

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyse the origin, development and possible interpretations of J.R.R. Tolkien's character of Gandalf the wizard, focusing primarily on the influence of three major sources of inspiration, suggested both by the author himself and intertextual elements recognisable in his fiction; The Bible, Norse and Finnish mythology (represented by The Poetic and The Prose Edda, Saga of the Volsungs and Kalevala) and the literary tradition centred around the legendary figure of Merlin, as well as the later works of fiction which it has inspired. The aim of the thesis is to illustrate to what extent is Tolkien's Gandalf only a continuation or adaptation of the historical literary tradition represented by the sources named above or on the contrary, an original and independent character. This discussion is aimed to demonstrate how J.R.R Tolkien's portrayal of wizard figures has not only helped to popularize the generic characterisation of wizards in fantasy fiction but helped to pioneer a new type of wizard figure.

Tolkien's influence on the fantasy genre was not necessarily inventive but rather transformative. The fundamental elements of Tolkien's fiction were not introduced by the author, but have already been a part of the developing genre. Before Tolkien, the authors of fantasy have strongly relied on archetypal figures, the model established by children's literature and fairy stories, mythology, the Arthurian legend or Christian allegory. In the character of Gandalf, Tolkien was aware of the sources named above, and used them as a point of departure for the creation of the character. However, Gandalf surpasses and overcomes this model in many respects, primarily because of his impossibility to be easily classified into any of the presented categories and roles, his attitude towards power and his humility and humanity. But most importantly, Gandalf is no longer only an archetypal character which serves to forward the plot, but a fully developed personality which, while not yet reaching the complexity of the following wizard characters, has served as a source of inspiration for the following generations of writers of fantasy.

Key Words: J.R.R. Tolkien, Gandalf, wizard, Bible, Odin, Vainamoinen, Merlin