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Tolkien's Imagination in the Lyrics of Contemporary Blackmetal Groups

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Téma práce: **Tolkienova imaginace v textech současných blackmetalových skupin**
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Zásady pro vypracování:

Klasická literární díla mnohdy prostupují současným uměním a inspirují ho. Autor se proto ve své práci zaměří na způsoby, jakým je svět Tolkienových románů tematizován současnými blackmetalovými skupinami z anglicky mluvících zemí. Cílem bude srovnat Tolkienovu předlohu s verzemi jeho literárního univerza v textech hudebních uskupení *Andracca* (Velká Británie), *Gates to The Abyss* (Spojené státy americké), *Keys of Orthanc* (Kanada), popřípadě i dalších. Cílem práce je zmapovat způsoby, jakými současní hudebníci navazují na Tolkienovu představivost a jak ji rozvíjejí, zejména ve smyslu pojetí postav a Středozemě.

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Primární zdroje:

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ANNOTATION

This thesis deals with Tolkien's imagination in lyrics of Tolkien black metal bands from English-speaking countries. Its main goal is to analyze those lyrics, find common elements and contrast their usage with Tolkien's literary work. The first part of the paper defines this musical genre and describes Tolkien's influence on the black metal scene. The second part consists of text analysis that contrasts the portrayal of evil and nature in both fictional universes.

KEYWORDS

J.R.R. Tolkien, Lord of the Rings, Middle-Earth, Influence, Black metal, Tolkien black metal, Battle of good and Evil, Nature, Music, Setting, Power, War, Evil, Good

ANOTACE

Tato práce se zabývá propojením Tolkienova fiktivního světa s jeho otiskem v hudebních textech tolkien black metalových kapel z anglicky mluvících zemí. Jejím hlavním cílem je analyzovat tyto texty, najít společné prvky a následně porovnat jejich použití s Tolkienovou předlohou. První část práce se zabývá obecnou teorií, přiblížením tohoto hudebního žánru a popisem vlivu Tolkienovi práce na black metalovou hudební scénu. Ve druhé části se nachází samotná analýza textu, která porovnává především vyobrazení zla a použití přírody v obou svtětech.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

J.R.R. Tolkien, Pán prstenů, Středozem, Vliv, Black metal, Tolkien Black metal, Boj dobra a zla, Příroda, Hudba, Zasazení, Moc, Válka, Zlo, Dobro

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Introduction

The impact of Tolkien's work can be seen not only among contemporary literary authors but also moviemakers, video-game developers, artists, and musicians. Since Tolkien's work influenced many people, it is no surprise that black metal, as a musical subgenre, is not an exception. Although black metal and Tolkien are two different and seemingly incompatible fictional universes, they share several narrative elements, passion for Nordic culture, admiration for wild nature, and a virtuous fan base. Nevertheless, both universes stand on entirely different values. On the one hand, there is Tolkien, a highly educated catholic professor who loves wandering throughout the forests, experienced both World Wars, and is known for creating a complex fictional world with its own fictional languages. On the opposite, there is the black metal scene that incorporates satanism and nationalism in their lyrics, whose musicians produce the rawest and most extreme sound possible to shock the mainstream. When combining those two worlds, many questions emerge. How can be those two universes compatible if they are the complete opposites of each other? How can young Satanists be fond of the story of a catholic professor? How is it possible that the rebellious scene adopted the product of the mainstream?

This paper deals primarily with thorough analysis and comparison of literary elements and techniques used in both Tolkien black metal and Tolkien's legendarium. Moreover, it provides the answers to the questions mentioned above and reveals the connection between those two fictional universes. The bachelor thesis is structured into three main chapters. The first chapter provides deeper insight into the theory and presents the brief history of this music subgenre. Furthermore, it describes the connection between both fictional universes, introduces the first Tolkien-related projects, and presents the theory behind the common elements used in both worlds. It also introduces lyrical themes that are frequently used in Tolkien black metal lyrics - namely evil, satanism, and nature. This chapter is followed by two analytical chapters that provide supporting evidence for the arguments introduced in the theoretical chapter.

The second chapter analyses the lyrical theme of the battle of good and evil and compares the approaches of Tolkien and Tolkien black metal bands towards this topic. Furthermore, this chapter partite the theme to further subcategories: war, good versus evil, and power. The portrayal of each subcategory in both worlds is examined and contrasted. The same applies to the third chapter, "The Role of Nature in Tolkien Black Metal," which analyses the lyrical theme of nature. Nature examined in this paper refers primarily to the story's setting; thus, it consists of natural terrain, architectural works, weather, atmosphere descriptions, and brief mentions of names of Middle-earth places. Comparably to the previous chapter, even this

chapter is split into two subcategories. Those are nature in the role of a supportive element, and nature portrayed as the main lyrical theme. Again, both subcategories are examined and contrasted to their original portrayal in Tolkien's legendarium. Furthermore, both analytical chapters feature several excerpts from lyrics of Tolkien black metal bands. Those lyrics primarily function as a foundation and the representative musical sample for the actual analysis that contrasts them with Tolkien's writing.

Since this thesis examines the relationship between Tolkien and Tolkien black metal and focuses chiefly on Tolkien black metal lyrics that are further contrasted with its primary source (Tolkien's *arcana*), it was essential to choose the proper musical representation. Therefore, bands examined in this paper were selected on the basis of their lyrical content and country of origin. Initially over 180 individual lyrics from 15 bands were analyzed, this number was later narrowed to a smaller musical sample of 40 songs from 5 bands that were adequate for the purposes of this work. The musical sample consists primarily of Andracca (UK), Gates to the Abyss (US), Dwarrowdelf (UK), Keys of Orthanc (CA), and Mirkwood (US). Examined bands share narrative elements with Tolkien's writing, have decent and well-arranged lyrics, and originate from English-speaking countries, which is crucial for contrasting their portrayal of Middle-earth stories. In addition, there are also lyrics from other bands analyzed or mentioned in this paper. Those lyrics function primarily as supportive material, and their main purpose is to support the arguments given in the paper. Those bands also meet the requirements used for the selection of bands mentioned above. Further analyzed lyrics are from bands Hithlum (US) and Line of Durin (US). Moreover, it should be stressed that every Tolkien black metal band has a unique artistic approach towards the given topics and the sound that often overlaps with other musical styles. Therefore, each band explores a different part of Tolkien's universe and presents its stories in a slightly different manner.

Black metal is globally viewed as a homogenous musical genre with anti-religious views and satanic imagery. Nevertheless, it is so broad that it is divided into several stylistic divisions - each with its own rules, lyrical content, and imagery. According to filters at Metal-Tracker, a website dedicated to downloading metal music, there are 25 stylistic divisions of black metal.¹ The fan base also composed several unofficial lists to keep track of black metal subgenres. Those lists usually consist of 20–30 stylistic divisions, yet they are continually updated and do not cover all existing subgenres. However, those lists can not be finished since stylistic divisions are intertwined, and new combinations are being made. Stylistic divisions range, for example,

¹ "Homepage," homepage, Metal-Tracker, last modified March 16, 2022, <https://en.metal-tracker.com/>.

from viking black metal, atmospheric black metal, through symphonic black metal to Tolkien black metal. Furthermore, they often consist of abbreviations such as NSBM (national socialistic black metal), DSBM (depressive suicidal black metal), or RABM (red and anarchist black metal). Therefore, Tolkien black metal is often shortened to TBM in this paper to avoid lengthy and repetitive structures. This abbreviation is used as both an adjective and a noun.

Although Tolkien's impact on black metal is apparent throughout the scene, Tolkien black metal, as its stylistic division, is a relatively new subgenre. According to the list from Metal Archives, 145 black metal bands currently use Tolkien's work as the central theme from the general search of 245 bands that display even other musical subgenres.² As Tommy Kuusela suggests, "the search does not take into account occasional references to Tolkien, nor does it take into account pseudonyms of band members or artwork being used for the records."³ The beginning of the Tolkien black metal can be dated to the nineties, although many bands were formed primarily after the release of Peter Jackson's movies in 2001-2003. Therefore, the whole scene has been poorly examined, and sometimes it is even excluded from the unofficial lists of black metal subgenres. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the sound of those bands often overlaps with other musical styles, and thus some of the bands examined in this paper could be defined more as death-metal or atmospheric/epic metal bands.

Tolkien and black metal alone are frequently researched topics. However, their combination is examined very sporadically. Despite this fact, two works have been mapping this subgenre more deeply, yet predominantly with the focus on musical theory and the global black metal scene. Those are "'Dark Lord of Gorgoroth': Black Metal and the Works of Tolkien" by Tommy Kuusela and "JRR Tolkien's Mythical Evil in Black Metal" written by Owen Coggins as an essay accompanying his presentation at ACCSFF. Apart from those two works, there are also websites that provide additional information about Tolkien black metal. Those are mainly Last.fm and Metal-Archives, which provide lists of Tolkien black metal bands, along with their music, lyrics, and other essential information. Other materials, such as *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult* or *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, are focused merely on the black metal scene and are aimed chiefly at its cultural background and musical theory. Furthermore, other scholarly papers and thesis examine its dark history, connection to nationalism, or Nordic influence. Those papers usually do not cover the

² "Search Results For: 'Tolkien,'" searching bands by themes, Metal-Archives, last modified March 1, 2022, <https://www.metal-archives.com/>.

³ Tommy Kuusela, "'Dark Lord of Gorgoroth': Black Metal and the Works of Tolkien," *Lembas Extra 2015: Unexplored Aspects of Tolkien and Arda* 19, no. 1 (2015): 90.

connection between the scene and Tolkien's writing, yet they sporadically mention Tolkien's influence on bands' names, visuals, and artistic pseudonyms.

In contrast, Tolkien's legendarium is one of the most researched fictional universes. Most academic works examining Tolkien's legendarium focus predominantly on the influence of Nordic literature and culture on Tolkien, his relationship to nature, his experience from World War I, and Middle-earth mythologies and evil. In addition, there are also several online Wikipedias and 'companions' that help with the understanding of Tolkien's complex work, such as *The Nature of Middle-Earth*, *The Dark Powers of Tolkien*, or *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's companion*. His work is also introduced by several books mapping his life. Those are primarily *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* and *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, both written by Humphrey Carpenter with the help of Christopher Tolkien. Comparably to the online materials about black metal, materials about Tolkien accompanied by essays from other scholars are available on the official website of Tolkien Estate.

Since this paper deals primarily with TBM bands from English-speaking countries and focuses chiefly on their lyrical content, the sources mentioned above covering different aspects of Middle-earth or black metal (instead of TBM) alone would be insufficient. Therefore, this thesis combines the sources mentioned above, supplements them with interviews, memoirs, and personal communication with bands. This thesis also supports arguments by contrasting all three universes that are tightly connected and influence each other – Middle-earth, black metal, and TBM. Furthermore, this paper primarily stands on personal analysis conducted in the analytical chapters below.

1. The Aspects of Tolkien Black Metal

The impact of Tolkien's universe on the former black metal scene can be dated to its very beginning. What was initially the domain of Norwegian black metal bands was later spread across the globe. Many bands worldwide adopted black metal sound, image, visuals, and even narrative. Moreover, they used their artistic freedom and created whole new stylistic divisions – such as pagan black metal, DSBM, or atmospheric black metal. This chapter aims to define the stylistic division (or a subgenre) called Tolkien black metal, provide its brief historical background and reveal its connection to Tolkien's legendarium. Moreover, it deals with the theory behind the usage of the battle of good and evil theme and the portrayal of nature within Tolkien black metal lyrics, which are furthermore contrasted with Tolkien's approach.

Although both worlds stand on entirely different foundations and embrace different values, they are deeply connected. Tolkien black metal and Tolkien's arcana share many narrative elements. They both feature the battle of good and evil, epic wars, and treachery. In addition, both worlds describe the lust for ultimate power, present mythos, and are interwoven with the vivid images of vast plains, mountain ranges, and other fantasy landscapes. According to AK of Mirkwood, the connection between Tolkien and black metal is not coincidental since “a fascination with pre-technological society, a focus on atmosphere and world-building, as well as a reverence for nature and atmosphere” are apparent throughout the whole black metal scene.⁴ Furthermore, they both share the passion for Nordic culture, nature, mythology and use it as a patriotic foundation in their works. Also, as will be mentioned in the text below, it is typical for black metal bands to use names borrowed directly from Tolkien's writing or incorporate Tolkien's story fully into their lyrics. This is particularly true for Tolkien black metal musicians who adopt whole Tolkien's world and use it in their musical expression.

Since, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien is one of the most significant figures in modern literature, he deserves at least a brief introduction. He is recognized primarily for his academic work concerning translations and further studies of Nordic mythos and culture, linguistic capacity and his literary work derived from it. Especially above-mentioned Nordic mythos in combination with Old Norse were Tolkien's passion that further influenced his writing, as is apparent from the Humphrey Carpenter's commentary: “[Old Norse literature and mythology] had a profound appeal to Tolkien's imagination.”⁵ He translated several Old Norse sagas and Old English poetry including *The Volsunga Saga*, the *Saga of King Heidrek*, *Beowulf*, or *Elder*

⁴ See Appendix A.

⁵ Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Bibliography* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2019), 92.

Edda. All of those along with other Norse myths influenced Tolkien tremendously in his creation of Middle-earth and even inspired several Middle-earth stories and names – for example dwarf names Kili, Fili or Bombur are taken directly from the poem “Völuspá.” Gloriana St. Clair suggests in her work that this influence can be further noticed on usage of riddles, burial customs of Gondor, portrayal of fate (apparent on Gollum’s role in the destruction of The One Ring) or the depiction of certain characters that resemble Norse gods (Gandalf as Odin).⁶

Although Tolkien’s most notable trilogy was not wholly accepted at the beginning, it rapidly changed with the release of its paperback edition in 1966.⁷ Michael A. Hall further presents that Tolkien’s work was initially popular at academic circles and later it spread from there to the whole popular culture.⁸ Since then, Tolkien’s work influenced countless individuals and projects, including the black metal scene.

Before the actual in-depth description of elements used in both fictional universes and revealing their connection, it is essential to also provide a brief historical background of Tolkien black metal. Therefore, several paragraphs below briefly present the origin of black metal that later split into several independent stylistic divisions, including TBM. Moreover, these paragraphs predominantly focus on Tolkien’s influence on black metal in its beginning. Their main goal is to present the global Tolkien black metal scene and its specifics.

Black metal represents an extreme subgenre of heavy metal music that consists of several stylistic divisions – small subgenres. Those divisions present different sounds, lyrical themes, and overall artistic approaches to the various topics. Black metal, as it is known today, was founded in Norway around the nineties by several influential bands – the true Mayhem, Emperor, Burzum, or Darkthrone. Their lyrics were primarily influenced by satanic imagery and beliefs, militarism, anti-Christian views, paganism, nationalism, hatred toward humanity, fantasy literature, and horror movies. As stated in Olson’s work, the main idea behind the music was to create the most extreme and evil sound possible and thus create solid opposition towards the mainstream.⁹ Therefore black metal artists mirror this attitude even to their music that consists primarily of shrieking vocals, distorted guitar sound, blast beats, lo-fi recording, and

⁶ Gloriana St. Clair, “An Overview Of the Northern Influences on Tolkien’s Works,” *Mythlore* 21, no. 2 (1996): 64–67.

⁷ Jane Chance, *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 26.

⁸ Michael A. Hall, “The Influence of J.R.R. Tolkien on Popular Culture” (Honors Thesis, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2005), 12–18.

⁹ Benjamin Hedge Olson, “I Am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture” (Master Thesis, Graduate College of Bowling Green, 2008), 26–30.

tremolo picking. This evil image is accompanied by strongly national fervor, usage of facepaint during live shows (to resemble a corpse), and their overall negative attitude towards life. Its primary and only purpose was to shock and induce disgust in the society, as is apparent from the radio interview with Øystein Aarseth, guitarist of Mayhem.¹⁰

Since many of the black metal scene founders were teenagers during the eighties, they were heavily influenced by Tolkien's universe and role-playing games set in his realm. Tommy Kuusela suggests that this influence was primarily caused by freshly published Norwegian translations of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* during 1972-1975, accompanied by the release of the animated movie *The Lord of The Rings* (by Ralph Bakshi) in 1979.¹¹ Both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* were exceptionally popular among teenagers during the eighties and thus influenced the whole Norwegian generation. He also adds, "the publishing house Tiden chose to invest in the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s," which spread the interest in mythologies and fantasy literature across Norway.¹² This claim is supported by Varg Vikernes, the prominent figure of the scene and the founder of the most influential black metal band Burzum. As he stated in his memoirs, he was collecting every role-playing game from Middle-Earth, was heavily influenced by Tolkien's stories and Norse mythology.¹³ His fascination with Tolkien can be seen, for example, in the names of his bands – Burzum and Uruk Hai. Uruk Hai was his first musical project that bears the name of the special breed of orcs of Isengard. Similarly, his second musical project Burzum is named after the word "darkness" inscribed inside The One Ring, as seen in the excerpt below. Furthermore, Varg even used the name Count Grishnackh as his artistic pseudonym, which is taken from the orc Grishnákh from *The Lord of the Rings*.

Ash nazg durbatulûk, ash nazg gimbatul, ash nazg thrakatulûk, agh burzum-ishi krimpatul [One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all, and in the darkness bind them]¹⁴

Moreover, Burzum was not the only black metal band influenced by Tolkien's writing to such an extent that it borrowed names from his legendarium. There are bands like Gorgoroth (named after the plateau in north-western Mordor), Isengard (named after the Saruman's

¹⁰ Øystein Aarseth, "Eurononymous Interview on Swedish Radio 1993," interview by Musikjournalen, 1993, recording, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhLpjQ8BvH4>.

¹¹ Tommy Kuusela, "Dark Lord of Gorgoroth: Black Metal and the Works of Tolkien," *Lembas Extra 2015: Unexplored Aspects of Tolkien and Arda* 19, no. 1 (2015): 99-111.

¹² Kuusela, "Dark Lord of Gorgoroth," 99.

¹³ "A Burzum Story: Part 1 – The Origin and Meaning," Burzum Story, Burzum, Last modified December, 2004, https://burzum.org/eng/library/a_burzum_story01.shtml.

¹⁴ John R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2007), 66.

fortress), or the band Darkthrone (possibly named after the Sauron's throne¹⁵). Apart from names, the scene was also strongly influenced by artworks related to Tolkien's writing. For example, the album cover from Burzum's *Det som engang var* is taken directly from the role-playing game *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*. This influence on the former black metal scene is also admitted by Samoth, member of the band Emperor, who stated, "We drew a lot of inspiration from artwork related to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*,"¹⁶ in his interview for *Decibel Magazine*.

As stated above, many bands were also heavily influenced by Norse mythology. This influence was particularly started by Varg through his extreme political views, who used Norse mythology in combination with Norwegian history and nature as a primary musical topic of his band Burzum. Varg influenced the direction of almost the whole Norwegian black metal scene, that later shifted in their lyrics away from Satanism to Norway's ancient past and its cultural heritage.¹⁷ Therefore, it is not surprising that the black metal scene easily adopted Tolkien's fictional universe that was undoubtedly inspired by Norse sagas.

The very beginning of Tolkien black metal can be dated to the nineties when bands Isengard, Summoning, or Rivendell were founded. Those bands came up with the idea of blending Tolkien's motives thoroughly into their lyrics and imagery and thus, probably unconsciously, created a new music subgenre. After the first bands emerged, Tolkien black metal experienced a slight pause when almost no more bands were founded. The new wave of bands using Middle-Earth as a central theme of their music came around the release of Peter Jackson's movie trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* in 2001–2003, which apparently ignited the new interest in Tolkien's work. Consequently, most Tolkien black metal bands were founded around 2001–2010, followed by an enormous upsurge in a new wave of bands in 2019–2020. In contrast to the black metal scene that used Tolkien's work superficially, TBM musicians fully incorporate Tolkien's imagination into their works and thus create an entirely new medium for presenting Middle-Earth stories.

Although Tolkien black metal is derived from black metal and is similar to it in many aspects, its core and values are rather different. In contrast to black metal, the TBM scene primarily uses the themes of paganism and nature that are occasionally combined with Satanism.

¹⁵ Tommy Kuusela, "Dark Lord of Gorgoroth': Black Metal and the Works of Tolkien," 106.

¹⁶ J. Bennet, "Total Eclipse: Metal, Mayhem & Murder," in *Precious Metal: Decibel Presents the Stories of the 25 Extreme Metal Masterpieces*, ed. Albert Mudrian (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2009), 280–291.

¹⁷ Christopher Thompson, "Reflections of National Identity in Norway through Black Metal" (Master's thesis, Uppsala University, 2012), 24.

In addition, paganism is often used as a patriotic topic that emphasizes the Nordic heritage (this is especially true for bands from Scandinavia). Furthermore, the Tolkien black metal scene heavily incorporates Tolkien's universe, including his literary themes such as the battle of good and evil, war, power, and admiration for wilderness in their lyrics. However, TBM bands often portray those topics from the viewpoint of evil which is the exact opposite of Tolkien's approach.

Evil is the most used theme among Tolkien black metal bands. Although the TBM scene inherits the evil side of black metal (nihilism, anti-human views, military thematics) and musicians incorporate it into their lyrics, they reflect it primarily on Middle-Earth's evil. Middle-earth's evil, in most cases, represents destruction, the lust for power and unlimited knowledge, corruption, and dominion. This evil is often represented by particular events or characters in Tolkien's novels. Events that depict evil are, for example, Saruman's betrayal of the council, battles, or the creation myth where Morgoth perverted the creation song and thus formed the primeval evil. Tolkien's legendarium is also filled with characters that bear evil traits, spread destruction over Middle-Earth, or desire unlimited power. Those are particularly Saruman, orcs, Balrogs, Ringwraiths, Gollum, or Morgoth and Sauron. In addition, as Enas Subhi suggests in her work, *The One Ring* could also be perceived as a character since it is often personified and acts "with natural instinct for self-preservation."¹⁸

On the contrary, Tolkien black metal does not use evil as Tolkien portrayed it in his work and instead twists its meaning. Since Tolkien's evil is mainly portrayed by the protagonist (good side) within his novels, the evil is presented as a force that can be destroyed or banished. Consequently, this depiction of evil gives hope to protagonists in Tolkien's writing. Furthermore, evil characters in Tolkien's legendarium cannot create; they can only destroy, corrupt, pervert, and mock.¹⁹ Thus they are portrayed as less powerful than creatures representing the good side.

Nevertheless, bands often portray evil as the ultimate and the most powerful force. As Tommy Kuusela suggests in his work, "They [Tolkien black metal bands] drew inspiration from Tolkien's fiction, but were never interested in Tolkien's understandings of evil."²⁰ This results

¹⁸ Enas Subhi, *The Concept of Evil in J.R.R. Tolkien's Novel The Lord of the Rings* (Norderstedt: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2016), 34–35.

¹⁹ Martina Juričková, "The Nature of Evil in Tolkien's Works" in *Medzinárodná Konferencia Doktorandov Filologických Odborov*, (Bratislava: Comenius University, 2019), 6–7, accessed March 20, 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333024444_Chapanie_zla_u_Tolkiena_Nature_of_evil_in_Tolkien's_work.

²⁰ Tommy Kuusela, "Dark Lord of Gorgoroth': Black Metal and the Works of Tolkien," 91.

in bands avoiding specific stories or passages in order to preserve their portrayal of a fearless and powerful evil, such as the story about Sauron, who “repents in fear when the First Enemy is utterly defeated.”²¹ Since *The Silmarilion* and *The Lord of the Rings* are way darker than *The Hobbit*, it is also very likely that it is the main reason why bands use the stories primarily from those books. Moreover, as Tolkien stated in his letters: “In my story I do not deal in Absolute Evil. I do not think there is such a thing, since that is Zero. I do not think at any rate any ‘rational being’ is wholly evil. Satan fell.”²²

Tolkien black metal musicians also very often combine evil with satanism. As was mentioned in the text above, the black metal genre was built upon satanic imagery and beliefs. This was naturally bridged to TBM subgenre, which adopted this approach and combined it with Tolkien’s evil. LaVeyan Satanism is used not only to provoke but also as a tool for the expression of free will. Therefore, bands frequently commemorate evil characters that are in a certain way portrayed as Satan. This can be seen particularly in the songs about the creation myth where Morgoth is presented as the only person who is not controlled by Eru Ilúvatar (the creator of Arda) and bound to his music. This particular example is often used to present Morgoth’s free will and is viewed as a paraphrase of Lucifers’ rebellion towards God. Other possible satanic motives incorporated in Tolkien black metal music are the survival of the fittest, egocentrism, dominion over weaker creatures, or the overall lust for power and knowledge. Again as in the case of pure evil, even this incorporation of satanism in TBM lyrics goes against Tolkien’s values, who, as a Catholic, labeled *The Lord of the Rings* as “a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision.”²³

Another prominent topic in Tolkien black metal is nature. As the primary source of inspiration, nature can be seen especially in band names, logos, and album covers. The majority of unreadable black metal logos resemble tree branches or are reminiscent of tree roots. In addition, album covers often display fantasy landscapes, northern nature, or castles, and promo photos are often taken in deep forests. This admiration of trees is in a way similar to Tolkien, who admired nature and trees particularly. As Tolkien stated in his letter to Deborah Webster, “I am in fact a Hobbit (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands.”²⁴ In fact, trees are one of the most essential parts of his legendarium. The most famous are Old Man Willow, Party Tree, Gondor’s White Tree, The Two Trees of Valinor, or the whole nation

²¹ Carpenter, *The Letters*, 151.

²² Carpenter, *The Letters*, 243.

²³ Carpenter, *The Letters*, 172.

²⁴ Carpenter, *The Letters*, 288.

of ents. Tolkien's fascination with nature is apparent throughout his works. His stories are set in a fantasy landscape of incredible detail where mountain ranges, deep ancient forests, rivers, and vast plains are described. This portrayal of nature is not restricted only to his writing but also appears in his poems, rhymes, and songs that undoubtedly inspired TBM bands.

Those natural descriptions can be found even in Tolkien black metal lyrics. Although Tolkien black metal, and the whole black metal scene, are heavily influenced by natural motives, their lyrics often feature nature merely as a binary element. This binary element usually supports the main story or theme of the song – mostly war or the battle of good and evil. Furthermore, nature in TBM lyrics primarily functions as an atmosphere builder, and its primary purpose is to connect the listener to the story. It is also used to induce the right mood or to emphasize a specific message. Their lyrics also consist of brief mentions of Middle-Earth places that usually take the form of a name or paraphrased depiction from the original story. Those mentions of Middle-Earth places are often located at the beginning of the songs, thus creating an introduction that precedes the song's story.

Furthermore, nature as a supportive element is used primarily in war-themed songs. Introduction parts in war-themed songs usually describe the battlefield, build the atmosphere of war and emphasize certain moods (for example, pessimistic, melancholic, or hopeless) before the actual war is unleashed. The incorporation of nature as a supportive element is likely borrowed from Tolkien, who used a similar technique in his writing. His work also often consists of atmospheric introductions and introduction parts – especially in the cases of battles.

In contrast, Tolkien's portrayal of nature is way more complex than nature in Tolkien black metal lyrics. Tolkien uses nature in combination with the theme of the journey mainly as a tool for building the whole story. Since the setting is crucial for the story, as Leonard Lutwack suggests in the excerpt below, there is no doubt that Tolkien used this construct deliberately. His detailed portrayal of the setting heavily affects the overall story, creating new opportunities for his characters and even interacting with them. Tolkien described this combination of nature and journey as “a strong thread on which a multitude of things that he has in mind may be strung to make a new thing, various, unpredictable. And yet coherent.”²⁵ Therefore setting in Tolkien's legendarium often support the main storyline.

The quality of a place in literature is subtly determined by the manner in which a character arrives in it, moves within it, and departs from it. The general impression of a place often depends on its position in a series of places visited

²⁵ Carpenter, *The Letters*, 239.

by a journeying character, whose moving point of view confers comparison and climax on otherwise static places.²⁶

Moreover, nature portrayed in Middle-Earth can be divided into two main groups: pure and unspoiled nature and its destroyed industrial counterpart. The unspoiled nature is often represented by ancient forests, vast plains, hills, mountains, and rivers - more specifically, Mirkwood, Fangorn, Eryn Muil, Anduin, or the Shire. These locations are usually inhabited by beings that care about nature – elves, ents, or hobbits. In contrast, destroyed lands, such as Mordor, The Plateau of Gorgoroth, Dead Marshes, or Isengard, are inhabited by creatures and beings that spread destruction – orcs, trolls, spiders, Saruman, or Sauron. Tolkien heavily uses this contrast as a central foundation for his story. In opposition to his approach, Tolkien black metal bands usually do not use this concept and instead portray nature in the form of abandoned cities, mines, and other industrial landscapes. This approach is more likely connected to their obsession by portraying evil. Therefore, Tolkien black metal bands sporadically incorporate nature as a main lyrical theme to their lyrics.

²⁶ Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 59.

2. The Battle of Good and Evil

The battle of good and evil is a dominant theme shared by Tolkien's legendarium and the Tolkien black metal scene. Since both sides use the same narrative elements, this chapter deals with their thorough analysis and comparison to reveal the contrasts and similarities in their usage and presentation. Narrative elements analyzed in this chapter consist mainly of war, good versus evil, and power - all of them are tightly connected and noticeable in both lyrics and Tolkien's writing. Furthermore, this chapter covers battle scenes, important events (e.g., the creation myth), and the lives of certain characters since they are often paraphrased in Tolkien black metal lyrics.

The war theme in Tolkien black metal lyrics represents destructive power mainly used for conquering the world. It is a tool of dominion and is often used to destroy those who resist. This evil always wins and cannot perish. Therefore, every creature in Tolkien black metal lyrics that is ambitious and wants to be a powerful being must join the evil side to fulfill its goals - as Saruman, who betrayed his ally Sauron and decided to rule Middle-earth himself. Nonetheless, the original Middle-earth's evil portrayed in Tolkien's work can be banished and defeated. Despite this fact, bands found a way to emphasize the immeasurable power that the evil side possesses. According to Owen Coggins, the author of "JRR Tolkien's Mythical Evil in Black Metal," it seems that bands on purpose avoid battles and events where evil is defeated so that it can be portrayed as an indestructible and the most powerful force.²⁷ Although evil is chased away in several lyrics, it always finds its way back. As K.DWS, a member of the band *Andracca*, suggests, "Evil [on album *Morgulduin*] will spring up from somewhere, forever and indefinitely. It cannot be snuffed out."²⁸

On the contrary, evil in Tolkien's writing is used dialectically as a binary opposition to good, which emphasizes the positive quality of the latter. Even though Tolkien describes the same evil as used in Tolkien black metal lyrics, his interpretation is slightly different. In his stories, evil characters can be destroyed or banished, and the main characters are resistant to a certain extent to the corruption spread by evil forces. Furthermore, war is portrayed as just an inevitable event full of heroic deeds that should keep the peace and freedom within Middle-earth. Tolkien's characters, such as Frodo or Gandalf, are willing to stand against evil and even

²⁷ Owen Coggins, "JRR Tolkien's Mythical Evil in Black Metal," in *Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy*, (Toronto: Lillian H. Smith Library, 2011), 5, accessed March 1, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/1718000/JRR_Tolkiens_Mythical_Evil_in_Black_Metal.

²⁸ See Appendix B.

sacrifice themselves for the greater good. This can be seen, for example, in the Gandalf sacrifice in Moria or Frodo's parting with the Fellowship on the bank of river Anduin. Moreover, the protagonists' motivation, who are marching into a battle, is not about dominion over Middle-earth as it is usually portrayed in Tolkien black metal; it is instead about forced defense. Therefore, they are willing to march into an already lost battle to attempt to defeat evil so their nations can survive and live in peace.

This change of meaning can be seen primarily in the portrayal of the battle between Fingolfin and Morgoth in the song "Death Comes Swiftly" by the British band Andracca. Their lyrics paraphrase the Battle of Sudden Flame as described by Tolkien in *The Silmarillion*. The story presents the fight between the evil lord Melkor and elven king Fingolfin, who decides in despair to challenge Melkor to a final fight to end the war and ensure peace for his people. Tolkien describes the event as an inevitable situation where the good is forced to fight against evil to save his people's lives and their future freedom. In Tolkien's legendarium, Melkor's forces start the Battle of Sudden Flame to eradicate every living Noldor – members of Fingolfin's elven clan. After the almost lost battle and many deaths, Fingolfin decides in fury that he will challenge Melkor to fight in front of his army at the gates of Angband (Melkor's fortress). Fingolfin's motivation is to win the fight and end the bloodshed as a hero. Although there is no chance of winning, Fingolfin manages to wound Melkor eight times and heroically fights till the end.

The excerpt below presents Tolkien's version of the story, where evil is presented as a force that can be defeated. In Tolkien's version of "Of the Ruin of Beleriand and the Fall of Fingolfin," Melkor is afraid to fight but accepts the challenge to motivate his lieutenants. Even Melkor's army fears Fingolfin and sees him as a worthy opponent. Moreover, Melkor is wounded several times during the fight, and it is clearly not easy for him to destroy the challenger.

Then Morgoth hurled aloft Grond, the Hammer of the Underworld, and swung it down like a bolt of thunder. But Fingolfin sprang aside, and Grond rent a mighty pit in the earth, whence smoke and fire darted. Many times Morgoth essayed to smite him, and each time Fingolfin leaped away, as a lightning shoots from under a dark cloud; and he wounded Morgoth with seven wounds, and seven times Morgoth gave a cry of anguish, whereat the hosts of Angband fell upon their faces in dismay, and the cries echoed in the Northlands.²⁹

On the other hand, there are usually no heroic elements nor human-like evil portrayed in Tolkien black metal lyrics. The evil in the lyrics from the excerpt below is strong, powerful,

²⁹ John R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (London: HarperCollins, 2012), 170.

and fearless. Although the lyrics paraphrase the same event, it is focused more on the Elven king's death, Melkor's power, and it portrays Melkor as an absolute winner. The lyrics do not mention that Melkor is afraid of fighting or that he is temporarily unable to hit his opponent. Although the one Fingolfin's hit that wounded Morgoth and makes him "howl" is mentioned, the other six wounds are omitted from the story. The song simply presents Melkor as the winner, commemorates his victory, and almost entirely omits signs of his struggle. According to the song's portrayal of the story, Melkor is undoubtedly the most powerful being that cannot be defeated, as can be seen from the excerpt below. The song also borrows several passages directly from Tolkien's writing, which is a common technique used across the whole Tolkien black metal scene. The song borrows phrases like: "He sounded his horn," "like thunder on the ground," "iron crowned," "Ringil glittered like ice," "smoke and fire," "the King grew weary," "crushed him to his knees," or "of the lord of slaves."

The King grew weary.
Melkor's shield, crushed him to his knees.
He looked into his eyes, and he knew death was upon him.

Melkor bore down upon the King.
With his iron clad foot, crushing his neck,
And as his foe's blood rushed about him,
The King Fingolfin took his final breath.³⁰

A similar situation appears in the song "At The Gate," composed by the Canadian band Keys of Orthanc. The song is about the War of the Last Alliance, where Sauron is killed and his One Ring taken from him. Many elements depicted in Tolkien's story are avoided in the song; thus, evil can be presented as the most powerful force. Tolkien's original story portrays the battle as the conflict in which the armies of endangered inhabitants of Middle-earth create a strong alliance that manages to defeat Sauron's forces. Although the battle itself is described initially as long-lasting bloodshed, it is still full of hope, bravery, and heroism. Furthermore, the battle portrays how the antagonist slowly loses and is defeated after several years of the siege. This confirms that in Tolkien's legendarium, good always outweighs evil.

In contrast, the song's lyrics do not admit that the evil was defeated and rather vilify the men of Gondor. In addition, the song describes how the Dark Lord gathered the army unobserved in his fortress and is now ready to conquer the whole world. The excerpt below portrays the good side (Gondor) rather contemptuously. The men of Gondor are presented as

³⁰ Andracca, "Death Comes Swiftly," track 7 on *Morgulduin*, Blackwood productions, 2018, cassette tape.

the weak force that cannot handle the simple task of watching over the enemy and do not let the dark forces spread. Therefore, the men of Gondor are considered to be inferior.

The two great towers, Carchost and Narchost
Built by the losts, the men of Gondor
Guarding the entrance to the Black Lands
the vigilance of men failed, failed to withstand.

The race of men, who let the darkness
That crept right back into Mordor
The Dark lord reinforced the towers
A Black gate between them is born.³¹

Furthermore, the war in the song is glorified and presented as the way toward complete dominion over weaker beings. It describes how the forces gather and march against the men of Gondor, who unnecessarily let the enemy strengthen its armies. It is also depicted how the ubiquitous death is powering the One Ring and making the antagonist more powerful, as is apparent in the excerpt below.

Orcs, men and elves, all bowing before death
All joined by their blood, dripping on the ground
Nourishing the power within the mountain
And the master ring, to bind them all into darkness.³²

Another example of a song that vilifies characters representing the good side and commemorates the fact that evil finds its way to spread under their reign is the song by the band Keys of Orthanc called “The Old Castle of Durthang.” The song tells the story of the Durthang that the men of Gondor have built to watch over Mordor. Similarly, as in “At the Gate,” the good side leaves the fortress and thus allows the enemy to take over the castle and create an enormous army within its walls. Moreover, the song depicts how was the castle of Durthang exploited by the enemy for his needs. In fact, the castle of Durthang was used as the capital city of Mordor and is known as the most significant war camp in Middle-earth.

Apart from the war, another essential element of the battle between good and evil is power. Tolkien’s world is built upon battles that only purpose is to gain the ruling power over Middle-earth. Comparably to the depiction of war, the evil side wants the power primarily to conquer the world and fulfill its ambitions. On the contrary, the good side seeks the power to survive and maintain peace in its lands. Even though the motivation differs on both sides, Tolkien’s writing depicts them as two natural elements that coexist and are entwined. Their

³¹ Keys of Orthanc, “At the gate,” track 2 on *A battle in the dark lands of the eye...*, Naturmacht Productions, 2019, compact disc.

³² Keys of Orthanc, “At the gate.”

interconnectedness is apparent primarily in the portrayal of Boromir, who wants to steal The One Ring from Frodo and use its power to bring peace to his lands. Similarly, even Frodo decides to keep the ring for himself before its destruction in Mount Doom, yet from pure selfishness imposed on him by The Ring. Those two stories present the idea that even the good characters bear evil traits that can be under the influence of evil brought to light. Tolkien presented the idea of dominion and evil that arose from the good root in his letter to Milton Waldman, as can be seen in the excerpt below. However, the good is still rather emphasized in Tolkien's writing. On the contrary, Tolkien black metal focuses primarily on the evil side of this coexistence, perhaps because free will and immeasurable power are the most admired in the black metal scene.

“The enemy in successive forms is always "naturally" concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord of magic and machines; but the problem: that this frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others.”³³

The song “The Necromancer” by the band Gates to the Abyss, presented below, is a good example that portrays different motivations on both sides. Lyrics paraphrase Tolkien's creation myth and focus on the creation of primeval evil. The song is about Melkor, the most powerful angelic being created by the godlike deity Eru Ilúvatar, who is supposed to help with the world's creation by singing the great song of Ainur. However, due to Melkor's pride, and knowledge that is greatest among his brothers, Melkor decides to disrupt the harmony and alter the music to add evil to the Great song. Since Melkor wants “to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself,”³⁴ he also disrupts the overall theme of the creation song. Consequently, primeval evil is then created.

I - am your dark master
I - will not relent
I - will show no mercy - as their bones turn to dust
I - am eternal night
I - am the abhorred
I - am the end of life - forevermore

Yes, I knew more music than he
but wisdom outweighs any great melody - he showed me
The faultiness of gods and that true power lies within
free thinking my only sin³⁵

³³ Carpenter, *The Letters*, 146.

³⁴ Tolkien, *The Silmarilion*, 29.

³⁵ Gates to the Abyss, “The Necromancer,” track 5 on *Sorcery of Melkor*, 2019, digital format.

Lyrics present the creation myth as an event when was the greatest being defined – the dark master Melkor. Furthermore, the lyrics are represented from the viewpoint of Melkor, who worships himself as a powerful being and is proud of his act. In addition, Melkor mocks Eru Ilúvatar and looks down on him – even though Eru is the god and his creator. The overused word “I” and other egocentric passages in the song correspond with Tolkien’s narration that portrays Melkor as a selfish being that his thoughts had corrupted.

Perhaps the egocentrism of the main antagonist in the song could be connected to modern satanism, which is apparent throughout the whole black metal scene. According to Owen Coggins, Melkor’s corruption and his subsequent downfall are similar to the biblical creation myth and its primeval evil – the devil³⁶. Comparably to Melkor, Satan is also an egocentric angelic being who has a different opinion about the creation. He also intervenes in the creation process and thus is banished. Consequently, he is marked as an evil being and the enemy of the good. This view on the possible interpretation shares even J.R.R. Martin from band Orcrypt: “For some it might be wanting to identify with a certain darkness, for others Sauron, Mordor, Orcs and Morgoth might represent an adversarial icon in a similar, but secular way to Satan/Lucifer.”³⁷

LaVey’s Satanism is the most used topic in the black metal scene and is known for its egocentric approach toward life, its emphasis on free will, and pushing the idea that everybody is a god into the foreground. Therefore, it is likely that the song combines the above-mentioned creation myths and presents them as an allegory that refers to LaVey’s satanism. Furthermore, Melkor’s portrayal in the lyrics thus can be described by the excerpt from *The Satanic Bible*: “I AM A SATANIST! BOW DOWN, FOR I AM THE HIGHEST EMBODIMENT OF HUMAN LIFE!”³⁸

Conversely, Tolkien’s story depicts the creation myth that does not commemorate evil. It presents the story of creation to give the reader insight into the very beginning of the fictional world of Arda. Although the creation of primeval evil and corruption is apparent in The Great Song, the whole chapter is not focused on it. Instead, it describes evil as something natural that has its place in the world to emphasize the good side of the creation. Although Melkor disrupted the song's harmony, the evil elements added to the song did not destroy the creation; instead, they enhanced all the good created.

³⁶ Owen Coggins, “JRR Tolkien’s Mythical Evil in Black Metal,” 5.

³⁷ See appendix C.

³⁸ Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 26.

Ilúvatar said again: 'Behold your Music! This is your minstrelsy; and each of you shall find contained herein, amid the design that I set before you, all those things which it may seem that he himself devised or added. And thou, Melkor, wilt discover all the secret thoughts of thy mind, and wilt perceive that they are but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory.'³⁹

In addition, evil in Tolkien's legendarium has no power of creation. Its only real power is the corruption of things that had been already created, as portrayed in *The Silmarillion*: "[...] and naught that had life of its own, nor the semblance of life, could ever Melkor make since his rebellion in the Ainulindalë before the Beginning: so say the wise."⁴⁰ Although Melkor originates from the creation of God, thus, he had been once good, he has not the same power as other angelic beings. Therefore, this describes evil as something less potent than the good itself. This portrayal of evil is frequently omitted in Tolkien black metal lyrics.

On the other hand, the song "Valar" by Andracca describes the creation myth and its essentials as portrayed in *The Silmarilion*. There are no lines that connect the song to the usual portrayal of those events in the Tolkien black metal scene. On top of that, lyrics commemorate the act of creation itself, and everything evil is omitted. Thus the line "Foe to all that is evil"⁴¹ can be perceived as the perfect example of bands and their individual approach to the topic. Many of them present different musical topics, values and focus on individual interpretations of certain events.

The presence of good and evil is presented differently in Tolkien's writing and Tolkien black metal. As stated above, Tolkien usually tells an unbiased story where the good and evil are supplementing and amplifying each other. Furthermore, in Tolkien's legendarium, the good prevails and is emphasized by evil. In contrast, Tolkien black metal focuses more on evil and destruction; therefore, the good is usually portrayed as a weak force predestined to annihilation.

Although the battle of good and evil is a dominant theme within the Tolkien black metal scene, its portrayal is usually restricted only to war-themed songs or songs that commemorate evil characters and their deeds. On the contrary, Tolkien explores this topic more in-depth and provides even more complex stories – from the creation of primeval evil through epic battles to the topic of technology versus nature. Since the theme of technology versus nature strongly overlaps with the content of the next chapter, the following paragraphs will focus chiefly on 'the evil versus the good' side of this conflict.

³⁹ Tolkien, *The Silmarilion*, 31.

⁴⁰ Tolkien, *The Silmarilion*, 63.

⁴¹ Andracca, "Valar," track 9 on *Morgulduin*, Blackwood productions, 2018, cassette tape.

Tolkien is known for his aversion to technology which is often portrayed in his work as an unnecessary and evil bringer of a destruction. His aversion was heavily influenced by the First World War where was the modern technology used primarily for mass destruction. Since Tolkien experienced the horrors of war personally and even fought in The Battle of the Somme (one of the most bloodiest battles of the Great War), he was undoubtedly affected by it to such an extent that he reflects it even in his writing. This war experience certainly enhanced his disgust toward modern technology. He presents this attitude to technology in his letters, stating, “It is full Maytime by the trees and grass now. But the heavens are full of roar and riot.” He continues, “How I wish the 'infernal combustion' engine had never been invented. Or [...] that it could have been put to rational uses – if any....”⁴² The portrayal of technology as a bringer of destruction is then apparent from his letter to Milton Waldman, where he describes how is technology used as a mean for dominion in his writing, as is presented in the excerpt below:

[Fall and Mortality] (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective - and so to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents – or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognised.⁴³

This conflict is mostly presented through his stories where evil spread the destruction across the landscape and where evil perceives the nature primarily as a source of materials necessary for its war machinery. The depiction of Isengard, Moria or the scourge of Shire portrays this exact conflict. Since Saruman become evil figure in *The Lord of the Rings* his change even transformed into Isengard itself. Isengard reshapes from a place with fruitful gardens into a dark stronghold that consumes its natural surrounding. Furthermore, Saruman’s only concern is to find materials for the creation of new destructive weapons and siege engines, and thus support his planned dominion over Middle-earth. This is presented particularly in the Treebeard portrayal of Saruman when he describes him as following: “He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment.”⁴⁴ Consequently, his plundering of near Fangorn forest leads to the battle where Ents (as the opposition toward industrialization) destroy Isengard.

⁴² Carpenter, *The Letters*, 77.

⁴³ Carpenter, *The Letters*, 145 –146.

⁴⁴ John R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (London: HarperCollins, 2012), 616.

Similar transformation can be seen even at the end of *The Return of the King*, where Shire is corrupted by the Saruman's forces. Although Shire represents the agricultural society that adores and preserves nature throughout the whole story, it becomes more industrialized and loses its touch with surroundings at the end. This transformation is caused by Saruman and Gríma who use the Shire as a sanctuary after their escape from Orthanc. Nevertheless, since inhabitants of Shire are Hobbits instead of Orcs, it is recultivated and brought back to its original shape after the return of Merry, Pippin, Sam and Frodo. This recultivation of the corrupted land is apparent even in the previous case, where Ents destroy Isengard and incorporate it back to its natural habitat. Those stories portray primarily two sides: nature and industrial landscape as its evil counterpart. Both sides further represent the good versus evil that battles over power.

Although it is evident from the above-mentioned examples that perception of the battle of good and evil differs in both Tolkien's work and Tolkien black metal lyrics, it is essential to emphasize that each band in Tolkien black metal has an entirely different approach to the lyrics and theme. Comparably to every other music genre, even TBM is not a homogenous music genre; thus, its interpretations of certain events and portrayal of themes can differ as well as the sound and imagery. However, generally it can be said that Tolkien black metal focuses primarily on Middle-earth's evil and avoids every story, event, and mention where this evil is defeated or perished. This is the exact opposite of evil depicted in Tolkien's legendarium.

3. The Role of Nature in Tolkien Black Metal

Similarly, as the battle of good and evil, even nature plays an essential role in both fictional universes. Nature is frequently mentioned and appears mainly in the form of brief mentions, borrowed names, graphic visuals, or whole elaborate descriptions across both worlds. Although Tolkien and Tolkien black metal musicians adore nature, draw inspiration from her and use her in their works, both worlds use the theme of nature differently. Therefore, this chapter primarily analyzes the use of nature within their works. Furthermore, this chapter deals with a connection between both fictional universes and compares their approaches to the topic. Similarly, as in the battle of good and evil, even nature analyzed on the pages below consists of two types: nature as a supportive element and nature as the main topic. Since nature is closely connected to the battle of good and evil in Tolkien black metal lyrics, and both themes often overlap, the following pages also feature some previously analyzed excerpts.

Brief mentions or further depictions of mountain ranges, forests, cities, castles, seas, caverns, battlefields, strongholds, or landscapes from Tolkien legendarium are commonly used elements throughout the Tolkien black metal scene. As stated in previous chapters, nature is deeply rooted in the Black metal genre and is perceived as the primary source of inspiration. As Christopher Thompson suggests, former black metal bands were in the beginning heavily influenced not only by nature but also by Norwegian national romantic artists who used natural motives combined with their patriotic fervor in their paintings.⁴⁵ This inspiration influenced their lyrics, sound, visuals, and overall band image. Therefore, bands often use natural patterns resembling trees, roots, or tree branches in their logos. The inspiration by nature can also be seen on album covers that often feature a picture of forests, castles, or other landscapes. This is particularly true for Tolkien black metal, which borrows this habit and incorporates natural motives to the lyrics and visuals more often than the rest of the black metal scene. Albums *Dush Agh Golnauk* (Keys of Orthanc), *Of Darkened Halls* (Dwarrowdelf), *Minas Morgul* (Summoning), *Mountains and lakes* (Mirkwood), and

Poems of Mountains and Forests (Fangorn) are perfect examples of how is nature used visually on album covers of Tolkien black metal bands. Moreover, Tolkien himself created many personal illustrations that accompany his books. Similar to TBM, those illustrations often depict the natural terrains of Middle-earth and use natural motives. Since Tolkien's art is in a certain way similar to Tolkien black metal album covers, musicians were likely influenced by

⁴⁵ Christopher Thompson, "Reflections of National Identity," 51–57.

it to such an extent that they decided to accompany their album with fantasy landscape as well. For example, illustrations *The Shores of Faery*⁴⁶ and *Bilbo Comes to the Huts of the Raft-elves (II)*⁴⁷ stylistically resemble those used on Emyn Muil 's album covers.

Apart from visuals, the inspiration by nature and Tolkien's work within Tolkien black metal is apparent even in the names of bands, albums, and songs. As Owen Coggins mentions in his work, it is common for black metal bands to use names of places, characters, and races from Tolkien's arcana.⁴⁸ Similarly, as in the case of visuals, this applies not only to the global black metal scene but rather to Tolkien black metal. Those names are frequently taken directly from Tolkien's work and are, in most cases, names of forests, plains, mountain ranges, and other places located in Middle-earth. Therefore, there can be found such bands as Mirkwood (the most significant forest in Middle-Earth), Rivendell (an elven valley), Hithlum (the region north of Beleriand), Emyn Muil (mountains near Death Marshes), Eldamar (elven homeland), or Dwarrowdelf (another name for Moria). The same thing applies to the names of albums – *Morgulduin* (river going through Gondor) by Andracca, *Mirkwood* (elven forest) by Mirkwood, *Gondolin* (elven city) by Eldarion, or *Lugburz* (Sauron's dark tower in the Black Speech of Mordor) by Summoning.

Since the usage of names and Middle-Earth's nature is widespread among Tolkien black metal bands, it is not surprising that nature pervades even lyrics. Although the theme of nature is rooted in both Tolkien's legendarium and Tolkien black metal, nature in TBM lyrics is often used primarily as a supportive element. Nature in the form of the supportive element is frequently used to build the required atmosphere, introduce the listener to the upcoming story's settings, or emphasize a certain feeling or message. Many bands mention nature mainly at the beginning of the song. This atmospheric introduction usually takes up to one or two lines and is a precedent for the main content of the lyrics. These introduction parts can be seen especially in songs describing a war or other armed conflict. Their lyrics often contain a brief description of a battlefield before the war is unleashed. This technique can be seen in the songs "Death Comes Swiftly" (Andracca), "Lord Gothmog" (Gates to the Abyss), "The Scorching Eye" (Mordor), or more apparently in "At the Gate" (Keys of Orthanc), as can be seen in the excerpt below.

⁴⁶ John R. R. Tolkien, *The Shores of Faery*, illustration, Tolkien Estate, May 10, 1915, <https://www.tolkienestate.com/painting/the-silmarillion/>.

⁴⁷ John R. R. Tolkien, *Bilbo Comes to the Huts of the Raft-elves (II)*, illustration, Tolkien Estate, May 10, 1915, <https://www.tolkienestate.com/painting/the-hobbit/>.

⁴⁸ Owen Coggins, "JRR Tolkien's Mythical Evil in Black Metal," 1–3.

The two great towers, Carchost and Narchost
Build by the losts, the men of Gondor
Guarding the entrance to the Black Lands
The vigilance of men failed, failed to withstand⁴⁹

The verse consists of four lines from the beginning of the song and describes the two great towers, Carchost and Narchost, built by men of Gondor to keep the Sauron's forces within Mordor. Since the song's primary theme is war, this brief description functions not only as a tool for establishing the mood of the song but also introduces the setting of the upcoming event. Once the battlefield with its depressive and heavy mood is introduced, the story continues and leads to the actual Battle of Dagorlad. Furthermore, the description of the battlefield takes its inspiration directly from the passage about the plains of Dagorlad mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings*. The song paraphrases this passage and even uses similar structures, for example, "the vigilance of men failed" or "Lurking in the depths," to preserve the original depiction, as can be seen below.

[...] Sam understood, almost with a shock, that this stronghold had been built not to keep enemies out of Mordor, but to keep them in. (It was indeed one of the defences of Ithilien, made when, after the Last Alliance, Men of Westeros kept watch on the evil land of Sauron where his creatures still lurked.) But as with Narchost and Carchost, the Towers of the Teeth, so here too the vigilance had failed, [...]⁵⁰

Passages of atmospheric introduction can be found even in Tolkien's writing. Brief descriptions of the battlefield can be found, for example, before The Battle of Helm's Deep, The Battle of the Pelennor Fields, or The Battle of the Black Gate. In a similar way to Tolkien black metal lyrics, the primary purpose of a brief description is to introduce the setting to the reader and highlight the desired atmosphere. As can be seen below in the passage from the description of The Battle of Helm's Deep, the depiction of the battlefield right before the actual battle takes place is a good tool for establishing the overall mood and connecting the reader emotionally to the story. The description of the weather and approaching storm in the following excerpt is a perfect way to induce the dark and unpleasant atmosphere of the upcoming battle.

It was now past midnight. The sky was utterly dark, and the stillness of the heavy air foreboded storm. Suddenly the clouds were seared by a blinding flash. Branched lightning smote down upon the eastward hills. For a staring moment the watchers on the walls saw all the space between them and the Dike lit with white light: it was boiling and crawling with black shapes, some squat and broad,

⁴⁹ Keys of Orthanc, "At the Gate," track 2 on *A Battle in the Dark Lands of the Eye...*, Naturmacht productions, 2019, compact disc.

⁵⁰ John R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2007), 1177.

some tall and grim, with high helms and sable shields. [...] Thunder rolled in the valley. Rain came lashing down.⁵¹

Apart from Tolkien's writing, introduction parts are apparent even in Tolkien's songs and poems accompanying his legendarium. They can be seen particularly in songs "When Evening in the Shire Was Grey," "Sing Now, Ye People of the Tower of Anor," "Over the Land There Lies a Long Shadow," or in "Song of the Mounds of Mundburg." The beginning part of the song "When Evening in the Shire Was Grey" presented below functions as a lament for Gandalf, who had fallen in Moria. Even in this case, the song uses phrases such as "When evening in the Shire was grey" or "before the dawn he went away" to induce sadness in the reader. Moreover, the preceding paragraphs describe the Company's grief and Frodo's feelings and thus deepen the story's overall mood. Those paragraphs contain words such as "grief," "tears," "sorrow," and the phrase "He was seldom moved to make song or rhyme"⁵² which support the atmosphere of the following song.

When evening in the Shire was grey
his footsteps on the Hill were heard;
before the dawn he went away
on journey long without a word.

From Wilderland to Western shore,
from northern waste to southern hill,
through dragon-lair and hidden door
and darkling woods he walked at will.⁵³

Although it seems that introduction parts are the domain of war-themed songs, they are, in fact, not restricted only to these topics. Comparably to Tolkien's rhymes, introduction parts can be found even in songs covering a completely different theme. For example, the song "Hidden Beneath Fangorn" by Hithlum (US) presents the story of Saruman, who is wandering through Fangorn forest and planning his treachery. Similarly, the song "Nazgûl" by Fenris (US) is mainly about the nine pursuing the ring-bearer. Instead of war, those songs focus more on the story of particular characters or events (as is apparent from the song above). Again as in the case of war-themed songs, introduction parts are mainly located at the song's beginning and take the form of a brief mention of the natural terrain or a place located in Middle-earth. Apart from introducing the atmosphere and setting, they also remind the listener of the original story. This way, the listener knows the exact location of where the story takes place and thus can

⁵¹ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 694.

⁵² John R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2007), 467.

⁵³ Tolkien, *The Fellowship*, 467–468 .

recall certain feelings attached to it or events and other information initially described in *The Lord of The Rings*. The excerpt below is taken from the song “Hidden Beneath Fangorn” by Hithlum. This excerpt mentions the Fangorn forest, where hobbits Pippin and Merry meet Treebeard, who was forced to defend his people and destroy Isengard. The song talks about Saruman, who decided to betray the council and join Sauron in his quest for the dominion of Arda. Moreover, the second line of the song paraphrases the original portrayal of Saruman. It resembles the description at the end of the chapter “The Riders of Rohan” where is Saruman spotted at night in the Fangorn forest: “Suddenly Gimli looked up, and there just on the edge of the fire-light stood an old bent man, leaning on a staff, and wrapped in a great cloak.”⁵⁴

I walk through the forest, Fangorn
As an old man cloaked with my staff
The fire is all that is left
The smoke of Isengard soon I will spread
For my spies, bird, wolf and man
Shall inform me of all their plans⁵⁵

Although nature as a binary element is widespread throughout Tolkien black metal lyrics, there are also examples of songs that use nature as the main topic. However, compared to Tolkien’s work, their depiction is not as complex and deep as one could think. Presumably, the main reason is that lyrics do not provide enough space for full artistic expression since they are not accompanied by another work providing deeper insight into the story. Alternatively, even though nature inspires bands, their focus is simply aimed predominantly at fantasy thematics instead of nature itself. Nevertheless, nature in the role of the main musical theme is usually used in two ways. The first way is represented by songs that are somehow commemorating once-famous cities and places (in the realm of Middle-earth). The second way is represented by songs that are often composed of parts of Tolkien’s poems.

Lyrics that highlight certain places, primarily once-famous cities, are common within the Tolkien black metal scene. It can be compared to the previous chapter about the battle of good and evil, where many songs commemorate certain evil characters and their deeds. In terms of nature, lyrics often describe a particular place and highlight its famousness and kings (or inhabitants) who once brought it glory. Although the Tolkien black metal scene heavily incorporates natural motives into their works, this technique is used primarily in the cases of architectural works and less in the case of the natural landscape. Since the black metal scene is

⁵⁴ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 575–576.

⁵⁵ Hithlum, “Hidden Beneath Fangorn,” track 4 on *In the Land of Mordor, Where the Shadows Lie*, Ketzer Records, 2005, compact disc.

globally interested in portraying evil and destruction, it could be the main reason why an industrial and military setting is used more often than the natural one. Consequently, the most used architectural work within Tolkien black metal lyrics is Moria (underground mining city), which is often described as a mighty place that has been destroyed and abandoned. Commemoration of places located in Middle-earth is primarily apparent in songs “The Old Castle of Durthang” by Keys of Orthanc, “The King Under the Mountain” by Windrider (UK), “Where Daylight Dies” by Dwarrowdelf, “Whispers Among the Mountains” by Eldarion or “Khazad-dûm” by Line of Durin.

The excerpt below, taken from the song “Khazad-dûm” by the American band Line of Durin, presents Moria as a once-famous place that has been abandoned. Lyrics describe how the prosperous dwarven kingdom turned into the tomb after Balrog was awoken. Lyrics paraphrases the story of Moria from the song “The Darkness Dwells in Durin’s Halls” written by Tolkien. Gimli introduces this song at the end of the chapter “A Journey in the Dark” as the fellowship of the Ring approaches Moria. Its lyrics provide an in-depth description of the halls of Moria, its location, and its emptiness, which undoubtedly inspired musicians who created the song below. In addition, the song’s end also contains a quote from Saruman (from the movie *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*), more specifically the line about Balrog: “The Dwarves delved too greedily and too deep. You know what they awoke in the darkness... Shadow and flame!”⁵⁶

Hidden 'neath the Misty Mountains
An ancient hall stands proud
Glory of the Dwarven kingdom
Mining jewels and mithril from the ground [...]

[...] What was once a place of honor,
Now a bleak and empty tomb
The bodies of our kinsmen lying where they fell
In the great halls of Khazad-dûm⁵⁷

Another example of highlighting once-famous places is the song “The Withering Woods” by Dwarrowdelf. This time, the song focuses primarily on the natural terrain instead of architecture. Lyrics praise the wild nature, its forgotten majesty and present the topic of men conquering nature. Since Tolkien used this conflict to construct his legendarium, the song may focus on this issue on purpose. The conflict between men and nature is mainly seen in Tolkien’s

⁵⁶ *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, directed by Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001), 1:38:10, <https://www.hbomax.com/cz/cs/feature/urn:hbo:feature:GXdu2ZAglVJuAuwEAADbA>.

⁵⁷ Line of Durin, “Khazad-dûm,” track 1 on *Line of Durin*, 2019, digital format.

portrayal of each place that mirrors its inhabitants. As Benjamin Maxwell Garner suggests in his work, “the societies which inhabit Middle-earth are heavily connected to the environment, both culturally and economically.”⁵⁸ This reflection is primarily apparent in each nation’s relationship with nature, representing the mentioned conflict. According to Iris Gabás, the relationships can be seen, for example, on elves who live in line with nature and adore its beauty and pureness, or hobbits portrayed as an agriculturally sustainable community.⁵⁹ In addition, the conflict is visible in the portrayal of orcs, who spread destruction of both the natural landscape and whole nations. Furthermore, the story of Saruman and his industrialization of Isengard, which leads to the destruction of its surrounding (Fangorn) from the previous song “Hidden Beneath Fangorn” by Hithlum, is another excellent example of the topic of men versus nature. The song below presents a similar story of men destroying the forest to build a long-lasting civilization.

Seized by the sea,
Relentless, no mercy
Sundered with steel
The children’s tyranny

Withering trees
Returning to me
Man spreads his domain
he seals the woodland fate⁶⁰

Comparably to the usage of Middle-earth once-famous places in TBM lyrics, Tolkien often mentions those places even in his poems and songs. Presumably, mentions of Middle-earth places are used to support the main story and provide the context and their history to the reader. Songs that commemorate or simply present someplace are mainly “Galadriel’s Song of Eldamar,” “Gondor! Gondor, Between the Mountains and the Sea,” “In the Willow-meads of Tasarinan,” or “Gandalf’s songs of Lórien.” However, those places consist primarily of natural landscapes instead of cities, which is the exact opposite of Tolkien black metal lyrics that mostly depict cities and architectural works.

As is apparent from the songs’ analysis in both chapters, many bands are fond of incorporating specific passages or quotes from the original writing into their lyrics. They also borrow names from Tolkien’s work and use them for their songs, albums, pseudonyms, and

⁵⁸ Benjamin Maxwell Garner, “Far Over the Misty Mountains Cold: an Ecocritical Reading of J.R.R. Tolkien’s the Hobbit” (Honor Thesis, Bucknell University, 2015), 20.

⁵⁹ Iris María Blanco Gabás, “Environmental Attitudes in The Lord of the Rings” (graduate paper, University of Zaragoza, 2015), 4–14.

⁶⁰ Dwarrowdelf, “The Withering Woods,” track 2 on *Of Dying Lights*, Flowing Downward, 2019, compact disc.

band names. Moreover, this borrowing is not restricted only to Tolkien's books; many bands use the passages even from Peter Jackson's movies. Therefore, it is not surprising that Tolkien inspires specific black metal musicians to such an extent that they incorporate his work unaltered to their lyrics and thus compose the song merely from his verses. Comparably to Tolkien's work, those lyrics often adore natural landscapes or other places in Middle-earth, are about wandering in the wilderness or about specific events (often war). Songs "Journey's End" and "Mountains and Lakes" by Mirkwood, "The Lord of the Silver Fountains" and "In Moria, In Khazad-dûm" by Dwarrowdelf, and "The King Under the Mountain" by Windrider are good examples of how are the whole passages of Tolkien's poems used in the lyrics of Tolkien black metal bands.

For example, the mentioned band Mirkwood is one of those bands that use pieces of Tolkien's poems and combine them with parts from other authors (e.g., Alan E. Poe, William Wordsworth, or J. W. Goethe). This band's repertoire primarily focuses on portraying unspoiled nature, and its main topic is the journey through the wilderness. This approach can be compared to Tolkien, who used the topic of a journey and nature across his work.

The excerpt below presents the song "Journey's End" by Mirkwood. As is apparent from the lyrics, the song uses the topic of a journey as the main narrative. Its second verse consists of a part from Tolkien's "In Western Land" that Sam Gamgee sang in the Tower of Cirith Ungol. Moreover, Its ending is slightly altered (the "all the westward" part is added). This way, the borrowed verse accompanies the rest of the lyrics. Furthermore, the song ends with the first four lines from the borrowed verse. Comparably to this song, even their song "Twilight Falls" contains Tolkien's poem "Ho! Ho! Ho! To the Bottle I Go," which accompanies the first stanza from William Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." As well as in the previous example, even here, Tolkien's part is slightly altered – the word "rain" is replaced by the word "snow."

All the eastward paths I tread through glads and over fells
over mountains beneath the moon by stones carved with ancient runes
in the darkest halls of stone past lands where cold wind blow
beyond all peaks of snow beyond the suns warm glow

Though here at journey's end I lie
In darkness buried deep
Beyond all towers strong and high
Beyond all mountains steep
Above all shadows rides the sun
And stars for ever dwell

I will not say the day is done
Nor bid the stars farewell all the westward⁶¹

On the contrary, the song “In Moria, In Khazad-dûm” by Dwarrowdelf is composed entirely by Tolkien’s “Song of Durin.” Furthermore, the song primarily presents Moria as the once-famous city. Similarly, their other song, “Far Over Misty Mountains Cold,” is composed of three of Tolkien’s poems: “Under the Mountain Dark and Tall,” “Far Over the Misty Mountains,” and “The Wind Was on the Withered Wheat.” In addition, this song contains 18 verses composed so that the overall structure and chronology are preserved. The first three verses taken from “Far Over the Misty Mountains” are chronologically correct, followed by the fourth verse from “Under the Mountain Dark.” The following part is composed from the fifth to tenth verses of “Far Over the Misty Mountains.” The last part of the song features all six verses taken from “The Wind Was on the Withered Wheat,” starting with the first verse and leading up to the sixth and thus representing numbers from 11 to 16. The song is ended with the first and second verses from “Under the Mountain Dark.”

Although the Tolkien black metal scene draws inspiration from Tolkien’s legendarium and incorporates its nature into their lyrics, they often use Middle-earth’s nature as a supportive element rather than the main lyrical topic. When nature is in the main topic’s role, it is often restricted to the depictions of famous Middle-earth places that primarily consist of architecture and industrial areas instead of natural landscapes. Musicians often use this nature as an imaginary bridge between the story and the listener. Its main purpose is to induce the required atmosphere, introduce the listener to the story’s settings, or emphasize a specific feeling, and thus connect the listener emotionally to the song. Nature in TBM lyrics is frequently used as borrowed names or brief mentions that often support the main lyrical themes – often war, evil, or particular events. Furthermore, their utilization of nature as a supportive element strongly resembles how nature is used in Tolkien’s writing, poems, and songs.

On the contrary, Tolkien uses more complex depictions and does not rely merely on brief mentions. His portrayal of nature is complex and often overlaps with the main narrative. This overlap can be seen on the topic of the journey, which functions as a primary foundation for the story. As Tolkien mentioned in his note about the W. H. Auden’s review, he used the journey primarily as a tool that “provides a strong thread on which a multitude of things that he has in mind may be strung to make a new thing, various, unpredictable. And yet coherent.”⁶² The mentioned combination of the journey and nature is an essential foundation for his

⁶¹ Mirkwood, “Journey’s End,” track 1 on *Mirkwood*, Werewolf Promotion, 2015, compact disc.

⁶² Carpenter, *The Letters*, 239.

storytelling. Furthermore, he uses nature to describe races, nations, and even their conflicts – as can be seen in the depictions of Hobbits, Elves, Orcs, Ents, or the story of the transformation of Isengard.

Although both fictional universes portray nature similarly, the level of complexity in their depictions differ. Tolkien provides elaborate descriptions of nature that support his story, and nature in his writing often overlaps with the main theme. On the other hand, the Tolkien black metal scene only mentions places and does not provide more profound complexity in their depictions.

Conclusion

Tolkien black metal strongly resembles Tolkien's work, albeit both worlds are seemingly incompatible at first glance. They share not only lyrical themes and narrative elements but also a passion for Nordic mythology and culture. Tolkien black metal musicians frequently paraphrase Tolkien's stories from *Silmarillion*, *The Lord of the Rings*, or *The Hobbit*, and even use Middle-earth settings in their songs.

This paper defined the new musical subgenre called Tolkien black metal and presented its aspects at the beginning, continued with the description of Tolkien's influence on the black metal scene, and provided a brief insight into the history of this new musical stylistic division. After that, narrative elements and themes used in both fictional universes were described. The second part of the paper consists of the analysis of the lyrics from bands Andracca (UK), Gates to the Abyss (US), Dwarrowdelf (UK), Keys of Orthanc (CA), Mirkwood (US), Hithlum (US), and Line of Durin (US).

The introduction part of this work defined specific terms and introduced the reader to the methodology used for the purposes of this paper. Furthermore, it presented the raw numbers, such as the number of bands playing Tolkien black metal registered at official online portals and the number of other stylistic divisions of black metal. In addition, this chapter provided an overview of reliable sources used in this work. The introduction chapter is then followed by the theoretical chapter.

The theoretical chapter "The Aspects of Tolkien Black Metal" provided essential information about the genre and its roots and presented its brief history, focusing on Tolkien's influence. It primarily dealt with the connection between Tolkien's work and the black metal scene and their further impact on the Tolkien black metal scene. This chapter also provided the background of this connection, which is crucial for further understanding of the topic and is essential for the following analysis. Furthermore, it consisted of a brief description of Tolkien's life to contrast his values with the values and beliefs of Tolkien black metal bands. Then the chapter moved to the definition of the themes used across both fictional universes. Those lyrical themes were then further introduced and contrasted to their original use within Tolkien's work. Moreover, this chapter revealed several arguments that function as the analytical part's foundation.

After that, two analytical chapters, "The Battle of Good and Evil" and "The Role of Nature in Tolkien Black Metal," were introduced. Both chapters analyzed certain lyrical themes described in the theoretical chapter and contrasted them to their original portrayal in Tolkien's

work. Those chapters used the arguments given in the “Aspects of Tolkien Black Metal” and supported them with their thorough analysis.

The first analytical chapter, “The Battle of Good and Evil,” presented the portrayal of evil, war, and good versus evil thematics within Tolkien’s work and Tolkien black metal lyrics. This chapter dealt primarily with the analysis of songs “Death Comes Swiftly,” “Valar,” and “Depths” by Andracca, “At the Gate” and “The Old Castle Durthang” by Keys of Orthanc, and the song “The Necromancer” by Gates to the Abyss. Furthermore, the chapter provided an overview of the usage of the theme of evil throughout the Tolkien black metal scene and revealed contrasts in its portrayal in *The Silmarillion*, *The Lord of the Rings*. The analytical chapter presented the idea that evil is portrayed merely from the viewpoint of antagonists, which contradicts its depiction in Tolkien’s novels. Moreover, it also revealed that Tolkien black metal bands often omit stories in their lyrics that portray evil as a destructible force. Furthermore, it presented the idea that bands often commemorate evil characters and their deeds, which is in line with the portrayal of evil in the black metal scene. These arguments were supported by a thorough examination of the above-mentioned lyrics and their contrasting with Tolkien’s work.

The paper is concluded with the second analytical chapter, “The Role of Nature in Tolkien Black Metal.” Comparably to the previous analytical chapter, even this chapter examined several lyrics from Tolkien black metal bands. Namely: “At the Gate” by Keys of Orthanc, “Hidden Beneath Fangron” by Hithlum, “Khazad-dûm” by Line of Durin, “The Withering Woods” by Dwarrowdelf, and “Journey’s End” by the band Mirkwood. The chapter provided an analysis of the theme of nature. It was analyzed in its both possible forms –nature as a lyrical theme and nature as the supportive element. Firstly, the chapter presented nature as a binary element, followed by nature as the main lyrical topic. Then the usage of those elements in several Tolkien black metal lyrics was examined and compared to Tolkien’s portrayal of nature in his work. The chapter presents the argument that Tolkien black metal bands use the theme of nature similarly to Tolkien, yet to a different extent. As is presented in the second analytical chapter, Tolkien based his storytelling on a combination of nature and the journey themes that functions as the main foundation of his work. Those themes are complex and cover more than just the simple depiction of natural terrain. On the contrary, as presented in the analytical chapter, Tolkien black metal bands use nature primarily as a binary element whose main function is to support the main narrative – it is less complex and more in the form of brief mentions. Furthermore, it also proposes the idea that bands use nature chiefly in the form of the atmospheric introduction. This is primarily apparent in war-themed songs that briefly mention nature at their beginning to set the song’s mood and introduce the listener to the upcoming

story's settings. The chapter also reveals that most lyrics containing nature as the main theme focus predominantly on architectural works instead of the natural landscape. Comparably to the previous chapter, even these arguments were supported by the thorough analysis of both fictional universes.

To conclude this work, all the examples and analysis mentioned above prove that Tolkien black metal, as a new musical genre, is heavily influenced by Tolkien's work. In fact, the scene is influenced by Tolkien to such an extent that they incorporate his rhymes and small excerpts from his books into their lyrics or even use names from Tolkien's legendarium for their bands, albums, and artistic pseudonyms. Furthermore, Tolkien's work is frequently paraphrased in Tolkien black metal lyrics, yet its general interpretation is often twisted and portrayed from the viewpoint of evil.

Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá propojením Tolkienova fiktivního světa s jeho otiskem v hudebních textech tolkien black metalových kapel z anglicky mluvících zemí. Jejím hlavním cílem je analýza textů tolkien black metalových kapel, nalezení společných prvků a jejich následné porovnání s použitím v Tolkienově literární předloze. Tolkien black metal, nový hudební subžánr vzniklý v devadesátých letech minulého století, čerpá svojí inspiraci z Tolkienovo světa, který dále zobrazuje ve svých hudebních textech. Ačkoliv se může na první pohled zdát, že jsou oba světy nekompatibilní a zastávají zcela protichůdné názory, z jejich spojení čerpají desítky kapel po celém světě.

Teoretická kapitola této práce se zabývá propojením Tolkienova literárního universa se svým black metalovým protějškem, který je následně přiblížen stručným nástinem jeho historie s důrazem na Tolkienův vliv. Ten v osmdesátých letech výrazně formoval celou generaci norských teenagerů, která následně hrála výraznou roli při formování black metalových kapel. Popisuje především negativní přístup black metalové scény k životu a jejich touhu vytvořit nový extrémní hudební žánr, který by svým šokujícím obsahem vytvořil protiváhu k tehdejší popkultuře. Popis Tolkienova vlivu na black metalové kapely je reflektován především v přebírání jmen z jeho tvorby, vliv obrazového materiálu doprovázejícího jeho knihy a také následné přebírání společných témat – například vyobrazení boje dobra se zlem a přírody. Definice black metalu je následně obohacena o stručné přiblížení Tolkienova života, které slouží především k porovnání odlišných názorů a přístupů k tvorbě. Staví vedle sebe Tolkiena, jakožto katolicky založeného a uznávaného profesora, který prožil obě světové války a vytvořil jedinečný fiktivní svět s mnoha různými jazyky a kulturami, a black metal, který se kromě jiných kontroverzních témat neštítí vyobrazit ve svých textech nacismus nebo satanismus. Toto přiblížení také popisuje společné prvky obou světů, jako je zájem o severskou mytologii a kulturu, přírodu a jejich následné použití coby patriotického elementu v jejich tvorbě. Kapitola dále popisuje vznik tolkien black metalu jakožto nového subžánru, který opustil většinu black metalových témat a plně přijal Tolkienův literární svět, který vyobrazuje z pohledu vlastní perspektivy.

Druhá část teoretické kapitoly se zabývá definicí tolkien black metalu, jakožto nového hudebního žánru spadajícího pod vliv black metalu, a předkládá jeho nejčastější hudební témata, která následně porovnává s Tolkienovou literární předlohou. Tolkien black metal je představen primárně jako stylistická divize black metalu, jejíž hlavní hudební a tematickou náplní je Tolkienův svět. Stejně tak jako ostatní stylistické divize (NSBM, viking black metal,

atmospheric black metal, a další), i tolkien black metal je reprezentován rozdílným zvukem, jinými tématy a odlišným názorovým proudem. I přes to je ale znatelné, kam až jeho kořeny sahají. Z black metalu si propůjčuje extrémní zkreslený zvuk s chraplavým vokálem (tzv. growling nebo screaming), zálibu v prezentování zla a občasný náznak satanismu. Tematicky se pak převážně věnuje boji dobra se zlem a válečným konfliktům Středozemě – obě tato témata často interpretačně převrací a prezentuje je z pohledu zla, což je pravý opak toho, jak jsou tato témata znázorněna v Tolkienových knihách. Kapitola dále pojednává o využití přírodních motivů v tolkien black metalových textech, které porovnává s jejím použitím v Tolkienově tvorbě.

Celá teoretická kapitola taktéž předkládá několik základních tezí, které jsou následně prokázány v navazujících analytických kapitolách. Mezi tyto teze patří především již zmíněné tvrzení, že tolkien black metalové kapely často záměrně převrací interpretaci jednotlivých témat a prezentují je primárně z pohledu zla. Dále také předkládá tvrzení, že tolkien black metalové kapely používají přírodu především jako sekundární prvek, kterým podporují hlavní narrativ dané písně. Často se tak můžeme v textech setkat s přírodou (potažmo zasazením), která je zmíněna pouze na začátku písně z důvodu navození příslušné atmosféry a následnému přiblížení zasazení děje posluchači. Tato technika je hojně využívána především v rámci písní pojednávajících o různých válečných konfliktech ze Středozemě – v těchto textech je příroda použita primárně jako nástroj k představení bitevního pole.

Další kapitolou je první analytická kapitola „The Battle of Good and Evil“ (Boj dobra se zlem). Kapitola důsledně analyzuje texty tolkien black metalových kapel s hlavním důrazem na vyobrazení zla ze Středozemě. Při porovnání těchto textů s Tolkienovou literární předlohou je zřejmé, že kapely úmyslně překrucují interpretaci zla z Tolkienových románů a zobrazují dané příběhy především z pohledu zla. Takto vyobrazené zlo je představováno jako nejmocnější síla ve Středozemi, kterou není možné nijak porazit, uvěznit, zneškodnit nebo zničit. Aby mohlo být zlo představeno v takovéto formě, musí se kapely často vyvarovat použití příběhů, ve kterých je zlo poraženo. Zlo a jeho skutky jsou tak v tolkien black metalových textech často oslavovány, což přímo souvisí s postojem klasické black metalové scény. Takto zobrazované zlo je však v mnoha ohledech odlišné od Tolkiena, který ho ve své tvorbě představuje z pohledu hlavních hrdinů. Ti zlo vnímají jako sílu, kterou je možno porazit, uvěznit a případně i zničit.

Tato kapitola je následována další analytickou kapitolou „The Role of Nature in Tolkien Black Metal“ (Role přírody v tolkien black metalu). Stejně jako i v předchozím případě, obsahuje tato kapitola soubor analýz, jejichž hlavním cílem je porovnat použití, příp.

vyobrazení, přírody v obou fiktivních vesmírech. Příroda v této kapitole je rozdělena na přírodu v roli binárního elementu a přírodu, která je použita především jako hlavní literární/hudební téma. Většina textů tolkien black metalových kapel používá přírodu především jako podpůrný prvek, jehož hlavním cílem je „atmosféricky“ podpořit hlavní dej písni. Takto použitý podpůrný prvek je obvykle využíván v podobě krátkých zmínek prostředí Středozemě nebo krátkým popisem místa ve kterém se daný příběh odehrává. Příroda v roli podpůrného prvku je často zmiňována na začátku hudebního textu v podobě takzvaného atmosférického úvodu. Cílem tohoto úvodu je především navodit požadovanou atmosféru a uvést posluchače do děje. Tato technika je hojně využívána v případech, kdy je hlavním hudebním tématem válka nebo jiný válečný konflikt. Začátek písni, který je tvořený z jednoho, příp. dvou veršů, tak většinou popisuje prostor do kterého je děj zasazen – mnohdy bitevní pole. Použití přírody jako podpůrného prvku se víceméně shoduje s Tolkienovou prací, která taktéž využívá atmosférického úvodu. Tento úvod primárně slouží, stejně jako v případě tolkien black metalových textů, jako prostředek k propojení čtenáře s příběhem, navození požadované atmosféry, případně také jako prostředek k zvýraznění určitého pocitu nebo jistého poselství.

Druhá část kapitoly se zaměřuje na přírodu, která je použita jako hlavní téma. Oproti Tolkienovi, je toto téma v rámci tolkien black metalových kapel téměř nevyužito. Příroda v roli hlavního hudebního tématu převážně zobrazuje architekturu namísto přírodních lokalit, což se obecně vymyká z black metalového pojetí přírody, které často přírodu opěvuje a je i v rámci vizálu hodně ovlivněno lesy a severskou krajinou. Tolkien black metalové kapely tak často vyobrazují například Morii jako kdysi slavné hornické město. Tolkien oproti tomu využívá přírodu jako hlavního elementu velice často. Příroda v jeho pojetí je komplexním souborem popisů a návazností, kterým nechybí přesah. Obecně se dá říci, že je Tolkienova práce vystavěná především na tématu cesty, kdy se postavy dostávají do nových lokací, kterými jsou dále v příběhu ovlivněny. Tyto lokace jsou navíc často zasazeny do tematiky boje přírody s člověkem, která je patrná například na popisech jednotlivých kultur, které odrážejí zemi ve které žijí. V rámci Tolkienova díla si tak můžeme všimnout rasy elfů, žijících a opečovávajících nezničenou přírodu, a jejich protipólu, skřetů, žijících ve zdevastované zemi. Tematika industrializace je také patrná z Tolkienova pojetí Železného pasu, který je představen jako ohromné monstrum vidící přírodu pouze jako zdroj surovin pro válčení.

Práce jako celek tak odpovídá na zásadní otázky: Jak mohou být tyto fiktivní vesmíry propojeny, když oba staví na odlišných hodnotách? Jak je možné, že scéna, jejímž hlavním cílem je vystavět opak mainstreamu, přijala jako hlavní téma své hudby právě jednoho z

nejpopulárnějších spisovatelů? Zároveň vyvozuje konkrétnější výsledky analýzy, která dokládá tvrzení, že je Tolkienovské zlo v textech tolkien black metalových kapel zobrazováno primárně z pohledu zla, jakožto hlavní opak Tolkienovo zobrazení. Dále dokládá další zjištění, a to, že kapely využívají Středozemskou přírodu ve svých textech pouze jako binární element pro podporu hlavního děje, kterým je často zlo nebo válka dobra a zla.

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Analyzed lyrics

Andracca, “Death Comes Swiftly,” track 7 on *Morgulduin*, Blackwood productions, 2018, cassette tape.

Andracca, “Valar,” track 9 on *Morgulduin*, Blackwood productions, 2018, cassette tape.

Dwarrowdelf, “The Withering Woods,” track 2 on *Of Dying Lights*, Flowing Downward, 2019, compact disc.

Gates to the Abyss, “The Necromancer,” track 5 on *Sorcery of Melkor*, 2019, digital format.

Hithlum, “Hidden Beneath Fangorn,” track 4 on *In the Land of Mordor, Where the Shadows Lie*, Ketzer Records, 2005, compact disc.

Keys of Orthanc, “At the Gate,” track 2 on *A Battle in the Dark Lands of the Eye...*, Naturmacht productions, 2019, compact disc.

Keys of Orthanc, “At the gate,” track 2 on *A battle in the dark lands of the eye...*, Naturmacht Productions, 2019, compact disc.

Line of Durin, “Khazad-dûm,” track 1 on *Line of Durin*, 2019, digital format.

Mirkwood, “Journey’s End,” track 1 on *Mirkwood*, Werewolf Promotion, 2015, compact disc.

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Aendix A - Personal communication with Mirkwood (March 21, 2020)

Hey Roman,

Sure, thanks for the interest, happy to help with your thesis. I can't speak too much to how Mirkwood's lyrics are written since most of them are from other authors (Tolkien, Poe, Wordsworth, Goethe) so we don't write most of the lyrics ourselves. This is a habit we seem to have picked up from Summoning especially around their Stronghold / LMHSYF era albums. I've tried to answer your questions below:

1) Do black metal bands using the already existing Tolkien's world to express themselves or Do they developing the story?

I think there's a connection between the world Tolkien created and the sort of ideas and themes that many people in the black metal scene are (or were) interested in. This includes a fascination with pre-technological society, a focus on atmosphere and world-building, as well as a reverence for nature and atmosphere. So I think the draw to Tolkien is less about developing Tolkien's story further but more about identifying with themes and concepts in Tolkiens work that resound with the artists and overlap with what they wish to express in their music.

2) What are the similarities between BM scene and Tolkien's work?

I think I partially already touched on this in the last answer, but I think a lot of it comes from a feeling of connection to nature. Additionally, Tolkien also built out the dark side of his world fairly deeply, and of course black metal is interested in the darker parts of culture, history and mythology, and so again there is an overlapping shared interest. This is also evident, in this bands case, in the name of the band itself, Mirkwood being both a great forest of Tolkien's world, as well as a place where the darker elements of the world dwell.

3) Why is BM scene so much attracted to the Tolkien's work?

I think partially it's the shared interests, and partially also that a lot of black metal bands start around the same time in life that people become enthralled with Tolkien. I think I was around 14 or 15 when I started writing music with Mirkwood, and Tolkien's works were extremely influential at that age. It seems less likely that someone who's working in an office day in day out still shares the same fascination, but when you're younger the creativity and imagination of Tolkien, along with the rebellious and "dangerous" (I use quotes since metal isn't really that dangerous anymore on the whole) of metal are both great outlets for growth and escapism. There's a handful of examples of classic Norwegian black metal bands like Burzum (the name being literally from Tolkien) and Enslaved who started the bands young and also had an obsession with Tolkien and the Norse myths, which I don't think is purely coincidental.

Let me know if you have any other questions, and good luck with your thesis!

Cheers,
AK

Appendix B - Personal communication with Andracca (March 28, 2022)

To answer your questions:

1) In terms taking phrases directly, whilst I tried to keep doing so to a minimum, there are certain phrases that just capture a scene in such a specific way I felt it crucial to include in the telling of a particular tale. In much the same way, an artist painting a work inspired by Tolkien would be likely to include certain specific visual features in the work within a composition of their own creation. Despite this, I did try and rely on myself to create the lyrics as much as possible. At the time of writing that initial release, it was the first time I'd ever written music or lyrics, so using certain lines as prompts was undoubtedly partially down to me needing a bit more a push to get started in the beginning.

2) In my own mind I view Morgulduin as merely being a narrative for "evil" being carried out, rather than from the perspective of the evil doer, of course that is not to say that I am right and you are wrong in your interpretation, once the music is released, each individual has their own view on it, it is no longer "mine", which is a wonderful thing. That being said, I don't believe the album portrays evil as indestructible, with "The skies are Ablaze" detailing the fall of Ancalagon, black tides from the North being destroyed, and their master being bound in chains of ice. What you could say about the album, and indeed these stories, is that Evil will spring up from somewhere, forever and indefinitely. It cannot be snuffed out. The hearts of men can never be safeguarded from corruption (as Tolkien so beautifully portrayed in his ring wraiths). The threat never goes away, we cannot create a paradise, in other works of fiction, not even God was capable of such a thing, a serpent will always find a way in. For the good to prevail, we must all make sacrifices and do our best to cultivate what is good in us and others. I know many other black metal bands may give entirely opposite answers on this believing it to be exciting to glorify evil in some abstract sense, I would rather hope that society moves beyond good and evil and sees the place for each in our world, and the life-essence to be found in the never-ending conflict between the two, both internally and on a societal and global scale.

3) Whilst it wasn't explicitly intentional, I think that setting the scene for a narrative is very important, it aids especially in music in providing a mental image to match the soundscape. For me personally, I've always been a massive admirer of nature, living within 30 minutes drive of Snowdonia throughout my teenage years, with a view of the sea from my home kept me in close contact with stunning scenery on a regular basis. A great deal of my lyrical writing, or simply verbal thoughts come to me whilst out in nature. Such places evoke different emotions on every visit, with varying life circumstances to different weather casting a dramatically different scene from day to day. For this reason, it is important not to just mention where our story takes place, but what the conditions are like, no place ever remains the same. Even though I've lyrically moved on from Tolkien explicitly, nature is still a go to place for inspiration, it is a refuge in which one can think without the constant bombardment and noise of the modern world. It's no secret that nature and woodlands inspired much of Tolkien's work, as well as countless others, I truly believe it to act as a catalyst for our most truly human and honest ideas to flow freely. It is where we are meant to be, and where we shall all return to when our journey is at an end, hopefully when we are still quite ready for another adventure.

Appendix C - Personal communication with Orcrypt (March 10, 2020)

My short bullet points to your questions would be.

1) It is less about developing the story, but in a way expressing ourselves through the perspective of certain characters. Or put another way, exploring the darkness of characters that are left mostly voiceless in Tolkien's work.

2) I don't know if there is necessarily a direct similarity between Black Metal and Tolkien's work, although I'm sure one could argue that the conflict between Mordor and the rest of Middle Earth could share some similarities with the adversarial relationship Black Metal has often had with music and mainstream culture in general.

3) As for why Black Metal is attracted to Tolkien's work, I think that is an easier one to answer. Black Metal from its inception has always been focused on the darkest, the blackest, the grimmest aspects of thought and experience. With so many of the early bands focused on war, Satan, paganism, Norse mythology. Further to that in recent years Black Metal has explored the darkest parts of history, space, technology, drug use, urban life, depression, suicide and more. Tolkien is one of the most important and respected writers of fantasy literature and, beyond that, created such a rich, vibrant and comprehensive world that wanting to explore the darkness of these compelling, but voiceless cultures is an alluring prospect. For some it might be wanting to identify with a certain darkness, for others Sauron, Mordor, Orcs and Morgoth might represent an adversarial icon in a similar, but secular way to Satan/Lucifer. Or maybe, as I said earlier, it might be an opportunity to explore and try to give a voice to that side, similar to what Kirill Eskov did when he wrote "The Last Ringbearer".

Hope that is enough to start you off. If you need more detail, or have more specific questions, just ask. - J.R.R. Martin.