporate Middle-earth's fictional creatures, such as the Valar, into their spiritual practices and believe it is all real (Davidsen, 2013), whereas Tolkien fans are aware of the fictional origins of these concepts. Davidsen (2012) noted that, unlike The Church of All Worlds⁺⁺⁺⁺⁺, Tolkien spiritualists are fragmented and their initiatives often blend with other religious practices like Ouija boards, tarot reading and dowsing. Some examples include The Elf Queen's Daughters (later renamed Silver Elves) and The Tribunal of the Sidhe.

Peter Jackson's film adaptations (2001 – 2003), sparked renewed interest in Tolkien spiritualism, which featured a centralised focus on Tolkien's fictional lore (Davidsen, 2012). These new but largely incoherent and disorganised groups included the Middle-earth Pagans, Tië Eldaliéva (i.e.; The Elven Path), and IIsaluntë Valion (i.e.; The Silvership of the Valar).

Conclusion

Religion has played a significant role in shaping literature, influencing content and interpretation, as supported by contemporary research that highlights the role of values, learning, and cognitive processes in shaping human understanding (Baharudin et al., 2025). Based on the success of the novel, it has seemed to escape the negative criticism that authors often face when incorporating elements of history-based religions. The novel's success has inspired countless audiences, demonstrating the power of literature to entertain, inspire, and provoke thought. However, it is important to recognise the limitations of literature as a source of spiritual guidance. While it can offer valuable insights, literature should not be seen as a substitute for genuine religious practice or personal reflection due to its shaky foundation.

The authors of this paper discovered a significant lack of academic literature on the topic of religion in literary works as supported by Davidsen (2016). Despite extensive research, only a limited number of relevant journal articles were found. To address this gap, the authors relied on a selected past academic paper and incorporated unconventional sources. *The Handbook of Hyper-Real Religions* is one of the few academic works that delve into the phenomenon of individuals creating fiction-based religions inspired by *The Lord of the Rings*.

This study contributes to literary studies by offering a focused analysis of how *The Lord of the Rings* integrates Christian themes and symbolism without operating as an explicitly religious text, helping to explain its broad cultural acceptance and critical success. It addresses a notable gap in existing literature by responding to the limited academic attention given to religion in literary works, as identified by Davidsen (2016), and consolidates fragmented discussions into a coherent interpretive account. By situating Tolkien's work within debates on religion, myth, and narrative meaning, this study enriches current understandings of how religious ideas function implicitly in modern literary texts. This is consistent with current academic perspectives that emphasize the continuing relevance of belief systems, ethics, and interpretive frameworks across disciplines (Moorthy et al., 2023).

+++++A neo-pagan organisation inspired by Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961). It is one of the longest-lasting neo-pagan organisations in the United States of America (Davidsen, 2013, p. 379; Lanahan-Kalish, 2019). Though mostly rooted in Heinlein's work, the movement incorporates foreign elements (Davidsen, 2016; Lanahan-Kalish, 2019).

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