

# The Ring

## *An essay on Tolkien's mythology*

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J.R.R. Tolkien thought it unfortunate and dismal that England was one of the few places in northern Europe without a proper mythical background. He sought to recreate a mythical world that should have been created by the Anglo-Saxons between the time of the Roman retreat in AD 419 and the Norman Conquest in AD 1066. He found inspiration for his undertaking in many mythological manuscripts. His chief sources of inspiration came from Norse mythology, Celtic mythology, and the scraps of Anglo-Saxon mythology at hand.

My aim is to show how these different sources inspired Tolkien when writing *The Lord of the Rings*. More specifically, I will deal with Tolkien's use of the ring as a symbol. The ring is an ancient symbol with great importance in Northern European myths and history. Tolkien claims that the One Ring is archetypal. This is true for all the mythological content in his writings. His *fäerie* should be read as the primary source for all mythologies dating back almost forty thousand years. In dealing with the One Ring (henceforth referred to as  $\bigcirc$ ), and its mythological ancestors, I will discuss the roles of the smith, the magician, the alchemist, and the shaman.

The reader of this essay should be familiar with *The Lord of the Rings* (hereafter referred to as LotR; pages as e.g. 1:25, where 1 is Book One [not to be confused with part one of the trilogy.] and 25 is the page in the edition listed as primary source in the bibliography), as well as with *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, and *Unfinished Tales*. Having read "The monsters and the critics", and "On Fairy-Stories" is also helpful. Works by Tolkien, other than LotR, will be referred to by its title, and where relevant with page(s). My chief source for the myths is David Day's *Tolkien's Ring*. In the cases of the *Volsunga Saga*, *Beowulf*, and Celtic myths, I have managed to find other translations into English. In other cases, I have had to rely on Day's retelling of the myths, with one eye in *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Mythology*.

To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode. (*On Fairy-Stories*, 49)

### Forging of Rings

Tolkien's mythology of Middle-earth is intentionally rooted in northern European mythic traditions. There are, however, aspects of the Greco-Roman tradition evident in Tolkien's tales. The first European myth featuring a ring is probably the Greek myth about the Titan Prometheus. This myth links the ring to many images of power, which later emerge in the ring quest tradition.

The Titans, the giant sons and daughters of Gaea, was a race that ruled the earth before the Olympian gods. Prometheus, a smith and magician, prophesises the coming of the Olympian gods and the Titans' downfall. Although he grieves for his people, he decides to befriend and help the new gods, rather than fight them and perish with the rest of

his race. Prometheus gives the Olympian gods gifts of wisdom and knowledge. The crippled god Hephaestus is taught the skill of forging metals. Prometheus loves the earth and his great curiosity leads to the discovery of the secret of life. He uses this knowledge in the creation of man. Furthermore, he gives man the gift of fire, the light of wisdom, and the heat of unquenchable desire. The Olympian gods think that Prometheus made man in order to overthrow them, and therefore Zeus swears to chain Prometheus to the Caucasian Mountain for all eternity with chains forged out of adamantite by Hephaestus. As further punishment, Zeus sends a great eagle and a huge vulture to hack out Prometheus' liver every day. Every night, the liver grows back again. Prometheus thus suffers a similar fate to the other Titans. Later the gods find pleasure in the mortals created by Prometheus, Zeus regrets his harsh treatment of Prometheus, and sends his son Heracles (the result of Zeus' union with a mortal woman) to break the chains. However, as he had sworn to keep Prometheus chained to the Mountain, he takes a rock fragment and magically attaches it to a link of the chain. This link he then closes around one of Prometheus fingers (Day, 1994, 115-118; Gray, 1999, 12ff).

Man can therefore be said to wear rings to honour Prometheus, the creator of man. Furthermore, the ring is a sign of the smith, who is the master of fire and forging, and the magician, the master of the secret of life. According to David Day (1994, 151), Sauron, in the disguise of Annatar (the Lord of Gifts) mirrors Prometheus in giving gifts of knowledge and skill to the Elven smiths. Sauron, however, really betrays the elves. He tricks them into forging the Rings of Power, with which they can create magical wonders, and secretly forges  $\bigcirc$  to control them all (*The Silmarillion*, 287f).

Tolkien's Vala Aulë the Smith is much more like Prometheus than Sauron, who is a Maia; i.e. a lesser god. Since the Olympian gods are lesser gods than the Titans are, this places Sauron in Hephaestus' position. Sauron is originally a servant of the Vala Aulë, the creator (*The Silmarillion*, 27), but turns away from creation when he starts serving the Vala Melkor, the destructor (*The Silmarillion*, 16ff). In fact, the one mirrored by Sauron is Aulë, who originally gives the gift of alchemy to the Elves.

### The Alchemist

The Alchemist is a magician and a smith, and the symbol for the alchemist is a gold ring in the form of an Ouroboros. The Ouroboros is present in the Babylonian serpent called Ed, the Greek Ophion, the Hindu Sheshna, the Chinese Naga, and the Norse Jormangand. The Alchemist's ring represents universal knowledge and eternity. Dactylomancy, or the use of rings for divination and magic, has been practised throughout history. The Alchemist has the power to transform the world using both physical and magical fire. Prometheus could be said to be the first Alchemist. The good alchemist is the scientist, who wishes to study nature, maintain order, and perform small wonders within the boundaries of his art and the natural (or magical) world. The evil alchemist is a mad engineer, who wants to transform the world and ultimately destroy it. In LotR, Melkor and Sauron are evil alchemists,

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reforging the creations of the Valar and the Elves into vile creatures (*The Silmarillion*, 50), ravaged land, and ultimate darkness (Day, 1994, 147-150).

The nine human kings rewarded with Power Rings succumb quickly to Sauron, and most human races fall under his spell (*The Silmarillion*, 289). These nine human kings are the Ring-wraiths, Sauron's most dreaded servants. The enemies of Sauron who are resilient possess alchemical power of their own. These are the Noldor Elves, the Dwarves, and the Númenoreans.

Greatest of the Noldor Elves is Fëanor, who in *The Silmarillion* (67) combine elvish spells and the smith's skills to forge the Silmarils. These are stolen by Sauron's master, Melkor, and this results in the wars of the First Age. Fëanor's grandson is the Noldor prince Celebrimbor, the Lord of the Elven-smiths of Eregion, who forges the Rings of Power (*The Silmarillion*, 286ff), over which the wars of the Second and Third Ages are fought.

The Dwarves are tough opponents (*The Silmarillion*, 288f), for they are shaped by Aulë the Smith. They are resistant to both physical and magical fire. Telchar the Smith (3:533; *The Silmarillion*, 94, 177) forges the knife Angrist, which is used to cut a Silmaril from Melkor's iron crown (*The Silmarillion*, 181), and the sword Narsil, which is used to cut O from Sauron's hand (*The Silmarillion*, 294).

The Númenoreans and their Dúnedain descendants on Middle-earth learn their alchemical skills from the Noldor Elves and the Dwarves. The Dúnedain are not given Rings of power. Instead, Isildur, the High King of the United Kingdom of Gondor and Arnor, cuts O from Sauron's hand, ending the Second Age. During the Third Age, the kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor are the chief obstacles to Sauron's domination of Middle-earth. Isildur is killed and O falls into the river Anduin. Arnor is lost to the Witch-king of Angmar, the lord of the Nazgûl (the Ring-wraiths), and Gondor is ruled by a steward. With the help of the Rohirrim and the exiled Dúnedain, Gondor is left to fight Sauron (*The Silmarillion*, 294ff).

In addition, there are the five Istari, Maias who were sent by the Valar to Middle-earth to fight Sauron (*The Silmarillion*, 299ff). The three mentioned in LotR are Radagast, Saruman, and Gandalf. Radagast, who is chosen by Yavanna, is chiefly concerned with small animals and birds. Saruman (chosen by Aulë) is corrupted by the power of O, and tries to capture it for himself (2:276f). Only Gandalf (chosen by Manwë, the king of Arda [the World]) seems to understand the alchemical nature of the problem. He also wears one of the three Elven Power Rings, Narya, which makes him Sauron's most powerful opponent. Without Narya, Gandalf would probably have perished in his battle with the Balrog of Moria (a Maia in the form of a mighty demon, see 3:348f). Gandalf understands that ultimately the only way to defeat Sauron and his evil ring is to undo the alchemical process by which it was made (See also *Unfinished Tales*, 436-459, 502-520)

There is one more race to consider. The Hobbits appear about the same time as Sauron reappears in the Third Age. It is my theory that they are created by Aulë for his pleasure as well as a last defence against Sauron. The strength of the Hobbits lies in their nature, which is the opposite of Sauron's essence. The Hobbits love the natural world and have no wish to dominate it or the creatures in it. They are very curious about the world, but they would rather keep a safe distance from magic and other dangers than go on quests to the Cracks of Doom. Yet, that is exactly what they eventually do. Throughout LotR and *The Hobbit*, nearly all the great deeds are achieved, or are caused to be accomplished, by hobbits (Sale, 1969). Bilbo's adventures result in the death of Smaug the Dragon (*The Hobbit*, 262) and he finds O (*The Hobbit*, 79). Meriadoc assists in the termination of the Witch-

king of Morgul (5:875), and with Peregrin motivate the Ents to destroy Saruman's Tower (3:507). Sam mortally wounds the giant Shelob the Spider (4:755) and, most important of all, Frodo (with Gollum) destroys Sauron and O in Mordor (6:982).

### Language of Rings

The Anglo-Saxon *Exeter Book*, which was compiled and written circa AD 1000, tells of a precious ring that speaks without words to people who understand its magic speech. Talking rings appear in many myths, but mostly it is a spirit, demon, or something similar, that is trapped in the ring and speaks to its owner. Alchemists and other scholars have used rings as a means of gaining knowledge and power through memory systems based on rings. The knowledge preserved by the rings was heathen arcane lore, and therefore evil; at least according to the Christian Churches, who persecuted heathen practices, including the mystic usage of rings, throughout the Middle Ages. Another way that rings might speak is through fortune telling such as is performed by Lapp shamans. They place a ring on a drum, watch it dance around while tapping the sides of the drum, and then interpret the movements (Day, 1994, 12, 23, 154-157).

In LotR O speaks to the ones who come close enough and become interesting to its purpose, which is to seek a way back to its creator Sauron. Gollum (Smeagol the hobbit) wears O for centuries, and in his dialogues with himself, it is possible that he is actually talking to O and it to him. Gandalf, and others, say that O speaks to them, giving them visions of what they might do if they chose to wield it (See e.g. 1:75). O promises the type of power that would interest the person in question. Sam Gamgi, Frodo's gardener, has visions of a flowering Mordor and envisions himself as a great Elf-warrior (6:935), while Boromir sees himself crushing Sauron's forces and saving Gondor (3:418). Galadriel wields the Power Ring Narya, with which she keeps Lothlórien evergreen, and defends its borders against Sauron. Narya allows her to perform a kind of fortune telling in the Mirror of Galadriel (2:381ff), and both Frodo and Sam look in the mirror, and they see things they do not understand, but what they see later comes to pass.

The magic speech of the ring and the secret language of alchemy are one. The dominance of the symbol of the ring in pagan religions, and in shamanistic tribal cultures that use metal, is related to the ring's alchemical origins and the secret of the smelting and forging of iron, which was discovered around 1000 BC in the region of the Caucasian Mountains. The Iron Age transformed timid shepherds and farmers into ferocious warriors. The hero who won the alchemist's ring in the form of the secret of iron-smelting literally saved his nation. The symbolic language of the ring quest, at its most profound, is concerned with the spiritual consequences of the Bronze and Iron Ages, which changed forever the human conditions and perception of the world. Ultimately, the ring quest is concerned with the battle between Order and Chaos, and the eternal cycle of life (Day, 1994, 25-27).

### The Ring Quest

Of all mythologies available to him, Tolkien was most inspired by Norse mythology, in which rings are of utmost importance. The greatest power is in the ring on the hand of Odin, the Magician-King of the gods. Odin is the Allfather, Lord of Victories, Wisdom, Poetry, Love, and Sorcery. He is Master of the Nine Worlds of the Norse universe, and through the magical power of his ring, he is the Lord of Rings. The Vikings were ruled by mortal ring lords. Their longship's figureheads were the ring and the dragon. Odin is the ring-giver, who controls the nine worlds by distributing eight rings every nine

days. Viking lords controlled their realms by rewarding their warriors finger rings, arm rings, and neck rings, all forged from the gold they had gained in trade, in raiding, and in war. A Viking lord's power could be judged by his ring-hoard, i.e. the rings he distributed. Among the Vikings, the gold ring was a form of currency, a gift of honour, and sometimes an heirloom of heroes and kings (Day, 1994, 29ff). The Appendix contains a short historical overview, mostly concerned with the Vikings and the British Islands.

Tolkien's preference towards Norse Mythology, rather than Roman-Greek Mythology, can be explained by the less idealised ruling gods, and their battle against Chaos; a struggle that eventually will be their doom: "It is the strength of the northern mythological imagination that it faced this problem, put the monsters in the centre, gave them victory but no honour, and found a potent but terrible solution in naked will and courage" (*The Monsters and the Critics*, 25-26).

The ring quest was born in Norse mythology; the first being the one about Odin's quest for the ring Draupnir. Odin was not always almighty and his quest for power and his magical ring is long. Odin travels the Nine Worlds asking questions of Giants, Elves, Dwarfs, the trees, plants, and stones. He appears mostly as an old bearded wanderer with one eye, wearing a grey or blue cloak and a traveller's broad-brimmed slouch hat, carrying only a staff. Odin, the Wanderer, is the archetype for the travelling Wizard, but more importantly, he is the ultimate Shaman. The Shaman travels between the worlds of men and the worlds of spirits and animals, and to the land of the dead. In his trance-like state his spirit may become a bird, or it may ride on the back of a magical horse, and reaches the other worlds by climbing a cosmic tree: Yggdrasil, the great ash tree, whose mighty limbs support the Nine Worlds. It is on Yggdrasil that Odin is pierced by a spear, from which he then hangs for nine days and nine nights. By the ninth night, Odin deciphers the markings cut in the stone by Yggdrasil's roots, and discovers the secret of the magical alphabet known as Runes. By the power of the Runes, he resurrects himself. He then cuts the limb he hung from, and makes his magician's staff. By the magic of the Runes, Odin can cure, make the dead speak, render weapons powerless, gain women's love, and calm storms by land and sea. Odin then goes to drink from the Fountain of Wisdom at the foot of Yggdrasil. To drink, Odin must sacrifice an eye, but he gains great wisdom. Back in Asgard, the other gods recognise him as their Lord. Odin's staff is used in the making of the spear Gungnir. The Elfs Sindri and Brok, the greatest smiths in the Nine Worlds, forge the ring Draupnir, which contain all the wisdom of Odin. Draupnir means "the dripper", for this magical golden ring has the power to drip eight other rings of equal size every nine days, and with these gifts, he dominates the other eight worlds. Just as Sauron loses O, Odin loses Draupnir. Loki, the god of mischief, manages to get the blind god Honir to kill Odin's son Balder with a twig of mistletoe. Balder is placed in the huge funeral ship called Ringhorn and all the gods gather to pay homage. Odin's grief is so great that he places Draupnir on his son's breast. Without Draupnir, Odin's mastery of the Nine Worlds is in danger of being challenged by the Giants. Odin mounts his magical eight-legged steed Sleipnir and rides down into the deepest realm of Hel. Sleipnir leaps over the chained Hound of Hel, Odin seizes Draupnir, and peace and order are restored to the Nine Worlds (Cherry, 2001; Day, 1994, 38-43; Grey, 1999, 176ff).

The spirits of slain warriors gather in Valhalla in Asgard, where they remain, waiting for the time when they are called to participate in the cataclysm called Ragnarok. Tolkien envisioned a similar fate for his world. However, a better and

more peaceful world is to be reborn from the old violent one. The fundamental difference between the Norse Midgard and Tolkien's Middle-earth is that the Norse mythic world is essentially amoral (the absence of both Good and Evil, rather than the absence of a Christian God), while Tolkien's World, although not exactly moral, is consumed by the great struggle between the forces of Good and Evil. The struggle between these forces is essentially the same as the struggle of Norse mythology, i.e. the struggle between Order and Chaos.

Tolkien declares that power corrupts; something that the Vikings would have found inconceivable. It is not Sauron, but the corruption by power that constitutes the real evil. Sauron represents Chaos, while O represents evil: the force that promotes Chaos. When O (Evil) is destroyed, Sauron (Chaos) is defeated. The forces of Good try to uphold Order, but will have to give way to Chaos eventually. However, when Evil is successful it effectively destroys Chaos with the creation of a new world.

Although, strictly speaking, Evil does not exist in our world, it is very real in Tolkien's World, and there is no need to tell us that Evil is bad. As Eliade (1963, 144f) writes, "Myth, in itself, is not a guarantee of 'goodness' or morality. Its function is to reveal models and, in so doing, to give a meaning to the World and to human life. This is why its role in the constitution of man is immense." Tolkien understood the power of the myth, not only as a way of explaining, or re-enacting the mythological past, but also as a literary form.

### The Volsunga Saga

The most famous Norse ring legend is the *Volsunga Saga*, perhaps the greatest literary work to survive the Viking civilisation. It has become the archetypal ring legend, and is primarily concerned with the life and death of the greatest of all Norse heroes, Sigurd the Dragonslayer, a magical ring called Andvarinaut, and a curse that dictates the fates of the Volsung and the Nibelung. The chaotic fifth and sixth centuries, the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire, was a mythical age for Germanic and Norse people, from which they drew the stuff to create legends. *The Volsunga Saga* is based on historical events surrounding the annihilation of the Burgundians in AD 436 by Attila the Hun (Day, 1994, 45, 96).

There can be no doubt that this legend is the chief source of inspiration for Tolkien's Mythology, and I will therefore take pains to retell it as briefly as possible without omitting anything of consequence. My sources are the translation by R.G. Finch (1965), Day's somewhat flawed interpretation (1994, 45-59), and *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Mythology* (Gray, 1999, 176ff).

The *Volsunga Saga* begins with the tale of Sigi, the mortal son of Odin and King of the Huns. King Sigi's son, Rerir, cannot make his queen with child, so the gods send a Valkyrie with an apple, and somehow Rerir's wife becomes pregnant. After six years in his mother's womb, Volsung is delivered by caesarean. The eldest of Volsung's children are the twins Sigmund and Signy. On the day of Signy's wedding, Odin appears in the great hall of the Volsungs, draws a brilliant sword (Gram), drives it up to its hilt in a tree trunk, and declares that it belongs to the one who manages to pull it out. Only Sigmund has the strength to extract Gram. Signy's husband, Siggeir, kills Volsung, and puts Volsung's ten sons in stocks in the woods. Each night a she-wolf comes and devours one of the brothers. On the tenth night, Sigmund tears out the she-wolf's tongue with his teeth, and together with Signy and her son, Sinfjotli, they kill Siggeir. Signy takes her life after revealing that Sinfjotli is the son of Sigmund. Sigmund returns home with his son, and claims his father's throne. He marries Borghild, who is pregnant when Sigmund falls, his sword shattered after fighting Odin on the battlefield.

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The dying Sigmund urges his wife to take the shards of Odin's sword. The exiled queen gives birth to Sigurd, and raises him in secret under the protection of the Danes. On one of his journeys, Sigurd meets Odin, who gives him Grani, offspring of Sleipnir. Shortly after, Regin, Sigurd's friend and teacher, reveals himself as an ancient magician, and tells him his story.

The gods Odin, Honir, and Loki travel through the land of Regin's father, Hreidmar, the greatest magician of the Nine Worlds, when Loki kills an otter, which turns out to be one of Regin's brothers. Hreidmar tells his third son, Fafnir, to chain the gods with Regin's unbreakable iron chains. In order to compensate Hreidmar's loss, Loki is sent out to find a treasure, and he finds the gold of Andvari the Dwarf. Andvari pleads with Loki to let him keep the ring on his finger, but Loki guesses its worth and takes it as well. At this point, Andvari spits out a curse that will destroy all who possess the ring. Hreidmar receives the treasure and the ring Andvarinaut. The curse works quickly, and soon Fafnir has murdered his father and sent Regin on his way. Fafnir broods on the treasure for a long time, and eventually turns into a dragon.

Sigurd is urged to help Regin kill Fafnir the dragon, and is offered Andvarinaut and part of the treasure. Regin reforges the blade of Sigurd's father, and together they set out to reclaim the ring-hoard. At dusk, Fafnir goes to drink from a foul pool. Regin tells Sigurd to dig a hole in the dragon's path, hide in it, and kill the dragon with his sword when it comes down to drink. Once again, Odin appears and tells Sigurd to dig another hole, or else the boiling blood of the dragon will undo him. Fafnir is in this manner slayed, and Sigurd survives. Regin comes forth and tells Sigurd to roast the dragon's heart and give it to him. In order to see if the heart is properly roasted, Sigurd tastes its juice, and suddenly he understands the language of birds. They tell him that Regin is plotting to kill him, and so he slays Regin. He seeks and achieves further honour, for he makes war on all the kings and princes who murdered his kinsmen, and slays every one of them. Furthermore, he breaks into a fort where he finds Brynhild the shield maiden, whom he awakens from the sleep Odin has laid upon her for killing a favoured warrior of his. She shares her great wisdom with him and they swear to marry each other and no one else. Before he leaves her he gives her Andvarinaut, and so the curse is on Brynhild.

Sigurd ventures on and enters the realm of the Nibelungs. He befriends the king's three sons, Gunnar, Hogni, and Guttorm. The queen of the Nibelungs gives Sigurd a magical potion that makes him forget Brynhild, and makes him fall in love with queen Grimhild's daughter Gudrun. Sigurd and Gudrun are soon wed. Sigurd wins Brynhild on Gunnar's behalf, but takes Andvarinaut and gives it to Gudrun. Sigurd's memory returns on the night of the wedding, but then it is too late to do anything about it. Brynhild feels betrayed by Sigurd and boasts that her husband, Gunnar, is mightier than Sigurd. Gudrun cannot hold her tongue and tells Brynhild how she was betrayed. Brynhild makes her husband and his brothers promise to slay Sigurd. One night Guttorm attacks the sleeping Sigurd. As Sigurd is about to die, he hurls Gram after the fleeing assassin, who is severed in half. Brynhild's sorrow is so great that she mounts Sigurd's funeral pyre.

Gudrun still has Andvarinaut, while Gunnar and Hogni hides the ring-hoard of Andvari in a secret cavern in the River Rhine. Against Gudrun's will, Grimhild arranges a marriage between Gudrun and Atli, king of the Huns. Atli covets the hidden treasure, and since attack is the best defence, the brothers assail Atli. After killing many of Atli's champions, and with Gudrun fighting alongside with them, they are finally defeated. Gunnar says he will only reveal the location of the treasure if Atli kills Hogni. When Hogni is dead, Gunnar says

that he would never tell, but was afraid his brother would. Atli kills Gunnar and Andvari's treasure is lost in the Rhine. Gudrun feigns reconciliation and later murders her sons, and slays Atli in his sleep.

With Andvarinaut still on her hand, she walks into the sea with the intention of drowning herself. The waves carry her away, and she lands near the castle of King Jonakr. Their daughter, Svanhild, is promised to King Jormunrek, but falls in love with Jormunrek's son. King Jormunrek kills them both. Gudrun gives two of her sons armour that no weapons can pierce, and urges them to slay Jormunrek, but warns them not to do damage to stones or the earth. On the road, they encounter their brother, whom they kill and stain the ground with his blood. They find and slay Jormunrek. One last time Odin appears. He tells Jormunrek's people that the only way to kill the brothers is to stone them to death. This is possible because they violated the earth when they shed their brother's blood. The *Volsunga Saga* ends with the stoning of Gudrun's last kindred.

The influence of Norse mythology cannot be understated. The evil in *O* is the same as the evil spell that comes with the Ring of Andvari. Evil corrupts and destroys. The difference between the *Volsunga Saga* and *LotR* is that the risk of owning, and using the ring, the Norse considered worth taking, while Tolkien did not. There are of course characters, such as Boromir, Denethor, Saruman, and Gollum, who think they can wield *O*, but we know better. Odin's ring Draupnir is in its power more akin to *O*, but its power is neither good nor evil; though in mortal hands, it would soon become one or the other. As power corrupts, Tolkien would say that the wielder would turn evil, but the Norse had no such thoughts. Still, they would have brought about the world's destruction with Draupnir in their hands as sure as anyone with power enough to wield *O* would have become Sauron, and inevitably would have wreaked havoc on Middle-earth.

### Of Elves & Men

The most important manuscript in Celtic Mythology is the *Red Book of Hergest*. It contains *The Mabinogion*, a collection of stories, in which there is told of magic rings and invisibility in many forms. The main influence of Celtic Mythology is manifest in Tolkien's Elves, who are largely based on Tuatha Dé Danann. This mythological people lived on Ireland before the humans arrived, and just as Tolkien's Elves, they went into hiding and faded away. While studying various Celtic myths, some of which are truly fascinating, it becomes painfully obvious that Tolkien used little of the stuff that these legends are made of. Tolkien has left the action where he found it, and extracted ideas such as the nature of Elves. While the Celts have given Tolkien mythical Elves, the Anglo-Saxons have given him Man. As a professor of Anglo-Saxon, it must have felt quite natural to model the human races on the Anglo-Saxon, as one of Tolkien's goals was to create a mythological world worthy of this people (Day, 1994, 79-83; Guest, 1906, 13ff; Gray, 1999, 94ff; Rolleston, 1911, 103ff; Ross, 1996, 16ff).

The tale of Beowulf, composed as early as 700 AD, is an Anglo-Saxon stab at the *Volsunga Saga*. It actually begins by telling of Sigurd Fafnirbane, but the story that later unfolds is very different from the *Volsunga Saga*. Beowulf is a great hero, who saves the Danes from the monster Grendel and the monster's mother, who is an even more terrifying apparition than her son is. Many years pass, and Beowulf eventually becomes King of the Danes. As a last hurrah, Beowulf goes away to slay a dragon, a guardian of a huge ring-hoard. In this last battle he kills the dragon, but is fatally wounded, and dies shortly after he has seen the gold. There is something of Beowulf in Boromir, and other elements

echoed by Tolkien are the Rohirrim, Théoden, and their golden hall (3:529ff). The slaying of a dragon theme is used in *The Hobbit* (Day, 1994, 84-85; Swanton, 1978, 35ff).

Another Anglo-Saxon tale of import is the ring legend of the Saxon hero Wayland the Smith (the Norse Volund). Wayland made the sword Gram in the *Volsunga Saga*, and is said to have made many other swords used by heroes in countless other legends. In Wayland the Smith, we have the figure of the gifted, but cursed smith, who is manifest in the Noldor King Fëanor. He is also comparable to Telchar the Smith, and Celebrimbor, Lord of the Elven smiths of Eregion, who forges the Rings of Power. The tale of the Ring of Volund is written down in the long Icelandic narrative poem, the *Völundarkviða*. It begins with Volund capturing a Valkyrie, whom he takes as his wife. Nine years later, she escapes him, but leaves him a magical ring of gold. The ring gives Volund the power to forge magical weapons. It also allows him to hammer out seven hundred identical gold rings from its shape. This ring is no other than the ring Andvarinaut. Nidud, the King of Sweden, imprisons Volund in a fortress on an island, where he is forced to forge whatever the King demands. Volund eventually gets his revenge, and escapes his prison, stealing away with his ring and his best sword. He forges wings, with which he flies to Alheim, where the Elven smiths welcome him. The ring is stolen by Soté the Outlaw, who becomes obsessed with it. Soté, like Gollum (1:67ff), seeks out a place where nobody can find him and steal his precious ring. He finds shelter in a barrow grave, where he turns into a kind of Ring-wraith. Völund's Ring is the object of the quest of the hero Thorsten. Thorsten enters the barrow grave where Soté the Outlaw is hiding. The screams of a Soté mix with the cries of Thorsten. Steel strikes against stone and bone, and Thorsten emerges victorious, with Völund's Ring in his hand. Clearly, the hobbits' adventure with the Barrow-wights (1:153ff) is inspired from this tale. More important is the similar effect the rings have on Soté and Gollum (Day, 1994, 85-89; Gray, 1999, 176ff).

### Tom Bombadil

There is a character in LotR who is frequently misinterpreted by the critics, and probably by most readers. Helms (1974) understands Tom Bombadil as some kind of spirit of nature, a whimsical creature, representing the moral neutrality of nature to Middle-earth's implicit malice. Since Tom is considered unimportant, adaptations of LotR tend to cut Tom out. I will show that Tom Bombadil is the most important character of all. For reference, see 1:134-163. If Tom is acting whimsically, it is because he chooses to. The reason we find him odd, childish, and carefree is simply his inability to separate song from his other activities. He constantly sings nonsensical ditties. Song is fundamental to his being, suggesting he might cease to exist if he stops singing, though it is more likely that Tom's singing creates and sustains the world within the boundaries he has set for himself. Within these boundaries lies the Shire, which would mean that the hobbits are created by Tom. Hobbits are in many ways like Tom, suggesting that Tom does not change his appearance to be like the hobbits, but rather that he created them in his image. There is certainly power in Tom's song. His song controls the elements, creatures, and plants in the forest. He even possesses power of the dead, as is shown when he saves the hobbits from the Barrow-wights. In his letters, as quoted by Hargrove, Tolkien expresses the idea that Tom embodies pure science, i.e. he is curiosity personified. Tom delights in things as they are, and has no wish to dominate and control them, unless necessary to protect his creation. Tom has no desire to possess anything but knowledge. So, who is Tom?

Eldest, that's what I am. Mark my words: Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from outside. (1:146)

This statement can mean nothing but that Tom is one of the Ainur, one of the gods who created the world by singing, and who later, as Valar, descended to Middle-earth to wonder at the creation, shaping it further, and populate it with all kinds of creatures (*The Silmarillion*, 15ff). Hargrove (2001) writes, "Someone might, of course, want to object that Tom Bombadil really doesn't look or act like a Vala or a Maia, appearing and behaving instead more like an overgrown Hobbit". Hargrove's explanation for this is that Tom simply has the ability to change his appearance to make him congenial to creatures he encounters. According to Hargrove, this ability supports the theory that Tom is a Vala. I, however, do not agree. A chameleon act is not what makes a Vala. As Hargrove admits, a Maia could have pulled that off just as easily. The Maia are created by Eru, the One (out of whose thoughts the Ainur are formed), to help the Valar shape Middle-earth after the creation of the world. Since Tom existed before Melkor, the Dark Lord, and the other Valar descended to Middle-earth, he can be nothing less than a Vala. The question is which Vala Tom is. I have already expressed the idea that Aulë created the hobbits, which would have to mean that Tom is Aulë. This can be verified in many ways. Hargrove chooses to determine Tom's identity by comparing Tom's wife, Goldberry, with the wives of the Valar, and finds that Yavanna fits Goldberry's description, "for she is responsible for all living things, with a special preference for plants. Since she is Queen of the Earth, it is easy to imagine her watering the forest with special care, as Goldberry does during the Hobbits' visit" (Hargrove, 2001). Goldberry's appearance also closely resembles Tolkien's description of Yavanna in *The Silmarillion* (27f). Yavanna's husband is no other than Aulë. Tom's mastery of O can only be explained by him being Aulë the smith, who is the maker of all the substances of the earth. In the creation of Middle-earth, Aulë is involved in nearly every aspect of its making. Of all the Valar, Aulë has the greatest interest in the Children of Ilúvatar (Eru). Aulë has the power to dominate and control, but he does not choose to possess anything but knowledge, something he gladly shares with others.

Since Tom is Aulë, he has no fear of O. All other creatures who possess knowledge enough to understand what O represents are afraid to even touch it, fearing that the power of O will overcome them. O has no power over Tom Bombadil, and while it makes all others think of it as precious, Tom is not impressed. When Tom calls O "precious" he is clearly ironic. Tom delights in studying the craftsmanship involved in its making, and knowing what evil power lies in it, he disrespectfully puts it on his finger, and does not disappear. Furthermore, when Frodo puts it on his finger, Tom is still able to see Frodo. In addition, Tom makes O itself disappear (1:148).

Since Tom possesses such mastery over O, why does he not take it, reshape it, or destroy it? I suggest that he could do it, but he would still have to go to the Cracks of Doom, and this he clearly has no intention of doing, since he created the hobbits to run his errands. Hargrove proposes that Aulë is limited by the Music of the Ainur. He is bound by what he sang and he cannot go beyond those limits, nor can he

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change his part in the play. Tom Bombadil takes the ultimate moral stand against power and possession, denounces and dethrones the evil power of  $\bigcirc$ , and sends it out into the world again, trusting in the naked will and courage of his hobbits.

### The One Ring

When Sauron puts  $\bigcirc$  on his finger, his evil power is recognized by the Elves (*The Silmarillion*, 288). They realize that he can control their thoughts, and they decide to remove their rings and not use them. After the death of Isildur,  $\bigcirc$  falls into the river Anduin, but is found by the hobbit Deagol, who is promptly murdered by his friend Smeagol. Smeagol does not possess the power to wield  $\bigcirc$ , and so it uses him to try to get back to Sauron. Smeagol turns slowly into a kind of Ring-wraith (although still alive), who hates everything, including himself and his precious ring; a ring that he cannot get rid of until the moment comes when it opts to leave him to be found by Bilbo. Just like Smeagol, Bilbo finds  $\bigcirc$ 's invisibility spell very useful. Under the influence of Gandalf, Bilbo finally escapes  $\bigcirc$  by giving it to Frodo. The way Frodo acquired  $\bigcirc$  is important. This is the first time since Isildur cut it off Sauron's hand, that it has not decided its own course. Whenever Frodo is tempted to use  $\bigcirc$ , or actually uses it,  $\bigcirc$  has a chance to work corruption on him. Gandalf advises Frodo to use it seldom, if at all (1:66-80).

Unfortunately, the power of  $\bigcirc$  increases with the presence of Evil. On Weathertop, the presence of the Lord of the Nazgûl gives  $\bigcirc$  the power to convince Frodo to put it on his finger, and so he enters the dimension of the Nazgûl. They see him as clearly as he sees them and the Lord of the Nazgûl deals Frodo a blow with a cursed dagger (1:212). This wound works its way inward, and would have killed Frodo had it not been for Elrond's healing powers (boosted by one of the Elven Rings of Power). Since Frodo possessed  $\bigcirc$ , he would not have died as such. He would have become one of the Ring-wraiths, deprived of free will and life, but not of existence. Frodo recovers, but is never free from the ache of the scar. Boromir is also affected by  $\bigcirc$ . In him,  $\bigcirc$  probably sees a faster way to reach Sauron, since Boromir would wield  $\bigcirc$  to muster and command an army against Sauron; a war he has no realistic hope of winning. Boromir tries to take  $\bigcirc$  from Frodo, and forces Frodo to put  $\bigcirc$  on in order to escape. This is the point when Frodo decides to leave the others and embark on the perilous direct course into Mordor and Mount Doom (2:421f).

Although Frodo does not use  $\bigcirc$  again, it works on him, breaking him down, and finally breaks him at the Cracks of Doom. In Frodo's flight, he does not manage to get away from Sam, who also possesses  $\bigcirc$  for a while, and uses it to save Frodo from the clutches of orcs (6:937ff). If Frodo had not already been under the spell of  $\bigcirc$ , Sam would probably have kept it, and perhaps the ending would have been different. However,  $\bigcirc$ 's power over Frodo is so great that Sam cannot refuse to give it back (6:946).

At the Cracks of Doom Frodo claims  $\bigcirc$ , puts it on his finger, and challenges Sauron for power over Middle-earth. This is the moment Gollum completes his ring quest. Gollum bites off Frodo's finger and goes mad with excitement. Finally, he has his precious back. Now everybody will pay. Fortunately, Gollum slips and falls into the Cracks of Doom, and  $\bigcirc$  is destroyed, completing Frodo's backwards ring quest (6:981f). Why did not Sauron stop these puny hobbits from destroying his ring? The answer to this question is that Sauron could never imagine anybody ever wanting to destroy  $\bigcirc$ . In his mind, the only two possible explanations for the  $\bigcirc$  to close on him are: Either  $\bigcirc$ 's will has moved it closer to its maker by the way of commanding the minds of feeble creatures, or a powerful spirit has claimed it and is now

marching against him. This is why he fears the inferior army, lead by Gandalf, which march up to his gates to challenge him. Sauron must think Gandalf or Aragorn possesses  $\bigcirc$ , and therefore he attacks them with the whole of his force (6:921ff). As Auden (1969, 56-60) remarks, Evil's greatest disadvantage is that it cannot imagine what it is like to be good, while the Good can imagine what it is like to be evil. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that using Sauron's inability to understand that someone might try to destroy  $\bigcirc$  is not only the key to Sauron's ultimate destruction, but also the only way of destroying him (compare Gandalf's reasoning in 2:286f).

In one of his letters ("From a letter by J.R.R. Tolkien to Milton Waldman, 1951", 22), Tolkien says that the chief power of all the Rings of Power is the prevention/slowing of decay. Certainly, the Elven Rings are made to help craft and preserve the beautiful creations of the Elves. However, the conservation of the physical appearance of Bilbo is only skin deep. As long as one possesses  $\bigcirc$ , one is preserved from without, but at the same time corruption works from the inside. Eventually, all life leaves the body, and one enters fully the "invisible world" of the Ring-wraiths. Gollum is an example of what may happen if one is exposed to the power of  $\bigcirc$  for a long time. It is possible that the three Elven Rings can keep up appearance without any ill effects, but since Elves do not grow old, they would have little personal use for this ability, and therefore I conclude that the Elven Rings probably would not have this effect on the bearer. Beauty is a necessary alchemical quality of the Elven Rings, but in  $\bigcirc$  it is only feigned beauty. The Elven Rings' beauty lies in the creation and preservation of beautiful things in nature, while  $\bigcirc$ 's beauty is essentially superficial and useless.

Further, Tolkien says that the Rings of Power can make the bearer invisible, and make the "invisible world" visible to the bearer. There is no evidence to support that this applies to others than the less alchemically adept species, such as humans and hobbits. The powerful Elves are not invisible when they wear their rings. Instead, they are able, as is Tom Bombadil, to make the rings invisible. Sam never sees Galadriel's ring, although she shows it to Frodo, who can see it because of the sharpening of the senses that he gains from  $\bigcirc$  (2:385f).  $\bigcirc$  lets the bearer enter another dimension, rather than just making him invisible. This other dimension is most probably the land of the dead; to which the Shaman travels. It is not likely that the Elven Rings would have this effect, and there is no account of an Elven Ring ever being on the hand of a mortal, but Gandalf says:

A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he fades: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the dark power that rules the Rings. (1:60)

The invisibility in *The Hobbit* was invented by Tolkien without any thought as to what Bilbo's magic ring later came to represent in LotR. It is typical of Tolkien that he would write something, and only later try to explain it. A spelling mistake would generate a new dialect and a discrepancy in the story line would be explained by the existence of different narrators. There is no such thing as a reliable narrator in Tolkien's Middle-earth. Most of *The Hobbit* and LotR are supposed to be compiled from manuscripts written by Bilbo and Frodo (*The Red Book of Westmarch*). It is because of their limited vision, that it is, in order to understand the symbolism of the ring quest and its spiritual context,

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necessary to read *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*, which are compilations of Tolkien's other writings about Middle-earth, but mythologically supposedly traceable to other manuscripts from Middle-earth.

The really important function of  $\bigcirc$  is that it is evil.  $\bigcirc$  introduces Evil into Tolkien's Norse universe, filling an amoral world with morality. The introduction of Evil means that the opposing power may be termed the Good, and this transports the struggle between Order and Chaos to a different plane, a more human plane. Order and Chaos are natural components of any world. The battle between Good and Evil only exists in mythology and in the minds of people who believe in the existence of these opposing powers, for example in the form of God and the Devil. It can readily be argued that, in real life, Evil is only the absence of Good, although the concept of Good does not exist without its counterpart. Order is only a construction of our brains, and therefore more akin to Evil than to Good, while Chaos makes up the very structure of the universe. It seems the only certainty is the existence of Chaos. This is why Tolkien, just as the Norse, chose to put the monsters in the centre, trusting in the naked will and courage of the hobbits.

### Conclusion

J.R.R. Tolkien is successful in his attempt to create a consistent and believable mythical world. In Norse mythology, he found the raw material for his creation. He shaped a world, tempered by Celtic and Anglo-Saxon mythology, with the monsters in the centre. He understood the significance of the symbolic value of the ring, and chose to write a ring quest with many levels.

Early critics either tended to see nothing but the surface, or in an attempt to allegorise it, quickly lost track of what is important. It was not until the publication of *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales* that the keys to understanding LotR were presented to us. Still, many critics endeavour to make LotR fit the mould of their expectations. For example, just because Tolkien was a Catholic and LotR

tells of the struggle between Good and Evil, LotR is not necessarily a deeply Christian piece of literature. The only single idea in LotR that could be construed as Christian is the existence of Evil, but Tolkien's Evil is fundamentally of Norse nature. Evil is Chaos, or rather the force that promotes Chaos. Chaos cannot be defeated, since it is intrinsic to the structure of the universe. However, Order cannot be defeated by Chaos, since a new Order takes shape from the debris of the cataclysm. The Christian universe is linear, while Tolkien's universe is cyclic.

The functions of the smith, the magician, the alchemist, and the shaman are interconnected and bound up with the ring symbolism. Several of these functions are often present in one single character, such as Prometheus, Odin, Aulë, and Sauron. It is hard to pick one function that is more important in general than the others are, but in Tolkien's World the smith seems to be attached with superior importance. Tom Bombadil (Aulë) is therefore the most important character in LotR. He is the supreme smith and the creator of the hobbits, with whom we are supposed to identify ourselves. Tom is to the hobbits what Prometheus is to us. Prometheus' ring is not wrought by him, but forced upon him by a lesser god (Zeus), just as  $\bigcirc$  is not forged by Aulë, but by the lesser god Sauron. Tom and Prometheus have little interest in the rings. The rings' importance lies elsewhere.

Tolkien's claim that his ring is archetypal can be defended by showing how all the aspects of the rings in Northern European mythology and history are manifest in  $\bigcirc$ . The most evident and perhaps the most important aspect is that of immense power. Tolkien disliked power, or rather the use of power. The power of  $\bigcirc$  is truly terrible, and has been compared with the power of the atom bomb. Wielding  $\bigcirc$ , one can make great magic and, like the shaman, enter the land of the dead. However, the alchemical nature of  $\bigcirc$  cannot be escaped, and in the end, its magic will turn against its owner and trap him in the land of the dead forever. Like Faust, one receives power at the cost of one's soul. Power corrupts; promising control it brings Chaos, and the end of this world.

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## Appendix

(Adapted from Cherry)

- 100 Tacitus writes Germanica.  
200 Migration Period begins.  
300 Earliest runic inscriptions in Denmark.  
375 Ermenrichus king of the Goths dies. He is the basis for Jormunrek of the Volsunga Saga.  
436 Huns battle Burgundians.  
437 Burgundian King Gundaharius dies. He is the basis for the fictional Gunnar of the Volsunga Saga.  
449 Angles, Saxons, and Jutes migrate to Britain.  
453 Attila the Hun dies, possibly at the hands of his new wife the Germanic Hildico. Attila is the basis for the fictional Atli of the Volsunga Saga.  
500 Migration Period ends.  
528 Hygelac, king of the Geats, raids Frisia and the Rhine.  
550 Jordanes writes History of the Goths.  
570 Danes raid Frisia.  
597 St. Augustine begins conversion of Anglo-Saxons.  
600 Uppsala established.  
700 Frank'sasket made in Anglo-Saxon England depicting Wayland (Volund).  
700 Eggjum rune stone in Sogn Norway created. Its diction foreshadowing skaldic poetry.  
700 Beowulf thought to have been composed. It contains references to the Volsung legend, the Brisingmen, and Wayland (Volund) the smith.  
705 Foundation of Ribe on the Jutland peninsula.  
715 Willibrord leads first Christian mission to Scandinavia. His attempt to convert the Danes is unsuccessful.  
750 Foundation of Birka in Svealand (now Sweden).  
770 Waldere composed. It contains reference to Wayland (Volund).  
786 Paul the Deacon begins work on Historia Langobardorum, which contains a legend about Woden and Freia.  
789 Norwegians Vikings attack Portland England, the first attack on England.  
793 Vikings raid Lindisfarne.  
795 First recorded Viking attacks on Ireland and Scotland.  
800 Earliest Skaldic poetry.  
808 The Danish king Godfred sacks the trading centre of Reric and moves all of its traders to Hedeby on the Jutland peninsula.  
810 Danish attack Frisia and impose tribute.  
826 Danish King Harald Klak converted to Christianity. He is baptised at Mainz and is accompanied by Anskar on his return to Denmark.  
827 Harald Klak expelled from Denmark.  
829 Anskar's first mission to Birka.  
839 Swedish Vikings reach Constantinople.  
839 Vikings attack the Picts.  
841 Viking base Dublin established.  
843 Frisia comes under Viking control.  
844 First Viking raid on Spain.  
845 Pagan uprising causes missionaries to leave Birka.  
850 The Danish king Horik I allows Anskar to build churches at Ribe and Hedeby.  
860 Swedish Vikings, the Rus, attack Constantinople.  
862 Rurik becomes ruler of Novgorod.  
862 Finns and Slavs invite Rurik and the Rus to rule over them.  
865 Anskar dies.  
866 Danes occupy York.  
866 Vikings from Ireland and Scotland make Picts pay tribute.  
869 Edmund, king of East Anglia is killed by Vikings.  
870 Vikings begin settling Iceland.  
896 Viking army in England breaks up with some members staying in England to live.  
900 Time of Thjodolf of Hvinir a poet of King Harald Finehair. He composed the Ynglinga Tale and Haustlong.  
902 Vikings expelled from Dublin.  
917 Vikings recapture Dublin.  
919 Ragnald, grandson of Ivar of Dublin, gains control of York.  
930 Eyvind Skaldaspillir, skald to Norwegian kings Harald Fairhair and Hakon the Good.  
937 English defeat Norse-Scottish alliance at battle of Brunanburh.  
944 The Irish sack Dublin.  
954 End of Viking kingdom of York when Erik Bloodaxe is killed.  
961 Viking raids in Wales begin.  
965 Harald Bluetooth converts Danes to Christianity.  
970 Norway falls under Danish rule.  
974 Hedeby comes under German occupation until 983.  
975 Exeter Book copied. It contains the poem Deor, which has a reference to Wayland (Volund) the smith.  
985 Erik the Red sails from Iceland with a group of settlers headed to Greenland.  
990 Einar Skallaglam was a skald of Earl Hakon of Hladir who ruled Norway until 995. Einar was a friend of Egil Skallagrimsson.  
991 Olaf Tryggvason defeats English at Maldon.  
1000 Conversion of Iceland to Christianity.  
1000 Earliest Swedish runic inscriptions.  
1000 The Exeter Book is written.  
1000 Rune stone in Sweden depicts Sigurd roasting Fafnir's heart.  
1014 Brian Boru defeats the Norse.  
1016 King Cnut the Great's rules England.  
1035 Earl Thorfinn of Orkney wins control over most of Northern Scotland.  
1042 End of Danish rule in England.  
1052 Diarmait takes Dublin.  
1066 The Battle of Hastings.  
1075 Adam of Bremen writes Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum, which includes description of the rituals performed at Uppsala.  
1080 Pagan ceremonies at Uppsala end.  
1100 Welsh poetry with close parallels to skaldic lines.  
1125 Icelandic Book of Settlements written.  
1169 Danes expand into Baltic.  
1185 The Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus written  
1195 Nibelungenlied written.  
1200 Saga of the Volsungs written down. The only manuscript in existence dates from ca 1400.  
1210 Oldest Icelandic family sagas written.  
1220 Prose Edda written.  
1230 Egil's Saga written possibly by Snorri Sturluson.  
1240 Heimskringla written by Snorri Sturluson.  
1240 Codex Regius manuscript of the Poetic Edda written.  
1245 Kormaks Saga written.  
1245 Laxdaela Saga written.  
1250 Swedish Lawbooks written down in alliterative form.  
1261 Greenland comes under Norwegian rule.  
1263 Iceland comes under Norwegian rule.  
1266 Norway cedes Isle of Man and Hebrides to Scotland.  
1271 End of the Rus Rurik dynasty.  
1300 Grettir's Saga and Sturlunga Saga created.  
1350 Red Book of Hergest composed.  
1370 Flatayjabok written.  
1469 Denmark cedes Orkney and Shetland to Scotland.  
1480 Last Norse Greenland colony becomes extinct.

