

# Reconstruction of Myth in Mythopoesis Adaptation: The Evolution of J.R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium

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## Abstract

Reconstructions of narratives become inevitable in adaptations. When mythopoeic works like that of J.R.R. Tolkien are adapted, the myths contained within are also reconstructed, which changes how those works are perceived and understood by successive generations. This paper focuses on Tolkien's novel *The Lord of the Rings* and its adaptations by Peter Jackson and Amazon Studios in an attempt to trace how such reconstructions occur in each retelling and how they evolve over time with different socio-cultural and political significations. In addition, this paper posits that mythopoeia, despite not being connected to any specific culture like mythology, serves a function similar to mythology and is therefore equally important.

**Keywords:** Adaptation; Myth; Mythopoeia; Reconstruction; Tolkien.

## Introduction

J.R.R. Tolkien's magnum opus, *The Lord of the Rings*, is a work of mythopoeia. Mythopoeia or mythopoesis refers to the creation of myths, either collectively within a given culture or individually by a writer or a group of creators. Tolkien's Middle-earth, with its own cosmogony, myths, history, geography, languages, customs, and people, is one of the most well-developed mythopoeias in existence. *The Lord of the Rings* expands the narrative of his prior novel, *The Hobbit* (1937), and was initially published in three volumes: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954) and *The Return of the King* (1955). The addition of six appendices in the third volume provided further insight into his mythopoeia. Works like *The Silmarillion* (1977), *Unfinished Tales* (1980), and *The History of Middle-earth* (1983-

96) along with other posthumously published works together constitute Tolkien's *Legendarium*. The success of these works also prompted several adaptations in various formats. Other notable works of mythopoeia include C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos, Robert E. Howard's Hyborean Age chronicles, Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* series, and of course, George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series.

However, despite emerging as a formidable realm of creative expression in the last century that warrants serious exploration, unlike mythology, the narrative genre of mythopoeia is often relegated to the periphery of scholarly discussions. Critics, sceptical of its ability to meet the established cultural criteria for myth, dismiss works of mythopoeia as artificial constructs. The noted folklorist Alan Dundes, mentioned in an interview that "a work of art, or artifice, cannot be said to be the narrative of a culture's sacred tradition... [it is] at most, artificial myth" (Adcox). The simple implication is that mythopoeia is not something to be taken seriously. This is perhaps one of the reasons why very few works of mythopoeia, if at all, are prescribed for formal academic studies even now.

This begs the question, how exactly is mythopoeia different from myth and mythology? The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms mentions that the term myth "has a wide range of meanings, which can be divided roughly into 'rationalist' and romantic versions: in the first, a myth is a false or unreliable story or belief (adjective: mythical), while in the second, myth is a superior intuitive mode of cosmic understanding" (235). In literature we are mostly concerned with the romantic understanding of it. Myths are, therefore, fictional stories containing deeper truths within a particular mythology. These hereditary stories of ancient origin were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group. They explained the nature of the world, the reasons behind events, and provided a rationale for social customs. The protagonists of myths, often divine beings, embody universal significance in stories that transcend individual cultures. William Blake attempted to create something of that sort with his *Vala, or The Four Zoas* (1893). Although incomplete, his prophetic mythology is possibly the first conscious work of mythopoeia which was conceptualized in 1797, half a century before the first recorded use of the word 'mythopoeia'. It was J.R.R. Tolkien who popularized the word with the creation of his Middle-earth mythos and expanded it to depths hitherto unimagined. These narratives, although fictional, do contain deeper truths about the nature of humanity, existence and of the world.

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Roland Barthes, in his seminal semiotic work *Mythologies* (1957), stresses on a different aspect of myth. For him, myth is a form and a mode of signification which conveys certain messages. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way it utters that message. Barthes talks of myth as a second order semiotic system which uses the sign of the first order linguistic system as a signifier for the mythical system. He calls it a metalanguage since it is a second language which talks about the first. To elaborate this Barthes uses the example of a French magazine's cover showing the image of a black child saluting the French National flag. While this can be interpreted as a sign of patriotism in the first order semiotic system, the second order mythic signification attempts to suggest their benevolence in order to redirect attention from French imperial efforts in Algeria. Barthes further highlights how language of the mass-culture is mythified to dress up reality in the garb of naturalness. Myths, therefore, serve as an instrument to naturalize history to convincingly present certain dominant ideas which influence the socio-cultural politics of the time.

Although Barthes' focus is primarily on the mechanics of language, his notion of myth being a receptacle for a message expands the traditional conceptualization of myth to incorporate contemporary speech and narratives within its framework. In addition to the assessment of myths in its traditional sense, this paper uses that framework to assess how the primary messages of Tolkien's *Legendarium* have been mythified and reconstructed in his most recent screen adaptations and how it has changed the perception of his work over time. To that end, this paper analyses Peter Jackson's three film adaptations- *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), and *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003), and the first season of Amazon Studio's *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (2022). While the nature of this study requires an assessment of fidelity in the adapted works, it is not limited to fidelity criticism alone.

### **Mythology versus Mythopoeia**

Before assessing any text, the implication that mythopoeia is something trivial needs to be addressed. After all, if it were that trivial, Tolkien would not have been one of the bestselling authors with over 600 million copies sold worldwide. During the process of creation of its mythos, works of mythopoeia often draw upon older myths from various cultures across the globe, and are subsequently characterized by dense self-referentiality. In William Blake's work on the *Four Zoas*, the influence of Christianity is obvious. Blake wanted to present his spiritual and political ideas as a

prophecy for a new age. He had a desire to recreate the cosmos and described the struggle between enlightenment and free love, and restrictive education and morals. Tolkien's work, similarly, is influenced by various Scandinavian, Greek and Christian myths. In one of his letters, he mentions that,

The *Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism (Tolkien, *The Nature of Middle Earth* 401).

The narrative spun by Tolkien and the messages and values that he projects, are very much in tune with what we derive from other mythologies. One of the core ideas in *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, is that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. This idea becomes the driving force behind the quest to destroy the One Ring, the symbol of ultimate power in the novel. This Ring of the dark lord Sauron is not only a receptacle of unimaginable power but has a will of its own which corrupts even the best of people. Gandalf, one of the most iconic and wise characters in Tolkien-verse, refuses to take it even in order to safeguard it lest he be tempted to use it. So terrible is its power that it must be destroyed for good.

Its strength, Boromir, is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart... And that is another reason why the Ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise (*Fellowship* 351).

This, of course, is linked to Tolkien's other ideas, especially concerning the Machine and the use of magic for domination by Sauron, unlike its use for art and sub-creation by the Elves. The idea that power corrupts can be found in his myth of the Fall of Melkor, who sought to turn away from the teachings of Eru Ilúvatar, their God, to create on his own but only manages to pervert and destroy existing creations. Outlined in *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien's cosmogonical work, this myth is directly influenced by the fall of Satan in Christianity. The Greek myths of Zeus, which narrates how he overthrew his father Cronus and the rest of the Titans to save everyone from their tyranny only to become tyrannous and rapacious himself after

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acquiring the power, echoes the same idea.

Then again, the nature of the One Ring also fuses two differing views of evil- the Boethian and the Manichean view. The Boethian view that there is no such thing as evil and that it is merely the absence of good echoes, in essence, the view of the orthodox Christian Church which believes that evil springs from the exercise of free will to separate oneself from God (e.g.-the Fall of Melkor). As Elrond observes in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, "Nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (Tolkien 351). This idea that evil is essentially internal, psychological, and negative can be seen in the Ring's amplification of emotions of the people around it. Manicheanism, on the other hand, views evil as a power equal and opposite to good. This 'heroic' view of evil as something external to be resisted can also be seen in the ring which acts as a sentient creature sometimes and abandons its bearers of its own volition. This philosophical duality rings true to what we experience in real life with its addictions and corruptions.

These examples show that mythopoesis can convey profound messages, just like mythology and possibly in a much more interesting manner. After all, not everyone is interested in reading mythology. Fiction, on the other hand, has a much larger appeal and is much better suited to convey messages with universal significance. And as Tolkien himself pointed out in a letter to Milton Waldman, his work "is mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine" (*Silmarillion* xiii). In the same letter, included as a kind of preface in *The Silmarillion*, he also lamented "the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands" (xi). Tolkien desired to create a new unique mythology, based on existing ones, not just because he could but also to fulfill this cultural void.

Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story-the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths - which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could

achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be 'high', purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd (*Silmarillion* xi).

These instances prove that it is only the cultural aspect of mythology with its sacred rites and traditions that truly differentiates it from mythopoeisis. But it is also important to consider individual faith and belief. For a non-believer or a person from another culture, myths remain mere stories with morals. It can even be argued that Tolkien's work, which has accrued millions of fans, hundreds of forums and discussion platforms, and numerous scholarly interpretations, have led to the emergence of a distinct culture unrestricted by race, class, geography, or religion, in which his words are sacrosanct, just like any other mythology. The other benefit of studying mythology, concerning the insight gained about a particular cultural group and its evolution through various trials and tribulations, can be found in works of mythopoeia as well. After all, even fictional narratives have roots in reality, studying which one can not only gain insight on the human condition but also truths about the motivations of a writer and their literary and socio-cultural backgrounds. Mythopoeia is artificial, yes, but as Barthes points out, so is mythology. Considering mythopoeia as unimportant or even secondary because of that would be nothing short of ignorance.

### **The Reconstruction of Tolkien's Myths**

George Bluestone, in his seminal text *Novels into Film* (1957) points out that "changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium," (5). Although an adaptation is never the same as its adapted text, in most cases they invigorate interest and give the prior text a new lease of life. Tolkien's work has been adapted into different media over the decades which has expanded his reach manifold. And although there have been a few radio and animated movie adaptations before, it was Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-03) and *The Hobbit* (2012-14) which introduced the author and his work to all reaches of the globe.

Tolkien wasn't completely opposed to the idea of adapting his works and

he himself sold off the rights of his two novels to United Artists in 1968. But he was distinctly unhappy with the first script shown to him in 1957. Tom Shippey mentions that the script was “beyond all question an extraordinarily bad one, unambitious and careless, and Tolkien’s comments are appropriately blistering” (411). Tolkien was aware that any script for an adaptation would require subtraction of a lot of content and as he mentioned in one of his letters, he actually preferred the outright removal of certain semi-independent sections instead of compressing the entire narrative because the “alternative would be, all too likely, that the Prime action - Tolkien’s term for Frodo and Sam making their way into Mordor - would be downgraded in favour of the subsidiary action, the wars and the battles and the heroes” (Shippey 411).

Peter Jackson had a monumental task in hand since the complex interleaving narrative structure and depth of content made the novel difficult to adapt. Linda Hutcheon, an eminent adaptation theorist, observes that any adaptation involves “a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another’s story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one’s own sensibility, interests, and talents. Therefore, adapters are first interpreters and then creators” (18). Jackson reconstructed the narrative with his own unique aesthetic and prioritised the aspects that he believed to be at the core of Tolkien’s work. He did remove some sections involving Subsidiary Action like that of Tom Bombadil and the Scouring of the Shire, just as Tolkien would have probably wanted, but still ended up prioritising the aspects of war. Christopher Tolkien, J.R.R. Tolkien’s son and literary successor, was distinctly unhappy with Jackson’s renderings. Just before the release of *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012), in an interview with *Le Monde*, he observed that the filmmakers had “gutted the book, making it an action film for 15–25-year-olds. And it seems that *The Hobbit* will be of the same ilk” (Rérolle). In the same interview, he lamented the fact that commercialization had reduced the aesthetic and philosophical creation of his father to nothing.

Christopher Tolkien’s objections did have merit since Jackson’s reconstruction differed from some of Tolkien’s core ideas, but as the film rights for the books had already been sold, he was unable to do anything about it. An apt example of this would be the treatment of the war between good and evil. Tolkien’s idea of eucatastrophe, which is a fundamental part of his mythopoeic conception, plays an important role in that. The quest to destroy the Ring ultimately fails as Frodo, at the very end in *The Return of the King*, claims the ring for himself. It is only through an act of eucatastrophe that good triumphs over evil. But evil and its darkness, as

his narrative points out, have only been pushed back by the destruction of the Ring. It has not been vanquished completely. There is a subtle but direct acknowledgement of the fact that evil will triumph one day. "Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again" (*Fellowship* 67). It is after Sauron's defeat that the Shire, a symbol of nature, innocence and goodness, is razed and its people enslaved. Frodo is so deeply scarred by the quest to destroy the Ring that he had to leave for the West, to the abode of the gods, in search of healing. The narrative is, therefore, a good catastrophe at best. This reflects the constant struggle of humanity to fight representations of darkness both within and without, something that Jackson subverts with his representation of evil being destroyed completely with the end of Sauron. This was foregrounded in his first film adaptation, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, where it is mentioned in the opening voice over that Isildur had "this one chance to destroy evil forever" (00:04:38-00:04:42) and reaches a conclusion in the third film. In the end Aragorn is crowned king, married to Arwen, and normalcy is restored as the four hobbits return to a pristine Shire. This sense of finality in good triumphing over evil in Jackson's rendition is, as can be expected, absent from Tolkien's text. And that's one myth reconstructed.

Equating Sauron with evil and not presenting him as just one of its manifestations follows a trend in Jackson's work where he takes metaphors quite literally, a prime example of which is Sauron's eye. Tolkien's chilling metaphor of the all-seeing and all-knowing lidless eye is materialised as an actual giant flaming eye on top of a huge foreboding tower using special effects.

Another mythic reconstruction lies in the notions of unity and hope. Tolkien's narrative offers no hope, no incentive for the characters to perform any feats of courage in the face of overwhelming odds. They just do so because it is the right thing to do, even if it costs them everything. This is reflective of Tolkien's own experiences during World War I. His contemporaries could easily understand and accept that the forces of evil might just be stronger than those of good. Jackson's 21<sup>st</sup> century audience, especially the American one, after decades of global military dominance would find that much harder to believe. And as such, disunity among allies becomes the main source of weakness and the journey to unite everyone becomes the premise of his war narrative, something that differs from Tolkien. This underlying theme begins in the Council of Elrond in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. After a long discussion about the Ring, "all the Council sat with downcast eyes, as if in deep thought" (*Fellowship* 355). Jackson's version is much shorter and ends with all parties shouting at each other, predom-



inantly along racial lines. When Frodo accepts the responsibility to carry the Ring to Mordor, a sense of unity is shown when members of all races join the fellowship. In the second film of Jackson's trilogy, *The Two Towers*, King Theoden laments that "The old alliances are dead... we are alone" (02:35:22-02:35:47) only for an elven army to show up to honour those alliances. This is an addition by Jackson and absent in Tolkien. Similarly, in the third film, *The Return of the King*, Jackson shows that it is only through the actions of Gandalf and Pippin that Gondor calls for aid, unlike in the book where Denethor, the steward of Gondor, has the beacons of Gondor lit even before Gandalf arrived in the city. This showed the distrust Jackson's Denethor had for Rohan and had the added benefit of showing his character in an unpleasant light. King Theoden, of course, comes to the aid of Gondor and the battle of Pelennor Fields is won.

Jackson also reiterates the existence of hope throughout the movies, a prominent example of which is Aragorn's conversation with Haleth before the Battle of Helm's Deep. When the young boy, fearful and in despair mentions, "The men are saying that we will not live out the night. They say that it is hopeless," Aragorn hands him back his sword and responds, "There is always hope" (Jackson, *Towers* 02:43:45-02:44:22). In the same film after a skirmish with warg-riders, Aragorn falls off a cliff into a river. It is a vision of Arwen which revitalises the injured Aragorn to fight on, the potential union between the two providing hope and motivation. Shippey comments that just as he is brought back to life by the love of her, she turns back from her journey to the West to share his fate and that of Middle-earth, to die for love of him (418). This reconstruction of the narrative by Jackson has subtly but significantly changed the overarching vision of Tolkien.

The aesthetics of Peter Jackson's films also play a crucial role in this. His emphasis on spectacle, wide landscape shots, and blood and gore along with the use of special effects and video game aesthetics presents a narrative which can only be referred to as Jacksonesque. Where Tolkien preferred a subtle and realistic treatment of matter, space and situations, Jackson preferred magnitude and the monstrous. It is, however, not surprising considering the dissimilarities between Tolkien's and Jackson's creative interests and temperament.

Tolkien wrote from the love of words, from the love of things old, and from a deep conviction, as a devout Catholic, that human life is first and foremost a moral challenge. Jackson directs his films from a love of visual images and technologically advanced special

effects, and from his lifelong passion for what film critic Matthew Stephenson has called the blend of “gore and absurdist humor.” Tolkien’s fiction explores what in one of his letters Tolkien called “the ‘theory’ of true nobility and heroism” ... a theme that leading Tolkien scholar Tom Shippey has described as the “tension between the two different heroic styles: archaic/heathen and modern/ Christian.” Jackson’s films, in turn, share a “celebration of all things gruesome” that Stephenson identifies as Jackson’s “unique vision and talent” (Oziewicz 253).

In one of his letters, Tolkien mentions that the failure of films lies in exaggeration and inclusion of unwanted matter due to failure in comprehending the core idea of the original, a sentiment that Hutcheon disagrees with. “Perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptations is not in terms of fidelity to a prior text, but in terms of a lack of creativity and skill to make the text one’s own and thus autonomous” (21). Hutcheon’s observation seems more on point as Jackson’s films have been quite successful financially and are widely considered to be cinematic masterpieces. If they have failed in any sense, it is in regard to fidelity and Tolkien’s assertion comes from that angle. The financial aspect of filmmaking is also a crucial factor. Jackson had to ensure that the films made the producers money. Therefore, in many aspects he had no choice but to play to the audience. A simple but apt example would be his inclusion of dwarf jokes, at the expense of Gimli (nobody tosses a dwarf!). The introduction of Arwen as a warrior princess to better match Aragorn’s ascendancy to kingship, at the cost of Frodo’s character development, is another.

The massive success of the films means that for most people, *The Lord of the Rings* now means the film version, and not the novel. It is a “fact that any adaptation establishes for the audience a situated, semiotic companion relation to that work of narrative fiction, thereby inevitably transforming how the source is (mis) remembered and (re) interpreted” (Oziewicz 248). Advances in cognitive studies have also pointed out that film facts tend to override our memories of book facts which reshapes our notions of the story while simultaneously narrowing our capacity to imagine it in a different way (Oziewicz 249). Since Jackson’s movies are the first or sole exposure to Tolkien for many people, the very idea of Tolkien’s mythopoeia has been further mythified and reconstructed. This evolution can be easily observed in the first season of Amazon Studios’ *Rings of Power* (2022) with its Jacksonesque aesthetics and stress on action and violence.

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## *The Rings of Power*

*The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (2022) is a television series developed by J. D. Payne and Patrick McKay for the streaming service Amazon Prime Video. This adaptation of Tolkien's Legendarium is set in the Second Age of Middle-earth and would cover major events like the forging of the Rings of Power, the rise and fall of the island kingdom of Númenor, rise of the Dark Lord Sauron, and the last alliance between Elves and Men. It is interesting to note that the series is technically based on just the appendices that Tolkien included in *The Return of the King* even though there exists other written material on the Second Age. The Akallabêth in *The Silmarillion* (1977), descriptions of the island of Númenor, and accounts of the Line of Elros: Kings of Númenor and of Galadriel and Celeborn in *Unfinished Tales* (1980), and Christopher Tolkien's magisterial work, the twelve volume *The History of Middle-earth* (1983-96) – all provide in depth knowledge of the Second Age. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (1995) and *The Nature of Middle-earth* (2021), edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Carl F. Hostetter respectively, supply further insight into that age. And yet, since Amazon Studios could only buy the rights of *The Lord of the Rings* and its appendices, none of that could directly be incorporated into the series. The result, as can be expected, is major canon divergence.

Although fidelity alone should not be the benchmark of judging any adaptation, admirers of Tolkien's texts have not responded kindly to such divergence. Fuelling such a response is the showrunners visible effort to prioritise contemporary demands of inclusivity and political correctness at the cost of a convincing narrative. A young Galadriel with a vengeful bent of mind, a confused Sauron as a sympathetic villain and a completely new character named Adar crusading for orc rights do provide the rationale for such a response against the show.

Nevertheless, the first season is visually stunning and provides opportunity to assess the reconstructions of Tolkien's myths, mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings*, in the traditional sense. The first and most obvious instance would be the depiction of Númenor, its rise and eventual fall. Tolkien modelled it after Atlantis, the fictional island described in Plato's dialogues, and referred to its creation as his 'Atlantis-complex' or 'Atlantis-haunting'. And as Brian Sibley commented, Tolkien was perhaps "attracted by the romance of a civilization overtaken by an Atlantean tragedy, something that has exerted its hold on the human imagination across many centuries of popular culture" (*Númenor* xxi). The Númenórean narrative is significant within Tolkien as it is there that Men face their second

Fall from grace. Although there is much information about the island and the Second Age, there is no published narrative streamlining the major events in the form of a story. Technically, the show is quite original in that regard. Its visual representation, consequentially, has also reconstructed the mental image that existed prior to it. What was once considered to be just myth and lore has now been rendered into a tangible fictional reality with its own mythic capabilities.

Another mythical reconstruction in *The Rings of Power* comes in the form of the origin story of mithril, a highly prized silvery metal. The show presents it as an ore containing the light, and by extension, the power of the last Silmaril, a jewel crafted by Fëanor in the First Age which contained the unblemished light of the Two Trees of Valinor. In the fifth episode, High King Gil-Galad asks Elrond to recount *The Song of the Roots of Hithaeglir*, a legend solely invented for the show, which details a battle fought by two representatives of good and evil somewhere on the Misty Mountains over a tree within which, some believed, a Silmaril lay hidden. The legend speaks of a pure hearted elven warrior who sacrifices his own light to protect the tree as the Balrog, a monstrous evil creature, expends his hatred to destroy it. The contest is settled when lightning strikes the tree and forges a power "as pure and light as good, as strong and unyielding as evil" ("Partings" 00.34.28-00.34.35) which seeps deep within the mountain and forms the ore. While Elrond's comment that it is an "obscure legend, regarded by most to be apocryphal" ("Partings" 00.33.22-00.33.27) raises reasonable doubt about the legend and its veracity, a later event in the seventh episode, involving Prince Durin and the near instant healing of a dying leaf after encountering a piece of mithril, highly suggests that its power is derived from a Silmaril.

In the books, while mithril is presented as a wondrous and rare metal it is not linked to the Silmarils in anyway. In fact, there are references which suggest that it was also found in Númenor and perhaps in Aman as well. The fate of the Silmarils, as Tolkien devised it, is a tale of much valour and resilience fraught with tragedy. When Morgoth stole the three jewels after slaying Finwë, Fëanor's father and the High King of the Noldor, Fëanor and his seven sons swear a terrible oath to pursue and acquire the Silmarils at all costs. This pushes them onto a trajectory involving unspeakable deeds which make them utterly unworthy of the jewels- as the two sons of Fëanor, Maedhros and Maglor, later find out.

But the jewel burned the hand of Maedhros in pain unbearable;  
and he perceived that it was Eönwë had said, and that his right

thereto had become void, and that the oath was vain. And being in anguish and despair he cast himself into a gaping chasm filled with fire, and so ended; and the Silmaril that he bore was taken into the bosom of the Earth (*Silmarillion* 305).

Of the remaining two, one was made into a star borne by Eärendil and the other cast into the sea by Maglor himself in despair. “And thus it came to pass that the Silmarils found their long homes: one in the airs of heaven, and one in the fires of the heart of the world, and one in the deep waters” (*Silmarillion* 305). There is a sense of poetic justice in how Tolkien crafts his narrative, simultaneously shedding light on the history of the elves and their very nature. These myths speak not just of the Elder Days and the Elves but also of the reasons and motivations behind much of their actions in the Second and Third Ages. They provide deep insight into the very nature of the world. While the reconstruction of this myth suits the narrative woven by the showrunners, it ignores much of the actual backstory which ultimately impoverishes its overarching narrative.

The reconstruction of Galadriel’s character is another step away from Tolkien. *The Rings of Power* presents the graceful and wise elven lady as vengeful warmonger who would stop at nothing to see her perception of evil destroyed, invoking the myth of the woeful fate of Fëanor and his sons. “It would seem that I’m not the only Elf alive who has been transformed by darkness. Perhaps your search for Morgoth’s successor should have ended in your own mirror” (“Udun” 00:50:43-00:50:56). Although Adar’s comment is appropriate in this regard, we know that Galadriel doesn’t meet the Fëanorian fate – Tolkien explicitly details her fate and Jackson retains that. Furthermore, the show Galadriel helps Sauron return to Middle-earth, unwittingly aiding the very character she sought to destroy. Such characterisation is unfortunate since Tolkien’s Galadriel always remained level-headed and just irrespective of the situation and was one of the few who distrusted Sauron even when garbed in a fair form. Sauron’s disguise as Halbrand, and his later portrayal as the heir to the Southern Kingdom, draws parallels with the Aragorn arc from Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Just like Aragorn’s intentional portrayal as a relatable hero faced with self-doubt and spectres of the past, the Halbrand backstory victimises Sauron and makes his actions more relatable. The myth of Annatar and his deception of the elves is seemingly abandoned. The new character of Adar, one of the first elves to be corrupted by Morgoth in the previous age, embraces the mantle of the sympathetic villain even better than Sauron, as he wages war to create a home for all orcs.

While the creators of the Amazon series had every legal right to carve the narrative in this manner, much of Tolkien's original essence is lost. While this aptly reflects the Barthesian notion of myths appropriating popular culture to propagate certain agendas, these alterations have also reconstructed the contemporary Jacksonesque perception of Tolkien and naturalised it, giving rise to a new narrative for a new generation. And thus, Tolkien's myths have evolved further. Whether it is for the better or worse, only time and further research would tell.

## Conclusion

This study, primarily focusing on Tolkien's work and two of their adaptations, traces how myths of mythopoeic works are reconstructed in each retelling and how such visual alterations change the perception of the original work. It shows how mythopoeic myths evolve with different socio-cultural and political significations over time, moving away from the original vision of the author to become a cultural phenomenon of its own. This study also debunks the claims of artificiality levelled at mythopoeisis, shows how it acts as a potent medium for conveying profound messages and proves that it is just as important as mythology. This ongoing interplay between mythopoeisis and cultural evolution exemplifies the enduring power of Tolkien's legendarium to resonate with diverse audiences across time.

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