

SECONDARY SCHOOL FOR CATERING AND TOURISM CELJE

# MYSTICAL OR MYTHICAL LORD OF THE RINGS?

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## SUMMARY

Tolkien, the father of modern fantasy literature, inspired us with his epic tale *The Lord of the Rings*, which is considered as one of the best books written in the 20th century. Tolkien's extraordinary journey through Middle-earth arouse our interest in his world. Since the book was assembled over a long period of time, we strongly believe, that it is a composite of sources. Myth, legend, language, history, is therefore being explored to find parallels between the imaginary world of the Third Age and our own times.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was an English philologist, writer and university professor who is best known as the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as many other works. He was an Oxford professor of Anglo-Saxon language (1925 to 1945) and English language and literature (1945 to 1959). His works are known all over the world, especially *The Lord of the Rings* which became immensely popular in the 1960s and has remained so ever since, ranking as one of the most popular works of fiction of the twentieth century, judged by both sales and reader surveys.<sup>1</sup>

Today Tolkien is identified as »the father of modern fantasy literature«<sup>2</sup> and although *The Lord of the Rings* is often regarded as »an epic high fantasy novel«,<sup>3</sup> the question appears, whether there is more than just »high fantasy« behind this extraordinary journey through Middle-earth. Did Tolkien, who was a scholar with deep knowledge of languages both modern and ancient, use any of this knowledge while creating the languages of Middle-earth? Are the characters and place names in *The Lord of the Rings* related to words from old languages? Are there any connections between the history of Middle-earth and the history of England? Did the horrors of World War I, which Tolkien experienced himself, change the course of the novel? What mythological influences can be found in *The Lord of the Rings*? The latter, we believe, represent Tolkien's major influence, however, behind the mystical atmosphere of the story, we expect to discover much more.

1 [http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2003-12-12-lotr-main\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2003-12-12-lotr-main_x.htm)

2 <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8119893978710705002>

3 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Lord\\_of\\_the\\_Rings/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lord_of_the_Rings/)

To answer the above questions, we are going to dig deep into Tolkien's biography, search through the history of England, the history of the English language, the myths and legends connected in anyway to the creation of *The Lord of the Rings*, using the selective, comparative, descriptive, and explanatory methods. Hopefully we discover the reason why the places, the heroes, the villains of Middle-earth seem so familiar.

## II. THEORETICAL PART

### a) BIOGRAPHY OF J. R. R. TOLKIEN

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien is best known as the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, although his published fiction includes several books about what he called a legendarium, »a connected body of tales, fictional histories, invented languages, and other literary essays about an imagined world called Arda and Middle-earth.«<sup>1</sup>

J. R. R. Tolkien was born on January 3, 1892, in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State (now Free State Province, South Africa). He moved to England when he was four years old, with his mother, Mabel Suffield, and his younger brother, Hilary Arthur Reuel. His father, however, died in South Africa of rheumatic fever before he could join them. Tolkien spent his childhood at Sarehole, and he would later often use the scenes from the surrounding areas in his fiction. When Tolkien was twelve his mother died of diabetes. Because of their subsequent orphanhood, he and his brother were brought up by Father Francis Xavier Morgan of the Birmingham Oratory. The boys attended King Edward's School in Birmingham and young Tolkien's favourite lessons were those concerning languages. Not surprisingly, Tolkien graduated from the University of Oxford with a first-class degree in English language in 1915. Soon after, Tolkien joined the British Army effort in World War I. His battalion was moved to France, where Tolkien served as a communications officer until he came down with a trench fever and was moved back to England. During these last few months most of his close friends had been killed in action. Partly to their memory and because of his war experiences, Tolkien began to put his stories into shape, and *The Book of Lost Tales* developed.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J.\\_R.\\_R.\\_Tolkien](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._R._R._Tolkien)

On March 22, 1916, Tolkien married Edith Mary Bratt, the woman he had known since they had lived in the same house in Birmingham. They had four children: John Francis Reuel, Michael Hilary Reuel, Christopher John Reuel and Priscilla Anne Reuel.

Tolkien's first job was at the Oxford English Dictionary, where he worked on the history and etymology of words of Germanic origin. In 1920 he took up a post as Reader in English language at the University of Leeds, and in 1924 was made a professor there. Next year he returned to Oxford as a professor of Anglo-Saxon at Pembroke College.

His first novel, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937), developed from stories told to his children. The book became an immediate success because it was different, labeled as »an original blend, quite against the realistic trends in other children's books of the time«. <sup>1</sup> One of its strengths was the completeness of its setting. Tolkien's publisher was stunned by *The Hobbit's* success and asked for a sequel, which blossomed into an epic for all ages, called *The Lord of the Rings*.

As Tolkien wrote it, *The Lord of the Rings* rapidly developed into a romance primarily intended for adults, and was published in three volumes: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King* (1954-1955). The plot of the story – Frodo's quest to destroy the evil ring of power – is quite straightforward and *The Lord of the Rings* is considered to have had a great impact on modern fantasy writing.

In 1945, Tolkien moved to Merton College, Oxford, becoming the Merton Professor of English Language and Literature, in which post he remained until his retirement in 1959.

<sup>1</sup> [http://uk.encyclopedia.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761567525/Tolkien\\_J\(ohn\)\\_R\(onald\)\\_R\(euel\).html](http://uk.encyclopedia.msn.com/encyclopedia_761567525/Tolkien_J(ohn)_R(onald)_R(euel).html)

During his life in retirement Tolkien increasingly turned into a figure of public attention and literary fame. Fan attention became so intense that eventually he and his wife had to move to Bournemouth, a pleasant but uninspiring South Coast resort. On 22 November 1971 Edith died, so Tolkien returned to Oxford. He died on 2 September 1973. He and Edith are buried together in a single grave at the Wolvercote cemetery in the northern suburbs of Oxford.

Tolkien's death, however, did not mark the end of Middle-earth for readers. His son Christopher endeavored to complete some of his father's unfinished works. *The Silmarillion* was published in 1977 and in 1980 he began to publish some other incomplete writings under the name *History of Middle-earth*.

## b) SHORT SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

The backstory begins thousands of years before the action in the book, with the rise of the Dark Lord Sauron, who wanted to gain dominion over Middle-earth. After the Elven-smiths crafted the Rings of Power, Sauron forged the One Ring, filling it with his own power so he could rule all the others. But the One Ring was taken from him and after many years fell in the hands of the Hobbit, Bilbo Baggins.

Book I, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, begins with Bilbo's 111th birthday party, and his disappearance, after bequeathing to his nephew, Frodo, the Ruling Ring. Their friend, Gandalf the Grey, reveals to Frodo that the ring is in fact the One Ring, which the Dark Lord has been searching for most of the Third Age. Frodo accepts the task of bearing the ring to a council in the east. His friend Sam and his nephews, Merry and Pippin, elect to accompany him.

The group travels out of their homeland and into a dangerous forest. They meet a fellow named Tom Bombadil who helps them get out of trouble when they are faced with the Nine Black Riders. Later, they meet Strider, whose true name is Aragorn and is the heir of Gondor, and they continue their way to the country of the elves. There Frodo recuperates from the wound and is healed by Elrond. At Rivendell they hold a council on what is to be done with the ring. It is decided that the ring must be destroyed at the Cracks of Doom, many miles away in the evil land of Mordor. Frodo volunteers to take the ring and the company is chosen to go with him. The fellowship of the ring is established.

On the way, their path is repeatedly beset by evil forces: they are attacked by the orcs, they are driven into the dark forest of Lothlorien, where luckily they are freed by Galadriel, and they also face a terrifying creature Radagast. Gandalf sacrifices his life to destroy Radagast the Balrog. However, the fellowship is breaking and the two hobbits, Frodo and Sam, set off to Mordor without the others.

The second volume, *The Two Towers*, deals with two parallel storylines. At the beginning of the book, the fellowship is further scattered for Merry and Pippin are captured by Saruman's orcs. Boromir dies trying to defend them and Aragorn and the others set off in pursuit of their captors. The three meet Gandalf, who has been sent back to Middle-earth as Gandalf the White, to aid the forces of good. Meanwhile, the hobbits escape from captivity and meet Treebeard, The Ent, who rises the Tree-folk against Isengard and the forces of evil. The two reunite with Aragorn and the others after the Battle of Hornburg.

Frodo and Sam on their way to Mount Doom capture Gollum, also called Smeagol, a pale, hunched creature who used to be a hobbit, and place a leash around his neck. Gollum agrees to lead them to Mordor through the Dead Marshes in exchange for removing the leash from his neck. At the end of the volume, Gollum betrays the hobbits, intending to lead them to the great spider, Shelob, who would eat them. Frodo is stung by the spider but he survives and is captured by the orcs. Meanwhile, Sauron launches an all-out military assault upon Middle-earth.

In the third book, *The Return of the King*, the fellowship assists in the final battles against the armies of Sauron, including the siege of the tower-city of Minas Tirith in Gondor and the climactic life-or-death battle before the Black Gate of Mordor, where the alliance of Gondor and Rohan fights desperately against Sauron's armies in order to distract him from the Ring, hoping to gain time for Frodo to destroy it.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, Frodo and Sam escape from the tower, disguised as orcs. Deep in the realm of Mordor, they leave the road and head towards Mount Doom. However, when Frodo is about to complete his mission the temptation of the Ring proves to be too great and claims it for himself. Gollum reappears after a long absence, struggles with Frodo and manages to bite the Ring off of Frodo's finger. Crazy with triumph, Gollum falls into the Cracks of Doom, destroying the Ring in the process.

Thus, Sauron is banished from the world and his realm ends. Aragorn is crowned king and marries Arwen, the daughter of Elrond. At the end, Frodo remains wounded in body and spirit and sails west, accompanied by Bilbo, over the Sea to the Undying Lands.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Lord\\_of\\_the\\_Rings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lord_of_the_Rings)

### c) INFLUENCES ON THE NOVEL

Tolkien created in *The Lord of the Rings* a world, all of its history, its peoples, their languages. He created its geography, its gods, its conception. He created everything. The book is filled with Tolkien's strong ideas about the importance of myth, a deep appreciation of nature, his love of the common people and his Roman Catholic beliefs. Where did he find the material for such a complex work of art?

#### Childhood experiences found in *The Lord of the Rings*

Tolkien's Middle-earth fantasy classic begins with the influence of the writer's idyllic childhood in rural England, a beautiful description of The Shire. After his father's death Tolkien's mother found them a home in Sarehole, just outside the city of Birmingham. A complex mixture of the industrial Birmingham and the rural England, Worcestershire and surrounding areas, glitters throughout the story.

Although Tolkien was born in South Africa, his memories of that period were slight but vivid. One of the events that influenced Tolkien's writing was a scary encounter with a large spider. Dr. Quimby cared for the child after the bite and he is mentioned as an early model for characters like Gandalf the Grey.

After Tolkien's mother died he and his brother were brought up by Father Francis Xavier Morgan of the Birmingham Oratory. The images of the two dark towers in *The Lord of the Rings* were probably derived from Perrott's Folly and the Victorian tower of Edgbaston Waterworks.

Among some other locations mentioned as inspirations for Tolkien are Sarehole Mill, Moseley Bog, Clent Hills, Malvern Hills, Bromsgrove, Alcester, Alvechurch, etc. It has also been suggested the The Shire is based on the countryside around Stonyhurst College in Lancashire.

### The myths and legends that inspired Tolkien's work

After the last Romans left England in about 400 AD, quite a few invasions altered England's surface. First came the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, then the Danish and Norwegian Vikings, and finally, in 1066, the Normans from France. The result was many oral and written histories and legends of previous eras.

Tolkien was strongly influenced by English history and legends but he also drew influence from Scottish and Welsh history and legends as well as from many other European countries, e.g. Scandinavia and Germany. He found sources for his works in Norse, Finnish and Greek mythologies as well. The story of *The Lord of the Rings* is set in what Tolkien conceived to be the lands of the real Earth. In Germanic mythology Middle-earth (originally Middangard) is the world inhabited by men, the world between »Heaven above and Hell Below«. <sup>1</sup> This world is also the living space for Hobbits, Elves, Dwarves, Wizards, Orcs, creatures largely based on Norse and Germanic mythologies. Even the names such as Gandalf and Gimli are directly derived from Norse mythology.

Tolkien borrowings came from Anglo-Saxon literature, numerous Middle English works, etc. The works most often cited as sources for his stories include *Beowulf*, the *Kalevala*, the *Poetic Edda*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, etc.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tolkienociety.org/tolkien/biography.html>

Tolkien himself acknowledged *Beowulf* as an influence on his works, saying: »*Beowulf* is among my most valued sources...«<sup>1</sup> The Nordic legend tells of the adventures of Scandinavian hero who saves the Danes from the seemingly invincible monster Grendel. Tolkien imbued *The Lord of the Rings* with the physical and spiritual conflict evident in *Beowulf*.

The hero of the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, is Väinämöinen, a wise old shaman, who has a flowing beard and magical powers, just like Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*. In a similar manner to *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Kalevala* centers around a magical item of great power, the Sampo, which bestows great fortune on its owner. Like the One Ring, the Sampo is fought over by forces of good and evil, and is finally destroyed at the end of the story. Another similarity can be found at the end, when both wizards depart on a ship to lands beyond the mortal world.

The *Poetic Edda* was probably the source for the names of the dwarves, while the theme of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a 14th century tale, resisting temptation, is also a major plot in *The Lord of the Rings*.

### Reflection of languages in *The Lord of the Rings*

Tolkien's love of languages was evident from his early age. When he attended King Edward's School in Birmingham in the years 1910 and 1911, he excelled in classical and modern languages. In 1911 he went to Exeter College, Oxford, where he studied Classics, Old English, Germanic languages, Welsh, and Finnish. Soon he began to create languages of his own, such as Elvish (including Quenya and Sindarin), Dwarvish (Khuzdul), Entish, and Black Speech. The best developed of his artificial languages are Quenya and Sindarin.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.triode.net.au/~dragon/tilkal/issue1/beowulf.html>

Quenya was a »language developed by those non-Telerin Elves who reached Valinor (the 'High Elves') from an earlier language Common Eldarin«. <sup>1</sup> Quenya was not exactly a living language in Middle-earth during the Third Age. Most Elves spoke Sindarin, while men spoke Westron, and Quenya was only used in official names and writings.

Tolkien based his Elvish language on Finnish, on the other hand, the grammatical inspiration came from Latin and Greek. The phonology was based on Finnish as well, and to a lesser extent Latin, Italian, and Spanish. In his early work Tolkien called this language Qenya.

Sindarin was also the Elvish language and was spoken most commonly in the Middle-earth. Deriving from an earlier language called Common Telerin it was the »language of the Sindar, those Teleri which had been left behind on the Great Journey to the Elves«. <sup>2</sup>

Tolkien based the sound and the grammar of the Sindarin on Welsh, some consonant mutations however show the characteristics of the Celtic languages.

In his book *Hobbits, Elves, and Wizards*, Michael N. Stanton provides examples of the historical links for some of Tolkien's characters and settings. Here are a few examples:

- Saruman's name derives from the Anglo-Saxon, or Old English root 'searu-' for treachery.
- Sauran is linked to the Old Norse or Icelandic stem meaning 'filth'.
- Mordor derives from the Old English word 'morthor' meaning murder. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quenya>

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sindarin>

<sup>3</sup> Stanton, M. (2001). *Hobbits, Elves, and Wizard*. New York: Palgrave.

### Traces of religion in the novel

Among the largest influences on Tolkien's creation of the Middle-earth are his Catholic beliefs and the Bible. Many theological themes can be found in *The Lord of the Rings*, e.g. the battle of good versus evil and the triumph of humility over pride. Themes like fellowship, justice, salvation, immortality, mercy, free will, and self-sacrifice are also included. The theme of temptation is present throughout the story. Frodo struggles against it to use the ring, Gandalf tells Frodo what great need he has for it and Galadriel through wisdom declines it.

### The impact of industrialization and pollution

Tolkien was quite anxious about the growing encroachment of urbanization and industrialization into the English countryside. He disliked the side effects of industrialization. He sees technology as the tool of evil, the attitude most perceptible in the forced industrialization of The Shire. However, the story in *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen as a criticism of technology in general.

### Influences of the two World Wars on *The Lord of the Rings*

Tolkien, after having lost most of his close friends in the trenches of World War I, was opposed to war in general. He fought in the Battle of the Somme and probably drew on these experiences for the ravaged battlefields and breakneck action sequences.

### III. EMPIRICAL PART

#### b) DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

Tolkien was a distinguished linguist, Oxford scholar of dead languages, with strong ideas about the importance of myth and story and a deep appreciation of nature. Although his epic *The Lord of the Rings* ebbs and flows through the mysterious fantastical creatures, through barren wastelands and bountiful forests of Middle-earth, it is not too hard to find parallels between themes in the book and the real world.

This research work seemed a unique opportunity to explore the myriad of inspirations for Tolkien, focusing on his childhood experiences, myths, legends, languages, religion, and both World Wars.

## c) HYPOTHESES

1. We believe that all the students know who J. R. R. Tolkien was.
2. We also believe that all the students know at least one of Tolkien's works – *The Lord of the Rings*.
3. Most students will place Tolkien's work *The Lord of the Rings* among fantasy fiction.
4. Since students lack the background knowledge on *The Lord of the Rings* they will probably not find any facts in the story that base on Tolkien's life.
5. Students will not recognize the languages Tolkien used as a basis for his inventive languages in *The Lord of the Rings*.
6. Some students might find traces of mythological elements in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, but not all of them.
7. We believe that most students will label *The Lord of the Rings* as exaggerated imagination.

#### d) METHODS OF WORK

Our survey was based on a sample of students from Secondary School for Catering and Tourism Celje. There were 86 students, aged from 15 to 19, included in our survey. 50 females and 36 males. The sample we have taken our answers from is too small and is therefore not representative.

The questionnaire had 7 questions. Students were questioned during their classes. The questions were of opened, closed and combined type.

According to the collected material and the objective of our paper we used the following methods during our research work: a selective, comparative, descriptive and explanatory method. The paper was written in the programme Microsoft Office Word.

## e) RESULTS WITH INTERPRETATION

## 1. Who was J. R. R. Tolkien?

A: a priest

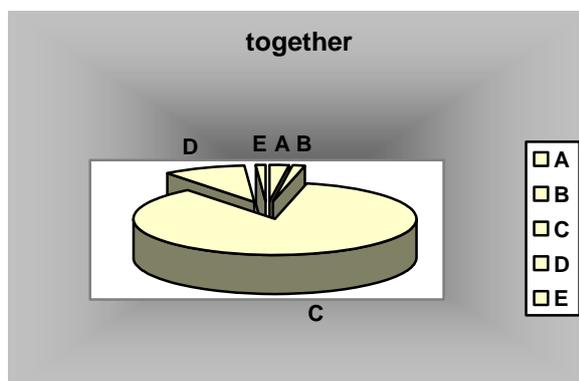
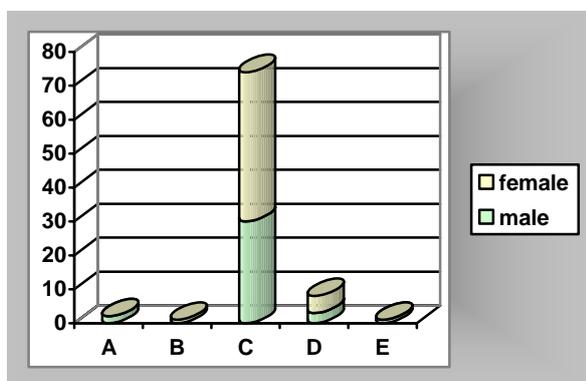
B: a hobbit

C: a writer

D: professor of Anglo-Saxon languages

E: a scientist

|          | female |            | male  |            | together |            |
|----------|--------|------------|-------|------------|----------|------------|
|          | count  | percentage | count | percentage | count    | percentage |
| A        | 0      | 0%         | 2     | 5,6%       | 2        | 2,3%       |
| B        | 1      | 2%         | 0     | 0%         | 1        | 1,1%       |
| C        | 44     | 88%        | 30    | 83,3%      | 74       | 86,1%      |
| D        | 5      | 10%        | 3     | 8,3%       | 8        | 9,3%       |
| E        | 0      | 0%         | 1     | 2,8%       | 1        | 1,2%       |
| $\Sigma$ | 50     | 100,0%     | 36    | 100,0%     | 86       | 100,0%     |



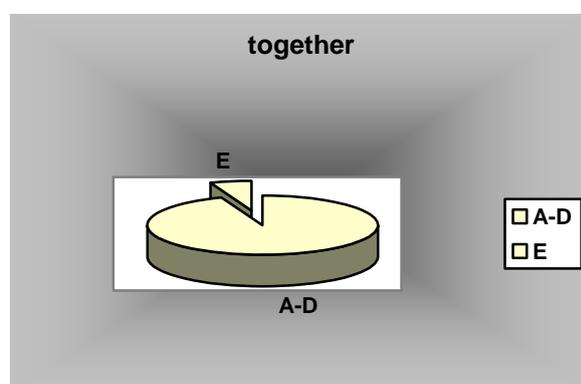
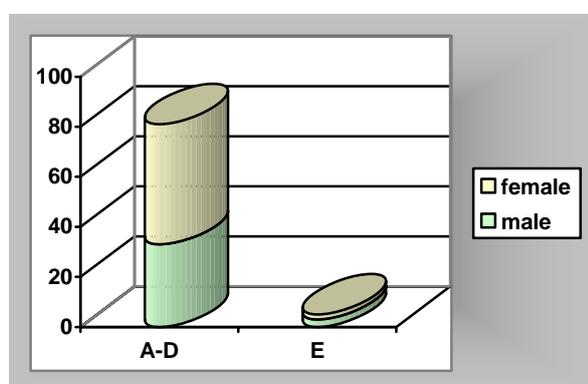
As can be seen from the results, most students knew who J.R.R. Tolkien was. We were quite surprised that some of them knew he was a professor of Anglo-Saxon languages.

2. Do you know any of Tolkien's literary works?

A: yes, I know \_\_\_\_\_

B: no

|          | female |        | male |        | together |        |
|----------|--------|--------|------|--------|----------|--------|
| A-D      | 48     | 96%    | 33   | 91,7%  | 81       | 94,2%  |
| E        | 2      | 4%     | 3    | 8,3%   | 5        | 5,8%   |
| $\Sigma$ | 50     | 100,0% | 36   | 100,0% | 86       | 100,0% |



As we expected, most of the students knew at least one of Tolkien's books. *The Lord of the Rings* was mentioned most often, then *The Hobbit*, while seven students knew *The Silmarillion*.

3. What genre does Tolkien's work *The Lord of the Rings* belong to?

A: horror

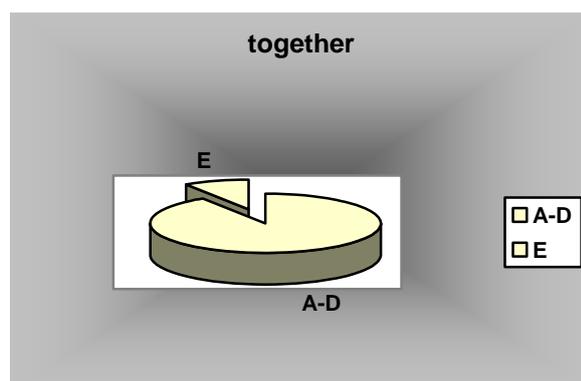
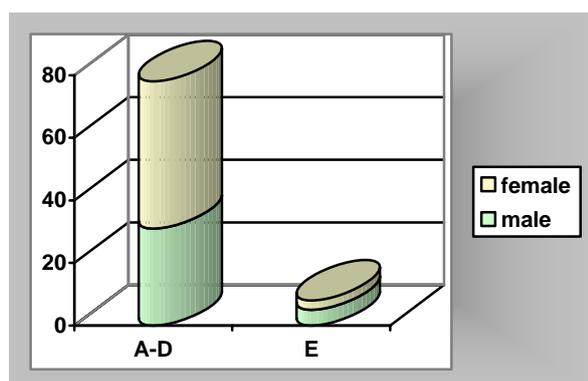
B: fantasy fiction

C: historical fiction

D: adventure novel

E: I don't know

|          | female |        | male |        | together |        |
|----------|--------|--------|------|--------|----------|--------|
| A-D      | 47     | 94%    | 31   | 86,1%  | 78       | 90,7%  |
| E        | 3      | 6%     | 5    | 13,9%  | 8        | 9,3%   |
| $\Sigma$ | 50     | 100,0% | 36   | 100,0% | 86       | 100,0% |



The results show that most students correctly placed Tolkien's work among fantasy fiction.

4. Could anything have influenced Tolkien's work *The Lord of the Rings*?

A: World Wars

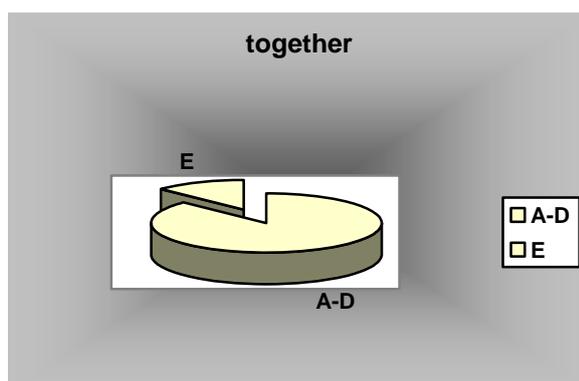
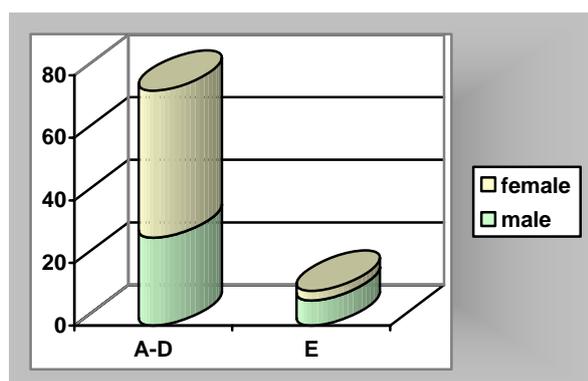
B: places he visited as a child

C: religion

D: knowledge of foreign languages and history

E: none of the above

|          | female |        | male |        | together |        |
|----------|--------|--------|------|--------|----------|--------|
| A-D      | 47     | 94%    | 28   | 77,8%  | 75       | 87,2%  |
| E        | 3      | 6%     | 8    | 22,2%  | 11       | 12,8%  |
| $\Sigma$ | 50     | 100,0% | 36   | 100,0% | 86       | 100,0% |



As can be seen from the results, most students believe that something influenced Tolkien's work, only 11% think otherwise.

5. Does the unusual language, the author uses in *The Lord of the Rings*, remind you of an ancient language or languages?

A: Anglo-Frisian

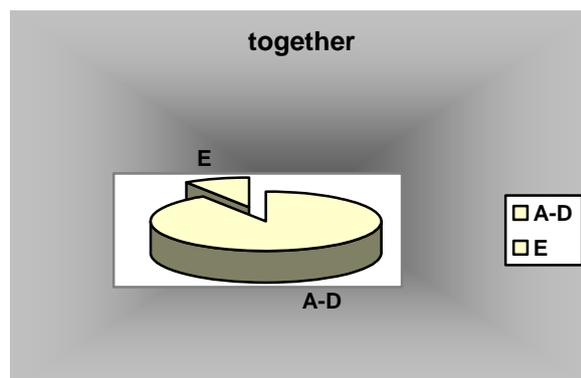
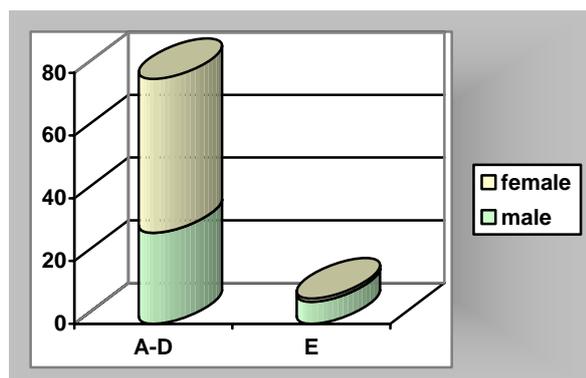
B: Old English

C: Middle English

D: Old Norse

E: no, it does not

|          | female |        | male |        | together |        |
|----------|--------|--------|------|--------|----------|--------|
| A-D      | 49     | 98%    | 29   | 80,6%  | 78       | 90,7%  |
| E        | 1      | 2%     | 7    | 19,4%  | 8        | 9,3%   |
| $\Sigma$ | 50     | 100,0% | 36   | 100,0% | 86       | 100,0% |



Opposite to what we expected, quite a lot of students, 90,7% of them, recognized the ancient languages which Tolkien used when inventing his own.

6. Can you find any mythological elements in *The Lord of the Rings*?

A: mythological characters

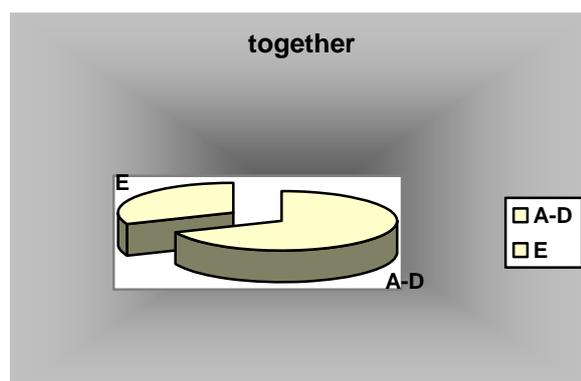
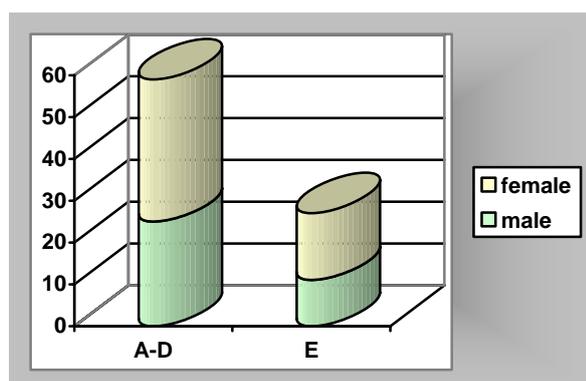
B: place names

C: mythological themes

D: supernatural forces

E: no, everything is a product of Tolkien's imagination

|          | female |        | male |        | together |        |
|----------|--------|--------|------|--------|----------|--------|
| A-D      | 34     | 68%    | 25   | 69,4%  | 59       | 68,6%  |
| E        | 16     | 32%    | 11   | 30,6%  | 27       | 31,4%  |
| $\Sigma$ | 50     | 100,0% | 36   | 100,0% | 86       | 100,0% |



Most of the students found the traces of mythological elements which Tolkien used in his work of art, *The Lord of the Rings*. The answer c. mythological themes was the one circled most often.

7. What do you think of *The Lord of the Rings*?

A: richly detailed picture of the ancient world

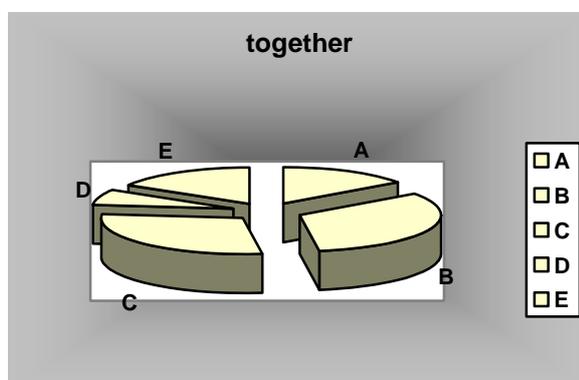
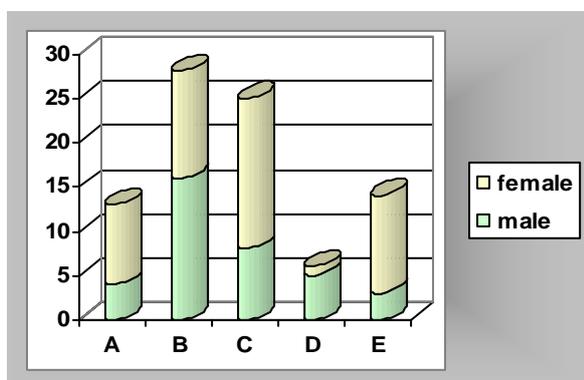
B: the best fantasy book ever written

C: a mixture of action, adventure, friendship, and love

D: a combination of Tolkien's Christian beliefs and his post WWI trauma

E: Tolkien's exaggerated imagination

|          | female |            | male  |            | together |            |
|----------|--------|------------|-------|------------|----------|------------|
|          | count  | percentage | count | percentage | count    | percentage |
| A        | 9      | 18%        | 4     | 11,1%      | 13       | 15,1%      |
| B        | 12     | 24%        | 16    | 44,5%      | 28       | 32,6%      |
| C        | 17     | 34%        | 8     | 22,2%      | 25       | 29,1%      |
| D        | 1      | 2%         | 5     | 13,9%      | 6        | 6,9%       |
| E        | 11     | 22%        | 3     | 8,3%       | 14       | 16,3%      |
| $\Sigma$ | 50     | 100,0%     | 36    | 100,0%     | 86       | 100,0%     |



Although we expected students to think of *The Lord of the Rings* as exaggerated imagination it did not turn out like that. 32,6% of students believe that *The Lord of the Rings* is the best fantasy book ever written.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Looking back, *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's great work of imaginative fiction, turned out more than just a thrilling fantasy adventure, for the more we dugged, the more we found: Tolkien's childhood experiences, myths, legends, ancient languages, the writer's Catholic beliefs, the Bible, two World Wars. Assembled together, this piece of art forms a portrait of Tolkien in all his aspects.

We are glad that many students who answered our questionnaire, also noticed some of the background to the story. Therefore, a few of our hypotheses turned out to be wrong. Namely, quite a lot of students recognized the ancient languages in the story and found the traces of mythological elements in the book. They do not think of *The Lord of the Rings* as exaggerated fiction as we predicted.

Nevertheless, the harvest has turned out well. The research work is finished, we have learned a lot and somehow it is difficult for us to accept that we have to say goodbye to Middle-earth and its enchanting inhabitants. But as Gandalf said: »I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil.«<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. (1999). *The Lord of the Rings*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.

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4. Could anything have influenced Tolkien's work *The Lord of the Rings*?

- A: World Wars
- B: places he visited as a child
- C: religion
- D: knowledge of foreign languages and history
- E: none of the above

5. Does the unusual language, the author uses in *The Lord of the Rings*, remind you of an ancient language or languages?

- A: Anglo-Frisian
- B: Old English
- C: Middle English
- D: Old Norse
- E: no, it does not

6. Can you find any mythological elements in *The Lord of the Rings*?

- A: mythological characters
- B: place names
- C: mythological themes
- D: supernatural forces
- E: no, everything is a product of Tolkien's imagination

7. What do you think of *The Lord of the Rings*?

- A: richly detailed picture of the ancient world
- B: the best fantasy book ever written
- C: a mixture of action, adventure, friendship, and love
- D: a combination of Tolkien's Christian beliefs and his post WW1 trauma
- E: Tolkien's exaggerated imagination