Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree Program

In

Scienze del Linguaggio

Final Thesis

Patterns of Tradition:

A Digital Philological Approach to Gift, Song and Remembrance in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*

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Academic Year
2024/2025

Lentius, profundius, soavius

(Slower, deeper, gentler)

— Alexander Langer

To those who, by giving, singing and remembering,

choose to build peace

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the Department of Linguistic and Comparative Cultural Studies for providing a stimulating and interdisciplinary environment in which to develop this research. A special thanks goes to the ARCHiVE Digital Centre at the Giorgio Cini Foundation for their support during my time there. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to use the V-Scanner to digitize *The Lord of the Rings*, a crucial step in preparing the corpus.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Chiara De Bastiani, for her constant availability, steady support and inspiring guidance throughout this work. Her encouragement led me to delve deeper into Germanic philology, programming and the worlds of heroes, battles and dragons. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Marina Buzzoni, who first sparked my interest in Germanic philology through her lectures. She suggested the idea of applying a computational approach to the study of these two texts and contributed with insight and brilliance to both the writing process and key decisions. Finally, I warmly thank my co-supervisor, Federico Boschetti, for his availability and support in building the experimental framework of this thesis. His concrete suggestions and patience were essential in carrying forward such an innovative and exploratory project.

I am sincerely thankful to all my university colleagues who accompanied me throughout the Master's journey, sharing ideas, encouragement and joyful moments along the way. I also wish to thank the team at the ARCHiVE Digital Centre of the Cini Foundation, whose support during this project was invaluable. Their work and dedication inspired me to further explore the intersection of cultural heritage preservation, archival practices and programming.

I am deeply grateful to my family for their unwavering support throughout my entire academic journey. Their patience, encouragement and constant presence—both in times of doubt and in moments of joy—have been essential to completing this thesis and to shaping my academic and personal path. A special thank you goes to Ana for being by my side throughout this entire thesis journey. Her presence was essential in facing the most challenging moments, offering support, perspective and encouragement when I needed it most.

ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a comparative digital philological analysis of *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, focusing on three culturally resonant motifs rooted in the Germanic tradition: gift giving, singing, and funerary practices. The study investigates how these motifs are structured, repeated, and transformed across the two texts, tracing both narrative continuity and creative reconfiguration in Tolkien's work.

The research employs a mixed-method approach that combines textual encoding, data analysis, and close reading. Both texts were digitized and annotated using XML-TEI, enabling systematic tagging of events related to the selected motifs. Quantitative analysis—implemented through Python scripting—examines the frequency, distribution, and categorical patterns of the data. Close reading of key episodes offer interpretive insight into the symbolic and narrative functions of the motifs. A dedicated web-based corpus viewer was also developed to navigate and explore the annotated data.

The thesis is structured into an introduction, six chapters, and two appendices: an overview of the historical and literary background (*Chapter One*); an examination of scholarly connections between *Beowulf* and Tolkien (*Chapter Two*); the methodological framework (*Chapter Three*); thematic analyses of gift giving (*Chapter Four*), singing (*Chapter Five*), and funerary practices (*Chapter Six*); followed by a conclusion and appendices. The study contributes original findings on motif recurrence and variation while demonstrating how digital methods can support rigorous and replicable literary analyse across historical and fictional texts.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Background and Rationale

The dialogue between ancient epic and modern fantasy continues to captivate scholars and readers alike. Among the many intersections between medieval and modern literature, the relationship between *Beowulf* and the works of J.R.R. Tolkien stands out for its depth and complexity. As both a philologist and a writer of fantasy, Tolkien occupies a unique position: he was not only a leading scholar of the study of *Beowulf*, but also one of the most influential authors to creatively rework its themes, structures, and values. Studying Tolkien's engagement with *Beowulf* today offers valuable insights into how ancient literary traditions are transmitted, transformed, and reimagined in new cultural and ethical frameworks. In a time when both medievalism and fantasy literature are being re-evaluated for their ideological weight and narrative potential, revisiting this dialogue sheds light not only on Tolkien's legacy but also on the evolving significance of heroic literature in the modern world.

The connections between *Beowulf* and Tolkien's fiction have been widely discussed by scholars such as Tom Shippey (2003), Verlyn Flieger (2002), and Dimitra Fimi (2009), who have explored Tolkien's philological imagination, his creative adaptation of Germanic motifs and the thematic resonances between ancient epic and modern fantasy. More specific comparative studies have examined motifs like gift exchange, poetic form, and burial rituals. For instance, Porck (2019) contrasts the economy of reciprocal gift-giving in *Beowulf* with the more relational and often non-reciprocal model found in *The Lord of the Rings*, particularly among hobbits and the Rohirrim. Hall (2006) has shown how Tolkien's use of alliterative verse and medieval poetic forms reflects not only stylistic influence but a deep narrative integration of Old English aesthetics. Lee and Solopova (2016) have highlighted the strong structural parallels between Anglo-Saxon funerals—especially Scyld Scefing's ship burial—and the funerals of characters like Boromir and Théoden.

While these thematic studies are insightful, they rely on selected examples and interpretive readings. To date, no research has systematically identified and analyzed all occurrences of these motifs across both texts. This thesis addresses that gap by

compiling and annotating all relevant episodes of gift-giving, singing, and burial in both texts. By combining close reading with structured data collection and visualization, it offers a more rigorous and replicable model for analysing how Tolkien reshapes traditional patterns within a modern literary framework.

This connection between *Beowulf* and Tolkien's fiction cannot be fully understood without considering his dual role as both a philologist and a creative writer. His academic career, marked by landmark works such as *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (1936), redefined how the poem was understood—shifting focus from historical artefact to literary achievement. Tolkien argued for the poetic unity and symbolic depth of *Beowulf*, particularly its treatment of mortality, myth, and the monstrous. These same concerns permeate his fiction. As Shippey (2003) emphasizes, Tolkien's narrative imagination was inseparable from his scholarly method: his legendarium emerged not in spite of his academic background, but through it. His fiction represents an act of mythopoeic philology, in which motifs, themes, and forms from Old English and Norse sources are reworked into new ethical and narrative structures. This creative process—anchored in deep linguistic and literary knowledge—makes Tolkien a unique case of an author who consciously reactivates a medieval worldview within a modern epic framework. By comparing *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, this thesis not only examines literary continuities, but also explores how inherited traditions are transformed into new modes of storytelling and interpretation.

2. Research Scope and Questions

This thesis investigates three narrative and cultural motifs that appear prominently in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*: gift-giving, singing, and funerals. These themes are not only recurrent but deeply rooted in the symbolic and ritual frameworks of early Germanic literature. In *Beowulf*, they reflect core values of the heroic world—reciprocity, memory, honour, and collective identity—while in Tolkien's fiction they are reimagined within a broader ethical and narrative vision. These three motifs were chosen because they combine literary prominence with cultural depth: they are structurally significant, thematically charged, and well suited to a comparative investigation across genres, time periods, and worldviews. The analysis follows a dual approach: a quantitative dimension, which identifies and visualizes all relevant

instances of the motifs across both texts, and a qualitative dimension, which explores their narrative, cultural, and symbolic implications. The aim is not merely to trace influence, but to examine how Tolkien actively engages with, transforms and sometimes subverts the traditions inherited from the medieval epic.

This investigation is guided by the following questions:

- How are the motifs of gift-giving, singing and funerals represented in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, respectively?
- What patterns emerge in terms of frequency, distribution and function across the two texts?
- In what ways does Tolkien reproduce, reframe or subvert the thematic and cultural models found in *Beowulf*?
- How do these motifs contribute to the ethical, symbolic, and narrative structures of each work?
- What can a systematic, data-informed comparison reveal that close reading alone might overlook?

The primary objective of this thesis is to investigate how gift-giving, singing, and burial rituals are used in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* to convey cultural values and narrative meaning. This involves identifying all relevant occurrences of each motif, annotating them within a structured framework, and comparing their distribution, function, and significance across the two works. A further objective is to evaluate how Tolkien's fiction reinterprets these traditional elements—preserving certain features while reshaping others to serve new ethical and narrative ends. By doing so, the thesis aims to contribute not only to the study of intertextuality and medievalism, but also to the development of replicable methods for literary analysis that integrate close reading, structured annotation, and data visualization.

3. Methodology

This thesis adopts a methodological framework rooted in the field of Digital Humanities, understood as a dynamic and interdisciplinary domain where computational methods are applied to traditional humanistic questions. As outlined in *Digital Humanities. Metodi, strumenti, saperi* (Ciotti 2023), the core of this discipline lies in its methodological reflection, where modelling, markup languages, and data structuring are not mere technical steps but theoretical acts that shape the very object of study. Within this paradigm, text encoding, data analysis, and visualization are

central practices that connect the hermeneutic tradition of philology with the affordances of computational tools.

This project is situated within this core area of Digital Humanities, combining philological rigour with data-driven approaches. In particular, it builds on the principles outlined by Pierazzo and Rosselli Del Turco (2023), who emphasize that the digital scholarly edition—and by extension, any structured textual analysis—is both a methodological model and a research output in itself. The aim is not only to interpret literary motifs but also to model them through a transparent and replicable workflow, making the interpretive process itself visible and reusable.

The analytical process begins with the preparation of two corpora: *Beowulf* in its Old English original and *The Lord of the Rings* in Tolkien's published modern English version. Both texts were normalized and encoded in XML-TEI, following a custom adaptation of the standard guidelines. For *Beowulf*, the XML structure reflects the poetic lineation and manuscript-based segmentation, while *The Lord of the Rings* was encoded by reconstructing a fine-grained structure based on page, line, and token-level references. This encoding allowed for precise alignment of textual segments and facilitated later stages of annotation and extraction. Although TEI was used as the base standard, some encoding decisions were tailored to the specific needs of this project and do not fully align with TEI recommendations. These customizations are discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3. This preparatory phase established the technical and conceptual infrastructure necessary for comparative analysis.

Once the corpora were encoded, each text was annotated manually to identify all relevant instances of gift-giving, singing, and burial. Each annotated event includes a defined textual window (quotation) and a set of structured attributes, including the main entities involved and their categories. For example, in the case of gift-giving: *giver*, *gift*, and *recipient*, each with a corresponding role label (e.g. Ruler, Hero, Commoner). Singing events were tagged with attributes such as *singer*, *content*, and their respective categories, while burials included *deceased*, *burial type*, and any *objects* involved. The annotation followed a systematic and exhaustive approach, aiming to include every occurrence of the three motifs across both texts. This distinguishes the project from previous scholarship, which has tended to focus on selected episodes. The annotation schema was designed to balance interpretative

flexibility with formal consistency, ensuring that the data could support both qualitative readings and quantitative analysis. The use of structured tables (.xlsx) enabled easy integration with later processing and visualization scripts. A detailed description of the annotation methodology and criteria is provided in Chapter 3, section 3.2.

The annotated data were analyzed through a dual approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Using Python and the Pandas library, scripts were developed to extract frequency counts, category distributions, and the narrative positioning of events across both texts. This programmatic approach enabled a precise and replicable mapping of motif occurrences, facilitating the detection of structural and thematic patterns. In parallel, close readings were carried out to interpret the narrative role and symbolic depth of selected episodes. Visualization played a key role not only in presenting the results but in guiding interpretation. Graphs and distribution plots, generated through Matplotlib, made it possible to identify hidden trends and support comparative insights. This reflects a broader understanding of visualization as an epistemic instrument—actively shaping interpretation rather than merely illustrating data. A full account of the analytical workflow is provided in Chapter 3, section 3.3.

To ensure transparency and accessibility, an interactive web application was developed using Python and Streamlit. This corpus viewer enables users to navigate the annotated data by selecting specific texts, motifs (gift-giving, singing, burials), and filters (categories, keywords), while also offering full access to the underlying XML excerpts. Each event is presented with structured metadata and contextual quotations, allowing for both overview and detailed inspection. The viewer serves not only as a dissemination tool but as an integral part of the research process. By facilitating engagement with the data, it enhances interpretability and fosters a replicable model for digital philological analysis. This reflects a growing emphasis in the digital humanities on openness, usability, and interaction as core scholarly values. A full description of the viewer's structure and functionalities is provided in Chapter 3, section 3.4.

4. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters, each corresponding to a key stage in the research process. Chapter 1 provides the historical and literary background necessary to contextualize *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It outlines the Anglo-Saxon cultural framework, the transmission of oral and written traditions, the heroic ethos, and the influence of medieval literature on Tolkien's work. Chapter 2 explores a range of thematic and stylistic parallels between *Beowulf* and Tolkien's work, including but not limited to the three core motifs. It reviews key scholarly contributions to contextualize the study within existing research. Chapter 3 presents the methodological framework adopted for the study. It details the creation and encoding of the textual corpora, the annotation process, the analytical approach, and the structure of the interactive corpus viewer. The chapter also discusses the project's contribution to the field of digital philology. Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the annotated data. Each motif is examined through a combination of quantitative visualizations and close readings of selected episodes. Comparisons are drawn between the two texts to identify narrative parallels and divergences. Chapter 5 offers concluding remarks. It summarizes the main findings, reflects on the methodological implications of the study, and outlines possible directions for future research.

In addition to the main chapters, two appendices provide essential supplementary material. Appendix A documents the annotation model employed in the project, including representative examples (A1), detailed descriptions of annotation fields (A2), and the controlled vocabularies used for categorization (A3). Appendix B presents the quantitative outputs generated during the analysis of gift-giving, singing, and burial events in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It is organized thematically and includes frequency tables, distribution data, co-occurrence matrices, and visualizations. Together, these appendices support the transparency, reproducibility, and empirical grounding of the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE
Anglo Saxons and Tolkien: A Background Overview

This chapter explores the cultural, historical, and literary foundations that shaped both the world of *Beowulf* and the intellectual environment of J.R.R. Tolkien. It begins with an overview of Anglo-Saxon England, examining its political landscape, religious transformation, and the interplay between oral and written traditions. Attention is given to the values embedded in heroic poetry and to the poetic devices that characterize early Germanic verse, such as alliteration and kennings. The chapter then turns to Tolkien's life, education, and academic career, tracing the development of his linguistic interests, his engagement with Germanic philology, and the central role of *Beowulf* in his scholarship. Finally, it considers the influence of mythology, faith, and language on Tolkien's literary imagination and the creation of Middle-earth. Together, these sections provide essential context for understanding the deep cultural and intellectual connections between the Anglo-Saxon world and Tolkien's work.

1.1 Beowulf: Historical and Literary Context

1.1.1 Anglo-Saxon England: History, Society, and Religion

The sources documenting the history of the Anglo-Saxons are complex and often unsatisfactory. Archaeological evidence, while informative, does not fully witness the period from the arrival of Angles, Saxons and Jutes to the establishment of permanent kingdoms. Moreover, the narrative sources that do exist, such as the works of Gildas (Giles 1841) and the Venerable Bede (Plummer 1896), offer valuable insights but are limited and reflect the specific perspectives of their times. Adding to this complexity, later compilations like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Swanton 1998), though detailed, were composed significantly after the events they describe and thus require careful interpretation to determine historical accuracy (Blair 2000, 1).

Bede describes the Anglo-Saxons as a group of Germanic peoples descending from the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes (*Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, I.15). The arrival of settlers from regions now known as northern Germany and Denmark into Britain during the fifth century occurred within the broader context of widespread Germanic tribal migrations in the late Roman and post-Roman periods in Western

Europe (Magennis 2011, 36). Once in Britain, these settlers established small, rural communities which gradually developed into structured kingdoms (Higham and Ryan 2013, 126). During the seventh century, Britain was divided into several small kingdoms. These kingdoms are often grouped together under the concept of the "heptarchy," which refers to the seven major kingdoms: Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria, East Anglia, Essex, Sussex, and Kent. Although this classification of the heptarchy provides a simplified framework for understanding this period, the actual political landscape was much more complex and fragmented, with varying degrees of authority and influence across regions (Campbell 1995). Among these, Wessex was distinguished by its administrative sophistication and eventual dominance under leaders such as Alfred the Great. Northumbria distinguished itself as a cultural and monastic centre, becoming a vital religious hub («Northumbria | Anglo-Saxon Kingdom, England | Britannica», s.d.[1]). Over time, these kingdoms consolidated power, shifting regional dominance. The governance system in Anglo-Saxon England transitioned from loosely organized tribal groups to a structured monarchical system. The king, maintaining supreme authority, was supported by the *witan*—a council of great nobles and higher clergy that advised on legal and territorial matters (Stenton 1971, 238).

The path to unification in Anglo-Saxon England, marked by significant leadership and cultural shifts, was profoundly influenced by Christianity's introduction in 597 AD. This religious shift reshaped societal frameworks and unified diverse kingdoms. The advent of Christianity also introduced written literature and learning, further transforming the cultural and intellectual landscape of the era (Magennis 2011, 19). The history of the Anglo-Saxons was also characterized by frequent Viking invasions, which began in the late 8th century. These invasions brought significant turmoil and reshaped many aspects of Anglo-Saxon society. As Viking raiders from Scandinavia attacked coastal settlements and ventured deeper inland, they destabilized existing kingdoms and influenced local cultures and governance. During this period Alfred the Great emerged as a formidable defender, successfully repelling these invasions and fortifying his kingdom (Higham e Ryan 2013, 126). Alfred the Great, king of the West Saxons, played a crucial role in unifying the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

[1] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Heptarchy last accessed June 14, 2025.

Beyond repelling Viking invasions, he implemented administrative and military reforms that initiated the political consolidation of these territories into what would become the kingdom of England. His reign, marked by a cultural flourishing, laid the groundwork for a unified English nation (Abels 2013). The lasting impact of these developments was profound, anticipating the development of England as a cohesive nation-state. The cultural, legal, and territorial integrations during this period created a unified identity that would be fundamental in facing future challenges, including the eventual Norman Conquest. This era not only shaped the political contours of modern England but also its cultural and historical identity for the following centuries.

1.1.2 Oral and Written Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England

Oral tradition held a central place in the societal and cultural structures of early Anglo-Saxon England. Jack Goody and Ian Watt's concept of 'primary orality,' where tradition, knowledge, belief, and law are predominantly transmitted through spoken word (1963), can be effectively applied to understand the cultural framework of the Anglo-Saxons. While some groups used runes, this form of writing was primarily confined to epigraphic commemorative statements and possibly rituals. It was utilized by a select few for specific purposes, rather than for recording extensive literary texts. (Magennis 2011, 38). The role of the *scop*, or oral poet, was crucial in such a society. As Havelock noted in his study, poetry performed a vital social function, preserving and instructing the societal traditions (Havelock 1986, 8). In Anglo-Saxon culture, the *scop* performed in the aristocratic hall, such as Heorot in Beowulf, where the "swutol sang scopes" (Mitchell 2017, line 90), sweet song of the scop, entertained the chiefain along with his family and companions. Musical accompaniment was integral to these performances, enhancing the narrative and aiding to memorization. For instance, in Beowulf, the mixing of song and narrative is vividly described:

> *Þær wæs sang 7 sweg samod ætgædere*
> *fore Healfdenes hildewisan;*
> *gomenwudu greted, gid oft wrecen.*
> *Ðonne healgamen Hroþgares scop*
> *æfter medobence mænan scolde,*
> *Finnes eaferum, ða hie se fær begeat:*
> (lines 1063-1068)

> There was song and sound the same together
> in the presence of Halfdane's battle-prince;
> a stringed-wood [harp] was strummed, a story often recited.
> Then hall-play Hrothgar's scop
> had to mention about the mead-bench
> [about] Finn's descendants, when the disaster befell them:
> (Mitchell 2017, lines 1063-1068)

This integration of music and epic narrative allowed the *scop* to recount historical battles and familial lineages, further enriching the cultural transmission. The cultural significance of this oral tradition was profound, shaping the collective memory and identity of the Anglo-Saxon people. Through these oral practices, they not only preserved their history and laws but also reinforced communal values, which in turn supported the societal structure and cohesion.

The advent of written tradition marked a significant shift in how knowledge and culture were preserved in Anglo-Saxon society. This shift was deeply influenced by the process of Christianization, which brought with it the establishment of monastic centres that became hubs of learning and manuscript production. Christian monks and scribes played a crucial role in this transition, meticulously transcribing oral traditions into written forms, thereby ensuring their preservation. This manuscript tradition not only preserved these stories but also infused them with Christian ethics and viewpoints (Dunn 2010). A prime example of this transformation is seen in *Beowulf*. Although it may have been recited and passed down orally across several centuries, it is from the closing years of the Anglo-Saxon age that we have definitive evidence of its existence in written form. *Beowulf* is a poem deeply rooted in the past, recounting events from the heroic age of the Germanic tribes before their conversion to Christianity. Composed in the Christian era, the poem is interlaced with Christian terminology, such as references to the *Liffrea* (Mitchell 2017, line 16), Lord of life, and other terms for God (Ghosh 2016). Despite its Christian composition, the poet engages imaginatively with the pagan past, providing a unique lens through which the Anglo-Saxon Christian audience could interpret their ancestral heritage (Magennis 2011, 82). In conclusion, the written tradition in Anglo-Saxon England was a dynamic interplay of past and present, pagan and Christian values. The preservation and transformation of these oral

traditions into written form not only ensured their survival but also allowed them to serve as a bridge between two distinct cultures, reflecting a society in transition.

1.1.3 The Heroic Ethos and Heroic Poetry

The heroic ethos in Anglo-Saxon literature is characterized by distinctive cultural values that emphasize bravery, loyalty, and honour. Central to this ethos is the figure of the hero, who exemplifies these virtues through his actions and interactions within the narrative. Heroes in Anglo-Saxon poetry, such as *Beowulf*, are portrayed as figures of immense strength and moral integrity, often standing as protectors of their people and defenders of justice. These individuals are not only warriors but also leaders who inspire those around them through their deeds and their adherence to the code of honour (Magennis 2011, 77). Integral to the heroic ethos is the concept of the *comitatus*, or the bond between a lord and his warriors. This relationship is founded on mutual respect and loyalty; the lord provides for his retainers, while the warriors vow their service and protection. The comitatus is a key element in many heroic narratives, showcasing the collective responsibility of the group and the individual valour required to maintain honour within the society (Haymes and Samples 2020, 12). The introduction of Christianity added new dimension to the heroic ethos, intertwining traditional heroic values with Christian virtues such as humility, piety, and a focus on the afterlife. This integration can be seen in later Anglo-Saxon literature where heroes are often depicted as champions of both earthly and spiritual worlds, and their quests are pervaded with Christian symbolism and themes of redemption.

The heroic ethos in Anglo-Saxon literature reflects the societal norms and values of the time. It embodies the ideal behaviours and attributes of warriors within the framework of feudal loyalty and Christian morality. Throughout *Beowulf*, the protagonist's actions highlight both the importance of the warrior code—loyalty to one's lord and courage in battle—and the Christian values of humility and concern for others. For example, Beowulf's decision to fight Grendel without weapons, relying solely on his strength, illustrates his personal bravery and commitment to the warrior ethos. Beowulf is motivated not only by personal honour and glory but also by his loyalty to King Hrothgar (Mitchell 2017, line 433). Additionally, after defeating Grendel's mother, the poet acknowledges both the wisdom of God and Beowulf's boldness (Mitchell 2017, line 1056), an indication of the centrality of Christian values.

Heroic poetry traces its evolution from the shorter and emotive heroic lay to the more complex heroic poem. The heroic lay, typically not exceeding a hundred verses, is marked by direct discourse, dramatic tones, and an absence of present-day references. These lays, set during the migration period, are thought to have flourished up to the 7th century AD, with the subsequent centuries serving as a phase of reception and eventual transcription into written forms (Gloning and Young 2003, 38). A quintessential example is *Das Hildebrandslied*, which embodies the characteristics of early heroic lays. As the tradition matured, these individual lays were often intertwined into larger heroic poems, creating a more elaborate narrative structure. This evolution allowed for the integration of multiple lays, enriching the story's depth and introducing moral commentary from the narrator, thus enhancing the narrative's complexity. Heroic poems are typically characterized by their integration of various historical events and legends into a cohesive story (Zironi 2022, 246-247). They also include narrative digressions that, while loosely connected to the main storyline, contribute to a richer narrative structure. For instance, Beowulf, one of the most celebrated heroic poems, not only integrates multiple heroic deeds but also includes episodes like the *Battle at Finnsburg*, suggesting that these tales circulated as independent lays before their compilation into the epic poem we know today. In conclusion, the transformation from heroic lay to heroic poem marks a significant development in the literary culture of the Germanic peoples. This evolution reflects a shift from brief, isolated narratives to extensive, integrated works that offer both entertainment and moral instruction, thereby showcasing the dynamic nature of oral traditions as they transitioned into written literature.

1.1.4 Literary Devices: Alliteration and Kennings

Germanic alliterative verse is a distinctive form of poetry and is characterized by the repetition of initial sounds in stressed syllables. This technique is deeply rooted in the oral traditions of the Germanic peoples, making it especially suited for memorization and recitation by scops. There is reason to believe that encomiastic songs were performed and circulated among various Germanic tribes and kingdoms, and even within monastic environments, as suggested by written testimonies from Tacitus, Paul the Deacon, and Alcuin. Tacitus, in his *Germania*, mentions that oral songs were the only form of transmission among the Germanic peoples (Church and Brodribb 1868,

ch. 2). Paul the Deacon recounts how the Lombard king Alboin was celebrated through such songs, reflecting the enduring tradition of *carmina* among the Germanic tribes (Foulke 1907, II.28). Alcuin, on the other hand, laments the presence of pagan songs in monasteries, expressing concern over their popularity even in these religious settings (Allott 1974, Epistola 39), indicating that these oral traditions persisted despite the growing influence of Christianity.

The structure of Germanic alliterative verse is crafted to support its oral transmission. Each line is divided into two half-lines, separated by a caesura, a brief pause that aids the rhythm of recitation. The link between these half-lines is achieved through alliteration, which involves repeating the initial consonant sounds of stressed syllables. In consonantal alliteration, the same consonant sound must be repeated, while in vocalic alliteration, any vowel can alliterate with another. Typically, the alliterative pattern is set by the initial accented syllable in the second half-line, which dictates the alliterative sound to be used in both halves. Each half-line usually contains two accented syllables, known as 'lifts,' along with a variable number of unaccented syllables, enhancing the dynamic rhythm of the verse (Reichl 2010, 39). An example of this can be seen in *Beowulf*:

> *Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþen[a] þreatum*
> *monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah,*
> (lines 4-5)
>
> Often Scyld Scefing shattered the ranks
> of hostile tribes and filled them with terror.
> (Mitchell 2017, lines 4-5)

Germanic alliterative verse stands out as a distinguished poetic feature that underscores the significance of musicality in Anglo-Saxon literature. This literary device not only enhances the auditory experience of the poetry but also reflects the intrinsic value placed on sound and rhythm within the literary traditions of the Anglo-Saxons.

Kennings are another distinctive and imaginative form of metaphorical expression widely used in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse poetry. Often crafted as compound words, kennings enrich the texture of a poem by adding layers of meaning and aiding in the structure and alliteration of the verse. These poetic devices allow

poets to express complex ideas through succinct and stylized phrasing. For example, in Anglo-Saxon literature, a kenning like *hwæl-weg* translates to "the way of the whale," meaning the sea; *sæ-mearh* denotes "the horse of the sea," referring to a ship; and *mere-hrægl* means "the dress of the sea," signifying a sail. These expressions showcase the poet's skill in creating an evocative language that transcends direct description (Godden and Lapidge 2013, 34).

The use of kennings was not limited to Anglo-Saxon poetry but was also a prominent feature in Old Norse literature, particularly in the works of the skalds. Norse kennings could reach such complexity that they often resembled riddles, challenging the listener or reader to unravel the layered meanings. An example from Old Norse includes phrases like *Óðins fjaðrir* (Óðin's feathers) for "thoughts"[2], which illustrate the metaphorical depth and poetic function of these expressions (McConnell et al. 2001).

Kennings significantly enrich the poetic texture of literature, enhancing its lyrical quality. They reflect the intellectual creativity and linguistic mastery of the poets, while also exemplifying the high value placed on eloquence and clever wordplay in ancient Germanic literary traditions.

1.2 J.R.R. Tolkien: Life, Scholarship, and Creative Work

1.2.1 Early Life and Influences

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in 1892 in South Africa, where his father, Arthur Tolkien, was employed. The family's stay in South Africa was however brief due to Arthur's health complications and subsequent death. Following this tragic event, Tolkien, his brother Hilary Arthur, and their mother, Mabel Suffield, returned to England to seek support from her family (Garth 2014, 8). During Tolkien's childhood, various sources of influence and inspiration might have laid the foundation for the creation of the Middle-earth universe. Tolkien's early education played a crucial role in shaping his academic interests. After his father's death, Mabel took charge of his education, teaching him subjects like drawing, calligraphy, botany, French, and Latin.

[2] Óðin's ravens, Huginn (thought) and Muninn (memory), fly across the world and bring back information to the god, symbolizing the ability of thought to travel far and gather knowledge. This association of feathers with thoughts in the kenning likely originates from this myth, where the ravens act as extensions of Odin's mind (Byock 2005, chapter 12).

This diverse instruction promoted Tolkien's intellectual growth and curiosity (Garth 2014, 8). Additionally, Tolkien developed a deep appreciation for the English countryside during his early years. Notably, Tolkien mentioned in a BBC interview that the Shire in his writings was inspired by the world he experienced during his childhood after moving from South Africa. His love for the central Midlands English countryside was especially related to its natural elements such as stones, elm trees, rivers, and the rustic inhabitants[3]. This appreciation for rural life and natural scenery helped shape not only *The Shire* but also the environmental and pastoral themes in his work, which contrasted with the rise of industrialization.

Furthermore, Tolkien exhibited a notable interest in fairy tales and mythical creatures from a young age. Although a common interest among children, Tolkien's fascination with dragons was particularly significant. At the age of seven, he wrote a story about a "green great dragon," showcasing his early creative imagination (Carpenter 1977, 25). From a later perspective, it is possible to hypothesize how the early life experiences of J.R.R. Tolkien significantly influenced his later works. Although these formative years may have provided deep inspiration and a foundation for the world of Middle-earth, more concrete evidence of Tolkien's interests and creative development becomes apparent in the years that followed.

It was during his adolescence and youth that Tolkien first engaged actively in a social and academic environment focused on languages, literature, and poetry. In school, Tolkien was encouraged for the first time to study ancient languages beyond Greek and Latin. During this period, he discovered Germanic languages such as Anglo-Saxon and Gothic. Following this discovery, Tolkien studied the literary canons of these languages: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in Middle English, *Beowulf* in Old English, and the stories of Sigurd in Old Norse (Garth 2014, 9).

During his undergraduate years, Tolkien's interest in and active participation in poetry found space and recognition in the T.C.B.S. (Tea Club and Barrovian Society). The T.C.B.S. was a social club centred on a shared interest in languages, literature, and poetry. Tolkien contributed to this club with his knowledge of ancient languages, often reciting passages from *Beowulf*, *Volsunga Saga*, and *Sir Gawain*. The discussions within the T.C.B.S. on literature and mythology may have influenced the creation of

[3] Gerrolt, Dennis. Interview with J.R.R. Tolkien. January 1971. BBC Radio 4, “Now Read On . . .”

the intricate histories and languages in *The Silmarillion* and other works, where language and culture are closely intertwined. The T.C.B.S. was fundamental in creating a social environment where Tolkien could discuss and explore literature. It was within this context that Tolkien began not only to read English poetry but also to write it (Harper 2006, 144).

During adolescence, Tolkien discovered and invented his first artificial languages. The first language he invented was Nevbosh, a mixture of words from classical languages. Over time, his languages became more sophisticated. With Quenya, a language heavily influenced by Finnish, Tolkien reached a more advanced level of language invention. Starting with Quenya, Tolkien eventually invented several languages that played a pivotal role in the cultures of Middle-earth**.** He also used these languages for the creation of fairy stories for the T.C.B.S. (Carpenter 1977, 95).

As Tolkien's academic and creative activities prospered, they were soon interrupted by the outbreak of World War I. His transition from these formative years into his wartime experiences would further shape his literary legacy.

1.2.2 Wartime Experiences

J.R.R. Tolkien's experiences as a soldier in World War I profoundly influenced his literary work. Serving as a lieutenant in the British Army, Tolkien witnessed the brutal realities of trench warfare. In 1916, he participated in the Battle of the Somme, where he experienced personal loss with the deaths of two of his closest school friends and fellow members of the T.C.B.S (Buck 2006, 699). These experiences significantly shaped Tolkien's writings, making him a war poet in his unique way. Despite not embracing the typical realist style of World War I prose and poetry, such as the works of Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon, Tolkien is considered a war poet. Garth argues that Tolkien's experiences of terror, sorrow, and unexpected joy led him to reinvent the real world in a strange, extreme form (Garth, 2003). Moreover, in his work *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Shippey discusses how authors, including Americans like Kurt Vonnegut and Ursula Le Guin, used fantasy and other non-realist forms to explore themes such as power dynamics, individual responses to evil, and the realities of total warfare (Shippey 2014). Additionally, themes in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are typical of British post-World War I literature. For instance, Croft examined how Tolkien's works trace themes of pastoral moments, as seen in the Shire,

the demonization of the enemy, represented by the orcs, the underground world of the trenches, as well as homo-eroticism and the vulnerability of the body (Croft 2004). This indicates that Tolkien dealt with similar themes as other war poets. Tolkien's experiences in World War I undeniably influenced his writing, infusing *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* with themes of war, heroism, and moral complexity. However, it is important to state that his interpretation of these motifs and themes was profoundly influenced by his personal worldview, religion, and interest in philology.

The experience of WWII for Tolkien was markedly different from that of WWI. During WWII, Tolkien was exempt from serving as a soldier due to his age and academic position. His contributions to the war effort included working in Civil Defense and training as a cryptographer for the Foreign Office (Lobdell 2006, 715). Despite numerous critical views suggesting that *The Lord of the Rings* is an allegory of WWII, it can be argued that the work was not significantly influenced by the events of WWII. So numerous were the claims of allegory that Tolkien himself explicitly dismissed the notion. In the foreword of *The Lord of the Rings*[4], Tolkien states: "As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical" (Tolkien 2011, xix). Tolkien, in fact, emphasized his preference for applicability—where readers are free to interpret their own meaning—over allegory, where the author imposes a specific message (Tolkien 2011, xix). Moreover, chronological inconsistencies further discredit the idea of *The Lord of the Rings* as an allegory of WWII. In the foreword to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Tolkien notes that the chapter *The Shadow of the Past* was written before the events of 1939, and the sources used to develop the story had long been prepared (Tolkien 2011, xx)[5]. Although the genesis of the work predates the war, the writing of *The Lord of the Rings* overlapped with the wartime period. While the ring may not be an allegory for the bomb, it is understandable how many scholars interpret it as a symbol: a weapon that each side could use to destroy the other (Croft 2004, 104). It is overall complicated to pinpoint the primary influence and cause behind the creation of *The Hobbit* and *The*

[4] Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings. The Fellowship of the Ring. HarperCollins, 2011.
[5] *The Shadow of the Past* is a chapter in *The Fellowship of the Ring* where Gandalf explains to Frodo the history of the One Ring and its connection to Sauron, setting the stage for the central conflict of the story.

Lord of the Rings. Nonetheless, understanding Tolkien's human experiences can provide deeper insights into the implications of his work.

1.2.3 The Academic: Philology and Beowulf Scholarship

Tolkien's academic career was distinguished and influential. He served as Professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford from 1925 to 1945, and then as Professor of English Language and Literature from 1945 until his retirement in 1959 (Fry 2006, 494). In 1936 J.R.R. Tolkien delivered a landmark lecture titled *The Monster and the Critics*, which was later published as an essay. In this work, Tolkien challenged the prevailing views on the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*. The importance of *The Monster and the Critics* lies in its profound and lasting impact on *Beowulf* scholarship, literary criticism, and Tolkien's own creative works. Firstly, with this essay, Tolkien revolutionized the studies around *Beowulf*. Prior to his work, scholars considered the *Beowulf* manuscript exclusively for its historical value, exemplifying the culture of the Anglo-Saxons (Drout 2010). Tolkien's contribution enlightened the poem with a new perspective: studying Beowulf for its literary value. He emphasized the importance of myth within Beowulf, the significance of the alliterative verse, and restored the poem to its integrity as a unified artistic creation. Additionally, the influence of Tolkien's essay extended beyond Beowulf studies and significantly impacted literary criticism in general. Tolkien's method of close reading, his insistence on the unity of the text, and his integration of philological investigation with literary methods profoundly influenced the field (Sherrylyn 2014). Moreover, the study of Beowulf deeply impacted Tolkien's own writing, particularly *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Ring*s. Many scholars have investigated, for example, the use of alliterative verse within *The Lord of the Rings* (Hall 2006). In conclusion, *The Monster and the Critics* is a crucial essay that reshaped the academic landscape of Beowulf studies, left an indelible mark on literary criticism, and enriched Tolkien's literary creations.

Besides *The Monsters and the Critics*, during his professional career as a Professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford, J.R.R. Tolkien produced several significant articles, essays, and lectures on Germanic philology. Many of these works are notable for their importance and relevance not only in the field of Germanic philology but also for their influence on the creation of Tolkien's legendarium, i.e. the entirety of his works concerning the universe of Middle-earth. In his essay *On Fairy-*

Stories[6], initially presented as a lecture at the University of St. Andrews in 1939, Tolkien discusses the nature, origins, and purpose of fairy tales. He aims to rehabilitate the genre from academics who undervalue it and those who would relegate it to children's literature. To do so, he delves into the etymology of the word *fairy* and the historical development of fairy stories within the Germanic tradition. The lecture *A Secret Vice*[7], 1931, concerns the creation of artificial languages and the related mythology. The lecture includes several poems in the languages that Tolkien composed, such as Nevbosh and Quenya, among others. Furthermore, this essay provides an enlightening overview of Tolkien's methods of linguistic invention. *On Translating Beowulf* [8]is an essay published in 1940 as a preface entitled *Prefatory Remarks on Prose Translation of 'Beowulf'* to C. L. Wrenn's 1940 revision of John R. Clark Hall's book Beowulf and the *Finnesburg Fragment: A Translation into Modern English Prose*. Tolkien discusses the difficulties and challenges in translating Beowulf from Old English to modern English. The essay addresses challenges related to the translation of lexicon, metre, and kennings. Tolkien had attempted a prose translation of Beowulf but abandoned it, dissatisfied[9]. His translation was eventually published and edited by Christopher Tolkien as *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary* in 2014[10]. Understanding Tolkien's contributions to Germanic philology is essential to appreciate the depth of his scholarship. Without his extensive knowledge and competency in this field, the creation of the universe of Middle-earth might have been impossible.

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[6] Tolkien, J.R.R. On Fairy-Stories. Edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson. London: Harper Collins, 2008.
[7] Tolkien, J.R.R. “A Secret Vice.” In The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
[8] Tolkien, J.R.R. “On Translating Beowulf.” In The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
[9] Kiernan, Kevin. "Why Tolkien Hated His Translation Of Beowulf." *Business Insider*, Insider Inc., 2 June 2014, https://www.businessinsider.com/beowulf-is-so-hard-to-translate-even-jrr-tolkien-hated-his-version-2014-6. Accessed 14 June 2025.
[10] Tolkien, J.R.R. Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary, together with Sellic Spell. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins, 2014.

1.2.4 The Author: Faith, Myth-Making, and Worldview

A mythology is a collection of myths that often explain natural phenomena, human behaviour, and cultural practices, featuring gods, heroes, and supernatural beings[11]. J.R.R. Tolkien's fictional world is frequently referred to as a mythology due to its intricate legends and rich narrative depth. As a renowned author, Tolkien created his own mythology for several reasons. One of the primary reasons was Tolkien's desire to provide England with a rich, cohesive mythological tradition similar to those of Greece, Rome, and Scandinavia. Tolkien felt that England lacked its own native myths that were deeply rooted in its language and culture. As Tolkien expressed in a letter, "I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands" (Tolkien, Letter 131). This sense of cultural lack motivated Tolkien to create a mythology that would give England its own set of heroic legends and fairy tales. A second motivation for Tolkien was his profound interest in languages. From a young age, Tolkien practiced the craft of inventing languages, creating Nevbosh and Quenya (as previously mentioned). As Shippey discusses, Tolkien emphasized that his invented languages were the foundation of his world, and the stories were created to provide a context for these languages, aligning his work with his academic interest in philology (Shippey, 2014). It is important to state that it is impossible to determine exactly and extensively what motivated Tolkien to create his mythology. While the two reasons provided are supported by Tolkien's own words and critics' research, it is worth mentioning that other factors, such as his war experiences, religion, and worldview, might have significantly contributed to his work.

Tolkien was a devoted Christian Catholic and often described faith as a fundamental part of his worldview that deeply influenced both his personal and professional life (Pearce 1998). As mentioned in the first part of this subchapter, Tolkien's faith was shaped since his early upbringing. Mabel, Tolkien's mother, converted to Catholicism after being deeply moved by its teachings, even at the cost of losing financial support from her family, who disapproved of her conversion

[11] Merriam-Webster. "Mythology." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. Accessed June 14, 2025. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mythology .

(Carpenter 1977, 28). Mabel's courage and resilience in upholding her faith left a profound impact on young Tolkien, who saw her sacrifices as a model of spiritual integrity and love for God (Carpenter 1977, 38). Her commitment to Catholicism fostered in Tolkien a reverence for his faith that he carried throughout his life. As an adult, Tolkien's religious beliefs influenced his friendships, particularly his intellectual exchanges with C.S. Lewis, who shared his interest in literature and theology. Although Lewis was initially skeptical about Christianity, Tolkien's thoughtful discussions on the nature of myth and the truth found in Christian narratives played a significant role in Lewis's eventual conversion, though he embraced Anglicanism rather than Catholicism (Duriez 2003, 112). Their discussions on faith and literature not only solidified their friendship but also contributed to Lewis's own writings on Christian themes, including his works on myth and theology. While Tolkien resisted allegorical interpretations of his work, he acknowledged that his faith subtly influenced his writing. He once described *The Lord of the Rings* as "a fundamentally religious and Catholic work," but emphasized that any religious elements were "unconscious" and emerged naturally from his worldview (Tolkien 1981, 172). For Tolkien, faith was not merely an aspect of his personal life but a lens through which he interpreted the world and crafted his mythologies, including "religious truth" within his tales without explicit references to Christian doctrine.

Regarding his work as an author, Tolkien's literary works are enriched with themes that reflect his Catholic faith, including concepts of providence, redemption, and hope. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, the notion of providence is prevalent, as characters often find themselves in situations that appear orchestrated by a higher power, mirroring Tolkien's belief in a purposeful universe (Wood 2003, 59). A significant example of this concept is Gandalf's speech to Frodo about the passing of the Ring from Bilbo to Frodo (Tolkien 2011, 56): "Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought." Gandalf's words suggest that even an apparently troubling event, like receiving the Ring, can be viewed as part of a larger, benevolent design—an idea closely tied to Tolkien's perspective on providence. Another crucial aspect of Tolkien's work is his depiction of the nature of

evil. Elrond's assertion, "Nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (Tolkien 2011, 266), highlights the idea that goodness is the fundamental state of the world, aligning with a Christian worldview. Both Saruman and Gollum, for instance, are offered multiple chances for repentance, suggesting that they are not inherently evil but rather capable of moral reform. This perspective emphasizes the potential for personal growth and redemption, a concept deeply rooted in Christian ethics. By presenting redemption as a possibility and upholding the belief that good is humanity's original state, Tolkien's moral outlook reflects a Christian ethos (Guanio-Uluru 2015, 52). Ultimately, Tolkien's works stand as a testament to his faith, conveying a moral framework that upholds hope, providence and redemption as integral to the human experience. These themes, however, are subtly interwoven into the fabric of his mythology rather than explicitly articulated.

Beyond the influence of *Beowulf*, which will be analyzed in the next chapter, the impact of Germanic and Nordic traditions on Tolkien's worldview and authorial style is significant, profoundly shaping his portrayal of cultures and characters in Middle-earth. One clear example of this influence is found in his depiction of the Dwarves, whose names are directly borrowed from the *Poetic Edda*, particularly the *Völuspá* (Fimi 2009, 45). For instance, names such as "Thorin," "Bifur," "Bombur," and "Dwalin" are taken directly from a list of Dwarves in this Old Norse poem. Tolkien did not simply adopt these names; he also characterised his Dwarves with traits aligned with their mythological origins—craftsmanship, resilience, and a strong sense of honor (Shippey 2014, 65). The cultural attributes of Tolkien's Dwarves, with their hidden nature and love of mining, mirror the portrayal of the *Dvergar* in Norse myths, who are similarly depicted as master craftsmen living in hidden underground realms.

Tolkien's portrayal of the hoarded treasure in *The Hobbit* is an example of the deep connection to the *Nibelungenlied*, particularly the story of Siegfried's cursed Nibelung hoard. In both tales, a treasure passes through different hands, bringing destruction to those who seek to possess it. In the *Nibelungenlied*, the hoard, after being won by Siegfried, ultimately leads to treachery and bloodshed among those who possess it. This cursed fate is echoed in *The Hobbit*, where the vast wealth guarded by Smaug becomes a source of greed and discord. Just as the Nibelung treasure passes from the Dwarves to the dragon and ultimately back to the Dwarves, resulting in

conflict and destruction, Smaug's hoard similarly sparks rivalry and war among the peoples of Middle-earth. A striking parallel can also be drawn between Tolkien's concept of the ring and a mysterious object within the Nibelung hoard: a "tiny wand of gold." The *Nibelungenlied* describes it as follows:

> In among the rest lay the rarest gem of all, a tiny wand of gold, and if any had found its secret he could have been lord of all mankind!
> (*The Nibelungenlied*, trans. Hatto, p. 147)

This golden wand, with its promise of absolute power, is conceptually similar to the ring in Tolkien's work, which likewise grants dominion over others but at the cost of the bearer's life.

Additionally, Tolkien's creation of the *Valar* and *Maiar* mirrors the influence of Nordic cosmology. The division between the *Valar* (the higher order of divine beings) and the *Maiar* (lesser divine spirits) parallels the distinction between the *Æsir* and *Vanir* in Norse mythology, where two groups of gods represent different aspects of the divine (Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 120). The *Valar*, akin to the *Æsir*, are powerful, governing forces in the world, while the *Maiar*, much like the *Vanir*, have specialized roles, such as guiding and influencing the mortal races. This hierarchical structure allowed Tolkien to craft a rich cosmology that mirrors the complex divine interplay described in the *Prose Edda*.

1.2.5 *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and the Legendarium

Two of the principal works in J.R.R. Tolkien's rich mythology are *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In the following, the plots of these works and their main characters will be briefly presented, as the subsequent chapters—dedicated to the thematic connections between *Beowulf* and Tolkien—will frequently reference key figures and events from these stories. Although *The Hobbit* is not directly analyzed in this study, it is included here as it serves as a sort of prologue to *The Lord of the Rings* and provides important background for some of the events discussed. Additionally, an overview of the editorial origins and revisions of these works is provided to offer a broader understanding of Tolkien's work as an author.

The Hobbit narrates the adventure of Bilbo Baggins in the world of Middle-earth. Bilbo Baggins is a hobbit, a small human-like creature typically living in cozy

underground houses. The peace of Bilbo and the Shire, a rural countryside inhabited by hobbits, is interrupted by the powerful wizard Gandalf and a group of thirteen dwarves, led by Thorin Oakenshield. Upon their arrival, Bilbo embarks on a quest with them to reclaim the Lonely Mountain, which once belonged to the dwarves and is now occupied by the dragon Smaug, along with its immense treasure. During their journey, Bilbo and the dwarves face numerous challenges, including goblins, spiders, trolls, and the creature Gollum, from whom Bilbo acquires the One Ring. This magical ring grants its bearer immense power and the ability to become invisible. The ring, forged by Sauron—a key figure in *The Lord of the Rings*—ended up in Gollum's possession by chance. Eventually, Smaug is defeated, and Bilbo participates in the climactic Battle of the Five Armies, where dwarves, elves, and men fight against goblins and wargs for Smaug's treasure. Bilbo, victorious, returns home with a portion of the treasure and the One Ring.

The origin of *The Hobbit* dates back to the early 1930s when Tolkien was an academic at Oxford. It is said (Chester 2006, 278) that during this time, Tolkien spontaneously wrote the famous opening line, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit," on a piece of paper. Encouraged by friends, colleagues, and editors, Tolkien continued writing and eventually completed the manuscript, which was first published in 1937 (Carpenter 1977, 181). Several revisions followed in 1951, 1966, and 1978. The 1951 revision was particularly significant, as it included major changes to characters and events to ensure consistency with *The Lord of the Rings*. One of the most notable revisions involved the character of Gollum, whose description and personality were altered. In the first edition of *The Hobbit*, Gollum's appearance was left vague, and his size and features were not clearly defined: "Deep down here by the dark water lived old Gollum. I don't know where he came from, nor who or what he was. He was Gollum—dark as darkness, except for two round pale eyes". Early illustrations of Gollum varied widely, but with the growing importance of the character in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien revised the description to align Gollum more closely with his eventual backstory—that of a hobbit corrupted and transformed into a monstrous creature. This revision ensured greater coherence between the two works, highlighting Tolkien's meticulous attention to detail in building his mythology.

The Lord of the Rings continues and expands the story begun in *The Hobbit*. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the focus shifts from Bilbo to his nephew, Frodo Baggins. Frodo is entrusted with the One Ring, and after discovering its power and danger, embarks on a journey to destroy the Ring before Sauron, its creator, can reclaim it. Compared to *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* is much larger in scope—over a thousand pages compared to the four hundred of *The Hobbit*. Consequently, more space is dedicated to exploring crucial themes and ideas. For instance, the figure of Gollum, as previously mentioned, becomes central in representing themes of good and evil, corruption, and mercy. Several new characters are introduced in *The Lord of the Rings*, while others from *The Hobbit* return. Aragorn, the rightful heir to the throne of Gondor, plays a key role as a companion on Frodo's journey. Sam, a hobbit and gardener, is another important character who accompanies Frodo until the end. Other members of the Fellowship, the company formed to help bring the Ring to Mount Doom for destruction, include Boromir, a proud warrior and the son of Gondor's steward; Gimli, a dwarf; Legolas, an elf; and Merry and Pippin, two more hobbits. Many other characters appear throughout the story and will be discussed in later chapters as needed. Eventually, Frodo destroys the Ring, and Sauron is defeated.

The story is divided into three volumes: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954), and *The Return of the King* (1955). Tolkien began writing *The Lord of the Rings* as a sequel to *The Hobbit* but soon realized it was becoming a much larger and more complex work. The writing process for *The Lord of the Rings* was long and meticulous, spanning from 1937 to 1949. The publication process was similarly complex, with Tolkien working closely with his publishers at Allen & Unwin to complete the publication according to his views. Despite Tolkien's intention to publish the work as a single book, *The Lord of the Rings* was released as in three volumes due to its length (Strugis 2006, 385). The exceptional success of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is evident in their lasting popularity and profound impact on the fantasy genre and popular culture. Both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* gained a dedicated following among both literary critics and general readers. The books have sold millions of copies worldwide, been translated into numerous languages, and adapted into highly successful films.

J.R.R. Tolkien's literary contributions extend beyond *The Hobbit* and *The Lord*

of the Rings. In fact, a series of works deeply concern the mythology and history of Middle-earth. It is worth reviewing these works to understand Tolkien's dedication to his world-building and the depth of his literary production. One of the most significant of these is *The Silmarillion*[12], published posthumously in 1977. This collection of myths and stories, edited by Tolkien's son Christopher Tolkien, provides a comprehensive backstory to the world of Middle-earth, detailing the creation of the world and the following history. *The Simarillion* focuses on the tales of the Silmarils, three powerful jewels central to the conflicts and tragedies of this work. Another important work is *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*[13], published in 1980. This compilation includes narratives that expand on the events of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, offering additional insights into characters and events. Tolkien also produced *The History of Middle-earth*[14], a twelve-volume series edited by Christopher Tolkien between 1983 and 1996. This extensive collection provides an overview of the development of Tolkien's legendarium, featuring drafts, notes, and essays that trace the evolution of his world from its earliest stages to the final versions of his stories. *The Children of Húrin*[15], published in 2007, is another essential work. This novel expands after one of the tragic tales briefly mentioned in *The Silmarillion*, focusing on the lives of Túrin Turambar and his sister Niënor. These additional writings provide a profound insight into the immense work of J.R.R. Tolkien. The rich and complex world Tolkien created owes much to the dedicated efforts of his son, Christopher Tolkien. Through Christopher's meticulous editing and publishing, readers can explore the extensive mythology and history of Middle-earth in these invaluable works.

1.3 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a foundational overview of the Anglo-Saxon cultural world and the intellectual background of J.R.R. Tolkien. The examination of Anglo-Saxon history, oral and literary traditions, and heroic values has shed light on the context in

[12] Tolkien, J.R.R. The Silmarillion. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.
[13] Tolkien, J.R.R. Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980.
[14] Tolkien, J.R.R. The History of Middle-earth. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983-1996.
[15] Tolkien, J.R.R. The Children of Húrin. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

which *Beowulf* was composed and transmitted. Likewise, tracing Tolkien's life, academic formation, and creative vision has revealed how deeply his work was shaped by philological study, Christian belief, and a fascination with myth. These elements not only informed his scholarship but also inspired the imaginative construction of Middle-earth. Understanding these backgrounds is essential to appreciating how literary traditions and personal convictions converged in Tolkien's engagement with the past, laying the groundwork for the literary developments explored in the chapters to follow.

CHAPTER TWO
Thematic and Stylistic Parallels between *Beowulf* and Tolkien's Works

The connections between *Beowulf* and Tolkien are numerous and have been thoroughly studied, analysed, and reported by several studies, demonstrating the importance and vastness of this argument (Shippey 2003; Fimi 2009; Flieger 2002; Orchard 2003). This chapter explores the thematic and stylistic parallels between *Beowulf* and Tolkien's works, particularly *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, focusing on how motifs, character types, and poetic devices rooted in the Old English tradition were reimagined within Middle-earth. The first section considers thematic elements such as monstrous adversaries, heroic ideals, and cultural practices that reflect the values of the Germanic world. The second section investigates stylistic features derived from Anglo-Saxon poetic conventions, including alliterative verse, kennings, and the impression of historical depth. Taken together, these parallels illuminate Tolkien's creative engagement with his source material and his ability to blend philological precision with narrative invention.

2.1 Thematic Parallels

2.1.1 Monstrous Adversaries

In *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, J.R.R. Tolkien addressed critics' concerns that the focus on monsters in *Beowulf* weakened the poem. First, critics argued that the monsters were less important than other elements, such as heroic legends and historical events (Tolkien 1936, 7–8). Second, critics claimed that, aside from killing monsters, Beowulf had little else to do, unlike mythic heroes like Hercules, who faced more diverse challenges (Tolkien 1936, 9). Tolkien countered this by asserting that the monsters were not a flaw but essential to the poem's central theme (Tolkien 1936, 19). He argued that the poet of *Beowulf* crafted the story around the idea of "man at war with a hostile world, and his inevitable overthrow in Time" (Tolkien 1936, 23). The inevitability of death is key to the poem, and the monsters play a central role in expressing this. For example, after Beowulf's fight with the dragon, the poet emphasizes the hero's awareness of his approaching death:

Gesæt ða on næsse niðheard cyning,
þenden hælo abead heorðgeneatum,
gold(w)ine Geata. Him wæs geomor sefa,
wæfre 7 wælfus. Wyrd ungemete neah
se ðone gomelan gretan sceolde,
secean sawle hord, sundur gedælan
lif wið lice.
(lines 2417-2423)

The king sat down on the cliff-top then
and wished good health to his hearth-companions.
His heart was sorrowful, restless, ready
for death, as his fate edged infinitely
closer, seeking to separate
the old man's life from his body. Not long
would his spirit be enfolded in flesh.
(Mitchell 2017, lines 2325–31)

This passage exemplifies how the monsters contribute to the deeper meaning of the poem. As Shippey notes, Tolkien viewed Beowulf's monsters as more than just adversaries, they represent forces that symbolize humanity's struggle against time and death (Shippey 2003, 85–86). It is thus valuable to examine the parallels scholars have drawn between two of *Beowulf*'s central monsters and two creatures in Tolkien's works: Beowulf's dragon and Smaug, and Grendel and Gollum.

2.1.1.1 Dragons

Typically serpentine in shape and associated with evil, dragons hold a significant place in Anglo-Saxon culture (Rauer 2000, 149). From the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s reference to "fiery dragons flying in the air" (Swanton 1996, 102) to the Gnomic Maxims describing dragons as creatures that "must be in the barrow, aged, proud in treasures" (Dobbie 1942, 47), these mythical beings are deeply intertwined in the literary and cultural traditions of the time. Importantly, Beowulf's dragon is often considered by critics the quintessential Anglo-Saxon dragon. As the final and most fearsome enemy Beowulf faces, the dragon is an ancient creature guarding a treasure hoard and enrages when a cup is stolen. This theft causes a fierce battle that ultimately results in the deaths of both Beowulf and the dragon. Similarly, in *The Hobbit*, Smaug

is an ancient dragon guarding a vast treasure hoard, also provoked to rage by the theft of a cup by Bilbo Baggins. This event leads to the destruction of Lake-town and culminates in the Battle of Five Armies. In the study *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues*, Rauer identifies four key motifs in the depiction of Beowulf's dragon: fire, hoarding, nocturnal nature, and inquisitiveness (Rauer 2000, 33–34). These motifs might also be applied to Smaug, helping to highlight the parallels between the two dragons.

Firstly, the motif of fire, burning, and heat is fundamental in *Beowulf*'s depiction of the dragon. The dragon's association with fire is so prevalent that Rauer suggests Beowulf often seems to be fighting the fire itself rather than the creature (Rauer 2000, 33). This is underscored by the consistent use of fiery imagery, with terms like *byrende* ("burning") (Kiernan 2011, line 2272), *fyre befangen* ("wrapped in flames") (Mitchell 2017, line 2274), and *hāt* ("heated") (Kiernan 2011, line 2296) emphasizing the overwhelming presence of heat and flames in the battle. This motif is not unique to *Beowulf*, as a similar theme is central to Tolkien's depiction of Smaug in *The Hobbit*. Fire is a defining characteristic of Smaug's destructive power, as seen in Chapter 14, "Fire and Water," where Smaug destroys Lake-town with flames (Tolkien 2006, 287–88). Additionally, in Chapter 12, "Inside Information," Smaug breathes fire even in his sleep when Bilbo first encounters him in the depths of the Lonely Mountain (Tolkien 2006, 257). In both stories, fire enhances the power of the dragons, highlighting their destructive force.

Another crucial motif in *Beowulf* is the dragon's hoarding and guarding of treasure. This theme is deeply rooted in Germanic tradition, with another quintessential example in the Volsung-Nibelung cycle, where the dragon, called *Fafnir* in Scandinavian sources, protects a vast treasure that tragically curses its owner (Byock 1990, 66–67). In *Beowulf*, the dragon, referred to as *hordweard* ("hoard watcher") (Kiernan 2011, line 2293), guards a massive treasure hoard hidden in a cave within a cliff. The story of the treasure is briefly sketched in lines 2247–66. The hoard belonged to an ancient noble population (Mitchell 2017, line 2234), whose last member carefully hid the treasure in the cave. Similarly, in *The Hobbit*, Smaug guards an immense hoard hidden inside the Lonely Mountain. The hoard also originally belonged to an ancient group of dwarves who were destroyed by Smaug's attack. In *The Hobbit*, it is Thorin

Oakenshield's task, as chief of the dwarves, to reclaim his ancestors' homeland and treasure. A parallel that can be drawn between Beowulf's dragon, Fafnir, and Smaug is the curse of the treasure. In all these tales, the owner of the treasure faces a tragic death: Beowulf in *Beowulf*, Sigurd in the Volsung-Nibelung cycle, and Thorin in *The Hobbit* (Byock 1990, 163).

A third defining motif of the dragon in *Beowulf* is its nocturnal nature. After Beowulf's deeds with Grendel and Grendel's mother, various battles and successions occurred, and Beowulf eventually became king, ruling for fifty years—until "a dragon began to rule the dark nights" (Mitchell 2017, line 2211). Moreover, following the theft of a cup, the poet is precise about the timing of the dragon's attack: "When it was clear that someone had stolen part of its wealth, the fire-beast waited restlessly till evening arrived" (Mitchell 2017, lines 2302–3). It is during the night that the dragon carries out its rampage, retreating to its cave "just before dawn" (Mitchell 2017, line 2321). It is worth noticing that the poet also depicts the dragon asleep during the day (Mitchell 2017, line 2218), and while sleeping dragons are found in other Old Norse sources, this portrayal is unusual in other traditions where dragons are typically sleepless (Rauer 2000, 34). Similarly, in *The Hobbit*, Smaug is asleep when Bilbo first encounters him (Tolkien 2006, 257), and he waits for nightfall to search for the thief and carry out his attack on Lake-town.

Finally, inquisitiveness is another significant motif in *Beowulf*, particularly in the characterization of the dragon. As Rauer points out, the dragon is portrayed as highly aware and investigative in nature. It finds the hoard (*hordwynne fond*, line 2270), detects the intruder's footsteps (*onfand feondes fotlast*, Mitchell, lines 2288–89), and quickly realizes that someone has stolen its gold (*He þæt sona onfand, ðæt hæfde gumena sum goldes gefandod*, Mitchell, lines 2300–1). This attention to detail and awareness is unusual compared to other dragon analogues in medieval literature, setting *Beowulf*'s dragon apart as a more conscious and vigilant guardian (Rauer 2000, 34). Similarly, this motif of inquisitiveness is central to the depiction of Smaug in *The Hobbit*. Like the dragon in *Beowulf*, Smaug is enraged by the theft of the cup and immediately begins a destructive search for the thief. On a more sophisticated level, Smaug expresses his inquisitive side during his conversation with Bilbo in Chapter 12, "Inside Information." After detecting Bilbo's presence, Smaug becomes intensely

curious about the intruder's identity and, before realizing the theft, engages in a series of riddles to discover who Bilbo is (Tolkien 2006, 262–64).

2.1.1.2 Ogre-like creatures

Together with the dragon, Grendel and Gollum are two other pivotal monsters in their respective stories. In *Beowulf*, Grendel is an ogre-like creature, driven by hatred for the sounds of joy and harps coming from Heorot (Mitchell 2017, lines 86–90), the hall of the Danish king. Grendel harasses the hall for twelve years, motivated by his exile and curse as a descendant of Cain (Mitchell 2017, line 107). Grendel is the first of the three monsters Beowulf faces, and Beowulf's victory over him ends with Grendel's wounding and flight. A possible parallel to this monster in Tolkien's work is Gollum (Nelson 2008, 71). Gollum, once a hobbit, is transformed into a monstrous, ogre-like creature by the corrupting power of the One Ring. While Grendel is a more straightforward villain in *Beowulf*, Gollum plays a more complex role in *The Lord of the Rings*, acting both as a treacherous enemy and a guiding figure. In the end, it is Gollum who completes the quest by destroying the ring. Despite these differences, Grendel and Gollum share significant thematic connections.

A recurrent motif in the depiction of both Grendel in *Beowulf* and Gollum in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is darkness. Like the dragon, Grendel's behaviour is distinctly nocturnal. He waits for night to carry out his first attack (Mitchell 2017, line 115), and his second attack also occurs at nightfall (Mitchell 2017, line 135). It is again during the night that Grendel attacks Heorot and battles Beowulf (Mitchell 2017, line 703). Grendel is often referred to with names that emphasize his connection to shadow and darkness, such as *sceadugenga* ("shadow-walker") (Kiernan 2011, line 703), *deorc deaþscua* ("death-shadow") (Kiernan 2011, line 160), and *se þe in þystrum bad* ("he who waited in the darkness") (Kiernan 2011, line 87). Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, darkness and nocturnal behaviour define Gollum. In *The Two Towers*, Gollum's first appearance is described: "There was a faint hiss, and a soft curse in the darkness, and a pair of lamp-like eyes gleamed above the edge of the rock" (Tolkien 2011, 616). However, his presence is hinted at earlier in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when Frodo senses a creature following the company in the Mines of Moria, occasionally hear the "faint fall of soft bare feet" following them in the darkness (Tolkien 2011, 312). In *The Hobbit*, Gollum is introduced as living by

"the dark water" (Tolkien 2006, 76). Verlyn Flieger notes Gollum's symbolic role, suggesting that he embodies the darkness evoked by the ring and serves to remind Frodo of its danger and tragedy (Flieger 2002, 151). Gollum remains hidden in darkness until he becomes an integral part of the story, foreshadowing his complex connection to the ring.

Another significant motif shared by both Grendel and Gollum is the element of water. Both creatures dwell near water and are comfortable in such environments. Nelson explores the thematic parallels between Gollum and Grendel, particularly focusing on this motif. He argues that both characters, as descendants of Cain and symbolic Leviathans, inhabit watery, dark environments that reflect their exclusion and anti-social behaviors (Nelson 2008, 64). Several instances in the texts emphasize this association. For instance, Grendel and his mother live in an underwater lair beneath a mere, a desolate place filled with dark waters and strange creatures, where no man dares to venture (Mitchell 2017, lines 1357–62). Moreover, after his defeat at Heorot, Grendel retreats to the mere, where his blood begins to boil the water (Mitchell 2017, line 1366). Similarly, Gollum, in his first appearance in *The Hobbit*, dwells in a dark, watery environment in a cave beneath the Misty Mountains, living on a slimy rock in the middle of an underground lake (Tolkien 2006, 78). Gollum's connection to water continues in *The Lord of the Rings*, from Gandalf's account of Gollum discovering the One Ring in a river (Tolkien 2011, 50) to Gollum's confidence in watery environments like the Dead Marshes. As with Grendel, Gollum, and even the dragon, water connects the creatures to worlds inhospitable to men.

Hands are a recurring motif in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, though with different meanings. In *Beowulf*, hands symbolize deeds aimed at the good of society and community, while in *The Lord of the Rings*, they often represent actions driven by personal ambition, frequently leading to tragic outcomes (Nelson 2008, 479). In Beowulf, the motif of hands is prominently featured in the battle between Beowulf and Grendel. The immense strength of Beowulf's hand-grip is emphasized, alongside the graphic description of Grendel's hands being crushed: "Fingers cracked" (Mitchell 2017, line 760), and Grendel "felt his finger-bones crushed in Beowulf's grip" (Mitchell 2017, line 764). One of the most striking depictions is when Beowulf tears off Grendel's arm "hand to shoulder" (Mitchell 2017, line 835) and displays it as a

trophy of victory (Mitchell 2017, line 836). However, in the battle with Grendel's mother, the perspective shifts: it is her hands and her grip that are described, emphasizing her strength and resilience as she attempts to avenge her son's death (Neidorf 2017). *In The Lord of the Rings*, the imagery of hands and fingers is deeply connected to the ring, symbolizing individual power. Gollum is obsessed not only with his own hands but also with those of other ring-bearers. The story of the ring begins with the cutting of Sauron's hand, and Gollum's long hands are frequently described as stretching obsessively toward the ring. At the end of the quest, the biting off of Frodo's finger echoes the dismemberment of Grendel's arm in Beowulf: "Suddenly Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm's edge. But Gollum, dancing like a mad thing, held aloft the ring, a finger still thrust within its circle. It shone now as if verily it was wrought of living fire" (Tolkien 2006, 700). Finally, the theme of exile might be considered one of the most crucial aspect in the depiction of both Gollum and Grendel. In *Beowulf*, Grendel's exile is the defining characteristic that sets his monstrosity apart from that of the dragon (Orchard 2003, 34). While the dragon is depicted with only vague human traits—its inquisitiveness—Grendel's portrayal as an exiled creature is profoundly human. This exile evokes ambivalent responses in the audience (Baird 1966, 379), as it is both a divine punishment, leading to repulsion, and a social exile imposed by men, which might cause pity. Similarly, in Tolkien's work, Gollum's exile sets him apart from Smaug. Unlike Grendel, Gollum's exile is caused solely by men, which generates sympathy not only from the reader but also from other characters, who spare his life on several occasions out of pity and understanding.

In *Beowulf*, Grendel's exclusion is emphasized in several passages. His first appearance shows him as alienated from the joyful community of Heorot, which he both envies and despises:

> *Ða se ellengæst earfoðlice*
> *þrage geþolode, se þe in þystrum bad,*
> *þæt he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde*
> *hludne in healle. Þær wæs hearpan sweg,*
> *swutol sang scopes.*

(lines 86-90)

Then the fierce demon who prowled in darkness
suffered torment: it tore at his heart
to hear rejoicing inside the hall,
the sound of the harp, and the bard singing
day after day for people's delight.
(Mitchell 2017, lines 86–90)

His isolation is further reinforced by his cursed lineage as a descendant of Cain, marking him as eternally separated from society:

Fifelcynnes eard
wonsæli wer weardode hwile,
siþðan him Scyppend forscrifen hæfde
in Caines cynne. Þone cwealm gewræc,
ece Drihten, þæs þe he Abel slog.
(lines 104-108)

He had lived long in the land of monsters,
condemned by the Lord with all Cain's clan
in revenge for the vicious murder of Abel.
(Mitchell 2017, lines 106–8)

Similarly, Gollum's exile begins after he murders his companion, Déagol, upon discovering the One Ring. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum is frequently described as lonely and isolated, reflecting his deep separation from society. When Gandalf recounts the story of the ring to Frodo, he explains how Gollum's family rejected him after the murder: "So they called him Gollum, and cursed him, and told him to go far away; and his grandmother, desiring peace, expelled him from the family and turned him out of her hole" (Tolkien 2006, 54).

2.1.2 Heroic Ideals

While commonly distinguished by their moral values and roles in society, the line between monsters and heroes is not always clear-cut (Kroll 1986, 117). In *Beowulf*, Orchard (2003, 32) identifies several connections between the hero Beowulf and the monster Grendel, highlighting their frequent similarities. One notable connection is the state of fury both Beowulf and Grendel experience during their confrontations.

Beowulf is described as furious while waiting for Grendel in Heorot (Mitchell 2017, line 709), and Grendel's fury is so intense that it shatters the door of Heorot (Mitchell 2017, line 726). Then, it is significant to notice that the only characters associated with fury in the poem are Beowulf, Grendel, and other monsters, including the dragon. Another link between them is their strength and brutality. Beowulf's strength, equal to that of thirty men (Mitchell 2017, line 379), reflects Grendel's act of seizing thirty men from Heorot (Mitchell 2017, line 122). Furthermore, both figures display brutal methods of fighting: Beowulf crushes a warrior to death (Mitchell 2017, lines 2498–2508), while Grendel tears apart a sleeping warrior and drinks his blood (Mitchell 2017, lines 739–43). A final connection lies in the social spaces they occupy, as both Beowulf and Grendel are referred to as *hall-thane* (Mitchell 2017, lines 142, 719) and *hall-dwellers* (Mitchell 2017, lines 769–70), emphasizing their shared connection to the hall, whether as its protector or its terrorizer.

However, it remains valuable to distinguish between heroes and monsters when analyzing connections between *Beowulf* and Tolkien's works. According to Campbell (2008), a hero embarks on an adventurous journey, faces formidable challenges, and ultimately returns transformed, often bringing benefit to their community. While not every heroic figure follows this definition precisely, connections can be drawn between heroic figures in both works—such as King Hrothgar, King Théoden, Éomer, and Beowulf. As Hill (1995) argues in *The Cultural World in Beowulf*, heroism in *Beowulf* is deeply tied to the warrior culture of the time, where gift-giving and loyalty were central to maintaining social order. This cultural aspect of heroism is reflected not only in Beowulf's actions but also in Théoden's role as a leader who rewards loyalty through gifts, reinforcing the bond between king and warriors. In this way, both texts explore heroism as a construct that goes beyond individual deeds, emphasizing the social responsibilities and community values that define a hero.

2.1.2.1 Kingship and Leadership

King Hrothgar, ruler of the Danes, is a descendant of Scyld Scefing, the first king mentioned in *Beowulf*, and the builder of Heorot, the great hall central to the poem. Hrothgar is portrayed as an elderly, white-haired king (Kiernan 2011, 357) with a glorious past, who is ultimately saved by Beowulf from Grendel's attacks. In *The Lord of the Rings*, King Théoden, leader of the Rohirrim, commands the warriors of Rohan.

During the story, Théoden is freed from a state of psychological enslavement by Gandalf and plays a crucial role in leading his people into battle. While Hrothgar remains a more static figure, staying in Heorot during the events of the poem, Théoden is active in battles. Nonetheless, there are notable parallels between the two. One such parallel is the origin of Théoden's name and how Hrothgar is referred to in Beowulf. Théoden's name comes from the Old English word *þeoden*, meaning "lord" or "leader" (Kiernan 2011, lines 34, 44, 65). Throughout Beowulf, Hrothgar is addressed with similar titles. For example, he is called *þeoden æþeling* (Kiernan 2011, line 129), meaning "son of a king," and *mærne þeoden* (Kiernan 2011, line 201), meaning "legendary lord".[16] While *þeoden* is occasionally used in Beowulf to refer to other leaders, this linguistic connection highlights a common thread between Théoden and Hrothgar as noble rulers.

Another key cultural element connecting these two kings is the tradition of gift-giving, which was a vital practice in Germanic societies (Porck 2019, 7–8). Gift-giving strengthened the bonds between a king and his warriors, symbolizing loyalty and mutual respect. In *Beowulf*, Hrothgar demonstrates this tradition after Beowulf defeats Grendel, rewarding Beowulf and his men with precious gifts, including weapons and armour, in the hall of Heorot (Mitchell 2017, lines 1020–25). The poem emphasizes that a king's generosity is essential for maintaining power and loyalty: "To be powerful, a prince should hand out gifts of his father's gold so that, when enemies strike, his friends and vassals will stand at his side" (Mitchell 2017, lines 20–25). Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Théoden shows his loyalty to his companions through acts of gift-giving. Before they leave Rohan, he offers gifts to Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli (Tolkien 2011, 522–25). After giving Shadowfax, a mighty horse, to Gandalf, Théoden tells his other guests: "And to you my other guests I will offer such things as may be found in my armoury. Swords you do not need, but there are helms and coats of mail of cunning work, gifts to my fathers out of Gondor. Choose from these ere we go, and may they serve you well!" While reinforcing Théoden's role as a king, the practice of gift-giving also strengthens the bonds between

[16] Bosworth, Joseph. "æðeling." In *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, edited by Thomas Northcote Toller, Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014. https://bosworthtoller.com/946 .

him and his allies, mirroring the essential role of this practice in solidifying alliances and ensuring loyalty in Germanic traditions.

2.1.2.2 Kinship and Loyalty

Another comparison can be drawn between Éomer in *The Lord of the Rings* and the heroic warriors in *Beowulf*, particularly Beowulf himself. Éomer, a warrior of Rohan, plays a crucial role in many battles and is essential to the development of the story. As the nephew of King Théoden, Éomer fights to defend Meduseld and protect his people. His heroic deeds are especially significant during the Battle of Helm's Deep (Tolkien 2005, 526–42), where he leads the Riders of Rohan to a decisive victory. Éomer also plays a key role in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields (Tolkien 2005, 839–50), arriving with the Rohirrim to turn the group against Sauron's forces, and he stands alongside Aragorn during the final confrontation at the Black Gate. Parallels between Éomer and Beowulf can be seen in their names, familial bonds, and shared values.

Like Théoden, the name Éomer appears in *Beowulf*. Éomer is mentioned in line 1960 as the son of Offa, a legendary king of the Angles, in a brief digression about Offa's heroic deeds and lineage. Éomer is described as a noble and valiant warrior who lived up to the expectations of his ancestry:

> *Þonon geomor woc*
> *hæleðum to helpe, Heminges mæg,*
> *nefa Garmundes, niða cræftig.*
> (lines 1960-1962)

> From his loins sprang Éomer,
> Hemming's kinsman and grandson of Garmund,
> who was a bulwark to his bold men.
> (Mitchell 2017, lines 1957–62)

Although Éomer's role in *Beowulf* is limited to this genealogical reference, it highlights the importance of lineage and the value placed on family heritage in Germanic culture. Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, the name Éomer is rooted in Old English, directly linking him to the world of *Beowulf*. The Rohirrim, who call themselves the Éothéod (from Old English *eoh*, meaning 'horse,' and *þéod*, meaning 'people'; Shippey 2003, 125), have a culture where prominent figures like Éomer,

Éomund, and Éowyn are named after Old English words, emphasizing the cultural continuity with *Beowulf*. Arguably, Tolkien's use of Old English in the naming of the Rohirrim reflects his philological expertise and his desire to root the culture of the Rohirrim in the same Anglo-Saxon traditions that inspired *Beowulf* (Solopova 2009, 87).

Family bonds and lineages are central to both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Beowulf, as the nephew of King Hygelac, fights not only for personal glory but also to honor and protect his family. His journey to Heorot is driven by a sense of obligation to repay the favor his father received and to safeguard family loyalties (Mitchell 2017, lines 456–72). After the deaths of Hygelac and his son, Beowulf assumes leadership, underscoring the importance of family relationships. This dynamic reflects the avunculate—a cultural practice in Germanic societies where the maternal uncle holds a significant role in the upbringing and support of his sister's children. Such relationships were pivotal, especially in matters of succession and loyalty (Bremmer 1976, 65–78). Similarly, Éomer's actions are deeply influenced by his relationship with his uncle, King Théoden. Éomer is fiercely loyal to Théoden, not just out of duty as a marshal of the Riddermark, but because of their deep familial bond. This portrayal mirrors the avunculate tradition, highlighting the enduring significance of maternal uncle-nephew relationships in shaping leadership and loyalty. As Fimi (2009) notes in *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits*, Tolkien draws heavily on medieval concepts of kinship and lineage to shape the relationships between characters like Éomer and Théoden, mirroring the strong family ties depicted in *Beowulf*. After Théoden's liberation from Saruman's control, Éomer fights by his side, motivated by duty and familial honour. Following Théoden's death, Éomer takes on leadership, ensuring his uncle's legacy and maintaining the strength and unity of Rohan.

2.1.3 Cultural Motifs

In previous chapters, an overview of the most important Germanic values was provided. Loyalty, heroism, and honour are central to these cultures and are widely represented in *Beowulf*. Several practices rooted in these values are depicted throughout the poem, serving as essential components of the social and cultural fabric. One such practice is gift-giving, where kings reward their warriors with valuable items,

such as weapons and treasures, to reinforce loyalty, honour their bravery, and ensure continued allegiance (Hill, 1982). This reciprocal exchange reinforces the bond between a leader and his warriors, solidifying social cohesion. Another important tradition is the elaborate funeral ceremonies, which not only honour the deceased hero but also serve as a collective mourning and reverence for the dead (Hill, 1995). Additionally, the hall serves as a central space in these cultures, symbolizing unity, power, and cultural identity, as seen in King Hrothgar's Heorot (Enright, 1988). Several parallels between Beowulf and Tolkien's works can be drawn in regard to these cultural practices.

2.1.3.1 Gift-Giving and Reciprocity

As mentioned before, the practice of gift-giving is a fundamental aspect of Germanic cultures. It consisted of a rewarding of goods that took place between the leader of the social group, typically the king, and the people under his power, typically the warriors (Bazelmans 2000). This exchange involved the giving of precious gifts, such as jewellery, weapons, or horses, and was aimed at solidifying the loyal bond between the king and his warriors (Hill 1982). More than just a transaction, gift-giving symbolized the mutual respect and obligation inherent in the relationship between a ruler and his subjects. By gifting valuable items, the king demonstrated his generosity, wealth, and ability to provide for his people, which, in turn, strengthened his authority and maintained the warriors' loyalty (Naismith 2016).

Even beyond the passages concerning King Hrothgar discussed in section 2.1.2 *Heroic Ideals*, the practice of gift-giving features prominently throughout *Beowulf*. For instance, after Beowulf returns to the land of the Geats, he presents King Hygelac with treasures he received from King Hrothgar (Mitchell 2017, lines 2144–76). This act of gratitude toward his king includes valuable battle gear and gold-adorned horses. In return, Hygelac rewards Beowulf with an ancient sword, further affirming their bond of loyalty (Mitchell 2017, lines 2190–99). Moreover, this practice is not limited to kings. In Beowulf, Wealhtheow, the queen of the Danes, presents Beowulf with a necklace, bracelets, and other gifts after his defeat of Grendel (Mitchell 2017, lines 1192–96). Although Wealhtheow is Hrothgar's wife, this moment underscores that gift-giving is not confined to exchanges between kings and their warriors; the queen also takes on the role of a gift-giver.

Another significant example of gift-giving in *Beowulf* occurs during Beowulf's final battle with the dragon. Wiglaf, a young warrior and likely kinsman of Beowulf, comes to his aid, standing by him when all other warriors have fled. After they defeat the dragon, as Beowulf lies dying, he gives Wiglaf his war gear as a reward for his bravery and loyalty. This act is not only a gesture of gratitude but also a symbolic transfer of leadership to Wiglaf as Beowulf's successor. The text refers to them as *sib æþelingas*, or "related princes," underscoring the kinship that makes Wiglaf an appropriate inheritor, particularly since Beowulf has no direct descendants (Eliason 1978, 95–105). Here, the tradition of gift-giving serves to reinforce bonds of loyalty, kinship, and continuity of leadership among the Geats (Enright 1988).

> *Dyde him of healse hring gyldenne,*
> *þioden þristhydig, þegne gesealde,*
> *geongum garwigan, goldfahne helm,*
> *beah 7 byrnan, het hyne brucan well:*
> (lines 2809-12)

> Then the king unclasped from his neck
> The golden collar and gave it to Wiglaf,
> And also the gilded helmet, arm-ring,
> And war-shirt, and told him to use them well.
> (Mitchell 2017, lines 2809–12)

With regard to Tolkien's work, several notable examples of gift-giving can be identified, apart from those involving King Théoden. One significant instance is the gifts bestowed by Galadriel, the wise and powerful Elven-queen, to the Fellowship of the Ring. Before the company departs from Lothlórien, Galadriel gives a unique gift to each member: to Aragorn, a sheath made for his sword, Andúril; to Merry and Pippin, small silver belts wrought with flowers; to Sam, a gardener and lover of trees, a little box containing earth from her orchard; to Gimli, the dwarf, a strand of her own hair; and to Frodo, the ring-bearer, a small crystal phial containing the light of Eärendil's star (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 374–76). This episode will be analyzed in more detail in Chapter Four: *Gift Giving: A Comparative Analysis (Quantitative and Qualitative)*. Another example of gift-giving occurs in The Hobbit, after the Battle of the Five Armies. In this battle, Thorin Oakenshield and his company

of dwarves fight alongside men and elves against goblins and wolves. Following Thorin's death, the dwarves decide to share a fourteenth of their treasure with Bard, the man who killed Smaug. This portion of the treasure was originally meant for Thorin, who is buried with the Arkenstone, the treasure he valued most (Tolkien, The Hobbit, 336–37). In an act of generosity, Bard then shares his portion of the treasure with both the people of Lake-town and the Elvenking. A final significant example of gift-giving, echoing the passing of leadership seen in Beowulf with Beowulf and Wiglaf, is the moment when Bilbo gives Frodo a mithril coat[17] and the sword Sting. Before Frodo departs on his quest to destroy the One Ring, Bilbo gifts him the sword he found during his adventures in The Hobbit and the mithril coat given to him by Thorin after the defeat of Smaug (Tolkien, The Fellowship of the ring, 277–78).

2.1.3.2 Funerals

Funeral rites played a crucial role in Germanic cultures, serving not only as a way to honor the dead but also as a reflection of the values and social structures of the community (Hill 1995, 12). Funeral practices often included elaborate burials, the burning of the body, or entombment with valuable grave goods such as weapons, armour, and personal treasures (Härke 1997, 144). Beyond the material, funerals symbolized the continuation of kinship, loyalty, and leadership, even after death. By honouring the dead with such ceremonies, the living demonstrated respect, loyalty, and duty, while reaffirming the social and political structures that held the community together (Davidson 1950, 184).

With regard to the funerals in *Beowulf*, John D. Niles observes, “What the Danes had been before Scyld, the Geats will be after Beowulf. The funerals of these two kings serve as resting points in this great scheme of rising and falling. They occur at key moments of transition and provide a focus for the listening audience to contemplate what constitutes effective leadership” (Niles 1983). The funerals in *Beowulf* not only mark the end of individual lives but also signify shifts in power and societal stability. Some of these funeral episodes will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six: *Burials: A Comparative Analysis (Quantitative and Qualitative)*. The

[17] Mithril is an incredibly rare and valuable metal in Middle-earth, known for its strength and lightness. The coat, therefore, is not only a protective gift but also a symbol of great worth, underscoring Bilbo's deep care for Frodo’s well-being.

poem opens with the funeral of Scyld Scefing (Mitchell 2017, lines 26–53), the first king of the Danes and an ancestor of Hrothgar. Scyld's life is briefly described as he rises from humble origins to become a powerful and respected ruler. After his death, his companions carry him to the sea, placing him on a ship laden with treasure, including battle gear and swords. The ship is then sent away, and his people mourn their loss. The poem closes with the funeral of King Beowulf. After his final battle with the dragon, Beowulf, mortally wounded, gives orders to Wiglaf for his burial (Mitchell 2017, lines 2793–2806). He requests a funeral mound by the sea, to be named "Beowulf's Barrow" as a reminder for future generations. The poem ends with a detailed description of Beowulf's funeral. After casting the dragon's body into the sea (Mitchell 2017, line 3132), the Geats build a pyre, placing Beowulf on it along with helmets, shields, and mail-shirts. As the funeral fire is kindled, the Geats mourn their fallen king, and a woman sings songs of lament, while the poet hints at a grim future of war, slavery, and sorrow (Mitchell 2017, lines 3137–3155). As with Scyld's ship burial, Beowulf's funeral serves as a reminder of the inevitable decline of great leaders and the fragility of societies built on personal heroism. Together, these funerals, as Niles suggests, frame *Beowulf*'s exploration of leadership, mortality, and the impermanence of worldly power (Niles 1983).

Funerals also play an important role in *The Lord of the Rings*, and their details echo the funerals described in *Beowulf* (Hall 2006, 46). At the beginning of *The Two Towers*, the funeral of Boromir, a member of the Fellowship of the Ring, is depicted after he is mortally wounded by orcs during battle. As Hall highlights, Boromir's funeral reflects the influence of *Beowulf* on Tolkien. Boromir's funeral notably mirrors the funeral of Scyld Scefing, which opens *Beowulf*. Like Scyld, Boromir is laid in a boat by his companions, surrounded by his battle gear, including his sword and horn. His boat is then sent away on the water, just as Scyld's ship burial does (Tolkien 2011, 417–18). Another funeral in *The Lord of the Rings* that mirrors *Beowulf* is King Théoden's. After the conflict of war, Théoden is taken back to Rohan, where his companions hold a grand funeral for him. Like Beowulf, Théoden is buried in a mound in the barrowfield, a site of burial and mounds. His body is laid on a pyre with his possessions, the fire is kindled, and songs of lament are sung (Tolkien 2011, 976–77). However, unlike Beowulf's funeral, Théoden's burial is followed by the celebration of

Éomer's rise to kingship, marking a transition to a hopeful future, in contrast to the more somber perspective at the end of *Beowulf*.

A contrasting example is the funeral of Denethor, the Steward of Gondor. In a state of despair, believing the end of his city is imminent, Denethor attempts a funeral pyre for himself and his son, Faramir, who is gravely ill but still alive. This act of desperation and intended murder-suicide is halted by Gandalf, who rescues Faramir. Denethor's insistence on being cremated, akin to ancient kings, reflects a distorted echo of traditional rites. His self-immolation, holding a palantír[18], symbolizes his surrender to despair and madness (Tolkien 2011, 853–55). Denethor's tragic end bears resemblance to the fate of Brynhildr in the *Volsunga saga*. After the death of Sigurd, Brynhildr, overcome with grief and seeing no hope, takes her own life by stabbing herself and requests to be placed on Sigurd's funeral pyre, choosing to join him in death (Byock 1990, 92):

> Brynhild continued: "Now, Gunnar, I ask a final request of you: let one huge funeral pyre be raised on the level field for all of us: for me and Sigurd and for those who were killed with him […]."

Both narratives depict characters who, in the face of overwhelming loss, resort to self-destruction, connecting their fates with those they mourn.

2.1.3.3 The Heroic Hall

Both Heorot, the hall of King Hrothgar in *Beowulf*, and Meduseld, the hall of King Théoden in *The Lord of the Rings*, serve as central settings in their respective narratives (Shippey 2003, 124). Scholars highlight that Heorot is the site of key societal practices such as gift-giving, the bestowal of honors, and the granting of lands (Enright 1988, 5). Heorot is often seen as a symbol of order, standing in contrast to the surrounding chaos and danger (Hume 1974, 63). Similarly, Meduseld is depicted with terms of brightness, warmth, and glory, fulfilling a similar role in Rohan. Both halls are more than just physical structures; they reinforce and celebrate the social systems of their communities, acting as symbolic centers of leadership and unity. Shippey notes that

[18] The palantír is an ancient seeing-stone made by the Elves, allowing users to view distant places and communicate over vast distances. However, stronger minds, like Sauron's, can use it to manipulate others. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Denethor's reliance on the palantír leads him into despair and madness, believing Gondor's fall is inevitable.

the chapter “The King of the Golden Hall” in *The Two Towers* strongly echoes the description and function of Heorot (Shippey 2003, 124). There are several social and cultural parallels between the hall of King Hrothgar in *Beowulf* and the hall of King Théoden in *The Lord of the Rings* (Kightley 2006). In both works, significant attention is given to the construction of these halls. In *Beowulf*, early in the poem, after recounting the lineage of King Hrothgar, the construction of "the greatest of halls" by Hrothgar himself is described (line 78), emphasizing the hall's importance as a symbol of his kingship and power. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the building of Meduseld is hinted to by Aragorn on their arrival. Unlike in *Beowulf*, where the hall’s construction is a recent event, Meduseld was built many years before the story takes place. Legolas says that “five hundred times have the red leaves fallen in Mirkwood, in my home, since then” (Tolkien 2011, 508), while Aragorn adds, “the raising of this house is but a memory of song, and the years before are lost in the mist of time,” highlighting the ancient status of Meduseld. Another significant connection between the halls lies in their restoration after dark periods. Both Heorot and Meduseld experience times of crisis: Heorot suffers twelve years of attacks from Grendel (*Beowulf*, line 147), while Meduseld’s king, Théoden, falls under the corrupting influence of Saruman. The restoration of Heorot is depicted in lines 991–96, where, after Grendel’s defeat, Hrothgar commands that the hall be adorned with gold, tapestries, and ornaments, symbolizing the return of order and prosperity. Similarly, the restoration of Meduseld is symbolized through the transformation of the natural environment after Théoden's liberation[19]. The stormy skies clear, and sunlight breaks through the clouds, reflecting the end of Saruman’s influence and the return of stability to Rohan. Théoden himself acknowledges the change, saying, “It is not so dark here” (Tolkien 2011, 515), contrasting light and darkness to signify his renewed strength and leadership. This shift in the weather metaphorically represents Théoden reclaiming his rightful place as king, just as Hrothgar's hall is physically restored.

Finally, the practices that occur in the halls also reflect each other. Aside from the gift-giving already mentioned—where in *Beowulf*, King Hrothgar, after Grendel's defeat, bestows armor and battle gear upon his warriors (lines 1020–25), much like

[19] Théoden’s liberation in *The Lord of the Rings* refers to his release from the influence of Saruman and Gríma Wormtongue, who had manipulated him into a state of despair and frailty. With Gandalf’s intervention, Théoden regains his strength and leadership, revitalizing the kingdom of Rohan.

King Théoden after being freed from Saruman's control (Tolkien 2011, 522)—two other significant practices are mirrored in both works. The first is the tradition of queens serving the cup to the king, symbolizing their role as peace-weavers and mediators, reinforcing social bonds and the king's authority (Enright 1988). In *Beowulf*, Wealhtheow offers the ceremonial cup to both King Hrothgar and Beowulf during the victory celebrations (lines 612–19). Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Éowyn serves the cup to the king after Théoden's liberation (Tolkien 2011, 522). Another cultural practice present in both stories is the tradition of singing (Niles 1983, 65). In *Beowulf*, one of the most significant songs is the *Finn's Lay*, sung in Heorot to celebrate the victory (lines 1063–1158). In contrast, the song sung in Meduseld is a lament for the death of King Théoden, where the Riders of the King's House ride around the barrow, singing a song composed by the minstrel Gleówine (Tolkien 2011, 976).

Beyond the social and cultural aspects of the halls, there are notable architectural parallels between Heorot in *Beowulf* and Meduseld in *The Lord of the Rings*. One significant shared motif is the use of brightness to characterize both halls. As Shippey observes (2003, 124), the first sight of Meduseld by the Fellowship echoes the depiction of Heorot seen by Beowulf and his warriors. In *The Lord of the Rings*, "the light of it shines far over the land," and "golden, too, are the posts of its doors" (Tolkien 2011, 507), while in *Beowulf*, Heorot's "golden light shone through the land" (line 311). Both texts highlight a contrast between the light of the hall and the darkness of the surrounding land. Additionally, both works emphasize the grand scale of the halls. In *Beowulf*, "the hall towered high" (line 81), and in *The Lord of the Rings*, "the hall was long and wide […] mighty pillars upheld its lofty roof" (Tolkien 2011, 512). Importantly, the interior architectural elements are similarly described, with a focus on gold and light. In Heorot, "tapestries, gold-laced, glowed from the walls" (lines 990–91), while in Meduseld, the pillars were "richly carved, gleaming dully with gold and half-seen colours" (Tolkien 2011, 512)[20]. Finally, the placement of the hearth and its role in the interaction between guests and the king are paralleled. In *Beowulf*, the warriors, led by Beowulf, march to the hearth near the king and offer their greeting:

[20] The adverb "dully" here reflects the subdued atmosphere in Meduseld before Théoden's liberation. At this point, the hall remains dim and overshadowed, symbolizing the state of Rohan under Saruman's influence.

“Good health to you, Hrothgar!” (line 407). Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf leads the guests past the “long hearth in the midst of the hall” (Tolkien 2011, 512) and greets the king: “Hail Théoden son of Thengel!” The sequence of events in both scenes reflects a shared ritual and emphasizes the association of warmth and light with the halls (Shippey 2003, 124).

The objective of this subchapter was to provide an introductory overview of the possible connections between *Beowulf* and Tolkien’s works. However, this subchapter is not intended to be exhaustive, as the parallels are numerous and have been widely studied. For instance, there are additional connections to be explored regarding the monstrous creatures in Tolkien's world, such as the wargs in *The Hobbit* and their link to the Old English word *wearg*, meaning "wolf" or "outlaw." Characters like Beorn, whose name can be associated with the Old English term for "bear" and "warrior," and even the portrayal of elves, reflect Tolkien’s deep engagement with Old English vocabulary and concepts (Porck, 2012). Similarly, deeper parallels can be explored between the heroic figures of the two works. While this study focuses on *The Lord of the Rings*, some comparisons can also be extended to *The Hobbit* — for example, between Beowulf and Thorin Oakenshield, who both exemplify leadership and the burdens that accompany it (Christensen, 1989). Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that Tolkien was not merely copying his sources but critically engaging with them. He reinterpreted elements of the Germanic heroic tradition through a Christian lens, transforming them into a unique form of heroism that retained the qualities he admired while avoiding those he found problematic, such as the emphasis on vengeance and the fatalistic worldview often present in Germanic heroism. Tolkien sought to create characters who embodied loyalty and bravery without the relentless cycle of blood-feuds, reflecting a more hopeful and redemptive perspective on heroism. This approach underscores Tolkien’s creative technique, which was not about direct imitation but about reshaping his influences to fit his own narrative and thematic purposes (Porck, 2019).

2.2 Stylistic Parallels

2.2.1 Alliterative Verse

Reflecting its origins in oral tradition, alliterative verse is a defining feature of Germanic heroic poetry. In this form, each line is divided into two half-lines (or verses) separated by a caesura, with alliteration serving as the unifying element (Orchard 2003, 21). The first foot (a unit consisting of a stressed syllable, often accompanied by one or more unstressed syllables) of the on-verse must alliterate with the first foot of the off-verse, creating a link between the two halves; this governing sound, known as the "head-letter" (Hauptstab), dictates the alliteration (Stockwell and Minkova 1997, 60). For instance, in the line "*Oft Scyld Scefing | sceaþena þreatum*," (line 3) the on-verse "*Oft Scyld Scefing*" alliterates on the sound /s/, which is carried over to the off-verse "*sceaþena þreatum*". The second stressed syllable in the on-verse may also alliterate, but only the first stressed syllable in the off-verse is part of the alliterative pattern. In the example above, while the word "*sceaþena*" in the off-verse begins with the head-letter /s/, only its first occurrence is relevant for the pattern. Any additional /s/ sounds in the off-verse do not contribute to the established alliteration—they are considered incidental and do not affect the structure of the verse. Each half-line typically features two stressed syllables (lifts) with a variable number of unstressed syllables (dips), lending the verse both rhythmic flexibility and structural coherence (Shippey 2007, 52). Consonantal alliteration involves repeating the same consonant sound, while in vocalic alliteration, any vowel can match with another (Chambers 1912, 67). In this case, "*Scyld*" and "*Scefing*" carry the primary stresses in the on-verse, while "*sceaþena*" and "*þreatum*" hold the stresses in the off-verse. The alliterative verse structure not only establishes rhythm but also aided in memorization for scops and performers, allowing them to recall and recite long passages with greater ease (Dronke 1997, 3).

The study of alliterative verse has been a cornerstone in the scholarship of *Beowulf*, with extensive analyses of its structure, rhythm, and cultural significance (Stockwell and Minkova 1997; Niles 2003; Orchard 2007). Scholars have long explored how this distinctive metrical form reflects the oral tradition of Germanic heroic poetry, emphasizing its role in the preservation of cultural narratives. In recent years, however, attention has turned to the way J.R.R. Tolkien integrated alliterative

verse into his own creative works. Three recent studies illustrate the growing academic focus on Tolkien's use of alliteration. Rebecca Power (2020), in the article "Tolkien's Penchant for Alliteration: Using XML to Analyze The Lay of Leithian," explores Tolkien's incorporation of alliteration in his epic poem, *The Lay of Leithian*. By using XML encoding to chart alliterative patterns, Power identifies overarching trends that reveal the narrative impact of alliteration, such as the frequent use of plosive consonants for Beren and liquid consonants for Lúthien, two central characters of the so-called poem *The Song of Beren and Lúthien* (Tolkien 2011, 193). This meticulous analysis demonstrates how Tolkien subtly enhances the narrative's emotional tone through alliteration. James Shelton (2018) examines Tolkien's adaptation of alliterative verse in *The Lord of the Rings*, particularly in Éomer's speech during the *Battle of Pelennor Fields.* Shelton argues that Tolkien uses this poetic form to re-contextualize the heroic ethos of Anglo-Saxon culture, adapting it for a modern audience. Finally, T.S. Sudell (2016) provides an in-depth study of Tolkien's *The Fall of Arthur*, highlighting it as a key work in the twentieth-century revival of Old English meter. Sudell positions this poem within the broader alliterative tradition, noting how its Arthurian subject matter allows Tolkien to extend the legacy of medieval verse into the modern literary canon. By maintaining the structure and themes of Old English poetry, Tolkien's *The Fall of Arthur* demonstrates his dedication to the continuity of alliterative verse while also contributing to its resurgence in modern poetry. These studies collectively underscore the significance of Tolkien's engagement with alliterative verse, not only as a scholar but also as a creative writer.

2.2.2 Use of Kennings

Kennings are metaphorical expressions prominent in Old Norse and Old English poetry, functioning as descriptive substitutes for simpler nouns. Traditionally defined as compound words or phrases that metaphorically describe an object or concept (Orchard 2003, 69), kennings are used in poetic language to add layers of meaning. However, the understanding of what constitutes a kenning has evolved over time, with scholars offering various interpretations. Rudolf Meissner defined kennings as compound expressions where one element metaphorically stands for another (Meissner 1921, 45). For example, terms like "whale-road" for sea and "sky-candle" for sun demonstrate the function of kennings as kind of metaphors. Meissner's

definition emphasizes their decorative and descriptive role rather than deepening into interpretive complexity. In contrast, Andreas Heusler, in his review of Meissner's work, presents a more intricate view, arguing that a kenning is not simply a metaphor but a two-part figure that depends heavily on context (Heusler 1922, 128). According to Heusler, a kenning involves a metaphorical base (B) and an "ablenkenden determinant" (C) that helps bridge the gap between the metaphorical expression and its referent (A). For instance, in the kenning "*sæ-hengest*" (sea-horse), the base "horse" (B) is clarified by the determinant "sea" (C) to refer to a "ship" (A). This definition highlights the kenning's interpretive complexity, engaging the reader to decode its meaning. In modern scholarship, the definition has broadened. Edith Marold offers a more comprehensive perspective, defining kennings as metaphorical expressions that enrich poetry by drawing on shared cultural references (Marold 2012, lxx). Unlike Heusler, the modern perspective focuses less on structural analysis and more on the figurative and evocative nature of kennings. Thus, while Heusler sees kennings as interpretive puzzles, the modern approach emphasizes their role in refining the aesthetic and cultural depth of Germanic poetry.

Kennings in *Beowulf* are a central feature of the poem's style and have been extensively studied for their contribution to the richness of Old English poetic language (Orchard 1997, 102; Swanton 1997, 55). These metaphorical compounds provide vivid, indirect descriptions that enhance the imagery and atmosphere of the text. Frequently discussed examples include *hron-rād* (whale-road) to signify the sea (Mitchell 2017, line 10) and *lyft-floga* (flyer through the air) for the dragon (Mitchell 2017, line 2315). Other kennings, such as *hond-gemōta* (hand-meeting) for a battle (Mitchell 2017, lines 1526 and 2355) and *sinces-brytta* (dispenser of treasure) for a generous king (Beowulf, line 607), add depth to the narrative. These expressions serve multiple purposes: enhancing imagery and symbolism, aiding the poem's alliteration and meter, and conveying cultural values and shared knowledge. For instance, the kenning *goldwine gumena* (gold-friend of men) emphasizes the ideal of a king as a provider and protector, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between a leader and his followers (Orchard 1997, 109). Additionally, *Beowulf* employs personal name kennings to emphasize lineage and honor, as seen in *Beowulf, bearn Ecgþeowes* (Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow) (Mitchell 2017, line 528) and *Hunferð, Ecglafes bearn*

(Hunferth, son of Ecglaf) (Mitchell 2017, line 499).

In his essay On Translating Beowulf, Tolkien noted how kennings serve not just to denote but to evoke the "vision of things," creating a brief yet striking image that enhances the poetic tone of Old English verse (Tolkien 1940, 58). Tolkien argued that translating kennings into mere literal names would strip the text of its evocative power, as the original phrases "flash a picture before us" in their brevity and richness (Tolkien 1940, 59). This technique appears in The Hobbit, particularly in Bilbo's dialogue with Smaug. Here, Bilbo engages in a series of riddles to keep his identity hidden while maintaining the dragon's curiosity. He uses metaphorical phrases like "friend of bears," "guest of eagles," "Ringwinner," "Luckwearer," and "Barrel-rider" (Tolkien 1937, 222). These kennings serve to obscure his identity while also painting vivid images that captivate Smaug. Tolkien also makes use of personal name kennings to emphasize lineage, similar to what we see in Beowulf. Examples like "Théoden, son of Thengel," "Thráin, son of Thrór," and "Frodo, son of Drogo" echo the tradition of ancestral references in Beowulf, where characters are identified by their lineage. These stylistic parallels between Beowulf and Tolkien's works could be further explored in future developments of this research, particularly through systematic analysis of kenning-like expressions and naming conventions.

2.2.3 The Impression of Depth

Among the stylistic connections between *Beowulf* and Tolkien's work, one of the most renowned aesthetic qualities of the works is the "impression of depth." In *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, Tolkien remarked that *Beowulf*

> must have succeeded admirably in creating in the minds of the poet's contemporaries the illusion of surveying a past, pagan but noble and fraught with a deep significance—a past that itself had depth and reached backward into a dark antiquity of sorrow. This impression of depth is an effect and a justification of the use of episodes and allusions to old tales, mostly darker, more pagan, and desperate than the foreground.
>
> (Tolkien 2006, 27).

Tolkien admired how *Beowulf* was rooted in tales that preceded the poet's time, extending beyond the poet's own awareness (Tolkien 2006, 72). Over time, scholars have identified this same quality in Tolkien's works. Shippey, for instance, praised

Tolkien's ability to create a coherent, consistent, and captivating world that is merely hinted at (Shippey 2003, 228). Tolkien himself was aware of the fascination in *The Lord of the Rings*, which stemmed from "glimpses of a larger history in the background." This concern is evident in a letter, where Tolkien expressed hesitation about publishing *The Silmarillion* alongside *The Lord of the Rings* because revealing too much of the backstory might diminish the sense of depth (Tolkien 2013, 143–145). In recent years, scholars have made efforts to determine the elements that contribute to this impression of depth. Drout, Hitotsubashi, and Scavera identified several key factors: (1) the creation of a vast background for the imagined world, (2) casual and often incomplete allusions to this background, (3) logical inconsistencies within the stories, and (4) variations in style across different sections of the text (Drout, Hitotsubashi, and Scavera 2014, 167–211).

Both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* exemplify the effect of the "impression of depth" in similar narrative moments. In the introductions of both works, the ancestral backgrounds of King Hrothgar and Frodo Baggins are explored in detail. In *Beowulf*, the account of King Hrothgar's dynasty begins immediately after the opening lines of the poem:

> *HWÆT: WE GAR-DENA IN GEARDAGUM*
> *þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon.*
> *Hu ða æþelingas elle(n) fremedon!*
> (lines 1-3)

> Of the strength of the spear-Danes in days gone by,
> We have heard, and of their hero-kings:
> The prodigious deeds those princes performed!
> (Mitchell 2017, lines 1-3)

This is followed by a recounting of the life of Scyld Scefing, from his early years to his boat-burial. We then learn of his son Beow, known for his generosity as a ruler, and of his descendants, Healfdene, and finally King Hrothgar, who is the reigning king during the events of the poem. Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, the story begins with an extended account of Frodo Baggins's family history. It is Ham Gamgee, Sam's father, who spreads rumours about Frodo's ancestors. The narrative delves into the story of Frodo's father, Drogo Baggins, and his mother, Primula Brandybuck,

recounting their death by drowning. Tolkien highlights the Hobbits' fascination with genealogy:

> ‘Drowned?’ said several voices. They had heard this and other darker rumors before, of course, but Hobbits have a passion for family histories, and they were eager to hear it again. (Tolkien 2011, 23)

Another recurring narrative motif in both works, which contributes to the impression of depth, is the gathering of characters to share old tales—often by a hearth. In *Beowulf*, after the defeat of Grendel, a warrior in Hrothgar’s hall sings of Siegmund, the dragon-slayer. This moment is significant because it connects to ancient mythic traditions that long predate the *Beowulf* poet. The introduction to this passage emphasizes the warriors' interest in composing and listening to tales rooted in ancient lore:

> *Hwilum cyninges þegn*
> *guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,*
> *se ðe ealfela ealdgesegena*
> *worn gemunde; word oþer fand*
> *soðe gebunden. Secg eft ongan*
> *sið Beowulfes snyttrum |styrian,*
> *7 on sped wrecan spel gerade,*
> *wordum wrixlan*.
> (lines 867-874)

> At times a warrior gifted with words,
> Who kept in his memory many ancient
> tales and sagas, composed a new song
> In praise of Beowulf’s brilliant deed.
> (Mitchell 2017, lines 826-829)

Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, the telling of old tales around a fire is depicted as a cherished tradition, especially among the Elves. In *Book II, Chapter 1: Many Meetings*, Frodo and Bilbo gather with the Elves in Rivendell's "Hall of Fire," a space dedicated to the singing of poetry and ancient stories. Here, Tolkien evokes the atmosphere of the gathering by hinting at the "songs of the Blessed Realm" that are sung "many times tonight" (Tolkien 2011, 238). It is remarkable how Bilbo himself

comments on the Elves' love for their stories: "They seem to like them as much as food, or more" (Tolkien, 237).

A final narrative moment in both works that contributes to the impression of depth is the introduction of ancient artifacts. In *Beowulf*, a crucial example occurs when Beowulf discovers an ancient sword in Grendel's mother's lair. During their battle, Beowulf loses his own weapon but finds a "huge and ancient" (Mitchell, line 1663) sword hanging on the wall. The poet hints at the origins of the sword, describing it as an "ancient smith's work" (Mitchell, line 1678) and alluding to a "giant's forge" (Mitchell, line 1679). Furthermore, in the description of the sword's hilt, the poet refers to inscriptions that speak of an unnamed ancient hero who once wielded the blade:

> *Swa wæs on ðæm scen(num) sciran goldes,*
> *þurh runstafas rihte (ge)mearcod,*
> *geseted 7 gesæd, hwam þæt sweo(rd) geworht,*
> *irena cyst ærest wære,*
> *w(reo)þenhilt 7 wyrmfah.*
> (lines 1694-1698)

> Upon the elaborate golden blade-guard
> with its fine scrollwork and serpentine patterns,
> in runic letters carefully written
> there was also the name of the ancient hero
> for whom this mighty sword had been made.
> (Mitchell, lines 1694-1698)

Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings* (*Book II, Chapter 3: The Ring Goes South*), Tolkien provides a rich history behind the sword that Aragorn receives from Elrond before the departure of the Fellowship:

> The Sword of Elendil was forged anew by Elvish smiths, and on its blade was traced a device of seven stars set between the crescent Moon and the rayed Sun, and about them were written many runes; for Aragorn son of Arathorn was going to war upon the marches of Mordor. Very bright was that sword when it was made whole again; the light of the sun shone redly in it, and the light of the moon shone cold, and its edge was hard and keen. And Aragorn gave it a new name and called it Andúril, Flame of the West. (Tolkien 2011, 277)

Like Beowulf's sword, Aragorn's blade is an ancient artifact with ancient history. Originally wielded by Elendil, it was reforged by Elvish smiths for Aragorn's use. The runic inscriptions on its blade deepen its connection to a long-forgotten past.

2.2.4 Elegiac Tone and Old English Elegies

In recent years, scholars have noted growing skepticism regarding the definition of the Old English elegy, with some arguing that it should not be considered an objective category (Battles 2014). Nevertheless, significant research has been conducted on this topic, making it possible to identify some foundational elements that clarify what is meant by the term "Old English elegy." Traditionally, scholars attempted to group Old English poems based on specific recurring themes: exile, the loss of loved ones, physical hardship, and reflections on the inevitability of death (Pilch 1964). More recent studies, however, have suggested that elegies are not solely defined by their themes but also by distinct formal characteristics, including monologue structure, a conventional introduction of the speaker, gnomic conclusions, and the repetition of key phrases or even entire lines. Occasionally, rhyme may also be present (Klinck 2001). Scholars now believe that what truly characterizes an elegy is a combination of thematic and formal elements, where the presence of some or all of these features defines the genre (Klinck 2001). In this context, the term "Old English elegy" is conventionally applied to certain poems found in the *Exeter Book*, specifically the following nine: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Rhyming Poem*, *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Resignation* (often limited to the second half, known as 'Resignation B'), *The Husband's Message*, and *The Ruin* (Klinck 2014). Similarly, scholars have argued that certain passages within *Beowulf* can be considered elegiac (Klinck 2014). One such passage, often referred to as "the lament of the last survivor" (lines 2247–2266), recounts the sorrow of the last member of a once-powerful tribe that possessed the dragon's treasure. Here, the theme of elegy is evident as the sole survivor mourns the loss of his companions, whose deaths remain unexplained. The man's lament captures the desolation left in the wake of their absence:

Næs hearpan wyn,
gomen gleobeames, ne god hafoc
geond sæl swingeð, ne se swifta mearh

burhstede beateð. Bea(lo)cwealm hafað
fela feorhcynna fo(rð) onsended."
(lines 2262-2266)

No longer is there delight from the harp,
Surges of joy from the singing wood;
No well-trained hawk now flies through the hall,
And the swift horse does not stamp in the courtyard.
Savage death has silenced them all.
(Mitchell 2017, lines 2179–2183)

Another passage often regarded as elegiac is known as the "Bereaved Father" episode. In this brief but poignant scene, a father grieves the death of his son, reflecting on the emptiness left behind:

Gesyhð sorhcearig on his suna bure
winsele westne, windge reste
reote berofene. Ridend swefað,
hæleð in hoðman. Nis þær hearpan sweg,
gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iu wæron."
"GEwiteð þonne on sealman, sorhleoð gæleð,
an æfter anum. Þuhte him eall to rum,
wongas 7 wicstede.
(lines 2455-2462)

He looks at his son's house and sees, heartbroken,
the abandoned beer-hall, the windswept rooms
that are now desolate; the nobles sleep
under the earth; there is no harp music,
no joy in the homestead as there once was.
He enters the bedroom, uttering his grief,
one groan after groan, and now
it seems to him there is too much space
in his fields and household.
(Mitchell 2017, lines 2455-2463)

Both of these passages evoke a deep sense of loss and desolation, underscoring the elegiac qualities present in the epic.

The presence of elegiac themes is also prevalent in Tolkien's work, which has been widely studied by scholars (Leigh 2006, Lee 1978, Patrice 2004). In particular, *The Lord of the Rings* features several poetic passages that fit the definition of an elegy. One prominent example appears in Book 1, Chapter 11, “A Knife in the Dark,” where Aragorn recites a poem often referred to as the "Song of Beren and Lúthien." He shares this tale with the hobbits as they rest by a fire on Weathertop during their journey to Rivendell. After repeated requests from the hobbits, Aragorn introduces the song with these words:

> ‘I will tell you the tale of Tinúviel,’ said Strider, ‘in brief—for it is a long tale of which the end is not known; and there are none now, except Elrond, that remember it aright as it was told of old. It is a fair tale, though it is sad, as are all the tales of Middle-earth, and yet it may lift up your hearts.’ (Tolkien 2011, 193)

The tale recounts the story of Beren, a mortal man, and Lúthien Tinúviel, the daughter of an Elven king. Their love story is filled with tragedy, as Beren and Lúthien face great trials to be together. Despite their eventual triumph, the sorrowful undertone remains, as Beren, being mortal, is destined to die, while Lúthien must choose to abandon her immortality to remain by his side. This conclusion, marked by sacrifice and loss, embodies the essence of an elegy, reflecting on themes of love, mortality, and the passage of time.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the deep connections between *Beowulf* and J.R.R. Tolkien’s works, emphasizing the influence of the Old English poem on Tolkien’s narrative structures and literary style. Building on the historical and literary contexts presented in the previous chapter, and considering Tolkien’s background in Germanic philology, it has been shown how these cultural and intellectual frameworks shaped his creative output. Thematic parallels—including monsters, heroic ideals, and cultural practices—reveal recurring motifs that link *Beowulf* and Tolkien’s Middle-earth. The final section examined stylistic elements such as alliterative verse, kennings, and the impression of depth, demonstrating how Tolkien drew from the poetic traditions of *Beowulf* to craft

narratives of enduring richness. By synthesizing historical, thematic, and stylistic perspectives, this chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding the extent and nature of the relationship between *Beowulf* and Tolkien's legendarium. The findings also affirm the scholarly relevance of this comparative approach and support further investigation in the following chapters, which will expand on these initial parallels.

CHAPTER THREE
Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted for the comparative analysis of *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* based on the themes of gift giving, singing, and burials. The work is grounded in a multi-step process that combines traditional philological methods—such as the critical preparation and structural segmentation of the texts—with digital tools for encoding, annotation, and data analysis. The chapter is divided into four main sections. Section 3.1 describes the creation of the two digital corpora, including their digitization, XML-TEI encoding, normalization and structural segmentation. Section 3.2 explains the annotation model and criteria used to identify and classify thematic events across both texts. Section 3.3 presents the analytical workflow and tools employed to extract and interpret patterns within the data. Finally, Section 3.4 documents the development of a custom corpus viewer, designed to support navigation, filtering and contextual analysis of the annotated corpora. Together, these steps establish a rigorous, transparent and replicable foundation for the comparative study presented in the following chapters.

3.1 Corpora Creation

3.1.1 Scope of the Corpora

This study is based on two complete texts: *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Despite their considerable differences in language, genre and historical period, both works are treated as full corpora to ensure a coherent and systematic comparison. The decision to analyse the entire texts, rather than isolated excerpts, reflects the need to trace thematic recurrences, stylistic patterns and narrative structures across each work as a whole. The choice to compare *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* is grounded in the strong thematic and stylistic connections between the two works, as explored in Chapter 2, *Thematic and Stylistic Parallels between Beowulf and Tolkien's Works.* Tolkien's deep familiarity with *Beowulf*—as a philologist, translator, and literary critic—informed his creative process and left a clear imprint on the construction of Middle-earth. As discussed in Chapter Two and noted by scholars such as Shippey (2003), Flieger (2002), and Fimi (2009), recurring motifs such as heroic gift-giving,

the cultural role of singing and the ritual significance of burials reflect core values of the Germanic world and are central to both texts. Selecting these two works allows for a focused investigation into how Tolkien reinterpreted traditional narrative elements from *Beowulf* within a modern literary epic.

3.1.2 Source Material

The two texts were acquired and prepared through different methods, depending on the availability and nature of the original sources. While *Beowulf* was accessed in an already digitized format, *The Lord of the Rings* required full digital transcription. The *Beowulf* text was obtained from *Electronic Beowulf*, Fourth Edition[21] (Kiernan 2014), a freely accessible online resource offering a fully digitized version of the poem based on a scholarly critical edition. For this project, only the Old English transcription was used. The text was copied directly from the online edition, with minimal adjustments: manuscript foliation and line numbering were removed to simplify later processing and markup. A minor inconsistency in the division numbering—where the sequence skips from 23 to 25—was also corrected to ensure structural continuity. The edition was selected for its philological reliability, accessibility and suitability for digital encoding.

The Lord of the Rings was digitized from the 2011 HarperCollins paperback edition, chosen for its stability, clarity and widespread availability. The process began with OCR (Optical Character Recognition) of the printed volumes, followed by extensive post-processing using Python scripts to clean, structure and prepare the text for encoding and analysis. The body of the narrative was reproduced page by page, line by line, and word by word, while all paratextual material—such as prefaces, appendices, and editorial notes—was excluded. This approach ensured a faithful representation of the text and allowed for precise control over structural segmentation. A printed edition was preferred over existing eBook versions to preserve the original pagination and line structure, which are essential for consistent markup, token identification, and position-based analysis. The consistency and stability of this edition, along with the practical manageability of the printed format, made it particularly suitable for manual digitization and structural markup.

[21] Electronic Beowulf https://ebeowulf.uky.edu/ Accessed 14 June, 2025.

3.1.4 Text Normalization

Before encoding and annotation, both texts underwent a process of normalization to ensure structural consistency and eliminate irregularities introduced during acquisition or transcription. This step was essential to prepare the corpora for reliable tokenization, markup and automated analysis.

For *Beowulf*, normalization focused on ensuring textual cleanliness and consistency without altering the original linguistic features of the edition. The Old English transcription was preserved in its original orthography, including Anglo-Saxon characters, and the punctuation provided in the edition was retained. The text was kept in verse form, with one line per verse, preserving the poem's original structure. Python scripts were used to automate several preprocessing steps, including the removal of manuscript foliation, deletion of line numbers, elimination of tab characters, and correction of double spaces. These double spaces often appeared at the caesura in verse lines; however, they were removed in order to ensure consistent tokenization and avoid misinterpretation during automated analysis. Capitalization and editorial punctuation were left unchanged. These automated operations allowed for an efficient cleanup of the digital text, ensuring its readiness for structural encoding and computational analysis. A line-level identifier was added at the beginning of each line (e.g., 1., 2.) to facilitate subsequent processing. When a word appeared multiple times within the same line, subscript numbers were added to each instance to ensure unique token identification. An example of the normalized *Beowulf* layout appears below:

```
1    HWÆT! WE GAR-DENA IN GEARDAGUM
2    þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon.
3    hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon!
4    Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
5    monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah,
```

Example 3 – Excerpt from the normalized Beowulf text

For *The Lord of the Rings*, normalization was a crucial step following the OCR-based transcription of the printed text. The original orthography and punctuation were preserved as faithfully as possible; however, italicized text—such as emphases or foreign names—could not be visually reproduced in plain text. Numerous OCR-related

errors were corrected, particularly misplaced diacritics in names such as *Théoden*, *Éomer*, and *Éowyn*, as well as character misrecognitions (e.g., *Glóin* appearing as *Gl6in*). Capitalization was also standardized across the corpus to maintain consistency. Python scripts were used to automate cleaning tasks, including the correction of diacritics, name variants, and residual OCR noise. Structural consistency was preserved by maintaining the same page and line divisions as in the original printed edition. Each line of the digital text corresponds exactly to a line in the book, and all words retain their original order and position. To facilitate token-level operations, a custom line-level identifier was added at the beginning of each line (e.g., 21.1, 21.2), indicating page and line number. As with *Beowulf*, subscript numbers were used to disambiguate repeated words within a single line. An example of the normalized *The Lord of the Rings* layout appears below:

```
19.0    Book One
21.0    Chapter One: A Long-expected Party
21.1    When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced
that he would shortly
21.2    be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with
a party of special
21.3    magnificence, there was much talk and
excitement in Hobbiton.
21.4    Bilbo was very rich and very peculiar, and had
been the wonder of
21.5    the Shire for sixty years, ever since his
remarkable disappearance and
21.6    unexpected return. The riches he had brought
back from his travels
```

Example 4 – Excerpt from the normalized The Lord of the Rings text

The text normalization strategy ensured that both texts were consistently formatted and cleaned, making them suitable for the next step: encoding the corpora in XML using the TEI guidelines.

3.1.3 Encoding Format

After text normalization, both texts were encoded using the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) guidelines[22], an XML-based standard widely adopted in the field of digital philology (Driscoll and Pierazzo 2016). The TEI provides a flexible and interoperable framework for representing textual structure, making it particularly suitable for projects that involve close textual analysis and comparison. Adopting a TEI-based approach ensures transparency, compatibility with existing tools and long-term sustainability of the data. A uniform encoding structure was applied to both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, despite their differences in genre and layout. By using the same TEI-based framework for both texts, it was possible to streamline the segmentation process and maintain consistency in the subsequent stages of annotation and analysis. This approach facilitated the comparison of structural elements across the corpora, simplified the automation of extraction scripts and enabled the use of a shared visualization model in the corpus viewer.

In *Beowulf*, the text was encoded using a minimal yet consistent TEI structure tailored to the needs of the project. The poem is contained within a single `<div>` element, and each line is introduced by a `<lb n="x"/>` milestone element, followed by a sequence of `<w>` elements identifying individual tokens. Although the TEI guidelines recommend the use of `<l>` for encoding verse, the decision to use `<lb>` was deliberate: it allowed for a linear, non-nested structure, avoiding overlaps with word-level annotations and simplifying integration with the tokenization and analysis pipeline. Similarly, a `<p>` container was used—despite *Beowulf* being a poetic text—strictly for structural convenience, without implying prose formatting. These adaptations highlight a pragmatic approach that prioritizes computational functionality over strict adherence to TEI guidelines considering the specific requirements of the corpus viewer and analytical tools. Each token was assigned a unique `xml:id` following the pattern `wX.Y`, where `X` refers to the line number and `Y` to the word's position within that line. In cases where a word appeared multiple times in the same line, a subscript numeral was added to guarantee uniqueness. The final tokenized corpus of *Beowulf* contains 17,372 tokens, each precisely traceable and aligned with

[22] TEI Guidelines https://tei-c.org/guidelines/

the external annotation layers used for the project. An example of the encoded structure for the opening lines is shown below:

```
<div n="0">
  <p>
    <lb n="1"/>
    <w xml:id="w1.1">HWÆT:</w>
    <w xml:id="w1.2">WE</w>
    <w xml:id="w1.3">GAR-DENA</w>
    <w xml:id="w1.4">IN</w>
    <w xml:id="w1.5">GEARDAGUM</w>
    <lb n="2"/>
    <w xml:id="w2.1">þeodcyninga</w>
    <w xml:id="w2.2">þrym</w>
    <w xml:id="w2.3">gefrunon.</w>
  </p>
</div>
```

Example 1 – Encoded lines from Beowulf (TEI-XML)

In *The Lord of the Rings*, a hierarchical TEI structure was adopted to reflect the book's internal organization. The text is divided first by `<div type="book">` and then by `<div type="chapter">`, each marked with a `<head>` element containing the respective title. Within chapters, the narrative is encoded in `<p>` blocks, and line breaks corresponding to the printed edition are marked using `<lb n="x"/>`. The `<lb/>` element was used to mark line breaks as they appear in the printed edition, in order to preserve the visual layout of the page—an essential feature for precise token tracking and for accurate rendering in the corpus viewer. Each word is enclosed in a `<w>` element and assigned a unique `xml:id` of the form `wX.Y.Z`, where `X` indicates the page number, `Y` the line number, and `Z` the word's position within that line (e.g., `w21.2.5` corresponds to page 21, line 2, word 5). This consistent and location-aware encoding scheme ensured full alignment between the digital text and its printed source. As with *Beowulf*, repeated words within the same line were disambiguated through the addition of subscript numerals. The final tokenized corpus of *The Lord of the Rings* contains 467,167 tokens, each uniquely traceable and structurally anchored for

subsequent annotation, filtering and analysis. An example of the encoded structure appears below:

```
<div type="book">
  <pb n="21"/>
  <head>Book One</head>
  <div type="chapter">
    <pb n="21"/>
    <head>Chapter One: A Long-expected Party</head>
    <p>
      <lb n="1"/>
      <w xml:id="w21.1.1">When</w>
      <w xml:id="w21.1.2">Mr.</w>
      <w xml:id="w21.1.3">Bilbo</w>
      <w xml:id="w21.1.4">Baggins</w>
      <w xml:id="w21.1.5">of</w>
      <w xml:id="w21.1.6">Bag</w>
      <w xml:id="w21.1.7">End</w>
      <w xml:id="w21.1.8">announced</w>
    </p>
  </div>
</div>
```

Example 2 – Encoded lines from The Lord of the Rings (TEI-XML)

By adopting a consistent TEI-based encoding framework across both corpora, the project established a solid foundation for all subsequent stages of processing. The structural markup was tailored to the specific features of each text while maintaining interoperability and analytical precision. This uniformity enabled efficient tokenization, reliable annotation alignment and seamless integration into the corpus viewer and analysis tools.

3.2 Annotations

3.2.1 Objectives of the Annotations

The annotation phase constituted a critical methodological step in bridging the encoded texts with their comparative analysis. By systematically identifying key narrative elements in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the process made it possible to extract structured information from otherwise unstructured prose and verse. This enabled both thematic exploration and computational analysis of how specific narrative patterns are developed and contextualized within each work.

The analysis focused on three recurring narrative themes: gift giving, singing, and burials. These were selected for their prominence in early Germanic literature and their cultural relevance within the heroic and mythological framework of *Beowulf*. At the same time, they are reimagined in *The Lord of the Rings*, where Tolkien adapts traditional elements to serve new narrative and ethical functions. Tracing these themes across both texts allows for an in-depth examination of how inherited literary patterns are transformed within a modern epic context.

The annotation process supported a threefold comparative investigation—thematic, quantitative and narrative-functional. Thematically, it enabled a systematic comparison of how each motif is represented across the two texts. Quantitatively, it provided measurable data such as frequencies, distributions, and co-occurrences. Functionally, it offered insights into how these themes contribute to plot development, social dynamics and the articulation of cultural values.

Finally, the annotations served as an interface between textual content and digital tools. Although recorded externally in spreadsheet format, they were fully aligned with the segmented XML texts and structured to interact seamlessly with Python-based scripts and the interactive corpus viewer. This alignment ensured that each annotation could be filtered, visualized, and explored through both interpretive and computational methods.

3.2.2 Annotation Model

The annotation model adopted in this project is primarily event-based, structured around the identification and description of individual narrative events. Each annotation corresponds to a discrete occurrence of one of the selected themes—gift

giving, singing, or burials—and captures the entities involved, their roles, and the surrounding textual context. The model was designed to balance clarity, flexibility, and analytical utility, enabling both thematic comparison and quantitative analysis across texts and categories. While not based on a pre-existing annotation framework, the structure draws on principles from event semantics (Pustejovsky 1998) and digital philology, adapted to suit the narrative and cultural dimensions of the selected themes.

Each annotated event is represented as a single row in a structured spreadsheet, with dedicated columns capturing both the narrative elements and their classification. The annotation structure is consistent across the three themes—gift giving, singing, and burials—while adapting to the specific features of each. All files include a unique id for the event, a quotation field that defines the window of reference within the source text, and a set of columns for annotating the relevant entities.

- Gift Giving – Fields
    - `id, n, quotation`
    - `giver_ref, giver_quoted, giver_NE, giver_NN, giver_category`
    - `gift_ref, gift_quoted, gift, gift_category`
    - `recipient_ref, recipient_quoted, recipient_NE, recipient_NN, recipient_category`
- Singing – Fields
    - `id, n, quotation`
    - `singer_ref, singer_quoted, singer_NE, singer_NN, singer_category`
    - `content`
- Burials – Fields
    - `id, n, quotation`
    - `deceased_ref, deceased_quoted, deceased_NE, deceased_NN, deceased_category`
    - `burialtype_ref, burialtype_quoted, burialtype, burialtype_category`
    - `object_ref, object_quoted, object, object_category`

To account for events involving multiple participants or components (e.g., several gifts or objects), a secondary field n was introduced to distinguish rows belonging to the same core event (`id`). In all three datasets, special characters such as hyphens (-) are

used to indicate missing data, and square brackets ([ ]) denote elements that are implicit rather than explicitly stated in the text. A summary of the field structure is provided here for clarity, while detailed explanations of each column, along with representative annotation samples, are included in Appendix A1 (*Sample Annotations*) and Appendix A2 (*Field Descriptions*).

Each annotated event includes one or more core entities that play a narrative or thematic role. These entities were selected based on their relevance to the thematic focus of the annotation and were recorded in a consistent and structured way across all datasets. For each entity, three levels of information were captured:

- a reference to the corresponding token in the XML (`*_ref`), used to link the entity to the exact position in the digital text;
- a quoted form (`*_quoted`), showing the textual expression used in the source;
- a semantic classification, including:
    - a normalized name (`*_NN`, normalized name, or `*_NE`, named entity), used for frequency and distribution analysis;
    - a category (`*_category`), used to group entities according to social or functional roles (e.g., *Rulers*, *Treasures*, *Poets*, *Boats*).

Depending on the theme, the entities annotated varied:

- Gift giving: `giver`, `gift`, and `recipient`;
- Singing: `singer` and `content` (theme of the song) ;
- Burials: `deceased`, `burial type` and `object`.

This structured approach ensured a high level of comparability and enabled precise filtering and quantitative exploration across the datasets.

To enable structured comparison between events, each entity was assigned a semantic category selected from a controlled list specific to each theme. These categories reflect the social, functional and symbolic roles of the entities involved, and were applied consistently across both corpora to support thematic grouping, filtering, and statistical analysis. The following is a compact overview of the categories used:

- People
  `Rulers, Heroes, Commoners, Poets, Good Supernaturals, Evil Supernaturals`

- Objects (Gifts or Grave Goods)
  `Treasures, Arms, Hospitality, Transports, Consorts, Jewels, Weapons`
- Burial Types
  `Mounds, Pyres, Boats, Eyot Mounds`
- Song Themes
  `Travel, Feasting, Nature, Tales, Lament, War, Myth, Enchantment`

All category labels were applied manually and documented in internal guidelines to ensure coherence throughout the annotation process. In ambiguous or implicit cases, the category was inferred based on narrative context and marked using square brackets (e.g., `[Rulers]`) in the dataset. Some categories required particular attention due to their interpretive ambiguity. For instance, the distinction between *Rulers* and *Heroes* was sometimes blurred, especially in cases where a character held political authority but also performed heroic deeds. In such situations, categorization was based on the dominant narrative function of the character within the event. These decisions were made consistently following internal guidelines and were marked explicitly in the dataset when inferred, using square brackets. A complete list of categories, including definitions and examples, is provided in Appendix A3 – Semantic Categories.

This annotation model was designed to balance formal structure and interpretive flexibility. By combining an event-based approach with detailed entity annotation and normalized semantic categories, it provided a consistent framework for capturing complex narrative elements across both texts. The resulting structure enabled both qualitative exploration and quantitative comparison of thematic phenomena within and across the two corpora.

3.2.3 Tools and Workflow

This section outlines the tools and procedures used to annotate the thematic content of *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. While the base texts were encoded in XML-TEI, the annotation process itself was conducted externally using spreadsheet files, in order to ensure flexibility, clarity and ease of interaction. The workflow was designed to be accessible and replicable, combining manual review and structured annotation with automated validation and data extraction. The ultimate goal was to create a set of consistent and analysable datasets aligned with the digital text and suitable for both interpretive and computational analysis.

The annotation was organized around three separate Excel files, one for each of the selected themes: gift giving, singing, and burials. Each file followed a consistent structure (as described in the previous section) and contained one row per event, along with all relevant entity information and semantic classifications. The spreadsheets served as the primary environment for annotating and reviewing events, allowing for easy manual editing, sorting, and filtering. External annotation also simplified the management of multiple thematic layers without overloading the XML structure. Each entry includes direct references (`*_ref`) to specific tokens in the XML corpus, ensuring precise alignment between annotation and textual source. This hybrid approach allowed the structural rigor of XML to coexist with the flexibility of spreadsheet-based work.

The annotation spreadsheets were created and managed using Microsoft Excel, which provided a familiar and efficient interface for manually entering and reviewing data. The structured layout of the files facilitated visual inspection, sorting by columns, and filtering by theme or category. While the annotation was performed manually, additional operations—such as data cleaning, normalization, and extraction—were automated using Python, particularly with the pandas library. These scripts were used to validate field consistency and prepare the data for quantitative analysis and visualization.

Each annotation was explicitly linked to the base text through token identifiers (`*_ref`) that correspond to `xml:id` attributes in the TEI-encoded corpora. This alignment ensured that every annotated entity could be precisely located within the digital text, enabling seamless integration between the annotation layer and the source. The same identifiers were also used to dynamically render the annotations in a dedicated corpus viewer, developed as part of this project. This tool displays quotations and highlights annotated entities directly within their narrative context, supporting both human-readable exploration and machine-driven processing. Further details on its implementation are provided in Section 3.4 – Corpus View.

This workflow, combining manual annotation in spreadsheets with automated processing through Python, ensured a balance between interpretive precision and computational scalability. The clear separation between the encoded text and the

annotation layer, combined with token-level interoperability, laid the foundation for consistent, replicable and flexible analysis across all stages of the project.

3.2.4 Annotation Scope and Criteria

The annotation process was applied to the entirety of both texts, covering all chapters of *The Lord of the Rings* and the full poem of *Beowulf*. Rather than limiting the analysis to selected excerpts or well-known episodes, the project aimed to identify and record every relevant instance of gift giving, singing, and burials across the full narrative arc of each work. This exhaustive approach was chosen to ensure that the resulting data would reflect not only prominent or thematically dense passages, but also more subtle or marginal occurrences that contribute to the overall representation of each theme. By adopting a comprehensive scope, the project makes it possible to track narrative patterns, recurrences, and variations across different contexts, characters, and structural positions within the texts.

In order to ensure consistency across both texts, a clear set of criteria was adopted to define which events were eligible for annotation. Although the specific features vary depending on the theme, the underlying principle remains the same: an event must include at least the core elements necessary to reconstruct its narrative and thematic function. For gift giving, this typically required the presence of a giver, a gift, and a recipient. When one of these elements was missing but clearly implied by the context—for example, when the recipient of a gift was not named but could be reasonably inferred—it was still annotated, with the missing element marked using square brackets (e.g., `[recipient]`). Cases involving abstract or purely symbolic references to giving, with no concrete narrative action, were excluded. Singing events were annotated when a singer could be identified and the theme or content of the song was either explicit or clearly suggested. Burial events required at minimum the presence of a deceased individual and at least one additional burial element, such as a burial type or grave goods. Scenes of mourning or death that lacked any reference to burial practices were not included. These criteria were consistently applied throughout the annotation process in order to capture meaningful events while maintaining a uniform level of interpretive rigor across both corpora.

During the annotation process, several cases emerged in which one or more elements of an event were ambiguous, incomplete, or only implicitly present in the

text. To address these situations consistently, internal guidelines were developed and applied throughout the project. When a relevant entity—such as a recipient, singer, or burial type—was clearly implied but not explicitly mentioned, it was still annotated and marked using square brackets to signal the interpretive nature of the annotation. For example, in the episode where Gandalf distributes fireworks at Bilbo's birthday party, the recipients are not individually named, but it is evident from the context that he is giving them to the gathered hobbit-folk. In these cases, the recipient field contains `[Hobbit-folk]`, and the category is marked as `Commoners` to reflect a reconstructed group designation rather than a directly stated entity in the text.

In more complex or borderline cases, interpretive decisions were guided by narrative context and thematic coherence. If the status of an event remained unclear, it was included only when it contributed to the consistency and completeness of the dataset and when its annotation could be reasonably justified by parallel examples or internal consistency within the text. The aim was not to eliminate subjectivity entirely, but to make it visible and accountable, ensuring that interpretive choices were applied transparently and uniformly across both texts.

By establishing clear criteria for inclusion and adopting consistent strategies for handling ambiguity, the annotation process remained both rigorous and adaptable. This ensured that the resulting datasets reflect a faithful and analytically robust mapping of the selected themes across the entire narrative arc of both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

3.2.5 Annotation Challenges

The annotation process provided a crucial foundation for the comparative analysis of *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, enabling the structured identification of thematic elements across two very different narrative and linguistic traditions. Annotating both texts manually required multiple careful readings, particularly in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, whose length and narrative complexity posed a significant challenge. While some events had already been discussed in scholarly literature, many minor or context-dependent episodes could only be identified through close and comprehensive rereading.

A second challenge involved dealing with events in which one or more components were implicit rather than explicitly stated. In such cases, the missing

elements were reconstructed based on narrative context and marked using square brackets, making the interpretive nature of the annotation visible and traceable.

Assigning semantic categories to the annotated entities also required a degree of subjectivity. Fortunately, both texts share a similar structure of social roles—such as `Rulers`, `Heroes`, and `Commoners`—which facilitated cross-textual consistency. The only theme-specific expansion was the category of `Good` and `Evil Supernaturals`, used exclusively in *The Lord of the Rings*. Although the moral alignment of supernatural beings was generally clear, a few cases required interpretive judgement. For example, Gollum was annotated as a *Good Supernatural* when performing protective or generous actions toward Frodo and Sam (e.g., giving them the rabbit to eat on p. 655), and as an `Evil Supernatural` when his actions had harmful or deceptive intent (e.g., "offering" Frodo and Sam to Shelob on p. 726). Despite these challenges, the resulting annotation layer provides a reliable and coherent framework for both thematic exploration and comparative analysis across the two corpora.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Objectives and Scope of the Analysis

The annotated datasets served as the foundation for a comparative analysis of *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, aimed at uncovering how selected Germanic themes are represented, developed and transformed across the two works. By examining the distribution and function of gift giving, singing and burials within each text, the analysis sought to move beyond impressionistic comparisons and provide a structured, data-driven account of thematic recurrence and variation. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled a multifaceted reading of the corpora, combining measurable patterns with close textual interpretation.

The analysis pursued three main objectives. First, it aimed to identify and compare the frequency and distribution of events related to gift giving, singing, and burials in both texts. This made it possible to detect narrative concentrations, underrepresented motifs, and thematic imbalances between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Second, it sought to examine co-occurrence patterns—such as typical combinations of giver and gift categories, or recurring pairings of singer types and

song themes—in order to uncover culturally or narratively significant configurations. Third, it aimed to interpret the narrative and symbolic function of these events through selected case studies, shedding light on how Tolkien reworks or reimagines traditional Germanic motifs within a modern literary and moral framework.

The analysis draws on the thematic annotations described in Section 3.2, which cover all instances of gift giving, singing, and burials across both corpora. While each theme was annotated in a dedicated dataset, the structure of the files was kept uniform to facilitate comparison. The annotated categories—such as givers, singers, gifts, song themes, burial types, and grave goods—provide a consistent analytical layer from which both statistical and interpretive insights were derived. To support these goals, the annotated data were processed using Python scripts designed to extract, quantify, and visualize patterns across the corpora. The next section outlines the digital tools and workflow employed for this purpose, followed by a presentation of the results through both quantitative metrics and qualitative interpretation, structured around the three thematic domains.

3.3.2 Analytical Tools and Workflow

The purpose of this section is to describe the digital tools and computational methods used to process the annotated data and produce the results discussed in the analytical chapters that follow. While the overall approach combines both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, the tools themselves were primarily used to extract, organize, and visualize quantitative patterns across the two corpora.

These quantitative outputs—such as frequencies, distributions, and co-occurrences—served as the basis for identifying meaningful trends and thematic structures. The insights obtained through this process informed the selection of specific events and passages that are discussed in detail through qualitative analysis in the second part of each thematic chapter. The tools, in this sense, supported a workflow where quantitative exploration guided and contextualized interpretive close reading.

All data extraction and analysis tasks were carried out using Python, which offered the flexibility and scalability needed to process both XML-encoded texts and spreadsheet-based annotations. The core library used for data manipulation was

Pandas[23], which enabled the loading, cleaning, filtering, and aggregation of annotation data from Excel files.

For parsing the XML corpora, the ElementTree library was used to extract token-level information, such as xml:id attributes and structural segmentation. In the analysis phase, Matplotlib and Seaborn were employed to generate visualizations, including bar charts, distribution plots, and heatmaps. Scripts were structured to read from centralized paths and to produce reusable, reproducible outputs such as frequency tables, co-occurrence matrices, and graphical representations.

This modular and consistent setup allowed the same workflow to be applied systematically across both corpora (*Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*) and across all three themes (gift giving, singing, burials), with minimal adjustments to the underlying code.

The output generated through this workflow consisted of both numerical data and visual representations, each contributing to a clearer understanding of thematic patterns across the two texts. Tabular outputs included frequency counts—both absolute and relative—for events and for specific categories of givers, singers, gifts, burial types, and other entities. Additional tables captured co-occurrence data, allowing for the analysis of recurring combinations (such as particular types of givers with specific kinds of gifts).

In parallel, the scripts produced a set of visualizations that were used to support the discussion in the analytical chapters. These included bar charts showing the distribution of events, line graphs mapping their presence across narrative progression, and heatmaps highlighting intersections between different entity categories. The visual outputs not only made the data more accessible, but also helped reveal trends and contrasts that might otherwise remain obscured in raw tabular form.

The data analysis framework developed in this project enabled a systematic comparison of thematic patterns across *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, combining quantitative extraction with interpretive depth. All frequency tables, distribution data, and graphical visualizations generated during the analysis are collected in Appendix B

[23] Pandas https://pandas.pydata.org/

– Quantitative Outputs, which serves as a reference for the discussions presented in the analytical chapters.

3.4 Corpus Viewer

3.4.1 Objectives of the Corpus Viewer

Given the complexity and volume of the annotated data, a dedicated corpus viewer was developed to facilitate exploration, verification, and interpretation of the annotations. While the annotated corpora exist in structured XML and spreadsheet formats, these raw files are not easily accessible to users unfamiliar with markup languages or programmatic data analysis. Moreover, the thematic richness of the annotations—spanning three distinct domains and involving multiple annotated entities—required a clear, interactive interface that could make the data intelligible even outside of a computational context. Although fully functional, the viewer was developed and deployed for local use only. It is not available as a public web application, but it serves as an internal tool for navigating and validating the annotated corpora throughout the research process.

The primary goal of the corpus viewer was to make the annotated data accessible, navigable, and interpretable across all stages of the research. By offering a user-friendly interface, the tool allows for direct interaction with the annotations without requiring technical expertise in XML or Python. Users can filter events by thematic domain, search for keywords, and view each annotated instance alongside its full textual context, including relevant entities such as givers, gifts, recipients, singers or deceased individuals.

Beyond accessibility, the viewer ensures semantic clarity by explicitly displaying the categories assigned to each annotated entity, thus supporting both interpretive work and data validation. It also preserves the structural alignment between annotations and the base texts, rendering quotations according to their original layout (by page and line in *The Lord of the Rings*, by verse in *Beowulf*). This feature is essential for maintaining coherence with the segmentation used in the XML corpora and the analytical scripts. By combining interactivity, legibility and structural precision, the viewer bridges the gap between raw annotated data and meaningful interpretive analysis. The following section describes the layout and organization of the interface, illustrating how users interact with the corpora through a series of

selection menus, filters, and result displays. An example of the viewer's initial settings is provided in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Initial settings panel.
Selection of corpus (Beowulf or The Lord of the Rings) and thematic domain (gift giving, singing, burials) in the viewer interface.

3.4.2 Interface Structure and Functionalities

This section provides an overview of the structure and key functionalities of the corpus viewer. Designed to support both thematic exploration and data validation, the interface combines an intuitive layout with interactive filtering and structured textual display. The screen is divided into two main areas: a sidebar on the left that contains all the configuration options, and a central panel that displays the search results and detailed annotations. An overview of the settings and filter options available in the sidebar is shown in Figure 3.2.

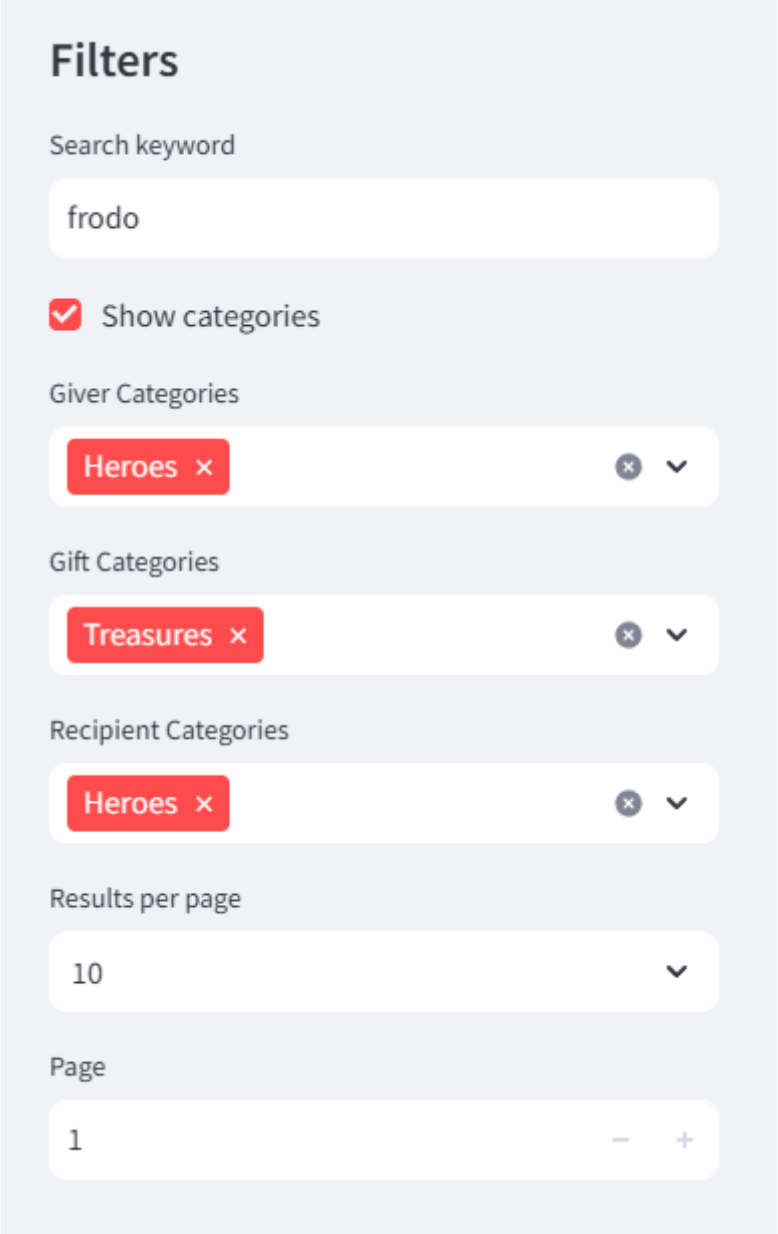


Figure 3.2: Sidebar with settings and filtering options.

The layout of the interface is structured to guide the user through a logical and efficient exploration of the corpora. On the left-hand side, the viewer presents a vertical sidebar where the user can select the corpus (*Beowulf* or *The Lord of the Rings*) and the thematic domain (*gift giving*, *singing*, or *burials*). This initial configuration filters the dataset to match the user's area of interest and dynamically loads the corresponding annotations. The central panel of the interface displays the results in tabular form. Each row corresponds to an annotated event and includes a unique identifier, a short excerpt from the text, and the main annotated entities. The interface was designed to provide

a clear overview of the data while also enabling users to delve into the details of each occurrence. This two-part structure—sidebar for selection and filtering, central area for results—ensures that users can easily navigate large sets of annotations while maintaining full control over the thematic scope and display preferences.

In addition to corpus and theme selection, the sidebar includes a set of interactive tools that allow users to filter and refine the displayed results. A keyword search bar enables full-text queries within the quotations, making it possible to retrieve specific events or lexical patterns of interest. Users can also choose whether to show or hide semantic categories, offering a cleaner or more information-rich view depending on the context of use. Further down, semantic filters allow the user to narrow the results based on the category of specific entities—such as limiting the view to events involving Rulers as givers, or to Objects as gifts. These filters are grouped by entity type and reflect the annotation schema introduced in Section 3.2. To support customized browsing, the interface also provides sorting options and a control to select how many results are displayed per page (10, 25, or 50). Together, these functionalities make it possible to interact with the corpus in a highly targeted way, facilitating both exploratory reading and structured analysis.

The main panel of the interface displays the annotated events in a clear, structured format. Each result includes a unique identifier, a brief quotation, and the key entities involved—such as giver, gift, and recipient for gift-giving events. This overview allows users to scan large portions of the annotated corpus quickly while retaining access to the essential semantic elements of each event. Clicking on any result expands the view to show a full quotation, with the relevant categorized explicitly. This detailed view maintains the original segmentation of the text: *The Lord of the Rings* is displayed by page and line, while *Beowulf* is rendered by verse, preserving the layout of the source material. Each line is introduced by its corresponding number, ensuring full traceability with the tokenized XML corpora used in the analysis. This dual-layer display—summary and full context—offers a balance between readability and depth, enabling both high-level browsing and close textual engagement. An example of a fully expanded annotation with highlighted entities is shown in Figure 3.3. The number of results (“Results found: 5”) reflects a filtered subset of the full dataset.

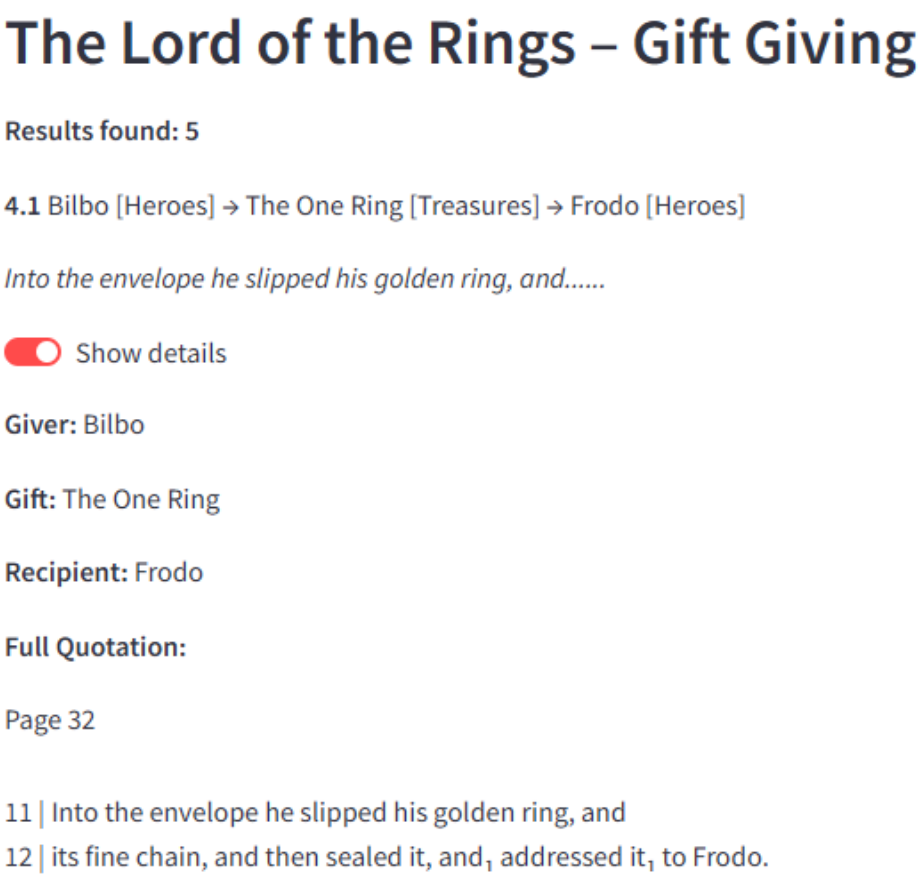


Figure 3.3: Full annotation display.

By combining configurable filters, structured annotation display, and faithful textual rendering, the viewer provides a powerful yet accessible tool for interacting with the corpora. It enables users to move seamlessly between abstract data and contextualized passages, supporting both exploratory investigation and targeted analysis. The following section outlines the technical implementation of the viewer, including the tools and libraries used to build the application and manage the annotated data.

3.4.5 Technical Implementation

This section outlines the technical framework behind the development of the corpus viewer. Built as a lightweight local web application, the viewer was designed to offer an intuitive interface for exploring the annotated data while maintaining a clear connection with the underlying XML-encoded corpora and spreadsheet-based annotations. The implementation prioritizes usability, modularity, and compatibility

with the broader data processing pipeline developed for this project.

The viewer was developed using Python as the core programming language, chosen for its versatility and integration with data analysis tools. The interface itself was implemented with Streamlit[24], an open-source Python framework that enables rapid development of interactive web applications. Streamlit made it possible to build a responsive and browser-accessible viewer without the need for front-end web programming. Data handling was managed with Pandas, which provided efficient loading, filtering, and structuring of the annotation datasets stored in Excel format. Additional Python modules, including xml.etree.ElementTree, were used to parse the XML-encoded corpora and align the annotations with the corresponding textual tokens. The codebase was modularized into custom scripts for parsing and rendering different types of events, ensuring clarity and ease of maintenance.

The annotated data were stored in separate Excel files, one for each theme (*gift giving*, *singing*, *burials*), and were loaded into the application using Pandas DataFrames. Upon selecting a corpus and a thematic domain, the corresponding dataset was dynamically imported and filtered in memory, allowing for efficient interaction without preloading all files.

Although the viewer does not render the full XML corpora directly, each annotation includes token references (xml:id values) that point to specific elements in the XML structure. These identifiers were used to extract and reconstruct the quotation window for each event, preserving the original segmentation of the text. Token indexing and alignment were handled via a custom parsing module that created a positional map of the XML tokens for each corpus. This setup ensured full **traceability** between the visualized annotations and the source texts, supporting both structural integrity and consistency with the analytical pipeline.

The interactive functionalities of the viewer were implemented using Streamlit widgets, which allow users to control filters, search inputs, and display settings in real time. Users can select a corpus and thematic domain, apply keyword searches, toggle the visibility of semantic categories, and filter results based on entity types. The interface reacts dynamically to every input, updating the results without requiring a full page reload.

[24] Streamlit https://streamlit.io/

For each result, the viewer displays both a short summary and a detailed view, which includes the full quotation and a clear indication of the annotated entities. These quotations are rendered line by line, following the segmentation of the original text: by page and line in *The Lord of the Rings*, and by verse in *Beowulf*. The layout preserves the position of each token and introduces a reference number at the beginning of each line to reflect the XML tokenization scheme.

Text formatting is handled using Streamlit's markdown features, ensuring visual clarity without relying on color or advanced styling. This approach guarantees a consistent reading experience while maintaining full alignment with the data model used for annotation and analysis.

The technical implementation of the viewer prioritized modularity, clarity and coherence with the overall workflow of the project. By combining Streamlit's interactivity with Python's data handling capabilities, the application offers a lightweight yet robust environment for navigating annotated corpora. Although the viewer was developed for local use only, its codebase remains fully accessible and adaptable. Possible improvements to the interface are discussed in the concluding chapter, along with a broader reflection on the strengths and limitations of the analytical framework.

3.5 Conclusions

The methodology adopted in this project was experimental in nature, combining traditional close reading with digital philology and data-driven analysis. At every stage—digitization, encoding, annotation, exploration, and visualization—choices were made with the aim of balancing interpretive depth and technical feasibility. While many of these decisions are open to debate, particular care was taken to document the reasoning behind them and to maintain full transparency regarding tools, criteria, and procedures. All scripts used throughout the workflow, from corpus preparation to data analysis and visualization, are archived and publicly accessible via the project's GitHub repository[25]. This ensures that the entire process is not only replicable but also open to review, extension, and reuse by other scholars working at the intersection of literary studies and digital methods.

[25] GitHub repository: https://github.com/marco-bozza/patterns-of-tradition.

CHAPTER FOUR
Gift Giving: A Comparative Analysis (Quantitative and Qualitative)

This chapter opens the core analytical section of the thesis and represents the first of three thematic comparisons between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, beginning with the motif of gift giving. These three narrative motifs—gift giving, singing, and burials—were selected for their cultural significance in early Germanic literature and for their narrative prominence in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Each motif reveals how social values are encoded in literary tradition and reimagined in Tolkien's modern mythology. As discussed in Chapter 2, scholarly literature highlights gift-giving as a ritual deeply embedded in Germanic heroic culture, closely tied to loyalty, leadership, and social cohesion (Bazelmans 2000; Hill 1982; Naismith 2016). In *Beowulf*, it appears as a royal prerogative but also extends to queens and warriors, reinforcing bonds of allegiance and succession. In Tolkien's works, the motif is reimagined through characters such as Galadriel, Bard, and Bilbo, who enact acts of generosity that are both symbolic and relational. These reinterpretations preserve the thematic core of reciprocity while expanding its scope to include new moral and narrative functions. Against this backdrop, the following analysis explores how gift-giving events are positioned in the narrative, and what social roles and symbolic meanings they carry in each text.

At the same time, this chapter introduces the analytical framework that is applied consistently throughout the analysis of the three motifs: gift giving, singing and burial practices. The comparative method adopted here combines quantitative and qualitative analyses to capture both large-scale structural patterns and fine-grained narrative meanings. The data are drawn from the custom-annotated corpora encoded in XML-TEI, as described in Chapter 3, Section 3.1, in which each thematic motif has been marked with relevant features such as participants, roles, object types, and narrative context. For gift-giving events, these include the giver, recipient, type of gift and categorical classifications (e.g., ruler, hero, supernatural being).

The analytical process follows a structured workflow. Data is extracted and processed using Python and the Pandas library, generating frequency tables and

relational mappings. These outputs are then visualized in the form of bar charts, distribution plots, and heatmaps, which highlight recurring patterns in how the motif is distributed across each narrative and how it varies across character types and thematic roles. This quantitative layer is essential for identifying where and how often gift-giving occurs, who participates and what is exchanged.

However, frequency alone cannot account for meaning. To address this, the second half of each chapter offers a qualitative analysis, focused on selected case studies. Through close reading, the chapter examines how specific gift-giving episodes function within the broader narrative: how they are framed, what values they express and what symbolic or ethical weight they carry. This dual method, quantitative overview followed by qualitative depth, allows for a subtle comparison that integrates measurable trends with interpretative insight. By applying this approach, the analysis uncovers not just how often gift giving appears, but what it reveals about the world each text constructs—addressing the broader research questions concerning the transformation of heroic motifs and cultural values across the two works.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

4.1.1 Distribution and Frequency of Gift-Giving Events

As a first step in the quantitative analysis, the distribution of gift-giving events across the narrative arc is examined to shed light on how both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* structure acts of generosity within their respective worlds. By examining how these events are spaced throughout the texts, we can identify key narrative clusters and thematic shifts.

The first graph (Figure 4.1) compares the relative frequency of gift-giving events across ten equal-sized textual segments, each representing 10% of the total tokens in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. This overview reveals notable structural differences between the two works. In *Beowulf*, gift-giving is concentrated in the later portions of the text, with a sharp peak in block 7. In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* displays a more distributed pattern, with a significant early peak in block 1 and moderate frequencies throughout the remaining segments.

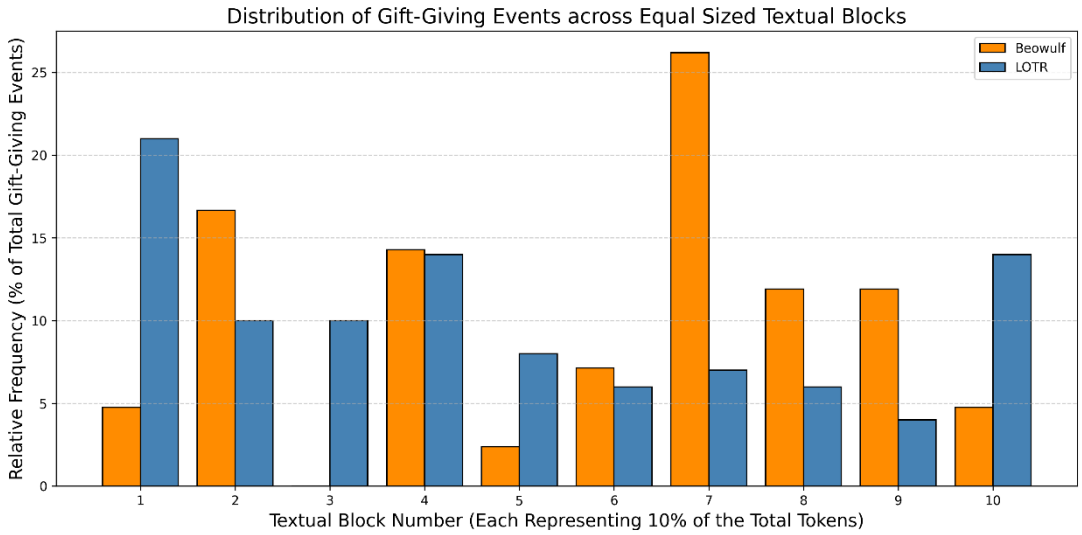


Figure 4.1: Distribution of Gift Giving Events across Equal Sized Textual Blocks

In *Beowulf*, the relative frequency of gift-giving events displays three significant peaks across the textual progression, located in blocks 2, 4, and 7 of the decile-based distribution (Figure 4.2). These correspond to blocks 11–19, 31–37, and 60–70 in the finer-grained 1% segmentation (Figure X). Each peak aligns closely with a distinct narrative context in the poem and reflects different social and symbolic dimensions of gift exchange.

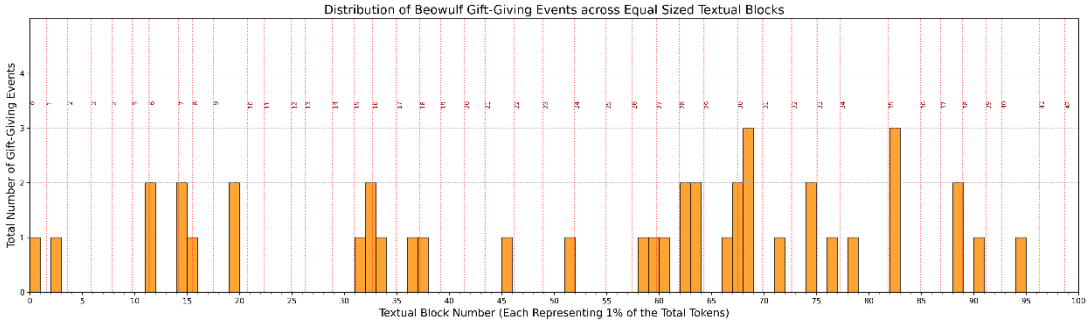
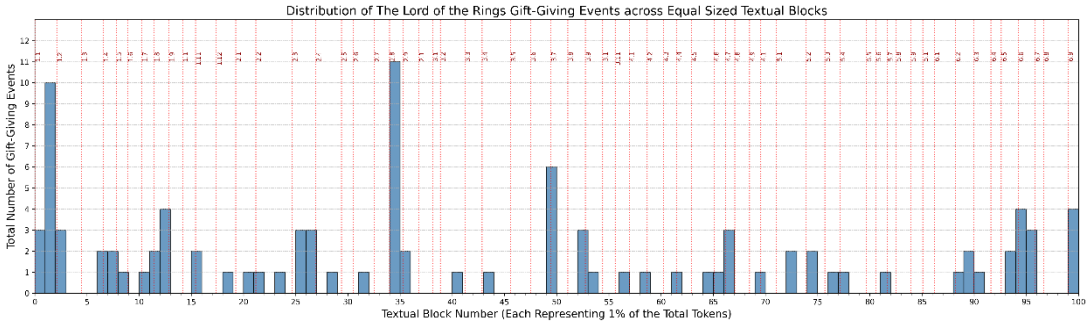


Figure 4.2: Distribution of Gift-Giving Events in Beowulf (1% Segmentation)

The first peak (blocks 11-20 in Figure 2) occurs during Beowulf's arrival and initial reception at Heorot. Although treasure-giving is foreshadowed—"*þæm godan sceal / for his modþræce madmas beodan*" ("to the good one shall treasures be offered for his bravery," *Beowulf,* ll. 384–385)—the actual material exchanges are mostly limited to hospitality gifts. These include drinking vessels ceremonially offered by Queen

Wealhtheow[26] to Beowulf and his companions (ll. 495–620), emphasizing communal bonding and the ritualized welcome of the hero into Hrothgar's hall. The second peak (blocks 31-37 in Figure 2) follows the defeat of Grendel and the restoration of order in Heorot. Here, the emphasis shifts from symbolic to concrete displays of royal generosity. Hrothgar bestows a rich set of treasures and arms upon Beowulf, including a golden banner, a helm, a mail-shirt, and eight horses (ll. 1019–1035). In the same section, Wealhtheow again performs a ceremonial offering of cup and treasure, reinforcing the queen's mediating role in heroic economy (ll. 1195–1199). The third peak (blocks 61-69 in Figure 2) coincides with Beowulf's return to Geatland and his report to King Hygelac. The narrative focuses extensively on reciprocal exchanges between Beowulf and Hygelac, including weapons, horses, and other treasures (ll. 2149–2199). In this sequence, Hygelac rewards Beowulf with ancestral heirlooms and territorial rights, including a hall and throne, while Queen Hygd distributes ceremonial drinking vessels to the warriors (ll. 1985–1987). These layers of exchange—between hero and king, queen and warriors—illustrate a complete heroic cycle, in which gifts mark both individual glory and the strengthening of social bonds (Bazelmans 2000; Hill 1982; Naismith 2016).

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the relative distribution of gift-giving events across the text reveals three notable peaks (Figure 4.3): the first in the opening chapters, the second during the departure from Lothlórien, and the third in the final sections of the story. These clusters reflect three narrative functions of gift-giving: tradition and custom, aid and foresight, and reconciliation and closure.



[26] Proper names from *Beowulf* are given in modernized form throughout the thesis. The transcription and spelling conventions are based on the *Electronic Beowulf*, edited by Kevin Kiernan. https://ebeowulf.uky.edu/

Figure 4.3: Distribution of gift-giving events in The Lord of the Rings (1% segmentation)

The first peak (blocks 1–3 in Figure 3) occurs in Book I, Chapter 1, centered around Bilbo's eleventy-first birthday. Here, gift-giving is part of Hobbit cultural tradition, where the person celebrating distributes presents to guests. Bilbo's gifts are varied and often humorous—ranging from umbrellas and waste-paper baskets to gold pens and ointments—emphasizing his eccentric character and the comic tone of the opening. However, this moment also includes the most consequential gift of the entire narrative: Bilbo's handing over of the One Ring to Frodo (*The Lord of the Rings,* p. 32), an act that initiates the central conflict of the story, even though its full significance is not yet known to the characters. The second peak (blocks 34-35 in Figure 3) appears in Book II, Chapter 8, "Farewell to Lórien", where the Fellowship departs from Galadriel and Celeborn. This episode features the most extensive and ceremonious distribution of gifts in the text. Galadriel offers both symbolic treasures—such as the Phial of Galadriel, Elessar the Elfstone, and her own hair—as well as practical items for survival, like cloaks, rope, cram, and boats. The act culminates in a formal cup-sharing ritual, in which Galadriel offers white mead to each member of the Company, transforming the farewell into a moment of both personal blessing and cultural rite. Gift-giving here merges Elvish ritual, foresight, and affection, cementing ties of loyalty and gratitude. The third peak (blocks 93,94,95 and 100 in Figure 3) takes place in the closing chapters of Book VI, especially "The Steward and the King," "Many Partings," and "The Grey Havens." These gifts serve a commemorative and reconciliatory function. Faramir gifts a crown to Aragorn and treasures to Éowyn, gestures that forge alliances and signal the return of peace. Bilbo gifts his book of lore, symbolizing continuity and remembrance. A repetition of the cup motif occurs when Éowyn offers a farewell drink to Éomer, mirroring earlier rituals of parting (p. 977). The most emotionally resonant gifts, however, are those linked to healing fractured werelationships: Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, once at odds with Frodo, leaves him her fortune to help hobbits harmed by the troubles (p. 1021). Finally, Frodo's farewell gift to Sam—"all that I had and might have had I leave to you" (p. 1029)—marks not only inheritance, but trust, love, and the passing of the story's centre from one bearer to another.

Overall, in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, gift-giving events cluster

around key narrative moments. Yet the nature and function of these peaks diverge notably: in *Beowulf*, gifts mark formal receptions and celebrations following heroic victories, reinforcing hierarchical bonds between rulers and warriors. In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* alternates between triumphs, personal farewells, and reconciliations, culminating in a final emphasis on healing and legacy. This contrast lays the foundation for understanding how different characters participate as givers, as explored in the next section.

4.1.2 Categories of Givers

After examining when gift-giving events occur within each narrative, it is important to identify who acts as the giver in these exchanges. The relative frequency of giver categories reveals how *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* assign the role of gift-giver across different character types, highlighting contrasting narrative priorities and cultural frameworks. The bar chart (Figure 4.4) compares five categories—Rulers, Heroes, Commoners, Good Supernaturals, and Evil Supernaturals—and shows how often each appears as a giver within the two texts.

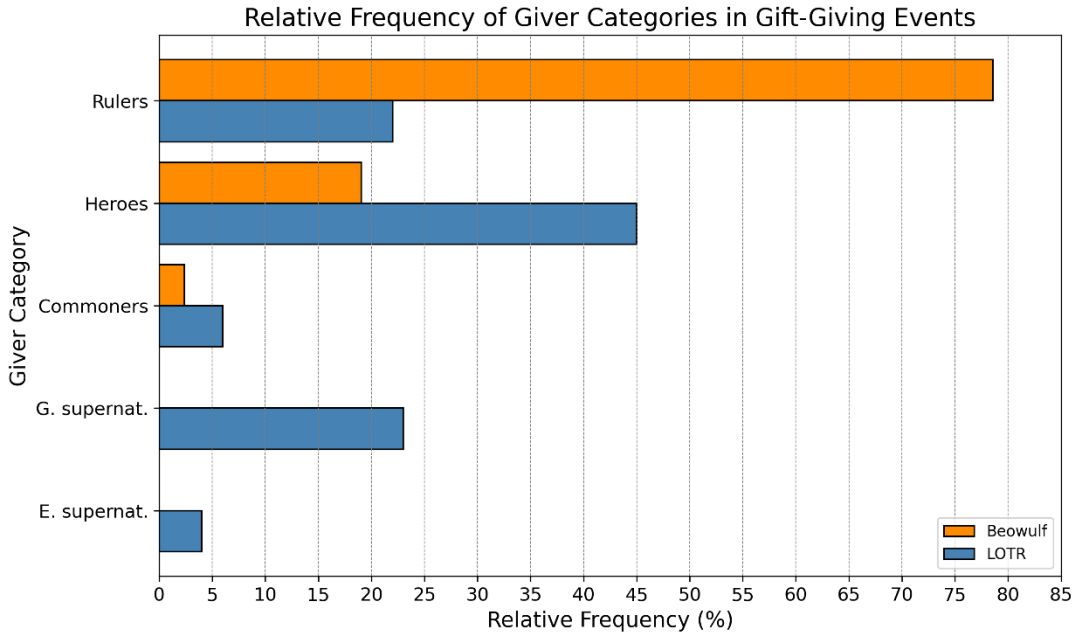


Figure 4.4. Relative Frequency of Giver Categories in Gift-Giving Events.

The most striking contrast lies in the overall distribution. In *Beowulf*, gift-giving is overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of *Rulers*, suggesting a centralized and

hierarchical economy of exchange. In *The Lord of the Rings*, by contrast, generosity is more evenly shared among *Heroes*, *Rulers*, and *Good Supernaturals*, pointing to a model of giving guided by relational and moral values rather than hierarchical obligation. As defined in the annotation model described in Chapter 3, these capitalized labels refer to semantic categories applied during the annotation process.

In *Beowulf*, Rulers account for nearly 80% of the giving events, reflecting their central role in sustaining loyalty and status through ceremonial distribution of treasure, arms, and symbolic items. Gift-giving functions as a tool of legitimation and cohesion within a warrior society. Other categories play minimal roles: Heroes are represented almost solely by Beowulf himself, who presents gifts to King Hygelac; Commoners appear only once, in the figure of an anonymous slave who offers a stolen cup to his lord—a gift that sets off the poem's final conflict.

Tolkien's narrative, on the other hand, embraces a more diverse and relational model. Heroes like Frodo, Bilbo, and Sam give and receive gifts as gestures of trust, care, and moral responsibility. Rulers—such as Aragorn, Galadriel, and Théoden—continue to give in ceremonial contexts, but not exclusively. Good Supernaturals such as Gandalf, Tom Bombadil, the Elves, and the Ents provide vital gifts of shelter, food, magical items, and advice. Their contributions reflect a world where supernatural aid and ethical intent are closely linked. Evil Supernaturals, though rare, play narratively significant roles. Sauron gives the Rings of Power as instruments of domination, and Gollum offers Frodo and Sam to Shelob in a perverse inversion of the gift. These cases expose the moral ambiguity inherent in the act of giving and its potential for manipulation. Commoners remain marginal but morally resonant. In *The Lord of the Rings*, characters like Mrs. Maggot, Barliman Butterbur, and Lobelia Sackville-Baggins perform meaningful acts of generosity despite their modest social standing. These moments emphasize Tolkien's vision of generosity as an ethical quality accessible to all, not just the powerful.

In sum, the contrast between the two texts reflects distinct social and narrative models. Beowulf constructs a gift economy rooted in vertical loyalty and heroic status, while The Lord of the Rings decentralizes acts of generosity, embedding them within a broader ethical framework that crosses ranks and groups. These divergent models

directly influence the kinds of gifts exchanged, which are examined in the following section.

4.1.3 Types of Gifts

Once the primary agents of generosity have been established, attention can shift to the nature of the gifts themselves. The bar chart (Figure 4.5) compares the relative frequency of different types of gifts in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, highlighting key differences in narrative values and cultural priorities. By comparing the relative frequency of gift categories, we can observe how each text structures its economy of giving—whether to display power, provide aid, or express emotional bonds.

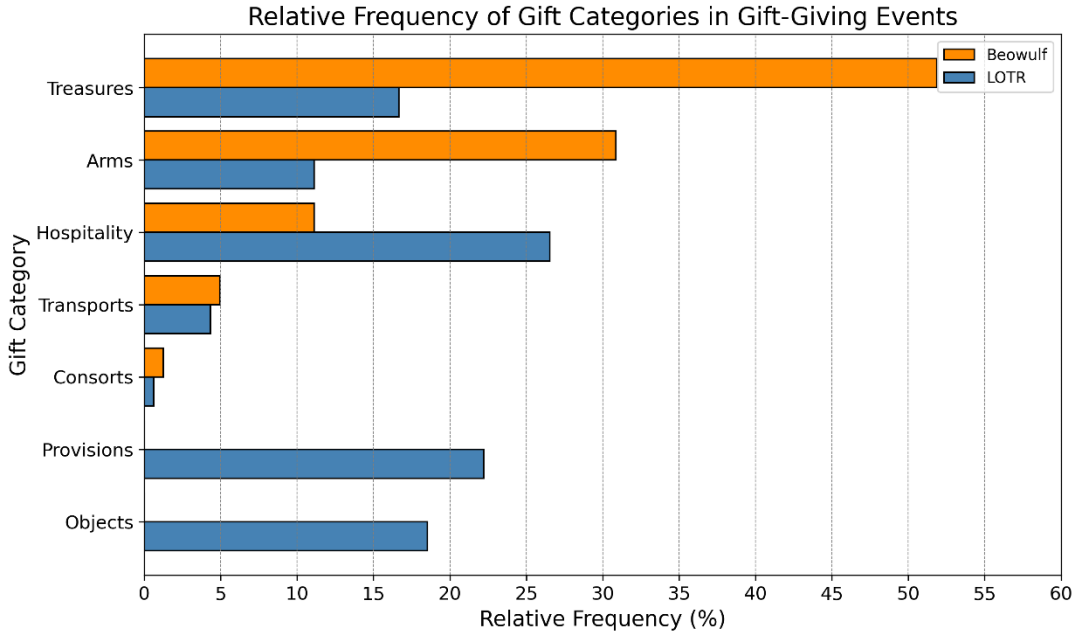


Figure 4.5. Relative Frequency of Gift Categories in Gift Giving Events

The chart (Figure 4.5) reveals a clear contrast in the distribution of gift categories between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In Beowulf, gift-giving is overwhelmingly concentrated in Treasures and Arms, reinforcing a heroic economy centred on martial prestige and elite cohesion. Gifts serve to reward valour, legitimize status, and affirm hierarchical bonds between rulers and warriors. Other categories—such as Hospitality and Transports—appear occasionally, reinforcing prestige rather than supporting basic needs. A unique instance is the Consort category: the marriage of Freawaru to Ingeld (l. 2020), offered by Hrothgar in an attempt to heal a tribal feud.

Notably absent are everyday Objects or Provisions. The gift economy of Beowulf excludes domestic or practical concerns, emphasizing wealth, honour and social order.

The Lord of the Rings, by contrast, presents a far more diverse and balanced gift economy. While Treasures and Arms are still present—often in royal or heroic contexts—they are less central than in *Beowulf*. The most frequent categories are Hospitality, Provisions, and Objects, which reflect a narrative logic oriented toward survival, support, and emotional connection. Hospitality often precedes assistance: each time the Fellowship encounters a new group, they receive food, shelter, and gifts to aid their journey. This structure recurs with the Elves (p. 86), Tom Bombadil (p. 146), Mrs. Maggot (p. 97) and Faramir (p. 678). These acts express care, solidarity, and mutual recognition rather than ceremonial obligation. Even symbolic or magical gifts—such as the Phial of Galadriel, the Elessar, or her strands of hair—carry emotional weight as tokens of trust, hope, and beauty. A consort-gift appears here as well: the bond between Éowyn and Faramir, established earlier through mutual affection, is later formalized when Éomer acknowledges their union. Although the relationship has been developed romantically before this moment, the union can still be seen as reinforcing political and familial ties within the restored order of Rohan and Gondor.

Ultimately, the types of gifts exchanged underscore two fundamentally different conceptions of generosity. In *Beowulf*, giving affirms hierarchy and prestige; in *The Lord of the Rings*, it sustains community and personal transformation. This broader ethical horizon also shapes who is deemed worthy of receiving gifts, as the next section will show.

4.1.4 Categories of Recipients

Following the analysis of the types of gifts, it becomes necessary to consider who receives these acts of generosity. The chart (Figure 4.6) displays the relative frequency of recipient categories in both narratives, offering insight into which groups are most often recognized through acts of giving. The chart shows a shared emphasis on the category of Heroes, which emerges as the most frequent recipient type in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. This commonality underscores the central narrative role of heroic figures, for whom acts of giving often serve to recognize bravery, loyalty, or, as in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, practical support.

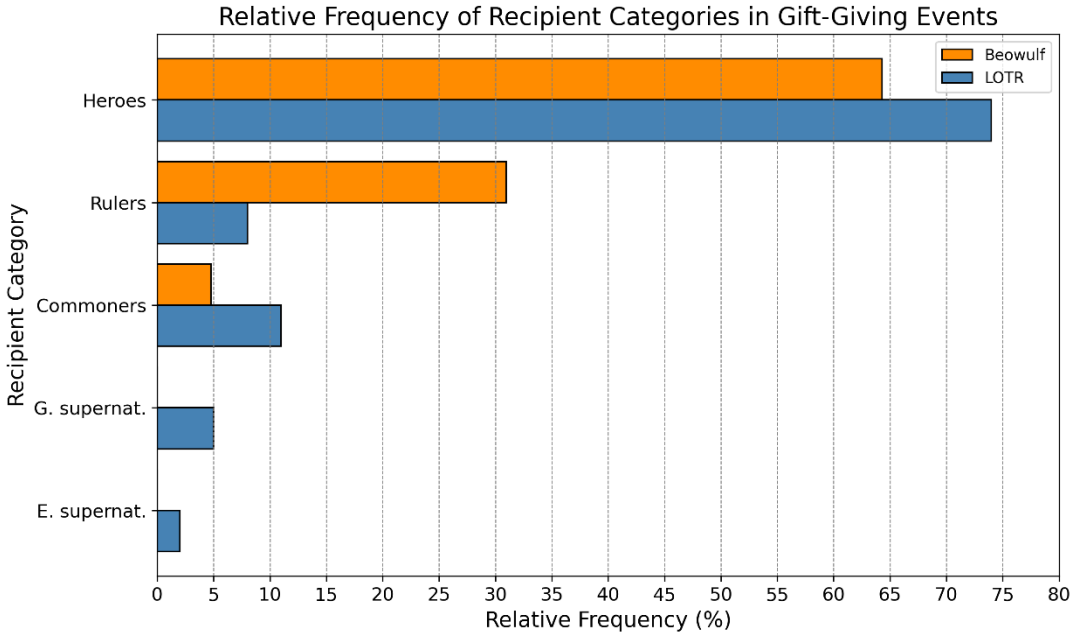


Figure 4.6: Relative Frequency of Recipient Categories in Gift-Giving Events

Beyond this initial similarity, however, the two texts diverge markedly. In *Beowulf*, the circulation of gifts is concentrated almost exclusively among Heroes and Rulers, reflecting a tightly hierarchical structure where exchange reaffirms status within an elite warrior class. Heroes receive gifts in acknowledgment of martial valour, while Rulers are honoured through gifts that reinforce political allegiance. Instances involving Commoners are rare and narratively exceptional. One notable moment occurs at the end of the poem, when Beowulf, facing death, requests that the dragon's treasure be used to benefit his people: "*Fremmað gena leoda þearfe*" ("Further the needs of the people," l. 2800). Even here, the gift to commoners is mediated through the hero's agency, and the act of giving remains framed within a heroic and ceremonial context.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, by contrast, the distribution of recipients reflects a more horizontally structured model of exchange. While Heroes continue to dominate, it is striking that Commoners appear more frequently than Rulers. This pattern is largely influenced by the opening chapter, where Bilbo distributes gifts to numerous ordinary Hobbits during his eleventy-first birthday party. Recipients include a wide range of figures such as Hobbit children, the Gaffer, and family members like Adelard Took, Dora Baggins, Milo Burrows, Angelica Baggins, Hugo Bracegirdle, and Lobelia

Sackville-Baggins. These gifts, often humorous or ironic, establish a world in which generosity extends beyond the heroic sphere into everyday life. The presence of Evil Supernatural recipients adds further complexity. Shelob receives Frodo and Sam from Gollum, not in a benevolent gesture but as a twisted form of offering aimed at reclaiming the Ring. Later, Saruman, reduced to misery and insignificance, is given a leather pouch of pipe-weed by Merry during Many Partings (p. 984). This small act of pity towards a fallen enemy shows that generosity, in Tolkien's world, can cross even moral boundaries, extending compassion where simple justice would not demand it.

Thus, while *Beowulf* restricts the flow of gifts to a tightly bounded elite, *The Lord of the Rings* expands the act of giving across social and moral boundaries. Heroes, commoners, and even adversaries participate in a network of care and reconciliation. The structure of giver–recipient relationships further illuminates this difference and will be explored in the final part of the quantitative analysis.

4.1.5 Giver–Recipient Combinations

Having considered givers and recipients separately, the focus now turns to the patterns of interaction between them. The heatmaps (Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8) present an integrated view of gift exchange patterns, visualizing the relationships between giver and recipient categories in each work. Each cell visualizes how often a giver category directs a gift to a recipient category, allowing us to assess the internal structure of the gift economy in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The darker the color, the higher the concentration of exchanges in that cell.

In *Beowulf*, the heatmap (Figure 4.7) reveals again a rigid, vertically structured system. The dominant interaction—Rulers giving to Heroes—accounts for more than half of all events, emphasizing a top-down model where kings and queens distribute treasure, arms, and honors to their retainers. Secondary interactions, such as Heroes giving to Rulers (e.g., Beowulf's offering to Hygelac), remain confined within the elite, reinforcing loyalty and social cohesion among warriors.
Gift exchanges involving marginal categories are extremely rare. The few exceptions include Beowulf's deathbed request that his treasure be used for the good of his people, and the episode of the anonymous slave who offers a stolen cup to his lord. The gift economy remains exclusive, tightly bound to hierarchy, military prowess, and political reinforcement.

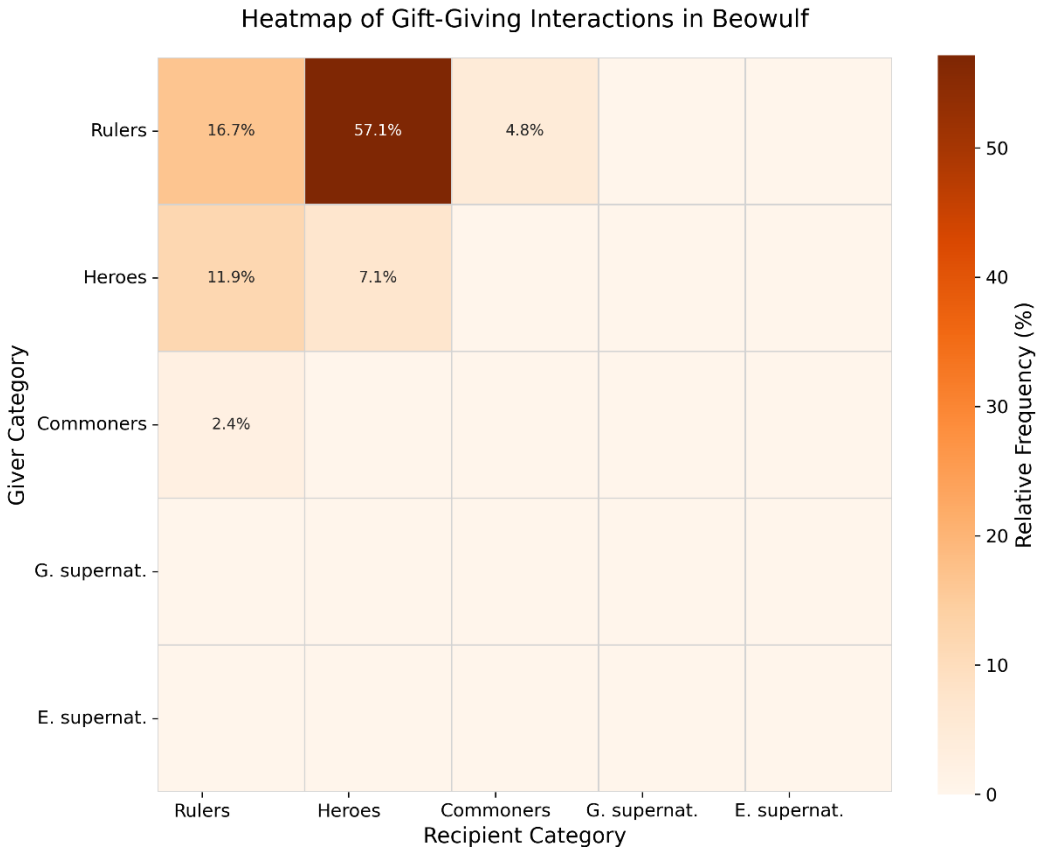


Figure 4.7: Heatmap of Gift-Giving Interactions in Beowulf

By contrast, the heatmap (Figure 4.8) for *The Lord of the Rings* displays a broader, more relational model. Gift-giving interactions are distributed across multiple categories, involving not only Heroes and Rulers, but also Good Supernaturals, Commoners, and even Evil Supernaturals. While Heroes giving to Heroes is the most frequent pairing—reflecting the narrative centrality of the Fellowship and the strong relational bonds within it—this category includes deeply meaningful exchanges such as the series of small but vital gifts that Sam offers to Frodo during their desperate journey across Mordor: elven-cake, the last drops of water, a pillow, and a girdle made of Sam's elven-rope (pp. 914–938). In these moments, generosity becomes a gesture of compassion and endurance in the face of extreme suffering.

Gift exchanges from Good Supernaturals to Heroes are also frequent and crucial. Beyond the well-known gifts from Gandalf and the Elves, even Gollum—an ambivalent figure—momentarily fulfils this role by bringing rabbits to Frodo and Sam to help them survive (p. 655). Although Gollum's motivations are complex, this act

still fits within the broader pattern of generosity crossing moral and social boundaries.

Recipients are similarly diverse, reflecting a network where generosity is not restricted by status but flows across social and moral divisions. Gift-giving in Tolkien's world becomes a means of sustaining survival, forging trust, and healing fractures, rather than a tool of reward or obligation.

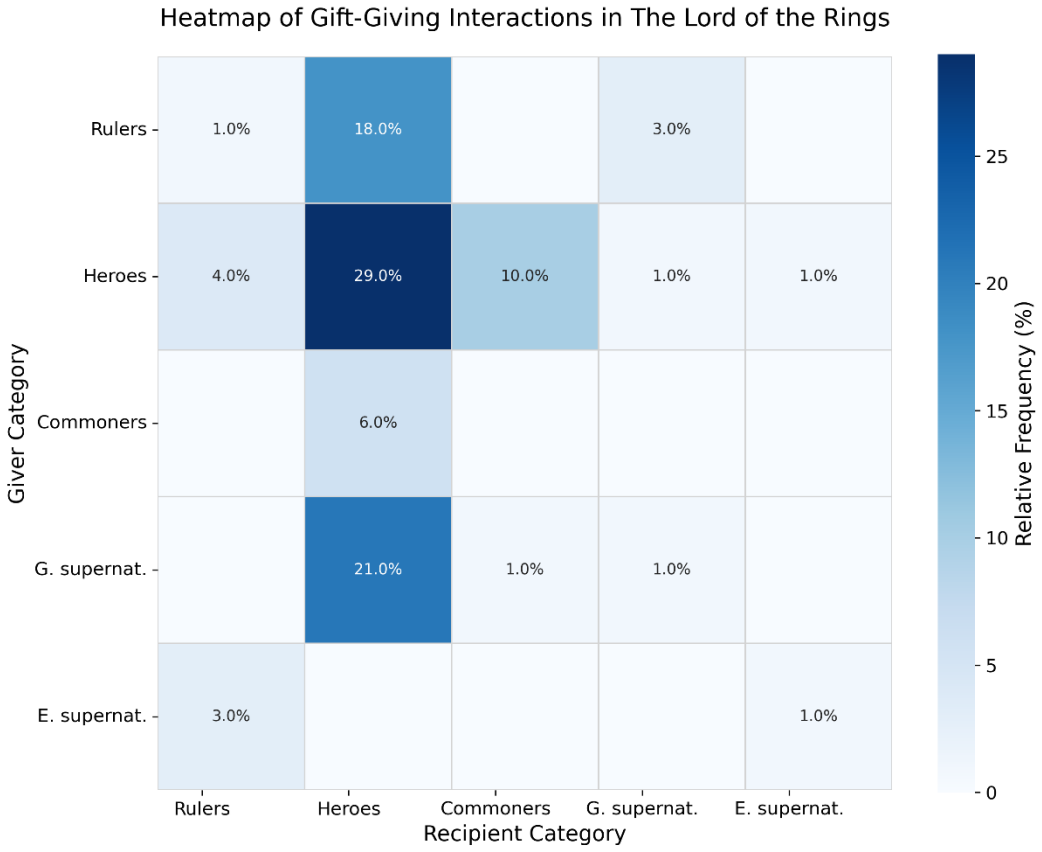


Figure 4.8: Heatmap of Gift-Giving Interactions in The Lord of the Rings

Comparing the two systems highlights a fundamental divergence. In *Beowulf*, generosity reinforces a rigid social hierarchy: gifts circulate within a closed elite, maintaining structures of honor, allegiance, and martial prestige. In Tolkien's world, by contrast, the act of giving is ethically expansive, building relationships across differences of class, group, and even moral alignment.

In sum, the heatmaps visually confirm the broader narrative patterns each work embodies. Beowulf envisions generosity as an instrument of social order and rank, while The Lord of the Rings reimagines it as an inclusive, relational practice that transcends hierarchy. Overall, the quantitative analysis reveals a consistent structural

contrast between the two works: in *Beowulf*, gift-giving reinforces centralized power and martial prestige; in *The Lord of the Rings*, it fosters survival, moral bonds, and communal resilience. Together, these patterns provide a foundation for the qualitative exploration of key gift-giving events, which follows in the next section.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

While the quantitative analysis has outlined broad patterns in the frequency, distribution and types of gift-giving events, a closer examination of individual episodes allows us to understand how these acts function narratively, socially, and symbolically within each text. Gift-giving is not only a matter of quantity or structure; it is also shaped by tone, context, gesture and language. This section explores in depth two representative scenes—one from *Beowulf*, one from *The Lord of the Rings*—to highlight how the same narrative motif is employed to express very different cultural values and ethical frameworks. Through close reading, the following case studies examine not just what is given, but how, by whom, to whom, and under what circumstances. They consider material exchange as a vehicle for political affirmation, personal recognition and mythic resonance. Each scene is analysed through its narrative context, the details of the exchange, its social and symbolic significance and its contribution to the broader worldview of the text.

4.2.1 Case Study One: The Rewards at Heorot

This section opens the qualitative analysis with the gift-giving episode that follows Beowulf's victory over Grendel (ll. 1008–1250). As a public act of gratitude and recognition, Hrothgar hosts a ceremonial feast and bestows lavish rewards upon Beowulf and his men. The scene marks the climax of Beowulf's first major achievement and formalizes his temporary integration into the Danish court, reaffirming core heroic values such as loyalty, reciprocity and public honour.

The gift-giving begins with King Hrothgar's public reward to Beowulf, which takes place in the great hall during a formal banquet. In front of the assembled court, Hrothgar presents Beowulf with an exceptional set of gifts: Halfdane's ancestral sword, a golden banner, a richly decorated helmet and a mail-shirt (l. 1019). These martial items, linked to royal and heroic status, elevate Beowulf's reputation while visually associating him with the Danish royal line. The king further honours him with

eight horses—one of which is adorned with a battle-saddle used by Hrothgar himself—emphasizing the transmission of both military prowess and sovereign prestige (l. 1042). Finally, Hrothgar extends his generosity to Beowulf's men, offering treasures and heirlooms, and even commands that gold be given in compensation for the warrior killed by Grendel, reinforcing the ethics of justice and recompense (l. 1050).

In parallel with Hrothgar's bestowals, Wealhtheow's intervention brings a complementary dimension to the ritual: dynastic strategy and rhetorical performance. Shortly afterward, Queen Wealhtheow enters the hall and adds her voice—and her gifts—to the ceremonial moment. After offering a cup to Hrothgar in a gesture of political affirmation (l. 1171) —symbolically reinforcing his status as king and her own role as queen and peace-weaver (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.3.3)—, she turns to Beowulf and bestows upon him a set of royal treasures: a gold cup, two arm rings, a lavish mail-shirt, multiple rings, and a magnificent neck-collar, described as the most splendid of its kind (ll. 1194-1197). These gifts reflect Wealhtheow's own authority within the court and complement Hrothgar's more martial rewards with objects of beauty, permanence and dynastic symbolism. Her gesture, public and deliberate, positions Beowulf as a trusted ally while also subtly reaffirming her hopes for the succession of her sons. As she declares, the necklace is "the greatest of those I have heard of under heaven" (*healsbeaga mæst þara þe ic on foldan gefrægen hæbbe*, ll. 1197–98), a line that elevates the gift's prestige while implicitly anchoring it to the royal lineage. Together, the gifts from the king and queen portray Beowulf as both a celebrated warrior and a respected guest—honoured for his deeds, yet still positioned as an outsider whose role remains temporary and politically limited.

The gift-giving scene between Hrothgar and Beowulf carries both social and political weight. More than a reward for heroic deeds, it is a formal act that publicly acknowledges Beowulf's valour and incorporates him into a system of mutual obligation. Hrothgar's role as *sincgyfa* (treasure-giver, l. 1011) reinforces his identity as a ring-giving lord, while Beowulf, who receives the gifts without hesitation or shame (ll. 1024–1025), is aligned with the ideal of the loyal *þegn* (thane, l. 1080). The material richness of the offerings—horses, armour, weapons, and treasure—visibly expresses this bond, where honour and allegiance are at stake. At the same time, the scene has clear political functions. By distributing further treasure to Beowulf's men

and compensating the warrior killed by Grendel (ll. 1051–1054), Hrothgar not only honours the fellowship but also ensures peace and prevents future conflict, fulfilling the social duty of *wergild*[27]. The entire episode reflects the principles of the *comitatus*—as defined in Chapter 1, Section 1.1.3—in which the lord provides wealth and renown, and the warrior returns loyalty and service. In this economy of honour, the gift is both symbolic and binding—an instrument of governance as much as of generosity. It also enhances Hrothgar's reputation before his court and foreign allies, presenting him as a generous and just ruler whose authority rests on ritualized reciprocity as well as military strength.

Alongside Hrothgar's politically charged bestowal of gifts, Wealhtheow's act of gift-giving carries its own ceremonial and symbolic weight, functioning not only as an extension of hospitality but also as a performance of dynastic diplomacy. As queen and peace-weaver (*freoðuwebbe*, l. 1942), her presence in the hall and her offering of treasures publicly affirm the unity and continuity of the Scylding dynasty. Her speech, addressed to Hrothgar and later to Beowulf, accompanies the distribution of arm rings, a mail-shirt, and the most magnificent necklace (*healsbeaga mæst*, l. 1197), reinforcing the social hierarchy while subtly emphasizing the role of the queen as mediator between generations. The act is deeply strategic: while she honours Beowulf, she also asserts her hopes for her sons' future succession, explicitly invoking Hrothulf's loyalty (ll. 1179–1189). In this sense, her gesture exemplifies the performative power of gift-giving as a tool for shaping political alliances and securing dynastic stability. Wealhtheow does not simply distribute treasure—she articulates a vision of order that seeks to bind warriors, kin, and court through a display of generosity framed by rhetorical finesse and maternal foresight.

In sum, the gift-giving episode at Heorot represents a paradigmatic instance of the heroic Germanic model. Hrothgar's lavish distribution of treasure—reinforced by Wealhtheow's ceremonial bestowals—constructs a tightly hierarchical social world in which political stability and honour are maintained through material generosity and public ritual. Gifts here are not mere exchanges of wealth but instruments of cohesion and control, embedding individuals within a system of mutual obligation under the

[27] Wergild: see Bosworth-Toller Online Dictionary, https://bosworthtoller.com/35368 . Last accessed June 14, 2025.

sovereign's patronage (Bazelmans 2000; Hill 1982; Naismith 2016). This episode illustrates a society where honour is formalised, kinship is political, and generosity is a strategy of cohesion. In contrast, the next case study explores how Tolkien reshapes gift-giving into a more personal and ethically expansive act.

4.2.2 Case Study Two: The farewell Gifts of Lothlórien

The second case study shifts the focus to *The Lord of the Rings*, examining the episode of gift-giving that takes place in Lothlórien as the Fellowship prepares to leave (p. 367-379). Structured around two distinct yet complementary moments, this scene highlights how Elvish generosity operates as both hospitality and foresight. The first occurs in the morning, when the Elves offer practical gifts—such as lembas and Elvish cloaks—intended to sustain and protect the Fellowship on their journey. Though distributed collectively and informally, these items establish the Elves' role as gracious hosts and wise guardians. The second moment takes place later that day during a formal parting ceremony led by Galadriel and Celeborn. Here, the tone shifts to solemnity and ritual, as Galadriel addresses each member of the Fellowship in turn, offering personalized gifts imbued with emotional, moral, or symbolic meaning. Although distinct in tone and structure, these two acts belong to the same narrative arc of departure and blessing. Taken together, they reveal how Elvish gift-giving operates on both practical and symbolic levels.

The first set of gifts offered to the Fellowship by the Elves of Lothlórien consists of food and clothing, distributed informally on the morning of departure. Each member receives lembas, the Elvish waybread, described as more nourishing than any food made by Men and capable of sustaining a traveller for a full day. This is followed by the distribution of Elvish cloaks, woven by Galadriel and her maidens. Each cloak is tailored to its wearer and fastened with a leaf-shaped silver brooch. Their colour is changeable, echoing the natural world—grey, green, brown, or silver—depending on light and setting. While the Elves emphasize that the cloaks are not magical armour, they note their usefulness in concealing the wearer from "unfriendly eyes" (p. 370). Although given collectively, these gifts are not impersonal. The Elves share lore and guidance along with the objects, explaining their use and significance. In particular, they invite the recipients to use the lembas only sparingly and "at need" (p. 369), underscoring the gifts' preciousness. This moment of exchange is both practical and

symbolic, preparing the Company physically for hardship and mentally for solitude and endurance.

While the morning gifts are practical and collective, the second moment introduces a more solemn and personalized dimension, marked by Galadriel's ritual farewell. It begins with the ceremonial distribution of a shared cup. Galadriel fills it with white mead and offers it first to Celeborn, before passing it to each member of the Fellowship in turn. This collective gesture of drinking the "cup of farewell" (p. 374) sets the tone for what follows: a moment of transition, charged with beauty and symbolic weight.

Once all have drunk, Galadriel presents individual parting gifts (p. 375). The sequence begins with Aragorn, to whom she offers a finely crafted sheath for Andúril, adorned with silver and gold tracery and elven runes. She then bestows upon him the Elessar, a green stone brooch passed down from Celebrían. This double gift affirms his royal destiny and links him genealogically and spiritually to the Elven line. Each companion receives a tailored gift. Boromir receives a golden belt; Merry and Pippin are given silver belts with flower-shaped clasps; Legolas is gifted a Galadhrim bow with a quiver of arrows; Sam receives a small wooden box containing blessed earth from Galadriel's orchard. Her words to Sam acknowledge the modesty of the gift while hinting at its restorative power and enduring symbolism. It is a promise of renewal, offered in a time of loss. Gimli's moment stands apart for its intimacy and daring. Asked to name his desire, he requests a single strand of Galadriel's hair—a gesture that shocks the Elves present. Galadriel responds not only by granting his wish, but by giving him three strands, accompanied by a blessing. Her response recognizes Gimli's courteous boldness and expresses hope for reconciliation between Dwarves and Elves. Finally, Frodo receives the most potent and mysterious object: a crystal phial containing the light of Eärendil's star, preserved in the waters of Galadriel's fountain. She presents it as a beacon for dark times, "when all other lights go out" (p. 377). This final gift, rich in poetic and eschatological significance, closes the exchange with a gesture of profound foresight and care. Together, these gifts serve not only practical or symbolic functions but form a ritual of separation that affirms identity and moral purpose. Each object is carefully matched to its recipient, and the entire scene transforms the act of giving into an act of prophecy, remembrance and hope.

Taken together, the two phases of gift-giving in Lothlórien serve a dual purpose: they function both as practical tools and as symbolic gestures of alliance. The first set of gifts—cloaks, lembas, and boats—highlights the Elves' role as hosts and protectors. These items are designed to assist the Fellowship in their journey: the cloaks provide camouflage and comfort, the lembas offers exceptional nourishment, and the boats enable a swift departure. Though simple in form, these provisions establish a powerful bond of solidarity, suggesting that the Elves are not merely passive observers of the war but willing to empower others to act against the Shadow. By contrast, the gifts of Galadriel and Celeborn operate on a more symbolic and political level. Each item is tailored not only to the recipient's character but also to their narrative and moral role within the larger story. Aragorn's sheath and brooch reinforce his royal lineage and future kingship, legitimizing his authority and foreshadowing his destiny. Frodo's phial encapsulates the Elves' spiritual legacy, offering not just protection but memory, light, and hope. Gimli's gift, intimate and unprecedented, becomes a symbolic act of reconciliation, charged with meaning beyond personal thanks.

More broadly, Galadriel's gifts function as tokens of recognition: each character is seen, named, and valued. Boromir's belt affirms his nobility despite his inner conflict[28]; Legolas's bow strengthens his martial identity; Sam's box links domestic restoration to the larger struggle. Even Merry and Pippin, who receive no named gifts, are honoured with silver belts that reflect their growing status within the Fellowship. The ceremony thus affirms not only the Fellowship's unity, but the distinct role, dignity, and destiny of each member—binding them through gifts that encode both memory and moral purpose.

4.2.3 Comparative Discussion

The two case studies—Hrothgar's and Wealhtheow's gifts to Beowulf, and Galadriel's farewell gifts to the Fellowship—share a common foundation in the ritualized exchange of objects as acts of recognition, affiliation, and symbolic investment. In both narratives, gift giving is embedded in a moment of transition: a hero is honoured

[28] Although Boromir ultimately succumbs to the temptation of the Ring, the gift he receives from Galadriel—a gold belt—acknowledges his noble lineage and valor. The gesture suggests that his worth is not erased by his inner struggle, and that his potential for redemption remains.

for past deeds and equipped for an uncertain future. The presence of material rewards, the ceremonial use of the cup, and the hierarchical structure of the exchange all point to a shared cultural logic rooted in Germanic heroic tradition. Yet, beneath these structural similarities lie significant divergences. While *Beowulf* presents gift giving as a reaffirmation of social order—anchored in lineage, rank, and political stability—*The Lord of the Rings* repurposes the same gestures to express emotional bonds, ethical ideals and future hope. Tolkien adopts the forms of heroic tradition, but reorients them toward a world where loyalty is earned, not inherited, and where gifts often reflect inner qualities rather than social status. This section examines both similarities and differences in three areas: the roles and hierarchies shaped by gift exchange, the kinds of gifts and their meanings, and the ritual and symbolic aspects of the act.

To begin, the role of gift-giving in establishing and reinforcing social hierarchies offers a revealing point of comparison between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. While both texts employ the practice to elevate and legitimise figures of importance, the underlying values and structures it affirms differ significantly. In *Beowulf*, gift exchange reinforces a vertical social order grounded in kinship and kingship. Hrothgar, as sovereign, dispenses treasures to Beowulf not only in gratitude but as a public reaffirmation of his own role as ring-giver—the stabilizing figure of the heroic hall. The structure of the exchange is hierarchical and reciprocal: Beowulf's protection of Heorot is rewarded with royal heirlooms, weapons, and horses, while Wealhtheow's formal gesture of presenting the cup affirms the legitimacy of succession and unity among men. Each gift is a confirmation of power, both of the giver and the receiver, within a clearly defined political framework. Tolkien retains this ceremonial dimension but reconfigures it within a more fluid and ethically oriented hierarchy. Galadriel's role is sovereign in stature but not in function: her authority is symbolic and spiritual, not political. The gifts she distributes vary widely and reflect individual identity rather than social rank. Frodo, Sam, Gimli, and Aragorn all receive highly personalized gifts that address their character, fate, or vocation, not their political status. The act of gift giving is still authoritative, but it signals recognition of inner worth rather than external position. In both texts, therefore, gift exchange serves to mark and elevate the recipient. But whereas *Beowulf* affirms a static social structure rooted in ancestry and office, *The Lord of the Rings* transforms gift giving into a mode

of personal validation and moral alignment. The traditional hero still receives treasures, but the logic behind the gesture has shifted from duty and honour to grace and hope.

Having considered how gift-giving reflects systems of power and legitimacy, we now turn to the nature of the gifts themselves. Both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* feature tangible and precious gifts, especially arms, treasures and ritual objects, yet their function and significance differ markedly. In *Beowulf*, the gifts are largely traditional: swords, helmets, mail-shirts, rings, and horses. These items reflect martial prestige and the wealth of the lord. Their value is public and performative—objects meant to be displayed, carried into battle, or passed on as heirlooms. The repetition and formal presentation of these gifts—especially the use of royal heirlooms like Halfdane's sword—emphasize continuity of power and reinforce the ceremonial bond between ruler and retainer. Tolkien adopts many of these traditional motifs—cloaks, belts, brooches, blades, even strands of hair—but reframes them in personal, affective, and even mystical terms. Galadriel's gifts are uniquely tailored: Sam receives earth to restore his future garden, Frodo is given a light for dark places, and Gimli is granted a gift that is both priceless and immaterial. The Elven cloaks and lembas also blend practicality with enchantment, embodying the union of beauty and usefulness characteristic of Elvish craftsmanship. The symbolic depth of Tolkien's gifts lies in their alignment with each character's inner journey or future need, rather than their economic or political value. In short, *Beowulf* encodes its gifts within a system of tribal honour and material display, while Tolkien deploys gifts as signs of moral insight and narrative foresight. The continuity of form (weapons, heirlooms, cup rituals) masks a profound shift in cultural logic—from a warrior code to a fellowship of free agents bound by ethical purpose.

Finally, the analysis moves to the settings and rituals in which these gifts are exchanged, revealing further contrasts in tone and worldview. In *Beowulf*, the ritual of gift exchange is explicitly public, structured and courtly. Hrothgar's bestowal of treasure, weapons, and horses takes place within the hall of Heorot during a formal victory feast, witnessed by a gathered assembly of nobles and warriors. The ritual is codified: Wealhtheow's mead-cup, passed from hand to hand, functions as both political affirmation and ceremonial gesture, affirming loyalty, lineage, and stability.

Each gift is offered in turn with visible grandeur, reinforcing the authority of the ring-giver and the ordered continuity of the heroic world. Tolkien's gift-giving scene in Lothlórien, while equally structured, takes place in a very different setting and emotional register. The farewell feast and distribution of gifts occur outdoors, at the edge of the Elvish land, "between the flowing waters that will bear [the Company] far from Lórien." (p. 373). There is no hall, no courtly audience, no throne: only the green grass, the boats on the river, and the Elves in silent attendance. Galadriel's gestures retain ritual dignity, yet convey personal care and emotional resonance. Her language is intimate and visionary, and the tone is elegiac rather than political: the moment is one of memory, not of sovereignty. Where *Beowulf* enacts public celebration and the reaffirmation of a political order, *The Lord of the Rings* offers a ritual of departure, marked by uncertainty, longing and individualized meaning. The same gestures—feast, cup, gift—are reimagined as tokens of farewell, intimacy, and spiritual support.

In sum, while both texts employ gift-giving to define identity and reinforce bonds, *Beowulf* affirms a world of formal obligation and social fixity, whereas *The Lord of the Rings* envisions generosity as a path to renewal, recognition, and shared hope.

4.2.5 Summary of Findings

The comparison of gift-giving episodes reveals how similar ritual forms are reimagined across contrasting cultural and ethical frameworks. Both texts embed the act of giving within moments of transition—following heroic deeds and preceding new phases of the journey—and use gift exchange to define social position, reinforce allegiance and mark narrative transitions. In *Beowulf*, gift-giving is a formalized act of political and social reinforcement. Hrothgar and Wealhtheow's offerings to Beowulf operate within a rigidly hierarchical structure, affirming roles and securing loyalty. The value of each gift lies in its symbolic visibility and performative weight, reinforcing an economy of honour grounded in duty and inheritance. In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* retains the outward forms of heroic gift exchange—treasures, ritual cups, heirlooms—but shifts their function toward personal dimensions. Galadriel's individualized offerings address inner character and future purpose rather than social rank, and the Elves' practical provisions embody solidarity and quiet grace rather than public spectacle. Ultimately, Tolkien draws upon the lexicon of heroic ritual to

articulate a more inclusive and ethically resonant vision of fellowship. Where *Beowulf* binds individuals into a world of hierarchical reciprocity, *The Lord of the Rings* transforms the gift into a medium of ethical vision, emotional depth and enduring hope.

4.3 Conclusion

Gift-giving in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* illustrates how a shared literary motif can be reimagined across contrasting cultural and ethical worlds. In both texts, the act of giving shapes key narrative transitions and defines relationships among characters. However, the logic behind gift exchange—and the values it communicates—diverges significantly. In *Beowulf*, generosity is inseparable from social hierarchy. Gifts are symbols of political legitimacy, circulated almost exclusively among rulers and heroes within a closed warrior elite. The quantitative data confirms this narrow distribution, while the qualitative readings highlight the formalized and ceremonial nature of gift exchange as a tool of cohesion and control. Acts of giving affirm one's place in a rigidly ordered society, and deviations from this model—such as the slave's gift or Beowulf's deathbed wish for the people—remain exceptional and ambivalently framed. In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* adopts a more inclusive and relational model. Gift-giving is dispersed across social ranks, social groups and even moral boundaries. It functions not only as recognition of heroic deeds, but as a vehicle for compassion. The quantitative analysis reveals a broader variety of giver and recipient types, as well as a wider thematic range of gifts—including practical aid, emotional tokens and magical objects. The close readings of Lothlórien show how Tolkien reimagines the ritual of giving as a deeply personal and ethical act—rooted not in duty or status, but in grace. Ultimately, this chapter reveals that while Tolkien inherits the outward forms of the heroic gift economy—treasures, heirlooms, ceremonial cups—he reshapes their function within a narrative world that privileges moral intent over social rank, and transformation over stability. Gift-giving thus becomes not merely a reflection of heroic tradition, but a dynamic medium through which Tolkien articulates a new ethics of generosity—one that forges bonds across difference and sustains community in moments of uncertainty. This interpretation expands on earlier scholarly discussions of reciprocity and the *comitatus* in *Beowulf* (Bazelmans 2000; Hill 1982; Naismith 2016; Enright 1988; Eliason 1978) and connects with broader reflections on gift-giving in Tolkien's work as discussed in Chapter 2, Sections 2.1.3.1 and 2.1.3.3.

CHAPTER FIVE
Singing: A Comparative Analysis (Quantitative and Qualitative)

As discussed in Chapter 1, the oral performance of song held a central role in Anglo-Saxon culture, functioning as a key medium of memory, identity, and social cohesion. The *scop* was not merely an entertainer but a custodian of tradition, preserving history and heroic values through alliterative verse and musical recitation (Havelock 1986; Magennis 2011; Mitchell 2017). This oral-poetic framework shaped the structure and function of *Beowulf*, where songs within the narrative reinforce communal values and connect past and present through stylized storytelling. Tolkien, drawing on this legacy, reimagines the role of song in *The Lord of the Rings* as a layered instrument of memory, myth-making, and personal expression. While preserving the formal echoes of ancient verse, he expands the emotional and ethical range of song, aligning it with themes of exile, healing, and hope.

This chapter explores the narrative, cultural, and ethical functions of song in the two works, combining quantitative data with close textual interpretation. Singing, in both texts, is more than a decorative feature—it serves as a medium for memory, identity and transition. The quantitative section maps the frequency, distribution, and types of songs and singers, revealing distinct narrative patterns and thematic emphases in each text. The qualitative section focuses on two emblematic episodes: the *scop*'s performance of the "Finnsburg Lay" in *Beowulf* and Bilbo's recital of the "Lay of Eärendil" in *The Lord of the Rings*. Through these case studies, the chapter examines how song functions as a vehicle of cultural transmission and emotional expression. By placing ancient heroic song and modern literary imagination in dialogue, this analysis illuminates both continuity and transformation in the poetic traditions that shape each world.

5.1 Quantitative Analysis

5.1.1 Distribution and Frequency of Singing Events

The distribution of singing events provides insight into how each text integrates acts of singing within its narrative structure. Analysing the frequency of songs across

equally sized segments reveals when and how singing intersects with key thematic and structural developments in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Figure 5.1 displays the relative frequency of singing events across ten equal-sized textual blocks (each representing 10% of the total tokens) in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The chart illustrates the overall narrative distribution of singing within each work.

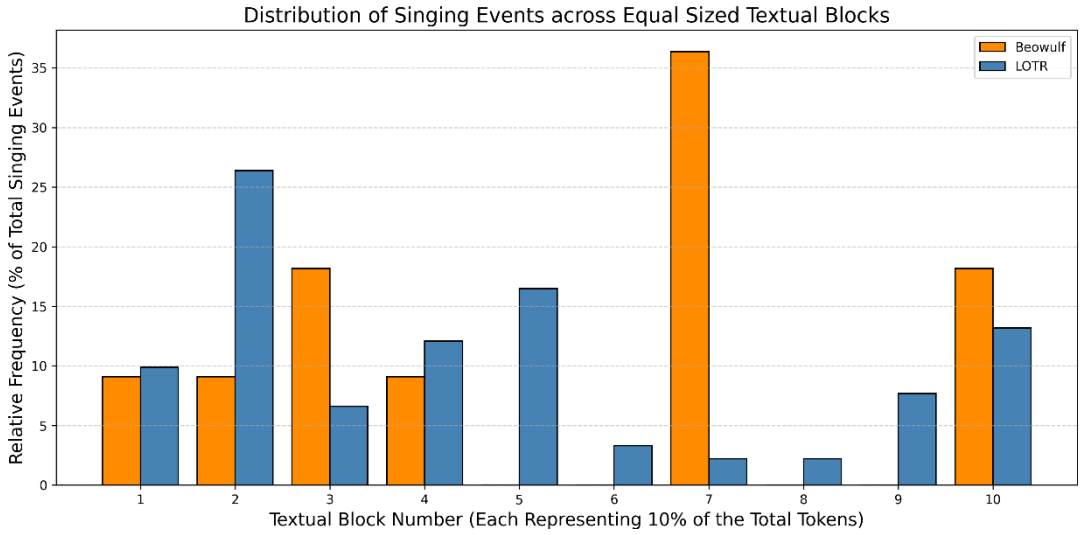


Figure 5.1: Distribution of Singing Events Across Equal-Sized Textual Blocks

In *Beowulf*, singing events are concentrated in a few specific blocks, with one particularly prominent peak. This suggests that singing is closely tied to specific narrative episodes rather than being a continuous feature of the text. In *The Lord of the Rings*, singing is more evenly distributed across the text, although several fluctuations are visible. This pattern indicates that singing plays a more consistent and integrated role throughout Tolkien's narrative, appearing at various stages to accompany different phases of the journey and thematic developments. These differing patterns suggest that *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* employ singing according to distinct narrative logics: in one case as a focused, episodic practice; in the other as a recurrent and versatile device. A closer analysis of the internal distribution of singing events within each text will clarify how these patterns correspond to specific narrative functions.

Focusing first on *Beowulf*, the graph (Figure 5.2) shows the total number of singing events divided across 1% textual blocks, offering a finer-grained view of their occurrence. Overall, the distribution of singing events in Beowulf is sparse and uneven. Musical moments are infrequent, with large portions of the poem devoid of

any singing. Against this background of relative silence, two clusters stand out—as clearly visible in the spikes around blocks 66 and 100 in Figure 5.2, concentrating singing within key ritual and celebratory contexts, while the rest of the narrative remains focused on action, speeches, and heroic deeds.

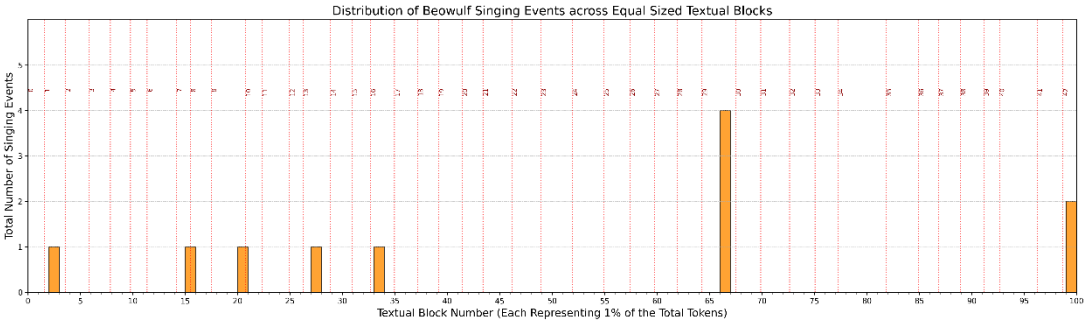


Figure 5.2: Distribution of Beowulf Singing Events (1% Blocks)

The first major cluster appears around block 66. In this section, Beowulf, having returned to Geatland, recounts to King Hygelac the events at Heorot. As part of his story, Beowulf describes the celebrations that followed Grendel's defeat, highlighting harp-playing by Hrothgar and poetic performances by court bards (*Beowulf,* ll. 2105–2109). Although narrated at Hygelac's court, the songs themselves belong to the earlier festivities at Heorot, illustrating the importance of music in both courts during distinct communal celebrations. The second cluster is located at the very end of the poem, around block 100, and coincides with Beowulf's funeral. Two crucial singing events take place here: first, a Geatish woman sings a mourning song, lamenting Beowulf's death and foretelling a grim future for her people (ll. 3150–3155); shortly after, twelve warriors circle Beowulf's barrow, chanting a word-song to honour their fallen king (ll. 3169–3173). Together, these musical moments close the narrative by weaving grief, memory, and communal identity into the final ritual of farewell. The identified peaks thus correspond to moments of particular narrative significance: the celebration following Grendel's defeat and the commemoration following Beowulf's death. Singing emerges in connection with ceremonial or transitional episodes, where collective memory, honour, and grief are expressed through poetic performance.

By contrast, the distribution of singing in *The Lord of the Rings* reveals a different pattern, reflecting a more sustained and versatile use of musical expression throughout the narrative. While some sections of *The Lord of the Rings* contain little

or no singing, musical events are much more frequent and evenly distributed across the narrative compared to *Beowulf* (Figure 5.3). Singing appears consistently throughout the narrative, though with variations in intensity, suggesting that song is an integral and recurring element of Tolkien's storytelling, accompanying different stages and emotional tones of the journey.

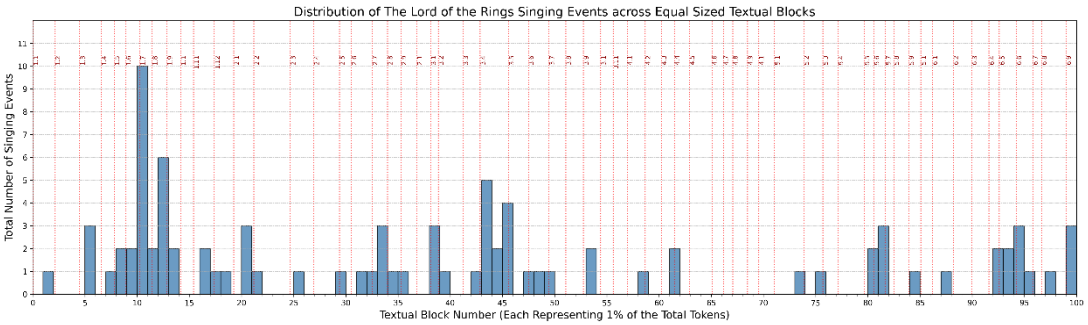


Figure 5.3: Distribution of The Lord of the Rings Singing Events (1% Blocks)

Three main clusters of singing events emerge. The first and most intense concentration occurs between blocks 10 and 14—as shown by the highest peak on the graph (Figure 5.3) corresponding to the arrival of Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin at the house of Tom Bombadil (Book I, Chapter 7, "In the House of Tom Bombadil"). During their stay, singing is particularly abundant: Tom himself often expresses himself through song, weaving stories and performing enchantments through his musical speech (*The Lord of the Rings,* p. 130). Goldberry also enchants the Hobbits with her songs, evoking vivid visions of nature and peace (p. 133). Even the Hobbits join in, participating in the musical atmosphere of Bombadil's household, where singing forms a natural part of communication and hospitality. The second cluster appears between blocks 43 and 46, during Merry and Pippin's encounter with Treebeard (Book III, Chapter 4). Like Bombadil, Treebeard blends speech and song, recounting the ancient history of the forest, the sorrow of the lost Entwives, and the endurance of the Ents (p. 467). His singing conveys both narrative memory and emotional depth, linking nature, loss, and perseverance through a musical mode of storytelling. The third and final peak spans blocks 93 to 100, aligning with the concluding chapters of the narrative. Here, singing marks key communal and emotional milestones: the celebration of Sauron's defeat, the mourning songs during Théoden's funeral, and the farewell and homecoming songs sung by the Hobbits as they return to the Shire. Music accompanies the transitions

from victory to grief and restoration, underlining the emotional closure of the story.

Thus, singing in *Beowulf* marks formal episodes of victory or mourning, while in *The Lord of the Rings* it weaves through personal and communal encounters alike. This difference introduces the next aspect: who participates as singers.

5.1.2 Categories of Singers

Building on the contrasting patterns of distribution, the analysis now turns to examine who sings in each work and how this further reflects their narrative models. The bar chart (Figure 5.4) compares the relative frequency of singer categories in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, offering insight into how each text distributes musical expression across different character types.

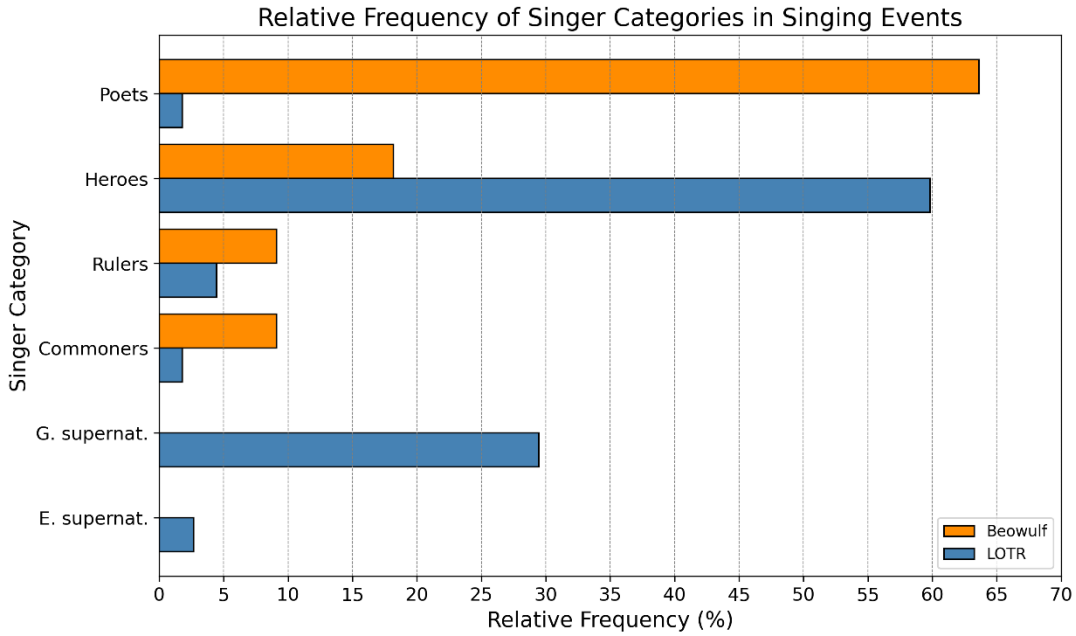


Figure 5.4: Relative Frequency of Singer Categories in Singing Events

In *Beowulf*, the act of singing is overwhelmingly dominated by the Poets (*scops*). Most singing events are attributed to dedicated figures, who perform songs recounting myths (e.g., the creation of the world, ll. 89–98), tales of heroism and feasting (ll. 495–497, 641–645, 1062–1159), and expressions of sorrow (ll. 2111–2112). Singing occurs primarily during communal gatherings and formal celebrations, reinforcing the Scop's role as a custodian of heroic memory and cultural identity. Instances involving other categories—Heroes, Rulers, and Commoners—are rare and narratively significant.

Notably, the Geatish woman's lament at Beowulf's funeral (ll. 3150–3155) expresses collective grief and foreboding, but remains an exceptional case. Overall, singing in *Beowulf* follows a vertically structured model: it is a formal, institutionalized act entrusted to specialized figures to sustain social and moral order. In *The Lord of the Rings*, singing is distributed across a wider range of figures. Heroes such as Bilbo, Frodo, Merry, Pippin, Sam, Aragorn, and others frequently sing, whether through travel songs like Bilbo's "The Road goes ever on and on" (p. 36), narrative chants such as Aragorn's tale of Tinúviel (p. 192), or laments like Gimli's mourning of Moria's past (p. 315). Singing accompanies their journeys, emotions, and memories, emerging as a spontaneous and personal mode of expression. Good Supernaturals also play a major role. Tom Bombadil, Treebeard, and the Elves sing to convey ancient stories, enchantments, and communal sorrow, such as the Elves' lament for Gandalf ("Mithrandir, Mithrandir," p. 359). Even Evil Supernaturals are not entirely absent: the Barrow-wight's harsh singing casts a malevolent enchantment, revealing that music, in Tolkien's world, can express both good and corrupt forces. Taken together, the distribution of singer categories in *The Lord of the Rings* reflects a horizontally structured model. Singing is a widespread, versatile practice that crosses social and moral boundaries, contributing to storytelling, emotional expression, and community building. In sum, *Beowulf* restricts song to professional poets, preserving heroic tradition; *The Lord of the Ring*s disperses musical expression across heroes, commoners, and supernatural beings, making song a living language of resilience and memory.

5.1.3 Types of Songs

After considering who sings, the analysis now turns to what is sung. Figure 5.5 compares the relative frequency of song categories in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, offering insight into the thematic dimensions of musical expression in the two texts.

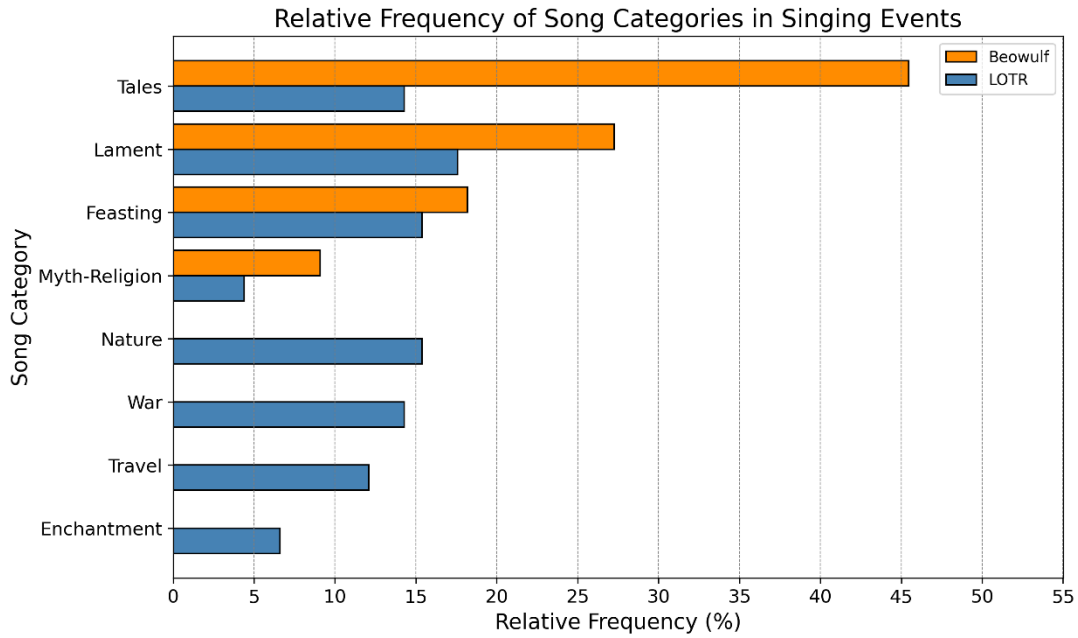


Figure 5.5: Relative Frequency of Song Categories in Singing Events

In *Beowulf*, singing is dominated by a narrow range of themes closely tied to heroic tradition and collective memory. Tales are the most frequent type: Scops recount ancestral exploits (ll. 641–645; 1062–1159) and legendary figures such as Sigemund (ll. 866–913), usually during feasts and communal gatherings. These performances reinforce social cohesion and link the present to a mythic past. Laments also hold a significant place, associated with mourning and foreboding. The scop's sorrowful songs (ll. 2111–2112) are echoed more prominently at the poem's end: in the Geatish woman's mourning for Beowulf and the Twelve Warriors' word-song of remembrance (ll. 3152–3184). These laments, though integrated within formal rituals, express authentic communal grief. Feasting songs, performed by the *scop* (e.g., ll. 495–497, 1062–1065), accompany moments of joy and reinforce bonds among warriors. Myth-Religion songs appear rarely, such as the scop's hymn on the creation of the world (ll. 89–98), broadening the scope of heroic society but remaining peripheral. Overall, *Beowulf* shows little thematic variety: there are no songs of nature, travel, or enchantment. Singing is mainly a formalized act that preserves heroic memory, enacts communal mourning, and celebrates feasting within a tightly structured society.

By contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* presents a far richer thematic landscape. Laments form a recurring thread, blending personal and collective sorrow. Aragorn's

song for Boromir (p. 418) and the Riders of Rohan's mourning chants (p. 460) recall, but also expand upon, the function of laments in *Beowulf*, articulating grief with personal immediacy rather than through strictly communal ritual. Tales continue to play a role, but in Tolkien's world they often carry personal meaning: Aragorn's song about Tinúviel (p. 192) inspires as much as it preserves cultural memory, in contrast to the purely historical focus of the Scops. Travel songs—such as Bilbo's "The Road goes ever on and on" (p. 36)—have no true counterpart in *Beowulf*. These songs give voice to the inner experiences of movement, uncertainty, and hope, marking emotional and narrative transitions. Nature songs emerge especially through Tom Bombadil and Treebeard, expressing harmony with the living world—again, a theme absent from *Beowulf*, where nature serves merely as a setting. Enchantment songs span both wonder and danger. While Elvish songs evoke beauty and mourning, the Barrow-wight's sinister singing (p. 530) shows that music can also corrupt and deceive—an expansion of musical meaning absent in *Beowulf*, where song remains morally unambiguous.

In sum, both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* associate singing with memory, mourning and storytelling. Yet Tolkien's narrative assigns music a more versatile, emotionally resonant role, embedding it within characters' personal journeys and across the moral fabric of the world.

5.1.4 Singer–Song Relationships

Having examined the distribution of singers and the thematic categories of songs separately, the next step is to explore how these two dimensions interact. The two heatmaps (Figures 5.6 and 5.7) visualize the relationship between singer categories and song contents in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. They show how different types of characters engage with different themes through musical expression, highlighting patterns of specialization, diversity, or overlap within each narrative tradition.

In *Beowulf*, musical activity is heavily concentrated around the Poets (Scops), who dominate the act of singing across a narrow thematic range. The majority of songs performed by Scops centre on Tales—narratives of heroic deeds and legendary ancestors—and Feasting celebrations, reinforcing communal memory and courtly tradition. Other singer categories—Heroes, Rulers, and Commoners—appear only

occasionally and are associated with a very limited thematic range, mainly Tales and Laments. Their musical contributions occur at specific narrative moments, such as mourning or exceptional acts of remembrance, rather than as part of ongoing storytelling. There is no evidence of Good or Evil Supernaturals engaging in musical expression. Overall, singing in *Beowulf* remains a formalized and institutionally framed practice, restricted to a few character types and focused on a limited set of thematic functions.

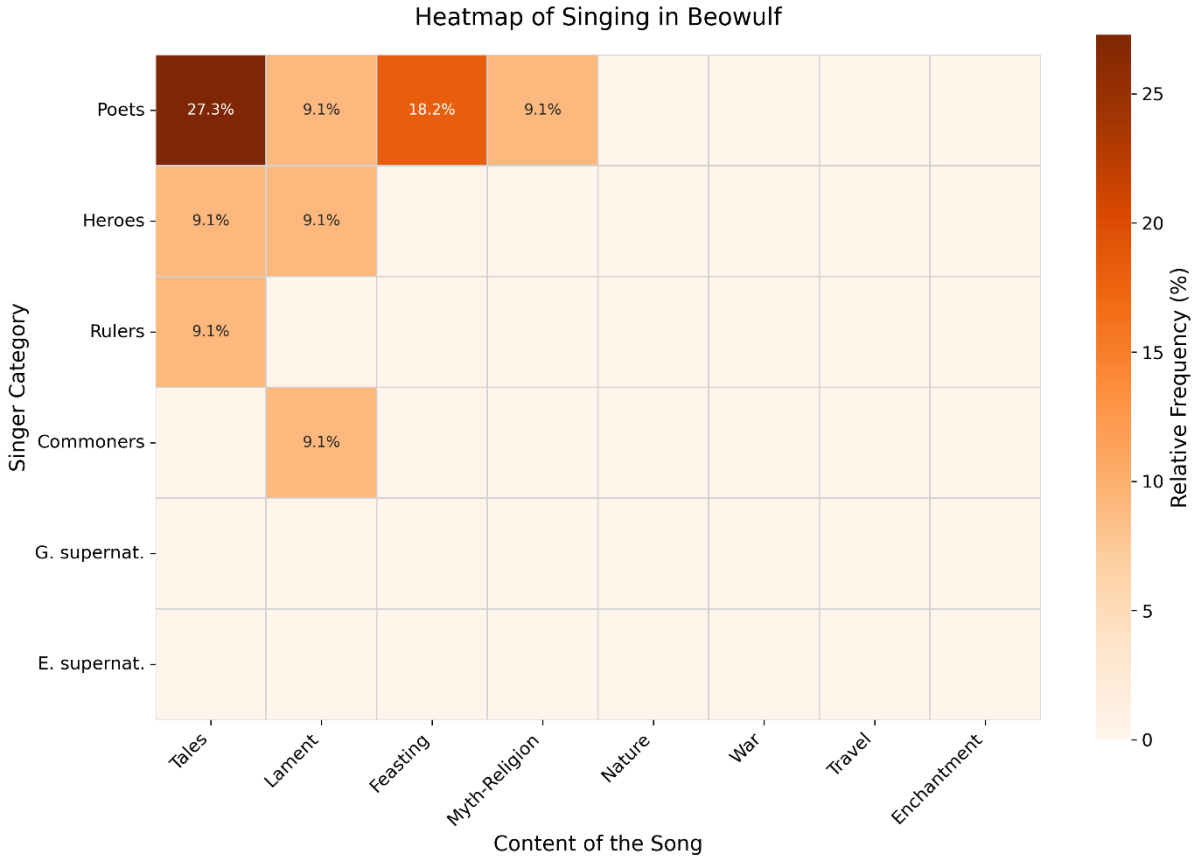


Figure 5.6: Heatmap of Singing in Beowulf

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the heatmap reveals a much broader and more balanced distribution of singing across both singer categories and song themes. Heroes are the most prominent singers, and they engage with a wide variety of themes—Tales, Laments, Travel, War, and Myth-Religion—reflecting the deeply personal and communal role that music plays throughout their journey. Good Supernaturals, such as the Elves, Tom Bombadil, and Treebeard, also contribute significantly to the musical landscape, singing about Nature, Feasting, Myth-Religion, and Enchantment.

Their songs expand the emotional and cultural dimensions of the world, blending storytelling, memory, and wonder. Commoners and Rulers participate in singing as well, though to a more limited extent, typically linked to themes of Feasting or Lament. Interestingly, Poets, who dominate the musical sphere in *Beowulf*, are only marginal figures in Tolkien's world, marking an inversion of the earlier model. Overall, singing in *The Lord of the Rings* is a transversal practice, crossing social and narrative boundaries. It serves both worldbuilding and emotional development, enriching the narrative by giving voice to a wide spectrum of characters and experiences.

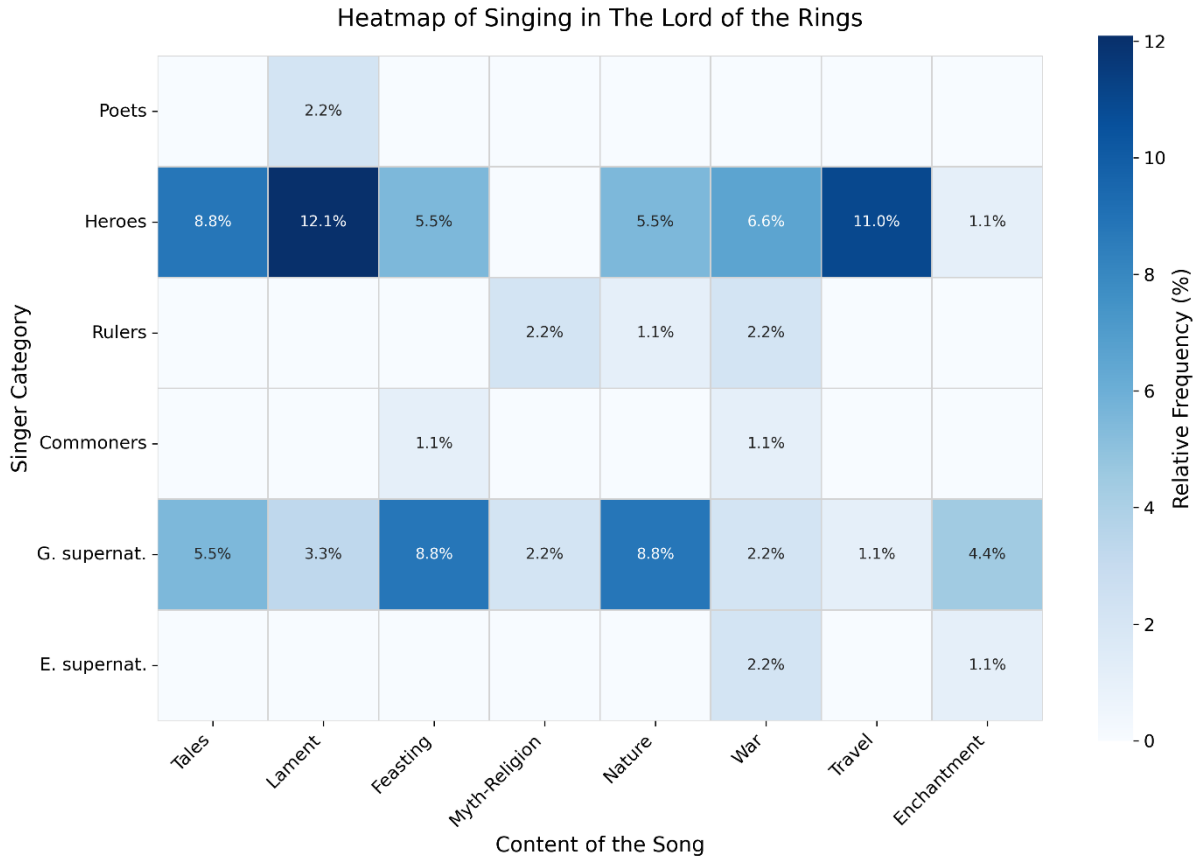


Figure 5.7: Heatmap of Singing in The Lord of the Rings

The quantitative analysis of singing events and singer–song relationships reveals a fundamental divergence between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In *Beowulf*, singing is centralized, formal, and thematically limited to heroic memory, feasting, and mourning, performed almost exclusively by professional poets within a hierarchical society. In *The Lord of the Rings*, singing is widespread, thematically diverse, and emotionally expressive, involving heroes, supernatural beings, and common folk.

5.2 Qualitative Analysis

This section explores the theme of singing through two emblematic episodes—one from *Beowulf* and one from *The Lord of the Rings*—in order to understand how poetic performance functions within heroic narratives. Singing, in both texts, is more than ornament or entertainment: it is a culturally significant act that shapes memory and frames key transitions in the narrative. Drawing on close textual analysis, the following case studies examine how song operates within its immediate narrative context, what is sung and by whom, and what social or political role the performance plays. Particular attention is given to the figures of the *scop* and the poet, the audience and setting of each episode, and the language and poetic techniques used. Through this analysis, the chapter seeks to highlight both the continuity and transformation of the singing tradition from the Anglo-Saxon hall to Tolkien's Elvish Rivendell, and to assess how Tolkien inherits, reinterprets, and reshapes the poetic conventions of the heroic past.

5.2.1 Case Study One: The Lay of Finn

Following the quantitative overview, the qualitative analysis begins with a singing episode from *Beowulf* that immediately follows the hero's triumph over Grendel. The singing episode is situated just after the celebration of Beowulf's victory: Hrothgar has bestowed rich gifts upon Beowulf and his men, and a joyful feast unfolds in Heorot (ll. 1063-1159). Amidst the formal reward-giving and public recognition, the *scop* rises to perform a heroic lay—a song recounting the tragic conflict between the Danes and the Frisians, centered on Hnæf, Hildeburh, and Finn. This song, often referred to as the "Finn Episode," (Camargo 1981) shifts the atmosphere from victory to lament, reminding the hall that heroic deeds are often shadowed by sorrow, betrayal, and loss. Delivered before the Danish court, the tale functions as both entertainment and ethical reflection. It reframes Beowulf's success within a broader tradition of heroic struggle and mortality, offering a counterpoint to the celebratory tone of the feast.

The song performed by Hrothgar's *scop* recounts the tragic events of the "Finn Episode", focusing on the doomed peace between the Danes and the Frisians. Structured as a lay of battle and loss, the song narrates how Hnæf, a Danish prince, is killed in Friesland during a fragile truce, and how Hildeburh, both a Danish princess and Frisian queen, suffers the loss of her brother and son in the same conflict. The *scop*

evokes the funeral pyre that consumes their bodies, the sorrowful lament of Hildeburh, and the precarious aftermath of the battle, as Hengest remains trapped in a cycle of vengeance (Camargo 1981; North 1990). The narrative unfolds with vivid detail and emotional weight: the gleaming of weapons (*swatfah syrce*, l. 1110), the tension of uneasy peace (*fæste frioðuwære*, l. 1095), and the violent return of conflict (*sweordbealo sliðen*, l. 1146). Grief and ruin are expressed through key terms such as *geomuru ides* ("sorrowful woman", l. 1074), *gyrnwræce* ("revenge", l. 1138), and *morþorbealo maga* ("murderous evil against kin", l. 1078), which foreground the sorrow, betrayal, and bloodshed that dominate the episode. Delivered within the formal setting of Heorot, the performance blends poetry with communal memory, drawing attention to the cost of failed alliances and the fragility of heroic ideals.

The performance of the "Finn Episode" within Beowulf reflects a key function of song in early Anglo-Saxon society: the preservation and transmission of communal memory and heroic values through alliterative verse, densely woven with martial and funerary vocabulary such as *sweord* (l. 1106), *wæl* (ll. 1073, 1116), and *bæl* (ll. 1108, 1116). As described by Havelock (1986), the *scop* serves not only as an entertainer but as a cultural historian, whose performance reinforces the norms of heroic society. In this episode, the scop's tale of Hengest and Finn operates on multiple levels. On the surface, it recounts a tale of failed peace, personal loss, and eventual revenge. Yet within the narrative setting of *Beowulf*, the song becomes a mirror of the heroic ethos: the bonds of loyalty, the duty to avenge, the fragile nature of truces, and the sorrow that follows broken oaths.

The political function of the song is especially significant. Sung in Heorot, shortly after Beowulf's triumph, it contrasts the harmony just restored with a tale of tragedy born from political compromise. The song highlights the risks of intertribal marriage diplomacy, embodied by Hildeburh, whose double loss—both her natal and marital kin—represents the tragic limits of peace-weaving. Her lament at the pyre can be read not just as personal grief, but as a warning about the costs of divided loyalty and the failures of heroic codes when tested by conflicting allegiances.

As scholars such as Magennis (2011) and Haymes & Samples (2020) argue, such performances reinforced the shared moral universe of the audience. The scop's song is thus a device of political reflection: it recalls past suffering to reinforce present

unity. Its performance within the hall acts as a cautionary reminder of the fragility of alliances, and the importance of unity under a just and generous lord—echoing the values enacted by Hrothgar during the feast. In a society still shaped by oral transmission, the scop's role is not merely aesthetic but profoundly instructive, anchoring collective identity in a shared past of glory, violence, and loss.

The performance of the "Finn Episode" within *Beowulf* is a paradigmatic example of the scop's role in articulating communal memory, reinforcing the heroic ethos, and reflecting on the costs of political fracture. Framed within a moment of restored harmony in Heorot, the tale warns against the fragility of peace and the tragic consequences of divided loyalties. Through its portrayal of Hildeburh's lament and Hengest's conflicted vengeance, the song dramatizes the tension between heroic duty and personal loss. Rather than a narrative aside, the embedded lay deepens the poem's moral texture and serves as a ritual act of remembrance. It affirms that in the heroic world, identity is forged as much by song as by sword, and that the past—when properly recalled—offers both instruction and caution for the present.

5.2.2 Case Study Two: The Lay of Eärendil

The second case study turns to *The Lord of the Rings*, focusing on a singing episode that, like in *Beowulf*, follows a moment of danger overcome and introduces a shift in tone. The singing episode in Rivendell takes place in Book II, Chapter 1 ("Many Meetings"), shortly after Frodo has recovered from his wound at Weathertop and been reunited with his companions. The Fellowship has not yet been formally established, and the narrative slows to offer a moment of rest, reflection, and reconnection with the Elvish world. This marks the first prolonged encounter with Elvish culture in the narrative, setting a tone of wonder and memory

The specific setting is the Hall of Fire, a space within Elrond's house described as both quiet and solemn—"usually empty and quiet" (p. 230) a place for "peace and thought" (p. 230). It is here that Frodo experiences his first immersion in Elvish song and lore. The moment is introduced through atmosphere: a mingling of music, twilight and dreamlike perception, culminating in Bilbo's chanting of the "Lay of Eärendil". The song narrates the mythic journey of Eärendil, a mariner who sails beyond the world and becomes a star, bearing the Silmaril as a light against the darkness.

The performance unfolds during an informal gathering. Bilbo, returning to his

role as poet, chants before a circle of Elves, joined by Aragorn in the composition of the poem. Frodo listens in a state of semi-trance, transitioning from waking into dream and back again. The episode thus blends song, narrative, and dream, offering a moment of mythic elevation that fuses personal memory with the vast history of Middle-earth. This song becomes a narrative hinge, connecting the mortal present to the deep past of Elvish legend. The performance begins subtly, emerging from the ambient music and voices in the Hall of Fire. Frodo, already drawn into a dreamlike state by the Elvish melodies, becomes aware of a voice that takes clearer shape: it is Bilbo, chanting a long poem about Eärendil the Mariner. The transition from instrumental and choral music to narrative song is seamless, blurring the line between memory and myth.

The poem itself is formally intricate, composed in regular stanzas of four lines with rich alliteration and internal rhyme. The opening stanzas set the tone with vivid imagery and sonic texture: *"Eärendil was a mariner / that tarried in Arvernien; / he built a boat of timber felled / in Nimbrethil to journey in"* (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, II.1, pp. 233–234). The consistent rhythm and sound patterns contribute to the poem's immersive, song-like quality, aligning form with the mythical tone of the episode.. It is epic in scope, recounting the mythological voyage of Eärendil, who sails west in search of the Valar and ultimately becomes a celestial figure. The narrative is marked by vivid imagery—silver sails, a swan-prow, towers mirrored in shadowy lakes—and by a gradual elevation from mortal struggle to cosmic resolution. The language is lyrical, full of maritime metaphors and elegiac tones, blending martial grandeur with visionary transcendence. Key motifs recur throughout: *silver*, *flame*, *star*, *shadow*, *song*, *light*, and *wandering*, creating a semantic field that evokes both celestial wonder and mortal longing. These lexical patterns reinforce the poem's symbolic layering of voyage, exile, and transformation. The act of singing is both performative and immersive. Frodo initially drifts into sleep, overwhelmed by the music, but gradually awakens into the poem, as though the words themselves shape his dreams. The performance is framed as a shared act between Bilbo and Aragorn, with Elves listening attentively and requesting a second recital. Yet despite its public nature, the moment remains deeply intimate and contemplative, more a meditation than a celebration. Finally, the song closes without overt applause or ceremonial markers. Bilbo quietly rejoins Frodo, reflecting on the composition and revealing that the poem was largely

his, though Aragorn had insisted on including the green stone—a subtle nod to Eärendil's connection to Aragorn's own lineage and destiny. The episode ends with the faint echo of another Elvish song in praise of Elbereth[29], underscoring the spiritual atmosphere of the scene and its placement within the mythic continuum of Middle-earth.

Bilbo's song about Eärendil, though performed in a relaxed setting, carries significant social and symbolic weight. At a surface level, it functions as poetic entertainment during an evening of music and reflection in Rivendell. Yet the content, form, and delivery of the song reveal its deeper role within the cultural and moral framework of Tolkien's legendarium. First, the song reaffirms Rivendell as a space of memory, lore and transmission. The Hall of Fire, described by Gandalf as a place for "peace and thought," becomes the setting for a ritual of cultural continuity, where stories of the Elder Days are preserved and performed not merely as art, but as living links between past and present. The presence of Frodo, Sam, and other mortals among Elves and Númenórean descendants highlights this dynamic: the song is at once ancient and newly received, echoing across time and social groups.

Second, the choice of subject—Eärendil—underscores the political and genealogical stakes of the performance. Eärendil is not just a mythic hero; he is the father of Elrond and Elros, making him a foundational figure in the histories of both Elves and Men. His journey to Valinor and transformation into a star represent both literal salvation (bringing the Silmaril to the Valar) and symbolic transcendence. In this context, Bilbo's act of singing is also an act of tribute, aligning the hobbits' humble presence with the vast moral and mythic currents of the world they have entered.

Third, the collaboration between Bilbo and Aragorn—subtly acknowledged in their debate over the poem's authorship—serves as a form of narrative co-authorship that reflects their shared connection to this heritage. Aragorn's insistence on including the green stone, emblematic of the Elfstone (*Elessar*), situates the performance within his own emerging identity as heir to the Númenórean kings. *Elessar*, one of Aragorn's epithets, means "Elfstone"; its presence here quietly foreshadows his future role as

[29] Elbereth, also known as Varda, is one of the Valar—angelic beings in Tolkien's mythology. She is associated with starlight and is especially revered by the Elves, who invoke her in moments of awe or need. Her presence through song reinforces the spiritual atmosphere of the scene and highlights the connection between beauty, memory and hope in Tolkien's cosmology.

returning king. Although his royal lineage has not yet been fully disclosed to the reader at this point in the narrative, the reference anticipates it with symbolic subtlety. The song, then, does more than retell a legend: it prepares the audience, and Frodo in particular, to recognize the cosmological and political dimensions of the journey ahead.

Finally, the reception of the song by the Elves suggests a culture in which poetry and music are both aesthetic and moral acts. The Elves listen attentively, request a second recital, and even debate the authorship playfully, signalling that participation in song is a sign of mutual recognition and shared values. For Bilbo, it is a moment of reintegration within Elvish culture; for Frodo, an opportunity to begin understanding the depth of the world he is entering; and for the reader, a clear example of how, in Tolkien's work, song is used to convey meaning more effectively than ordinary speech.

5.2.3 Comparative Discussion

The two episodes selected—Hrothgar's *scop* singing the "Lay of Finn" in *Beowulf* and Bilbo's recitation of the "Lay of Eärendil" in *The Lord of the Rings*—share a similar narrative placement. Both occur after a moment of violence or danger has passed: the defeat of Grendel in Heorot, and Frodo's recovery from his near-fatal wound in Rivendell. In each case, song provides a moment of cultural and emotional consolidation, reaffirming identity and values through the retelling of past events. Despite these structural similarities, the two moments emerge from very different cultural and literary frameworks. The scop's song in *Beowulf* is embedded within the social and political logic of heroic society: it reinforces dynastic history, political alliances, and the tragedy of feud. Bilbo's song, by contrast, is shaped by Tolkien's mythopoeic vision and elvish aesthetics; it reflects spiritual longing, memory of the Blessed Realm and the tragic beauty of exile. The contrast between these two modes of singing—courtly and performative versus lyrical and contemplative—reveals how Tolkien inherits but transforms the function of song in the heroic tradition. From this shared ritual of remembrance, the comparison unfolds along several key axes: the roles and functions of the singer, the themes and tone of the songs, the nature of the audience and the setting, and the broader conception of memory and cultural transmission in each world.

A first point of comparison concerns the figure of the singer and the role they occupy within the narrative and social structure of each text. In *Beowulf*, the *scop* is a central figure of social cohesion and memory. His performance is not simply entertainment but a collective act of memory and ethical teaching. Positioned in the hall after the distribution of gifts, the *scop* recounts the "Lay of Finn". His performance serves to reframe the recent events—Beowulf's victory over Grendel—within a broader heroic and dynastic continuum. The *scop* acts as a voice of the community, reminding the audience of their shared past, reinforcing ideals of honour and vengeance, and indirectly cautioning against the fragility of peace. In *The Lord of the Rings*, by contrast, Bilbo's role as singer is more ambiguous and personalized. He is not a formal bard, but a poet and former adventurer composing within an Elvish cultural setting. His song is not spontaneous oral tradition but the result of personal craft and aesthetic intention, developed with Aragorn's guidance. While it draws on deep mythic material—the story of Eärendil—it does not serve a political or commemorative function in the same way as the scop's song. Rather, it invites reflection, evokes wonder, and connects the listener to the deeper currents of Middle-earth's cosmology. Bilbo's role is that of a mediator between mortal and Elvish traditions, blending personal voice with inherited myth. Thus, while both figures occupy the space of the singer within their respective texts, their functions diverge sharply. The *scop* fulfils a communal role rooted in oral heroic tradition; Bilbo instead represents a more reflective, literary model—focused on personal voice, myth, and artistic creation. Tolkien reimagines the figure of the singer as a bridge between past and present, mortal and immortal, but detaches him from the scop's institutional role as historian and moralist of the mead-hall.

Another key area of comparison lies in the themes and tone that characterize each song. The "Finnsburg Lay*"*, performed in *Beowulf*, is tragic and martial, recounting the collapse of peace and the devastating cost of loyalty in a world defined by cycles of vengeance. The tone is solemn, somber and communal: the scop's tale mirrors the values of the warrior society, reminding the audience that even heroic intentions can end in ruin. His song functions as both memorial and moral warning, embedding personal loss within the collective history of dynastic conflict. By contrast, the song of Eärendil in *The Lord of the Rings* is mythic, visionary, and melancholic.

Its tone is more meditative than martial, focusing on transcendence, cosmic exile, and the longing for the unreachable West. Although it also contains sorrow and struggle, the song gestures toward hope and redemption through beauty and light. The focus shifts from the politics of vengeance to the metaphysics of destiny. Where the scop's song reinforces a heroic worldview rooted in kinship and retribution, Bilbo's composition gestures toward a broader, almost spiritual reflection on mortality, heroism and the legacy of myth.

Another important dimension of comparison lies in the setting and ritual framing of each singing episode. In *Beowulf*, song emerges within a highly structured ceremonial environment: the hall of Heorot, with its formal seating, cup-passing rituals and clear social hierarchies. The *scop* performs after the formal gift-giving, his voice reinforcing the values of the court and aligning poetic memory with dynastic affirmation. Singing here is explicitly embedded in communal celebration and political narrative—it confirms identity through lineage and history, weaving heroic memory into the ongoing performance of power. In the episode chosen from *The Lord of the Rings*, by contrast, singing occurs in a more diffused, contemplative space. The Hall of Fire is a place not of feasting but of reflection, filled with music and memory rather than hierarchy and display. The songs do not simply glorify the present or the recent past; they evoke distant ages, mythic figures and lost worlds. The setting encourages introspection, dream-like immersion and spiritual transport rather than public recognition or dynastic pride. While Frodo listens, the music blurs the boundary between waking and dreaming, between history and vision. In this context, singing becomes a ritual of memory and longing, not of sovereign affirmation. In both texts, the act of singing marks a pause in the narrative, a moment of heightening and reflection. But while *Beowulf* channels that pause toward communal identity and heroic commemoration, *The Lord of the Rings* uses it to evoke mythic depth.

A significant point of comparison between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* lies in the lexical and stylistic strategies used to convey poetic speech and singing. In *Beowulf*, the language of song is tightly woven into the fabric of alliterative verse, marked by formulaic expressions, kennings, and metrical constraints typical of the oral heroic tradition. Terms like *gomenwudu* (joy-wood, i.e., harp, *Beowulf,* l. 1065), and *healgamen* (hall-entertainment, l. 1065) reflect a specialized and conventionalized

lexicon rooted in a shared cultural code. The scop's language is not separate from the narrative voice but stylistically congruent with it, reinforcing the poem's unity of tone and worldview. By contrast, Tolkien constructs a layered and plural lexicon, often alternating between archaic English (*e.g.*, "ere," "fell," "gossamer"), modern poetic diction (*e.g.*, "wanderer," "mariner," "enchanted ways"), and untranslated Elvish (*e.g.*, *Elbereth*, *Calacirya*, *Tarmenel*). Songs in *The Lord of the Rings* are presented in multiple registers—some familiar and accessible, others deliberately remote and ceremonial. The "Lay of Eärendil", for instance, adopts a pseudo-archaic poetic style (*panoply*, *carcanet*, *ere the waking dawn, The Lord of the Rings,* p. 233-236) that evokes a mythic tone while remaining modern in structure. Elvish hymns such as *A Elbereth Gilthoniel* (p. 238) are left untranslated, functioning more as sound-symbolic invocations than conveyors of plot. This multilingual strategy reflects Tolkien's philological vision: song becomes not only a vehicle for cultural transmission but also a marker of historical and linguistic difference—between peoples, epochs and realms.

In sum, the comparison between the *scop'*s performance in *Beowulf* and Bilbo's song in *The Lord of the Rings* highlights both continuity and transformation in the role of poetic speech within heroic narratives. While both episodes are situated at liminal narrative moments—pauses after danger, gestures toward memory—they express radically different conceptions of song and its social function. *Beowulf* embeds song within the hierarchical, performative world of the mead-hall, where the *scop* affirms dynastic identity, heroic values, and political cohesion through formalized poetic tradition. Tolkien, by contrast, reimagines song as a contemplative act—rooted in myth, layered in language, and open to wonder. Through Bilbo's recitation and the Elvish setting of Rivendell, Tolkien shifts the poetic mode from communal declaration to individual meditation, from public memory to mythic vision. At every level—ritual, thematic, formal, and lexical—the transformation of the *scop* into the modern poet reflects Tolkien's reinterpretation of the Germanic tradition: not as a fixed code, but as a living reservoir of forms to be reshaped by new aesthetic and spiritual concerns.

5.2.5 Summary of Findings

The comparison of singing episodes in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* reveals both structural continuities and profound differences in purpose, tone and cultural vision. In *Beowulf*, the scop's performance of the "Finnsburg Lay" emerges as a paradigmatic

act of heroic memory: deeply embedded in the mead-hall's ceremonial structure, it serves to reinforce dynastic identity, articulate social norms, and caution against the dangers of political fragmentation. The scop's authority is communal and genealogical, grounded in oral tradition and upheld by a culturally shared lexicon shaped by alliteration, by kennings such as "gomenwudu" (joy-wood, i.e., harp, l. 1065), and by performative ritual. In contrast, Bilbo's recitation of the Lay of Eärendil in Rivendell reconfigures the role of song within a more introspective and mythopoeic framework. Though still embedded in communal space and cultural memory, Tolkien's treatment of music and verse is stylistically plural and aesthetically contemplative. It becomes a medium for cosmological imagination and intergenerational reflection. While Tolkien evokes the language and tone of ancient heroic poetry, he adapts its devices—such as epithetical naming and mythic register—to serve a vision shaped by exile, longing, and moral complexity. Taken together, the two case studies demonstrate how Tolkien draws upon the structural forms of early Germanic poetry—its singers, settings, and motifs—while reinterpreting their meaning through the lens of his invented mythology. The result is not a rejection but a transformation: poetic expression remains a vessel for memory and identity, yet the values it carries and the emotions it evokes have evolved. Where *Beowulf* uses song to bind the present to a heroic past, *The Lord of the Rings* uses it to open the present toward a distant, mythic horizon.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the narrative, cultural, and symbolic significance of singing in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* through a combined quantitative and qualitative lens. The quantitative analysis established clear contrasts in distribution, participants, and thematic functions of singing. In *Beowulf*, song appears sporadically but with high ritual density, centred on formal performances by specialized figures like the *scop* and tightly associated with heroic memory, feasting, and mourning. In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* presents a more evenly distributed and thematically diverse presence of song, performed by a wide range of characters and integrated into both everyday experience and mythic evocation. The qualitative analysis further deepened this contrast by comparing two emblematic episodes. The scop's performance of the "Finnsburg Lay" in *Beowulf* affirmed the communal values of a heroic society bound by vengeance and loyalty. Meanwhile, Bilbo's recital of the "Lay of Eärendil" in *The*

Lord of the Rings reflected Tolkien's reimagining of song as a contemplative, aesthetic, and cosmological act—rooted in myth and layered in language. Through both approaches, this chapter has shown how singing functions as a narrative hinge, a tool of cultural transmission and a mirror of the values each text seeks to uphold. In *Beowulf*, singing consolidates heroic identity through formalized memory. In Tolkien, it becomes a means of imagining otherworlds, bridging mortal experience with mythic time. Together, these texts reveal how song, far from being a marginal embellishment, lies at the heart of the narrative and ethical architectures of heroic literature—whether ancient or modern.

CHAPTER SIX

Burials: A Comparative Analysis (Quantitative and Qualitative)

Building on the previous chapter's exploration of singing as a form of cultural memory, this chapter turns to the equally symbolic and communal function of funerary practices. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.3.2), funeral rites in Germanic cultures were not only acts of mourning, but also expressions of social structure, kinship, and leadership. In both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, burials serve as narrative closures that encode cultural values and articulate visions of legacy and remembrance. This chapter examines how funerary practices are narrated and symbolically constructed in the two texts, with the aim of understanding how each frames death, memory, and the enduring significance of heroic identity. The first section offers a quantitative overview of burial events, identifying patterns in frequency, type, and associated elements. The second section moves to a close reading of two key episodes—the funerals of Beowulf and Théoden—to explore how each is shaped by its historical and literary context. Together, the analyses show how Tolkien engages with the heroic tradition while reimagining its emotional and ethical framework.

6.1 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis of burial events offers a systematic view of how commemoration and death are represented in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. By examining the distribution of funerals, the categories of the deceased, the types of burial and the associated grave goods, it becomes possible to trace the cultural values and narrative roles attached to funerary practices in each text. The following section presents visualizations that map these patterns, laying the groundwork for the interpretive discussion that follows.

6.1.1 Distribution and Frequency of Burial Events

Due to the small number of burial events in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, it is more effective to visualize their distribution directly rather than divide the texts

into regular narrative segments. The following graphs (Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2) show when funerals occur across the narrative sequence, using blocks that each correspond to 1% of the total tokens in the text. This method highlights the episodic nature of burials and allows for a clearer comparison of their thematic placement and structural role in each work.

In *Beowulf*, burials are rare and widely spaced. Only three funerals appear across the poem, each separated by long narrative gaps. As shown in Figure 6.1, they occur at the opening (block 0), the middle (around block 34), and the end (blocks 99–100). These moments are not recurring motifs but ritual closures that mark the rise, crisis and fall of heroic society. Both funerary forms—cremation on a pyre and burial in a ship—are also attested in historical sources and archaeological evidence. Tacitus mentions cremation as a Germanic practice (*Germania*, ch. 27), and ship burials have been documented in several sites, including Sutton Hoo and Oseberg. These parallels reinforce the historical grounding of the rituals depicted in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* and highlight Tolkien's engagement with real-world funerary traditions.

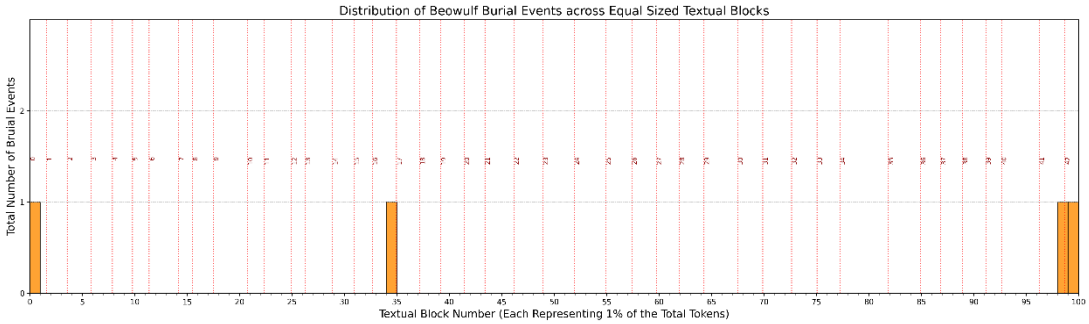


Figure 6.1: Distribution of Burial Events in Beowulf (1% Segmentation)

The first funeral, Scyld Scefing's ship-burial (*Beowulf.* ll. 26–52), opens the poem with a majestic send-off. Scyld is laid to rest with treasure and arms, evoking kingly grandeur and the transience of power. The second event, in the Finnsburg episode (ll. 1107–1123), features the cremation of Hildeburh's son and other fallen warriors. The pyre, steeped in images of blood, fire and grief, conveys personal and communal trauma. The final burial (ll. 3139–3170) is Beowulf's own. His funeral combines an elaborate pyre and a monumental barrow by the sea. It marks both the end of a sovereign and the collapse of Geatish society. Though few, these events form a thematic arc centred on mortality, kingship and cultural decline.

By contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* presents a more frequent and evenly spaced pattern (figure 6.2). Eight burials occur across early (block 11), middle (blocks 38, 41, 51) and late stages (blocks 81, 82, 95). Though still episodic, these funerals recur at key turning points, marking transitions, mourning or reflection.

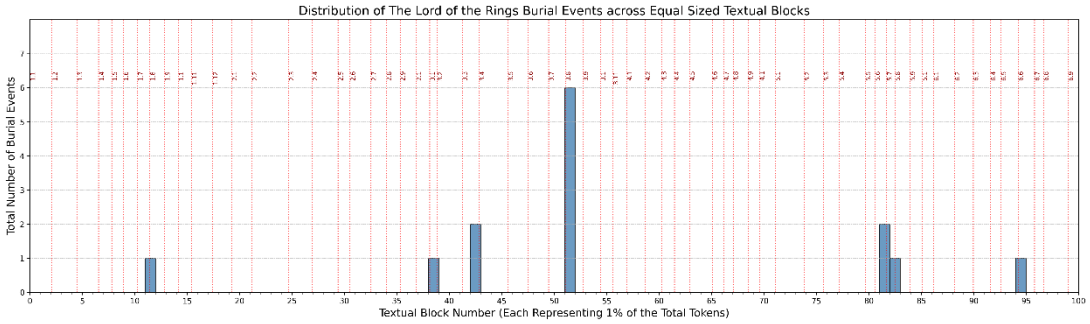


Figure 6.2: Distribution of Gift-Giving Events in The Lord of the Rings (1% Segmentation)

The most concentrated moment is around block 51 (Book III, Chapter 8), following Helm's Deep. Four distinct burial rites are recorded: the Riders of Rohan are interred in two mounds; the Dunlendings receive a separate grave; Háma is buried alone beneath the Hornburg; and the Orcs are excluded from ritual, their bodies piled in great heaps near the forest. These differentiated treatments affirm hierarchy and cultural boundaries, reinforcing the moral structure of the world. Boromir's river burial (block 38) is more intimate: a solitary boat adorned with battle tokens, followed by a lament. In block 80, Denethor's self-immolation breaks from the pattern—his pyre is a distorted burial born of despair, not honour. Gandalf's intervention and Faramir's survival restore order. Finally, Théoden's funeral (block 95) is the most complete: a state ceremony with songs, a tomb and a feast. His barrow ties him to the royal lineage of Rohan, blending personal grief with cultural identity. Together, these scenes show how Tolkien uses funerals not just for narrative closure, but to express grief, mark moral contrasts and reinforce culture. Compared to *Beowulf*, where burials are formal, rare, and hierarchical, *The Lord of the Rings* integrates a wider range of funerary forms into the story's emotional and ethical rhythm.

6.1.2 Categories of Deceased

The distribution of burial events by character type highlights key differences between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In *Beowulf*, funerals are almost exclusively

reserved for rulers and a few heroic warriors, reflecting the poem's emphasis on leadership, lineage, and political continuity. *The Lord of the Rings*, by contrast, presents a broader commemorative spectrum: alongside rulers and heroes, it includes burials for animals and enemy humans, suggesting a broader view of honour (Figure 6.3).

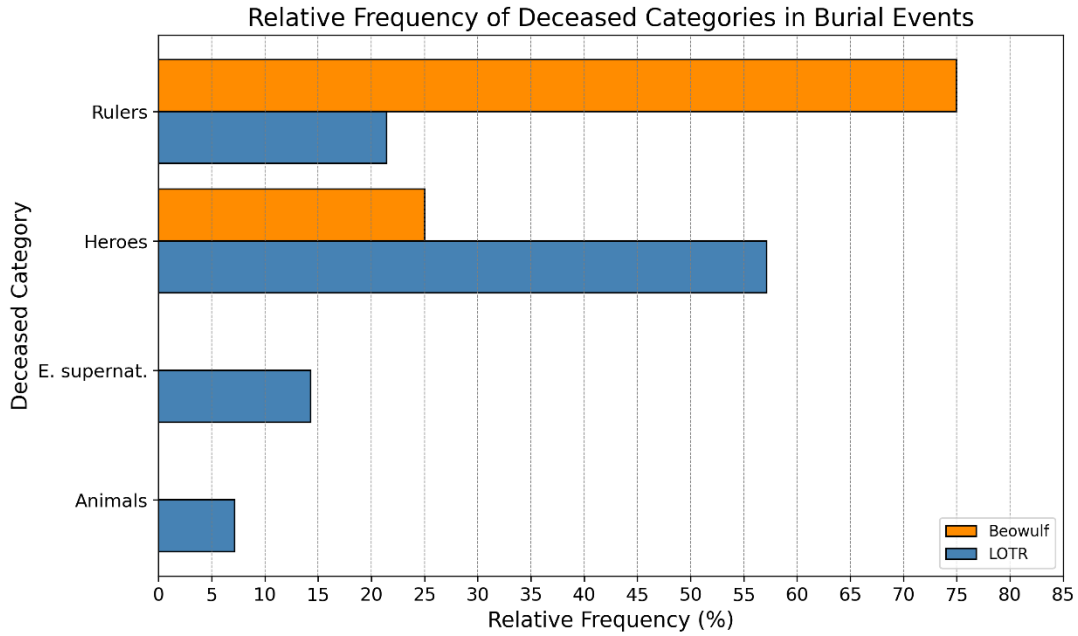


Figure 6.3: Relative Frequency of Deceased Categories in Burial Events

In *Beowulf*, burial is primarily granted to sovereigns or figures of exceptional status. Scyld's ship-burial (ll. 26–52) and Beowulf's funeral (ll. 3139–3170) frame the poem with ceremonial grandeur, marking the rise and fall of heroic society. The cremation of Hnæf and Hildeburh's son in the Finnsburg episode (ll. 1107–1123), while solemn and significant, involves noble lineage rather than reigning power—reinforcing the notion that funerary rites are largely reserved for deaths with communal consequence.

In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* offers a more expansive funerary landscape. Burial extends beyond rulers to include heroes, allies and even animals. Figures such as Boromir (Book III, Ch. 1), Háma, and the Riders of Rohan (Book III, Ch. 8), though not kings, receive full rites—mounds, songs and memorials—that affirm their role within the collective memory of their people. Snowmane, Théoden's horse, is honoured with a grave and poetic epitaph (*The Lord of the Rings,* p. 845), underscoring the emotional and symbolic reach of such gestures. By contrast, Orcs are burned or

left unburied (pp. 460, 570), excluded from ritual and moral community. Even the Dunlendings, though former enemies, are granted a separate burial mound, reflecting Tolkien's ethic of reconciliation and differentiated remembrance.

Overall, Tolkien constructs a funerary landscape where memory, hierarchy, and moral judgment intersect. While rulers like Théoden receive the most elaborate ceremonies, the inclusion of heroes, animals and even adversaries reflect a vision of honour that crosses lines of rank and species—though never indiscriminately or without ethical distinction.

6.1.3 Types of Burial

The chart (Figure 6.4) highlights key differences in burial practices between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. While both texts include pyres and mounds, only Tolkien's narrative features graves and heaps, pointing to a broader and more adaptive funerary repertoire.

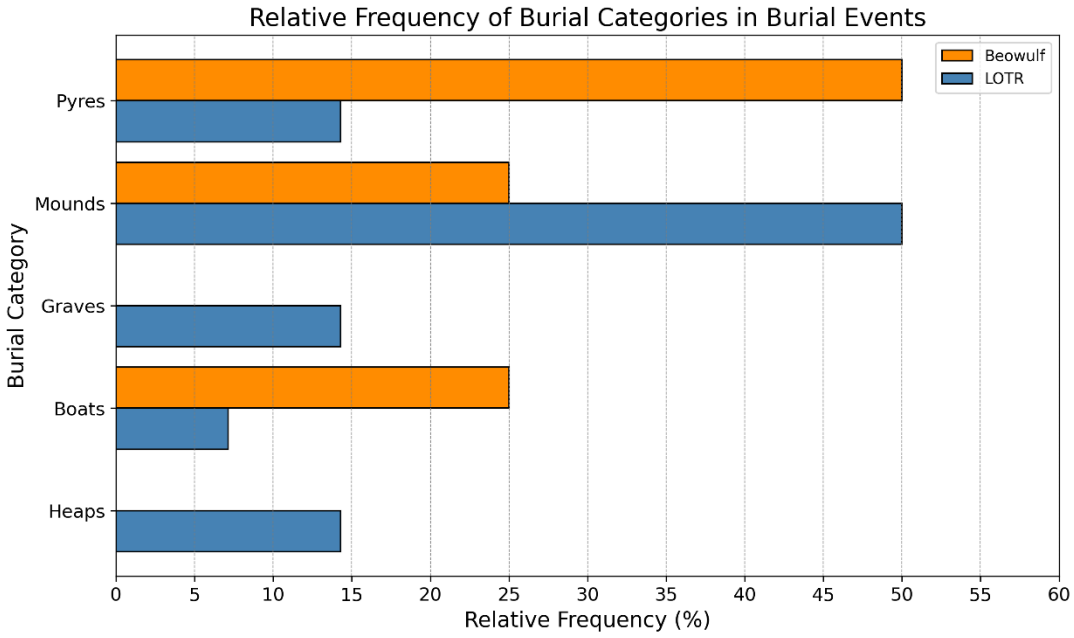


Figure 6.4: Relative Frequency of Burial Categories in Burial Events

In *Beowulf*, the limited number of burials—only three—underscores their exceptional and highly ritualized character. Pyres are the most prominent, occurring in two of the three cases, including Beowulf's own funeral, which concludes with the construction of a monumental barrow by the sea. This layering of cremation and mound-building

suggests a composite funerary tradition for elite figures. Scyld's boat burial, though unique, further emphasizes the cultural weight of heroic death. Notably, *Beowulf* contains no references to collective or unnamed burials, reinforcing its focus on individualized, honorific rites for rulers and distinguished warriors.

In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* displays a wider range of burial types: mounds, graves, pyres, boats and heaps. Mounds are the most frequent, used for Théoden, the Riders of the Mark, and the fallen at the Fords of Isen, and function to affirm collective memory and cultural identity. Other forms adapt to context: graves are used for Snowmane and the Dunlendings, while Boromir is laid to rest in a boat, his funeral marked by ritual care and poetic tribute. Orcs, by contrast, are burned or left in heaps—excluded from mourning rites and symbolically denied personhood. Importantly, pyres in Tolkien's world carry a darker tone than in *Beowulf*. Denethor's self-immolation, born of despair and madness, is portrayed as a failed or corrupted funeral act—an inversion of honour. Similarly, the pyres used to dispose of Orcs underscore their status as enemies beyond the moral boundaries of the Free Peoples.

Where *Beowulf* maintains a consistent and hierarchical model of burial tied to rank, *The Lord of the Rings* introduces variation that reflects emotional tone and ethical stance. Pyres and graves can elevate or condemn, include or exclude—depending on who is buried, how, and why. These patterns reflect fundamentally different conceptions of death and remembrance, which the next section explores through the presence and meaning of burial objects.

6.1.4 Associated Objects

In addition to the types of burial, the objects placed with the dead offer further insight into the cultural values each text associates with death and remembrance. The data (Figure 6.5) reveal a strong parallel between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*: burial objects are consistently limited to arms and treasures, with weapons being the most frequent—especially in Tolkien's text. This shared symbolic economy associates arms with martial valour and treasures with rank or status, framing burial as a cultural act of recognition and legacy.

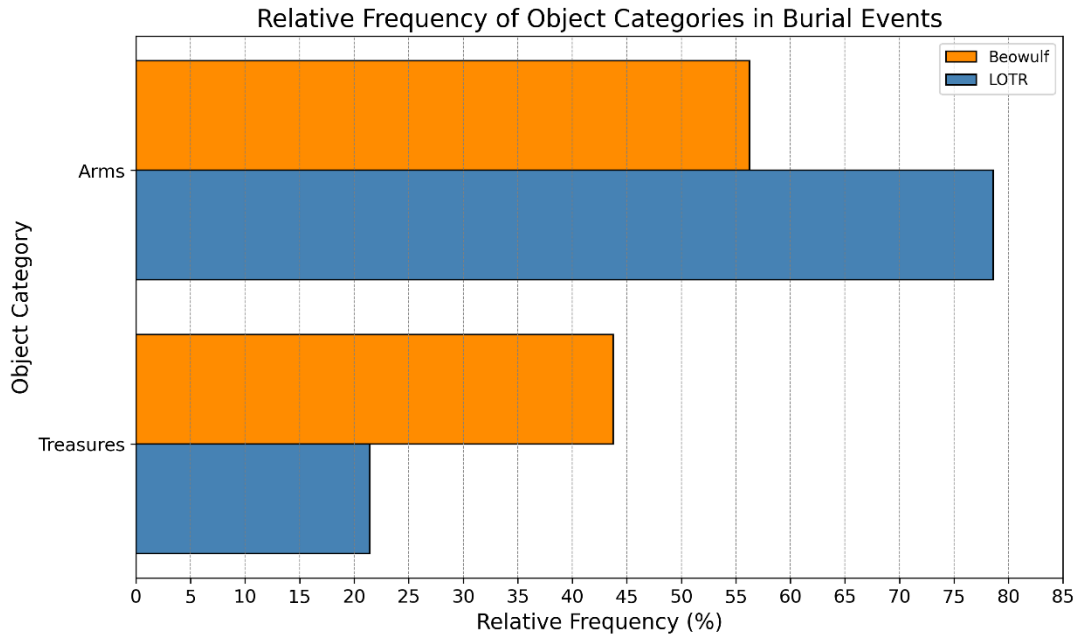


Figure 6.5: Relative Frequency of Object Categories in Burial Events

In *Beowulf*, weapons appear in nearly every burial. Scyld's ship departs laden with swords and mail-shirts (*madma mænigo*, l. 41), while Beowulf is cremated with his helmet, shield, and mail (*helmum behongen, hildebordum, beorhtum byrnum*, ll. 3139–3140). The funeral of Finn's warriors similarly features ornate armour: "*swatfah syrce, swyn ealgylden, eofer irenheard*" (ll. 1111–1112). Treasures reinforce this symbolism, accompanying Scyld's departure and filling Beowulf's barrow with gold (*gold on greote*, v. 3167), marking both as sovereign figures whose memory is preserved through material signs of power.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, arms also dominate the grave goods. Boromir's funeral boat carries his broken sword and those of his enemies; the Riders of Rohan are buried with spears; and Théoden lies in his tomb "with his arms and many other fair things that he had possessed" (p. 976). Treasures are rarer but still significant—Boromir wears the golden belt of Lórien, and Théoden's "fair things" suggest valuable possessions. Notably, the absence of grave goods is also meaningful. Denethor's despairing pyre, the heaps of Orcs, and Snowmane's grave without objects all signal exclusion—whether moral, symbolic, or species-based. In both texts, the presence or absence of objects reinforces the cultural worth ascribed to the deceased, distinguishing between honour, dishonour and otherness.

The quantitative analysis of burial events highlights key contrasts between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In *Beowulf*, funerals are rare, formal, and mostly reserved for rulers, marked by pyres, mounds, and consistent use of grave goods that reinforce heroic identity and social rank. Tolkien's narrative, by contrast, features a broader and more varied use of burial: not only rulers, but also heroes, animals, and enemies receive funerals, with diverse forms—graves, heaps, boats—adapted to moral, emotional, or practical contexts. Though arms and treasures appear in both texts, *The Lord of the Rings* also includes burials without objects, signalling exclusion or ethical ambiguity. Overall, *Beowulf* offers a rigid, hierarchical model of commemoration, while Tolkien portrays burial as a dynamic space where identity, memory and morality are in constant negotiation.

6.2 Qualitative Analysis

Building on the patterns identified in the quantitative overview, this section investigates the theme of heroic funerals through two central episodes—Beowulf's and Théoden's—in order to explore how mourning is shaped by the narrative and cultural frameworks of each text. In both cases, the burial of the king is not only a moment of grief but a revealing act of social meaning. Through close reading, the following case studies analyse the narrative context, the unfolding of the ritual and the symbolic and political dimensions of each funeral. By attending to both similarities and divergences, this section traces how Tolkien engages with the epic tradition while reimagining the function and significance of the heroic death.

6.2.1 Case Study One: King Beowulf's Funeral

Beowulf's funeral takes place immediately after the hero's final battle and death, concluding the poem with a ritual of commemoration that mirrors its opening scenes. As the Geats prepare his pyre, the narrative shifts from the immediacy of loss to the orchestration of collective grief. The description of the funeral is highly detailed and follows a ceremonial structure: the construction of the pyre, the lamentation by the Geatish woman, the burning of the body, and the subsequent burial of ashes in a barrow overlooking the sea (ll. 3110-3155). The placement of the funeral at the end of the poem serves as both closure and transformation. It closes the narrative arc of Beowulf's life, but also opens a new phase marked by political uncertainty, as observed

by scholars who link the funeral to a broader meditation on leadership, loss, and societal fragility (Niles 1983; Davidson 1950). While the ritual honours the hero's achievements, it also underscores the vulnerability of the community he leaves behind. The tone oscillates between solemn grandeur and quiet foreboding, revealing a tension between the ritual's splendour and its underlying implications. The woman's lament—brief but powerful—adds a raw emotional depth to the narrative. Her cry of anticipated ruin and loss (*sang sorgcearig... wælfylla worn, werudes egesan, hyðo and hæftnyd*, ll. 3153–3155) expresses fear of slaughter, captivity, and humiliation, hinting at the broader consequences of Beowulf's death for the Geats. The ritual sequence thus moves from personal grief to public commemoration, reinforcing both the memory of the hero and the fragility of the society that mourns him.

Following the structured ritual of mourning, the burial of Beowulf's remains is marked by another highly symbolic act: the entombment of treasure within the barrow. This moment extends the logic of the funeral from personal honour to cultural commentary. The treasure, previously guarded by the dragon and now buried with the hero, is explicitly described as useless – rusted, ancient, and removed from circulation (ll. 3166-3170). One could argue that by sealing it in the barrow, the Geats do not redistribute wealth, but instead stage an act of withdrawal, signalling the end of a heroic economy based on gift exchange and reciprocity. The gesture is deeply paradoxical: while it visually magnifies the greatness of Beowulf, it also acknowledges a breakdown in the social order he upheld. Unlike earlier gift-giving scenes, which reinforce bonds among warriors and lords, this moment isolates the treasure as a relic – glorious yet inert. Its burial alongside Beowulf transforms it from a medium of exchange into a monument to lost values. The barrow itself raised high on a headland and visible to passing ships, functions as a dual marker: it commemorates the individual and laments the fading of an age. It is both grave and signal – a tomb and a symbol – blending memory with warning. In denying future use of the treasure, the Geats create a narrative of irreversible decline: what was once shared is now sealed away, unreachable and unrenewable.

The burial scene does not simply mark the end of Beowulf's life, but exposes the political vacuum left in his absence. The choice to bury the treasure rather than redistribute it is not only symbolic – it reflects the Geats' loss of continuity and their

growing sense of vulnerability. Without a named successor and with enemies looming, the community honours its hero through a magnificent ritual, yet the very splendour of the ceremony reveals the fragility of the world he leaves behind. This tension is intensified by the shift in tone from heroic celebration to anxious foretelling. The mourning woman's cry, combined with the Geats' silent construction of the barrow, evokes not only respect but dread. The rituals of stability – fire, treasure and song – take on an elegiac quality, functioning more as farewell than affirmation. The funeral becomes a moment of political and emotional reckoning, where honour is upheld even as its sustaining structures collapse. In this sense, Beowulf's death is not portrayed as a triumphant conclusion, but as a turning point that casts doubt on the survivability of the heroic code. The rituals preserve his memory, but cannot preserve what he embodied: a centralised authority and a model of leadership that now belongs to the past.

In sum, Beowulf's funeral is both a culmination and a collapse: it immortalises the hero through ritual splendour, yet simultaneously marks the disintegration of the social world he sustained. The burial affirms values of courage, loyalty and remembrance, while revealing the limits of a heroic order unable to outlive its greatest figure. A similar tension emerges in *The Lord of the Rings*, where the funeral of Théoden likewise serves as a moment of collective mourning and cultural affirmation. Yet, unlike Beowulf's, Théoden's burial takes place within a different moral and narrative framework – one that allows for renewal, succession and the redefinition of heroic legacy.

6.2.2 Case Study Two: King Théoden's Funeral

Théoden's funeral occurs in the final chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*, after the defeat of Sauron and the coronation of Aragorn as King Elessar. With the war over, the narrative shifts from conflict to remembrance and from heroic action to ceremonial closure. Théoden, who fell at the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, is to be returned to Rohan for burial. His death, though tragic, is framed not as loss or failure, but as the noble fulfilment of a king's duty. This moment marks a transition in the story's emotional and political arc. As Aragorn prepares to begin his reign and the members of the Fellowship look toward home, Théoden's funeral becomes a necessary pause—a public acknowledgement of sacrifice before the world fully turns toward peace. The

return to Edoras is not a solitary event: it is accompanied by a diverse assembly of leaders and peoples from across Middle-earth, including Elves, Dwarves, and Men. Their presence underscores Théoden's status not only as King of Rohan, but as a unifying figure in the wider struggle against Sauron. After fifteen days of travel from Minas Tirith, the great procession arrives at Edoras. Théoden's body, laid upon a golden bier and guarded by his Riders, is transported with solemn dignity. The very scale and composition of the escort—featuring Aragorn, Elrond, Galadriel, Celeborn, and others—turn the funeral into a statement of pan-cultural recognition and respect. In this way, the journey itself becomes a ritual: a moving tribute that links place, memory, and honour across the geography of Middle-earth.

Upon arrival in Edoras, the ceremony becomes more intimate and richly symbolic. After three days of rest, Théoden is laid to rest in a stone house, accompanied by his arms and treasured belongings (p. 976). A green mound is raised over him, covered in grass and white evermind—*simbelmynë*, a flower associated with graves and named for its Old English roots: *symbel* ("always"[30]) and *mynan* ("to remember"[31]), evoking the idea of everlasting memory. The barrow becomes the eighth on the east side of the Barrowfield, visually completing the royal line and reinforcing the Rohirrim's strong connection to ancestry and tradition. This continuity is further expressed through song. During the funeral, the Riders of the King's House perform a ritual chant composed by Gleowine, Théoden's minstrel. Riding in a circle around the barrow on white horses, they sing of the king's great deeds and the glories of his forebears: the thunder of the North, the cry of Eorl the Young, the battles of Helm and Celebrant, and finally Théoden's own heroic charge and noble death (p. 977). This ritual mirrors the scene in *Beowulf*, where the Geats ride around the pyre, mourning their lord with a funeral chant that celebrates his greatness (ll. 3180–82). Though sung in the language of the Rohirrim, the song's emotional impact transcends language, stirring all present and linking past and present through ritualised memory. This moment draws on the tradition of heroic funeral poetry, echoing Germanic models while imbuing them with a distinctly Elvish-inflected sense of reverence and beauty.

[30] *Symbel*, "always, ever": Bosworth–Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*. https://bosworthtoller.com/29994
[31] *Mynan*, "to remember, to bring to mind": Bosworth–Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*. https://bosworthtoller.com/15305

Like the barrow, the chant positions Théoden within a heroic continuum—one that not only remembers the past but also carries its values forward. The ceremonial acts affirm that Théoden's life and death are not isolated, but woven into the living memory of the people.

In addition to its symbolic and emotional weight, Théoden's funeral functions as a moment of significant political meaning. The presence of leaders from Gondor, Lothlórien, Rivendell, and Dol Amroth elevates the ceremony from a national rite to an inter-cultural gathering (p. 977). Their attendance signals the forging of new bonds in the aftermath of war, affirming Théoden's legacy not only within Rohan but across the reunited realms of Middle-earth. Through shared mourning, the diverse peoples of the West reaffirm their mutual respect and solidarity. The orderly transition of power to Éomer is another key aspect of the ceremony. Éowyn's ritual offering of the memorial cup to her brother marks this handover with solemn dignity (p. 977). The act binds kinship and kingship together, enacting Rohirric custom while demonstrating the continuity of leadership. Unlike *Beowulf*, where the absence of a named successor suggests the collapse of political structure, Théoden's death makes space for stable renewal. His legacy is not sealed in a tomb but passed on through lineage, tradition, and action. The final political gesture is the public announcement of Éowyn and Faramir's betrothal. Introduced as part of the funeral proceedings, this moment transforms sorrow into celebration. The union of Rohan and Gondor symbolises the healing of past divisions and the blending of two heroic traditions—one rooted in martial honour, the other in moral vision. Framed as Théoden's legacy, the engagement signals not an end but a new beginning: the promise of unity, restoration, and shared purpose in the postwar world (p. 978).

Théoden's funeral, rich in ritual, symbolism, and political resonance, represents not only the culmination of his personal narrative but also a broader moment of cultural affirmation and renewal. Through carefully structured ceremony, visible continuity, and the forging of new alliances, Tolkien reimagines the heroic funeral as a space where memory and hope coexist. Unlike Beowulf's death, which leaves behind a fragile and endangered community, Théoden's passing enables transition, unity, and the strengthening of inter-cultural bonds. The contrast between these two funerals—both grand, yet fundamentally different in tone and implication—raises important

questions about how heroic death functions within epic storytelling. The following section draws these threads together in a comparative discussion, highlighting the shared structures and divergent outcomes that define *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

6.2.3 Comparative Discussion

Both funerals are portrayed as highly formalised rituals, rich in symbolism and cultural significance. Yet the setting, tone, and narrative framing of each ceremony point to contrasting worldviews. Beowulf's funeral unfolds with solemn grandeur on a headland overlooking the sea. His body is burned on a great pyre, surrounded by laments and ritual observance (ll. 3137–3143). A barrow is then constructed and filled with the treasures reclaimed from the dragon's hoard—gold that is described as "useless to men" after the hero's death (ll. 3168–3170). The setting is open, stark, and monumental. The ceremony, while public, is sombre and unadorned, framed by a mood of loss and foreboding. The Geats fulfil their duties with dignity, but their songs are tinged with anxiety: the hero is gone, and the future feels uncertain. Théoden's funeral, by contrast, takes place within a green and peaceful landscape, concluding with a richly attended ceremony in Edoras. The procession that brings his body home is accompanied by an extraordinary gathering of allies—Elves, Dwarves, Gondorians, and Hobbits—whose presence elevates the event from a national rite to a shared moment of honour across cultures (pp. 984–985). The king is laid in a barrow covered with grass and white evermind, and the funeral includes a song composed in his memory, followed by a communal feast (p. 986). The mood is solemn yet hopeful; the ritual honours the past while marking the beginning of a new era. In both cases, the funerals articulate collective identity and reinforce the memory of the king. But while Beowulf's ceremony signals the closing of a heroic age, Théoden's acts as a bridge between old and new, between mourning and renewal.

Having explored the ceremonial structure of each funeral, we now turn to the central figure of the rite: the king himself, and the legacy his death leaves behind. Both Beowulf and Théoden are honoured as heroic leaders, yet the conception of kingship and the aftermath of their deaths differ markedly. Beowulf dies as a solitary hero-king. His final act is to request a barrow by the sea that will serve as a beacon to sailors—a lasting monument to his fame (ll. 2802–2808). Though he passes on his armour and

expresses confidence in Wiglaf, there is no formal succession or public affirmation of leadership (ll. 2813–2820). The mood that follows is not one of renewal, but of dread. The Geats fear for their future, anticipating invasion and decline (ll. 3150–3155). Beowulf's legacy is monumental but static: it is preserved in the treasure buried with him and the towering barrow that marks his resting place. His kingship, defined by individual valour and self-sacrifice, leaves no stable structure behind. Théoden, by contrast, dies knowing that his house will endure. Though he falls in battle, he does so having reclaimed his authority and fulfilled his role as king with honour. His succession is clearly established: Éomer is publicly recognised as the next king immediately after the burial, during the funeral feast (p. 986). Théoden's legacy is not only remembered in song and ritual, but also embedded in the continuing vitality of his people. The announcement of Éowyn and Faramir's betrothal further extends this continuity, symbolising the renewal of alliances and the promise of future unity (p. 986). Théoden is not only remembered as a warrior, but as a ruler who restored strength and hope to his kingdom. While both kings are deeply mourned, the nature of their legacy diverges. Beowulf leaves behind glory and grief; Théoden leaves behind strength and succession. One death closes an era, the other opens a path forward.

Closely tied to kingship and legacy is the question of how each ruler is remembered. Both funerals are framed as moments of collective remembrance, but the tone, scope, and social function of commemoration differ significantly. In Beowulf, the commemoration is formal, solemn, and exclusive. After the hero's cremation and the construction of his burial mound, twelve warriors ride around the barrow, singing a dirge that praises his strength, wisdom, and generosity (ll. 3169–3178). The ritual preserves Beowulf's fame in song and monument, yet the atmosphere is elegiac rather than celebratory. The hoard buried with him remains untouched, a symbol of glory lost and value rendered inert. Memory in this context is monumental and retrospective—it looks back at what was, but does not shape what will be. The funeral closes the story of a central heroic figure; the community, though faithful in ritual, appears directionless and exposed. In contrast, Théoden's funeral cultivates a more inclusive and forward-looking form of memory. Alongside the formal rites—the barrow, the funeral song, the procession—there are intimate and emotional expressions of grief. Merry's personal farewell to Théoden, spoken in sorrow and affection, exemplifies a

type of remembrance grounded in relationship and shared experience (p. 986). The funeral feast reinforces communal bonds, bringing together people of different ranks and regions. The ritual does not merely preserve Théoden's legacy; it activates it in the life of the community. Through Éomer's succession and Éowyn's union with Faramir, the memory of the king is woven into the fabric of renewed political and emotional alliances. Tolkien thus reimagines commemoration as something participatory and regenerative. While *Beowulf* enshrines the hero in isolated splendour, *The Lord of the Rings* embeds remembrance in continuity and connection. In doing so, the function of heroic death shifts—from final monument to living tradition.

The funerals of Beowulf and Théoden reveal two distinct models of heroic death and remembrance. While both draw on a shared ritual vocabulary—barrow, song, procession—they diverge in purpose and effect. Beowulf's funeral marks the end of a heroic age, framed by loss, isolation, and the fading of communal structures. Théoden's, by contrast, transforms mourning into renewal, embedding legacy in succession, alliance, and shared memory. Through this reworking, Tolkien honours the epic tradition while reshaping it into a vision grounded in continuity, community, and hope.

6.2.5 Summary of Findings

The qualitative analysis of these two funerals highlights the symbolic weight of heroic death in both texts. The comparative analysis of *Beowulf*'s and Théoden's funerals reveals a shared structure rooted in heroic ritual, yet shaped by significant narrative and ethical divergence. Both scenes enact communal grief through ceremony, song, and symbolic acts—but the meaning and trajectory of these rites diverge sharply. In *Beowulf*, the funeral underscores the finality of a heroic age. The ritual is rich, formal, and solemn: the burning of the body, the sealing of the treasure, and the lament of the Geats all reinforce a vision of greatness lost. The king's legacy is elevated through visible signs of honour and lineage, but the ritual emphasises loss over continuity. The burial marks an ending not only for the individual, but for a cultural order that cannot sustain itself—a mythic farewell to a world defined by duty, honour, and fatalistic glory.

In contrast, Théoden's funeral in *The Lord of the Rings* draws on many of the same motifs—honourable death in battle, ceremonial song, burial with weapons and

heirlooms—but places them within a broader ethical arc of continuity and renewal. The lament becomes a celebration; the feast, a transition to new bonds; and the mourning, a space in which love, memory, and future alliances coexist. Tolkien transforms the heroic form into a framework that accommodates healing and peace. Ultimately, Tolkien pays homage to the epic funeral tradition represented by *Beowulf* while reshaping its meaning. Where *Beowulf* ends in irrevocable loss, *The Lord of the Rings* gestures beyond death toward reconciliation, alliance, and hope—revealing Tolkien's ability not only to honour ancient forms, but to reimagine their emotional and moral core for a modern age.

6.3 Conclusion

The comparative study of funerals in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates how shared ritual forms take on radically different meanings depending on their narrative and cultural context. Both texts give prominence to the burial of a central king, whose death marks a turning point for the society he leads. Yet where *Beowulf* constructs a world on the verge of collapse, Tolkien offers a vision in which death becomes a catalyst for renewal. Through fire, mound, and lament, *Beowulf* affirms the values of heroic culture while also exposing its fragility. The funeral is presented as a solemn act of remembrance that isolates the hero and leaves his people vulnerable to an uncertain future. By contrast, Théoden's funeral, though grounded in the same heroic language, is framed within a broader structure of continuity and communal strength. Tolkien does not merely preserve the epic code—he reimagines it as a vehicle for healing and solidarity. This chapter has shown how Tolkien's narrative both honours and reconfigures the traditions inherited from Old English epic. In doing so, it positions the funeral not only as a moment of closure, but as a gateway to renewed order and shared identity.

Conclusions

1. Restatement of Research Aims

This thesis set out to investigate the literary connections between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, with a focus on how J.R.R. Tolkien reimagines core Germanic narrative motifs within a modern epic framework. By examining both texts side by side, the project aimed to illuminate the continuity and transformation of cultural themes such as gift-giving, singing, and funerals. These motifs were selected not only for their narrative salience but also for their symbolic weight within the heroic tradition and their central role in Tolkien's world-building.

The analysis was guided by three interrelated research questions. First, it examined how the motifs of gift-giving, singing, and funerals are manifested across *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, considering both their frequency and narrative placement. Second, it sought to identify recurring patterns within the annotated data—structural similarities, dominant categories, and thematic distributions that might point to underlying narrative frameworks. Finally, the study explored the extent to which Tolkien's use of these motifs reflects continuity with the early Germanic tradition or reveals significant transformations, shaped by his own literary aims and ethical vision.

To pursue these questions, the thesis adopted a digital and comparative approach that combined philological sensitivity with computational tools. The aim was not only to interpret the texts, but also to model the analytical process itself—structuring data, visualizing patterns, and making each step of the interpretation transparent and replicable. By encoding the texts, annotating key motifs, and analyzing the results both quantitatively and qualitatively, the project aligns with the core principles of digital humanities, where methodological reflection is inseparable from interpretive insight.

2. Summary of Findings

The analysis of gift-giving revealed significant contrasts between the two texts, despite their shared reliance on this motif as a marker of social and narrative transitions. In *Beowulf*, the gift functions as a symbol of status and allegiance, operating within a rigidly hierarchical system where generosity consolidates the authority of kings and

the cohesion of warrior elites. Quantitative data confirms this closed structure: gifts circulate primarily among rulers and heroes, and are closely tied to political legitimacy and ceremonial recognition. In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* presents a more diverse and inclusive model of gift exchange. Gifts are shared across social ranks, between races and cultures, and even across moral boundaries. While some echoes of the heroic tradition persist—such as the ceremonial gifts in Lothlórien—Tolkien reconfigures the act of giving as an expression of grace, compassion, and ethical responsibility. The broader variety of giver and recipient categories, as well as the thematic richness of the gifts themselves, reflects a shift from formalised obligation to relational care. Ultimately, the motif of gift-giving becomes, in Tolkien's hands, a means of ethical worldbuilding—rooted in tradition, yet open to transformation.

The theme of singing revealed a profound divergence in how the two texts conceptualize and integrate poetic expression. In *Beowulf*, song appears in highly formalized contexts—typically as part of ritual gatherings such as feasts or funerals—and is performed by designated figures like the *scop*. The function of singing is largely commemorative: it transmits heroic memory, reinforces communal identity, and affirms cultural values centred on honour, vengeance, and kinship. Quantitative analysis confirmed the rarity yet concentrated placement of these events, often associated with narrative turning points. By contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* features a wider and more fluid distribution of song. Singing is not limited to specialized performers, nor confined to heroic acts. It emerges spontaneously in moments of reflection, grief, joy, or wonder, and serves both a narrative and a metaphysical role. Songs in Tolkien's work span genres and languages, and often reach beyond the immediate story world to evoke mythic time or cosmic order. This expanded function reflects Tolkien's belief in the deep cultural and spiritual power of poetry, transforming singing into a medium of inner vision and world-creation rather than mere celebration of deeds.

The motif of funerals provided one of the clearest contrasts in narrative tone and ideological outlook. In *Beowulf*, funerary rites are solemn, symbolic acts that mark the end of a heroic life and the impending dissolution of social order. The poem opens and closes with elaborate burials—Scyld Scefing's ship burial and Beowulf's mound funeral—framing the narrative within a cyclical structure of glory and decline.

Quantitative data reflects the thematic centrality but narrow distribution of these events, largely confined to royal or heroic figures. Qualitatively, the analysis underscored how funerals in *Beowulf* are framed by fatalism and loss, with grief expressed collectively but with no clear path forward. In *The Lord of the Rings*, by contrast, funeral episodes retain many of the same external features—processions, laments, burial mounds—but are embedded within a redemptive framework. Théoden's funeral, in particular, mirrors Old English ritual language but reframes the act as one of communal renewal and continuity. Death, rather than closing the heroic narrative, becomes a moment of healing and affirmation. This shift illustrates how Tolkien preserves the form of the medieval epic while reimagining its moral and emotional implications for a modern audience.

Taken together, the three motifs analysed in this thesis—gift-giving, singing, and funerals—reveal a shared ritual structure and a deep narrative function rooted in early Germanic tradition. In *Beowulf*, these acts serve to affirm social order, heroic memory, and the cohesion of a warrior elite. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien retains many of the external forms—ceremonial giving, poetic performance, heroic burial—but reworks their meaning within a broader ethical vision. Across all three themes, the emphasis shifts from hierarchy to reciprocity, from closure to renewal, from rigid codes to moral openness. This transformation reflects not a rejection of tradition, but a creative reinterpretation of its symbolic language. The combined use of quantitative and qualitative methods has made it possible to trace these dynamics with precision: identifying structural patterns, while also capturing the nuance of Tolkien's reimagining. In this interplay between continuity and innovation lies the core contribution of the thesis.

3. Contributions, Limitations, and Future Directions

The first major contribution of this thesis lies in the combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of the three selected motifs: gift-giving, singing, and funerals. This dual approach enabled a systematic mapping of all relevant occurrences in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, revealing recurrent structures, variations, and narrative functions. Building on this dataset, the thesis offers new interpretive readings that highlight both continuities and divergences between the two texts. Unlike previous studies, which tend to focus on a limited number of emblematic episodes, this research

stands out for its comprehensive scope: all pertinent events have been identified, annotated, and analyzed, providing a solid and transparent basis for comparative investigation.

The second key contribution of this thesis lies in its rigorous and replicable methodological framework. Through systematic annotation, data processing with Python, and targeted visualization, the study adopts a structured and transparent workflow that bridges philological inquiry and computational analysis. Visualization is treated not as a decorative supplement, but as a hermeneutic tool: graphs and distribution plots played an active role in revealing interpretive patterns and thematic contrasts. The methodology is fully documented and designed for reusability, relying on open formats, modular organization, and publicly readable scripts. This makes it possible not only to reproduce the results, but to apply the same approach to other corpora and narrative motifs.

While this study offers a focused and systematic comparison between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The choice to restrict the corpus to these two texts—though deliberate and thematically justified—necessarily excludes other relevant works, such as *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, or additional Old English poems, which could further enrich the comparative framework. On the methodological side, the manual annotation process, while rigorous and detailed, inevitably involves a degree of subjectivity, particularly in the delimitation of events and the assignment of categorical labels. Finally, although the combination of quantitative analysis and qualitative close reading enabled a multifaceted exploration of the data, not every annotated instance could be examined in narrative depth. The study thus privileges structural patterns and emblematic cases, while leaving room for further interpretive development.

Building on the results of this thesis, several directions for future research and development can be envisioned. First, the methodology could be extended to other texts, both medieval and modern—for example, to *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, or other Old English poems—broadening the comparative scope and testing the robustness of the model across different narratives and genres. Second, the annotation schema could be adapted to encompass additional thematic dimensions such as semantic fields and lexical patterns related to monstrosity, the representation and

narrative role of women in both texts, and depictions of nature. Further extensions could also include the systematic study of alliterative patterns, as introduced in Chapter Two, and the analysis of lexical choices that reflect Old English derivational morphology—for instance, formations like *Eorlingas*, which echo the inflectional structure of Old English. Expanding the thematic and linguistic range would further enrich the dataset and open new interpretive pathways. On the technical side, the interactive webapp could be improved and potentially opened to the public. Possible developments include enhanced filtering options, the ability to export data, collaborative features such as commenting, and the integration of an explanatory manual that clarifies annotation terminology and references the bibliographic sources used. Finally, by embedding the annotations directly into the XML-TEI files, the project could evolve into a shared annotated corpus—an open, reusable resource for scholars interested in philological, literary, or computational approaches to medieval and modern epic literature.

In conclusion, this thesis has sought to illuminate the complex interplay between tradition and innovation in Tolkien's reworking of early Germanic motifs. By combining close textual analysis with computational methods, it has shown how gift-giving, singing and funerals serve not only as narrative devices but also as cultural markers, transformed to articulate new ethical visions. The integration of digital philology and literary interpretation has enabled a systematic yet interpretive exploration of these themes, while also modelling a transparent, reproducible research process. Though the study is necessarily limited in scope, it aims to contribute both to the understanding of Tolkien's engagement with medieval literature and to the ongoing development of digital approaches to the humanities. Ultimately, it hopes to encourage further dialogue between traditional literary scholarship and the evolving methodologies of digital textual analysis.

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APPENDIX A
Annotation Model and Guidelines

This appendix provides supplementary documentation of the annotation model used in this project. It includes representative samples of annotated events (Appendix A1), a description of the annotation fields (Appendix A2), and the controlled semantic categories applied during annotation (Appendix A3). Together, these materials illustrate the structure and rationale behind the annotation process.

Appendix A1 – Sample Annotations

This appendix presents representative examples of annotated events for each of the three thematic domains: gift giving, singing, and burials. Each table displays a single annotated event, including all relevant fields (e.g., references, quoted forms, normalized names, and semantic categories), as they appear in the structured dataset. A brief excerpt from the source text is provided to contextualize each annotation.

Table A1.1 – Sample annotation: Gift Giving event (Galadriel to Frodo)

The following table presents a representative gift-giving event from *The Lord of the Rings*, in which Galadriel offers a symbolic gift to Frodo. This moment exemplifies the ceremonial and narrative significance of gift exchange in the text. The annotation includes the main entities involved—giver, gift, and recipient—along with their textual references and semantic classifications.

Field	Value
id	55
n	1
quotation	w376.39.1 'And you, ... w377.2.2 Mirror!'
giver_ref	w376.41.1
giver_quoted	She
giver_NE	Galadriel
giver_NN	–
giver_category	Rulers
gift_ref	w376.43.1
gift_quoted	the light of Earendil's star
gift_NN	The light of Earendil's star
gift_category	Treasures

recipient_ref	w376.40.10
recipient_quoted	you
recipient_NE	Frodo
recipient_NN	–
recipient_category	Heroes

Quotation excerpt

"And you, Ring-bearer," she said, turning to Frodo. "I come to you last who are not last in my thoughts. For you I have prepared this." She held up a small crystal phial: it glittered as she moved it, and rays of white light sprang from her hand. "In this phial," she said, "is caught the light of Eärendil's star, set amid the waters of my fountain. It will shine still brighter when night is about you. May it be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out. Remember Galadriel and her Mirror!"

Excerpt from: *The Lord of the Rings, Book II, Chapter 8.*

Table A1.2 – Sample annotation: Singing event (Bilbo)

The following table presents a singing event from *The Lord of the Rings*, where Bilbo softly sings a verse in solitude. This moment reflects the theme of travel, often present in his songs, and exemplifies the annotation structure used to capture song content and singer metadata.

Field	Value
id	1
n	1
quotation	w36.3.14 and then ... w36.12.6 say.
singer_ref	w36.4.8
singer_quoted	he
singer_NE	Bilbo
singer_NN	–
singer_category	Heroes
content	Travel

Quotation excerpt

and then in a low voice, as if to himself, he sang softly in the dark:
The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,

Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.

Excerpt from: *The Lord of the Rings, Book I, Chapter 1.*

Table A1.3 – Sample annotation: Burial event (Théoden)

The following table presents a burial event from *The Lord of the Rings*, depicting the funeral of King Théoden. The event is ceremonially rich and includes the placement of the king's body with grave goods and the raising of a commemorative mound. The annotation records the deceased, the type of burial, and a key associated object, all classified semantically.

Field	Value
id	14
n	1
quotation	w976.29.9 For after ... w978.9.10 bliss.'
deceased_ref	w976.30.8
deceased_quoted	Théoden;
deceased_NE	Théoden
deceased_NN	–
deceased_category	Rulers
burialtype_ref	w976.32.7
burialtype_quoted	a great mound
burialtype_NN	A great mound
burialtype_category	Mounds
object_ref	w976.31.5
object_quoted	his arms
object_NN	Arms
object_category	Arms

Quotation excerpt

For after three days the Men of the Mark prepared the funeral of Théoden; and he was laid in a house of stone with his arms and many other fair things that he had possessed, and over him was raised a great mound, covered with green turves of grass and of white evermind.

Excerpt from: *The Lord of the Rings*, Book VI, Chapter 6.

Appendix A2 – Field Descriptions

Table A2.1 – Field descriptions for event annotation

The following table provides a description of all fields used in the annotation of gift-giving, singing, and burial events. It includes both general fields (such as unique identifiers and quotations) and entity-specific fields (such as references, quoted forms, normalized names, and semantic categories). Fields marked with an asterisk (*) indicate variable prefixes based on the annotated entity (e.g., giver_, singer_, deceased_).

Field	Description
id	Unique identifier for the annotated event.
n	Sub-event identifier used when a single event involves multiple rows.
quotation	Textual excerpt (start and end) defining the annotated narrative window.
*_ref	Token ID pointing to the exact position of the entity in the XML text.
*_quoted	The original wording used in the source text for the entity.
*_NE	Named entity form of the entity, if applicable (e.g., proper names).
*_NN	Normalized name of the entity, used for grouping semantically similar instances.
*_category	Semantic category assigned to the entity based on its role or nature.
content	Thematic category of the song (used only for singing events).

Appendix A3 – Semantic Categories

This appendix presents the controlled semantic categories used to annotate narrative entities across the three thematic domains—gift giving, singing, and burials. Categories were applied consistently to enable cross-textual comparison and statistical analysis. Each table lists the category name, a brief description, and representative examples drawn from the annotated corpora. The classification covers people, objects, burial types, and song themes.

Table A3.1 – People Categories

Semantic categories for human, supernatural, and animal entities involved in gift giving, singing, or burial events.

Category	Description	Example
Rulers	Figures with political or military authority	Théoden / Hrothgar
Heroes	Individuals celebrated for heroic deeds	Frodo / Beowulf
Good Supernaturals	Benevolent non-human characters	Gandalf
Evil Supernaturals	Malevolent non-human entities	Sauron
Commoners	Regular individuals without special roles	Lobelia Sackville-Baggins
Poets	Characters who compose or recite poetry or songs	A maker in Rohan / Scop
Animals	Non-human animals with narrative significance	Snowmane

Table A3.2 – Object Categories (Gifts and Grave Goods)

Semantic categories for physical objects exchanged or used as grave goods.

Category	Description	Example
Treasures	Objects of high symbolic or material value	The One Ring / Rings
Arms	Weapons and armor	A knife / Adorned war-sword
Provisions	Food and drink useful during travel	Elven-cake
Objects	Ordinary utilitarian objects	An umbrella
Transports	Means of transport	A pony / Horses
Hospitality	Food or drink offered in a context of welcome	White bread / A cup
Consorts	Individuals given as spouses	Éowyn / Freawaru

Table A3.3 – Burial Types

Types of funerary practices as represented in the texts.

Category	Description	Example
Mounds	Earth or stone burial mounds	Riders of Rohan's burial / Beowulf's mound
Graves	Underground burials	Balin's tomb / Warriors' graves
Boat Burials	Burials involving boats	Boromir / Scyld Scefing
Pyres	Cremation on funeral pyres	Denethor's pyre / Beowulf's pyre
Heaps	Mass graves or heaps of bodies	Orc's heap

Table A3.4 – Song Themes

Thematic classification of songs based on their content and narrative function.

Category	Description	Example
Travel	Songs sung while traveling	Bilbo's "The Road goes ever on"
Feasting	Songs sung in festive or convivial settings	Drinking and merrymaking songs sung by Merry and Pippin
Nature	Songs describing or celebrating the natural world	Treebeard's songs celebrating forests
Tales	Narrative songs recounting events or stories	Aragorn's narrative songs about ancient heroes and legends
Lament	Songs of grief or mourning	Aragorn and Legolas's lament for Boromir
War	Songs about battles or military deeds	Théoden's war songs before battle
Myth-Religion	Songs about mythology or religion	Elvish songs referencing Valar, creation, and ancient days
Enchantment	Songs with magical functions	Goldberry's song that brings the rain

APPENDIX B

Quantitative Outputs

This appendix collects all quantitative outputs produced during the analysis of gift giving, singing and burial events in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It includes frequency tables, distribution data, co-occurrence matrices and visualizations that support the thematic discussions presented in the analytical chapters. The material is organized thematically (B1: Gift Giving, B2: Singing, B3: Burials), and each section is divided into tables and figures for clarity. The visual and numerical data provide the empirical foundation for the interpretive comparisons developed throughout the thesis.

Appendix B1 – Gift Giving

B1.1 Tables

Table B1.1.1: Frequency of Giver Categories

Giver category	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
Rulers	33	78,6	22	22
Heroes	8	19	45	45
Commoners	1	2,4	6	6
G. supernat.	-	-	23	23
E. supernat.	-	-	4	4

Table B1.1.2: Frequency of Gift Categories

Gift category	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
Treasures	42	51,9	27	16,7
Arms	25	30,9	18	11,1
Hospitality	9	11,1	43	26,5
Transports	4	4,9	7	4,3
Consorts	1	1,2	1	0,6
Provisions	-	-	36	22,2
Objects	-	-	30	18,6

Table B1.1.3: Frequency of Recipient Categories

Recipient category	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
Heroes	27	64,3	74	74
Rulers	13	31	8	8
Commoners	2	4,8	11	11
G. supernat.	-	-	5	5
E. supernat.	-	-	2	2

Table B1.1.4: Distribution of Gift-Giving Events across Texts

Block	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
0-10%	2	4,8	21	21
10-20%	7	16,7	10	10
20-30%	-	-	10	10
30-40%	6	14,3	14	14
40-50%	1	2,4	8	8
50-60%	3	7,1	6	6
60-70%	11	26,2	7	7
70-80%	5	11,9	6	6
80-90%	5	11,9	4	4
90-100%	2	4,8	14	14

Table B1.1.5: Frequency of Giver–Gift Pairs

Pair	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
E. supernat. → E. supernat.	-	-	1	1
G. supernat. → G. supernat.	-	-	1	1
Heroes → E. supernat.	-	-	1	1
Heroes → G. supernat.	-	-	1	1
E. supernat. → Rulers	-	-	3	3
Rulers → G. supernat.	-	-	3	3
G. supernat. → Commoners	-	-	1	1
Commoners → Heroes	-	-	6	6
Heroes → Commoners	-	-	10	10
G. supernat. → Heroes	-	-	21	21
Commoners → Rulers	1	2,4	-	-
Rulers → Commoners	2	4,8	-	-
Heroes → Heroes	3	7,1	29	29
Heroes → Rulers	5	12	4	4
Rulers → Rulers	7	16,7	1	1

Rulers → Heroes	24	57,1	18	18

B1.2 Figures

Figure 4.1: Distribution of Gift Giving Events across Equal Sized Textual Blocks

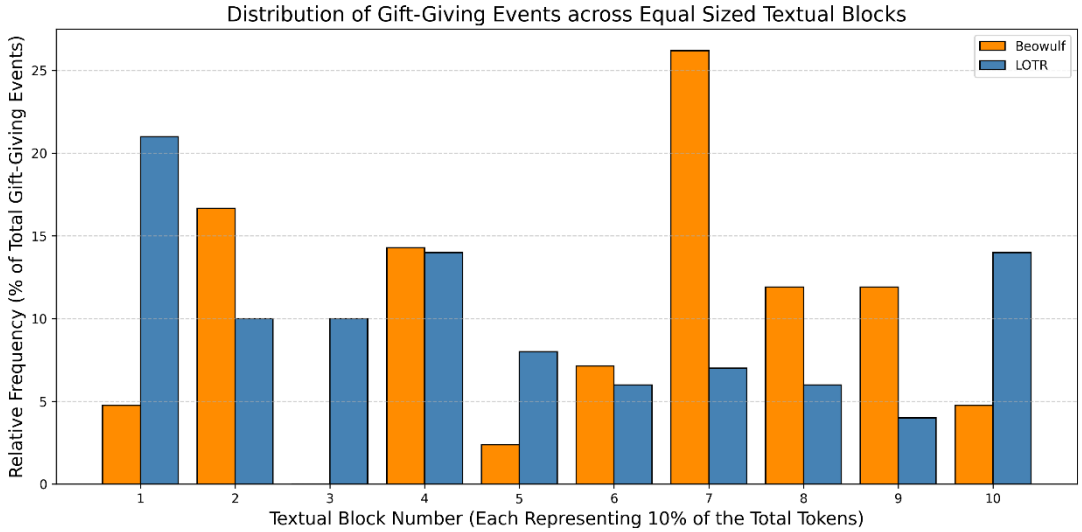


Figure 4.2: Distribution of Gift-Giving Events in *Beowulf* (1% Segmentation)

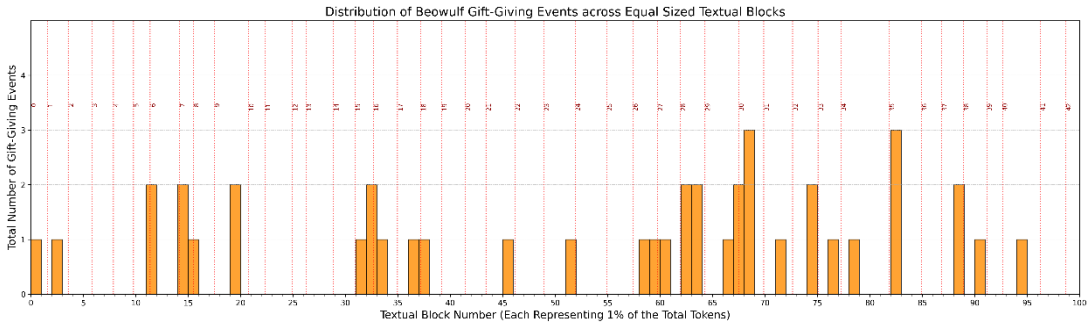


Figure 4.3: Distribution of gift-giving events in *The Lord of the Rings* (1% segmentation)

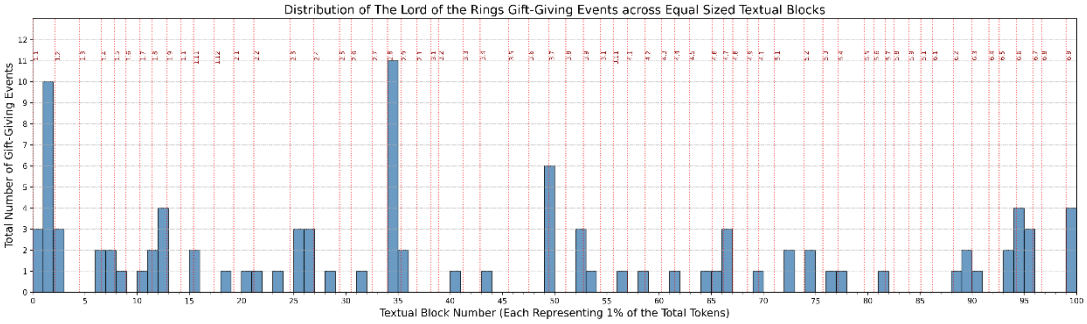


Figure 4.4. Relative Frequency of Giver Categories in Gift-Giving Events

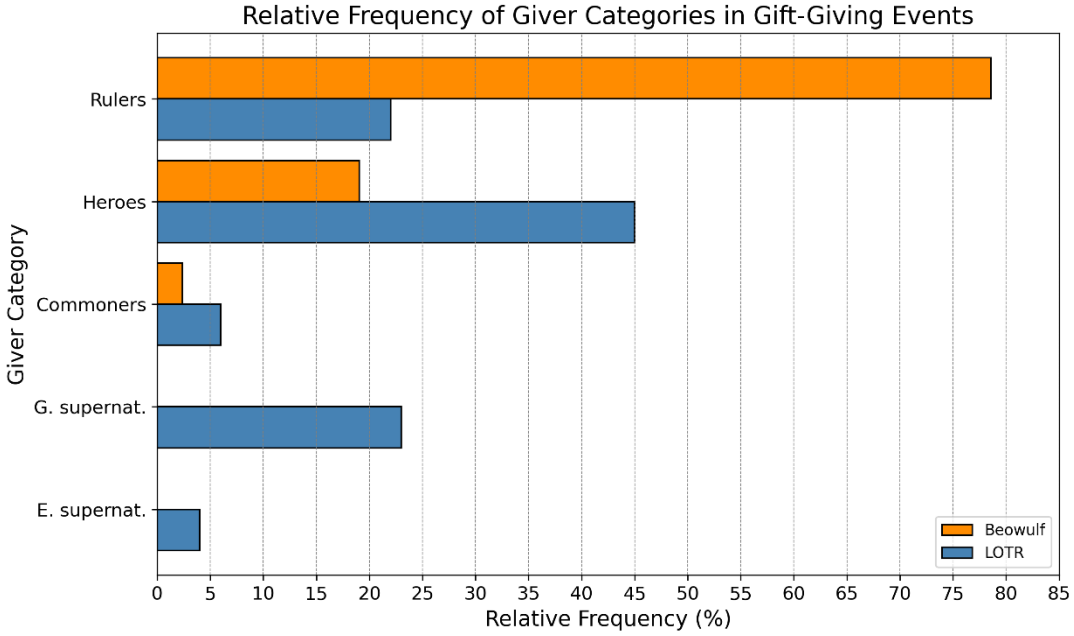


Figure 4.5. Relative Frequency of Gift Categories in Gift Giving Events

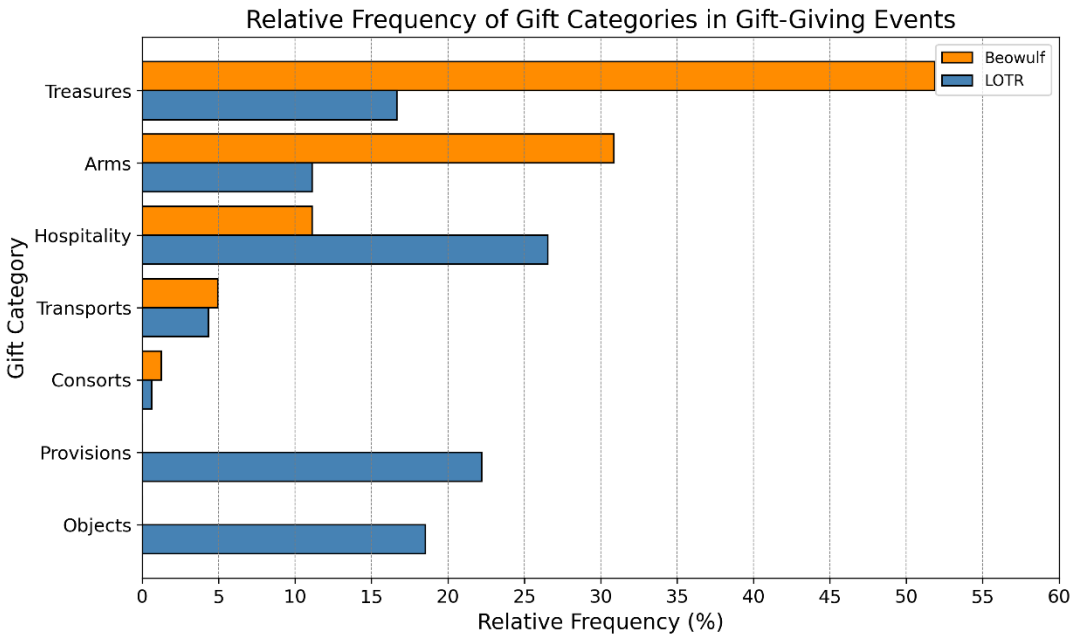


Figure 4.6: Relative Frequency of Recipient Categories in Gift-Giving Events

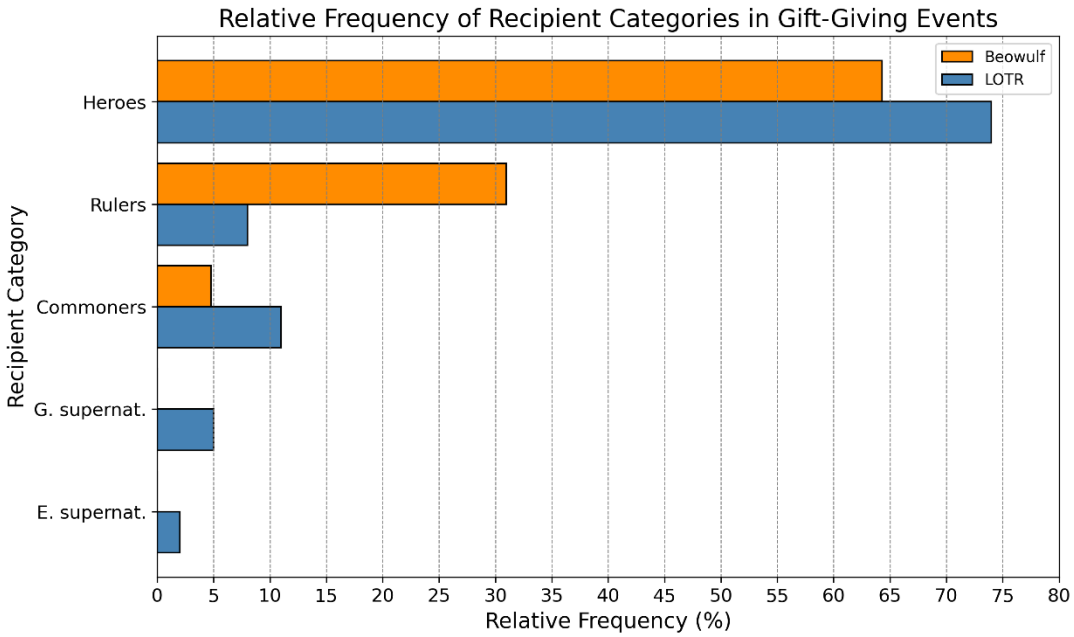


Figure 4.7: Heatmap of Gift-Giving Interactions in Beowulf

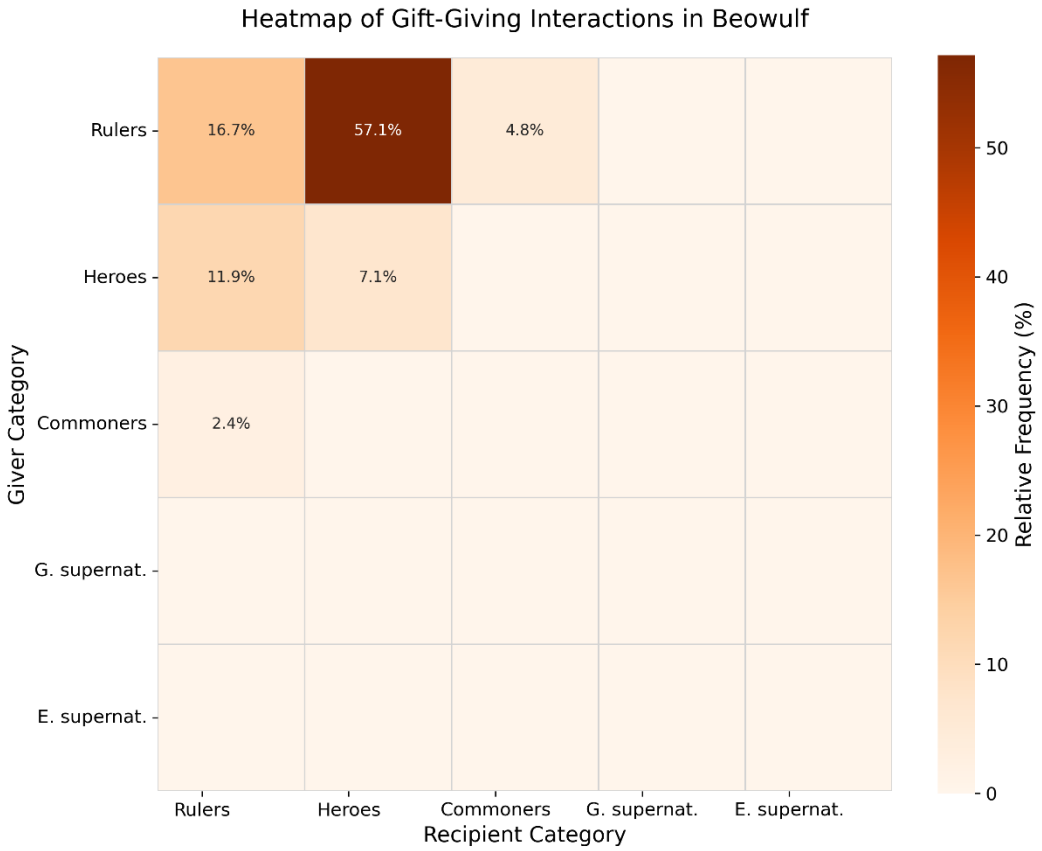
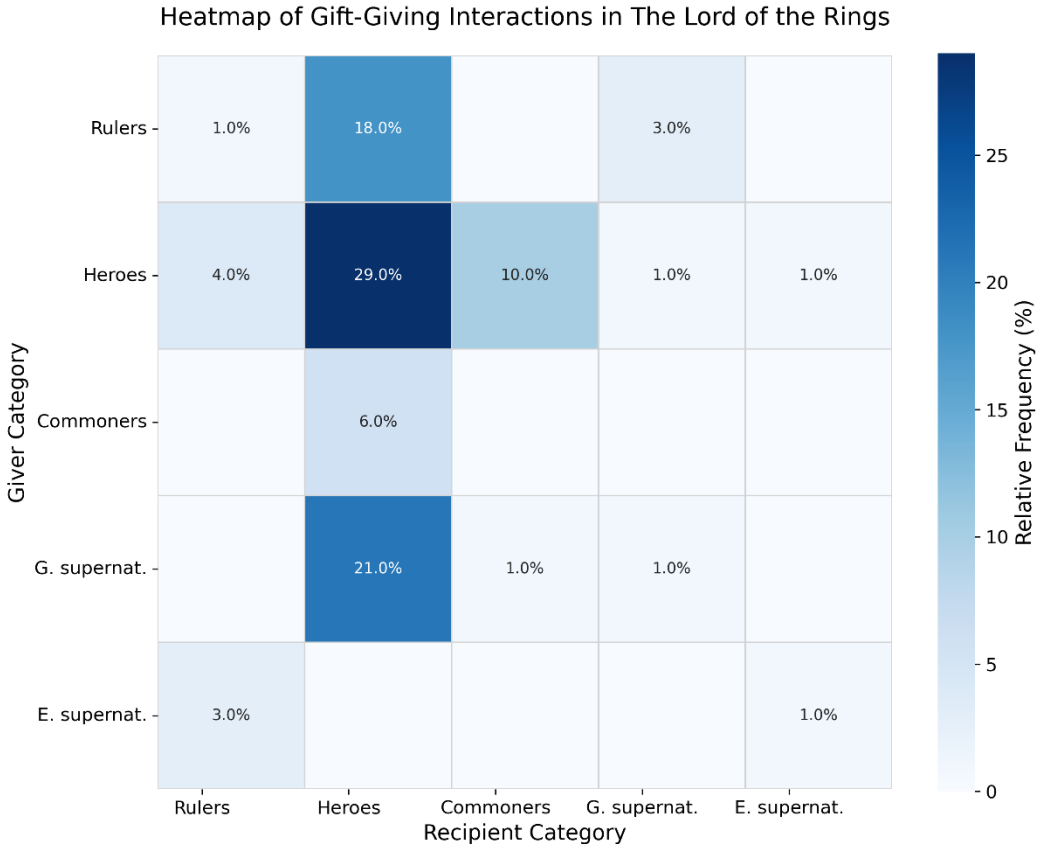


Figure 4.8: Heatmap of Gift-Giving Interactions in The Lord of the Rings



Appendix B2 – Singing

B2.1 Tables

Table B2.1.1: Frequency of Singer Categories

Category	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
Poets	7	63,6	2	1,8
Heroes	2	18,2	67	59,9
Rulers	1	9,1	5	4,5
Commoners	1	9,1	2	1,8
G. supernat.	-	-	33	29,5
E. supernat.	-	-	3	2,7

Table B2.1.2: Frequency of Song Categories

Category	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
Tales	5	45,5	13	14,3
Lament	3	27,3	16	17,6
Feasting	2	18,2	14	15,4
Myth-Religion	1	9,1	4	4,4
Nature	-	-	14	15,4
War	-	-	13	14,3
Travel	-	-	11	12,1
Enchantment	-	-	6	6,6

Table B2.1.3: Distribution of Singing Events across Texts

Block	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
0-10%	1	9,1	9	9,9
10-20%	1	9,1	24	26,4
20-30%	2	18,2	6	6,6
30-40%	1	9,1	11	12,1
40-50%	0	0	15	16,5
50-60%	0	0	3	3,3
60-70%	4	36,4	2	2,2
70-80%	-	-	2	2,2
80-90%	-	-	7	7,7
90-100%	2	18,2	12	13,2

B2.2 Figures

Figure 5.1: Distribution of Singing Events Across Equal-Sized Textual Blocks

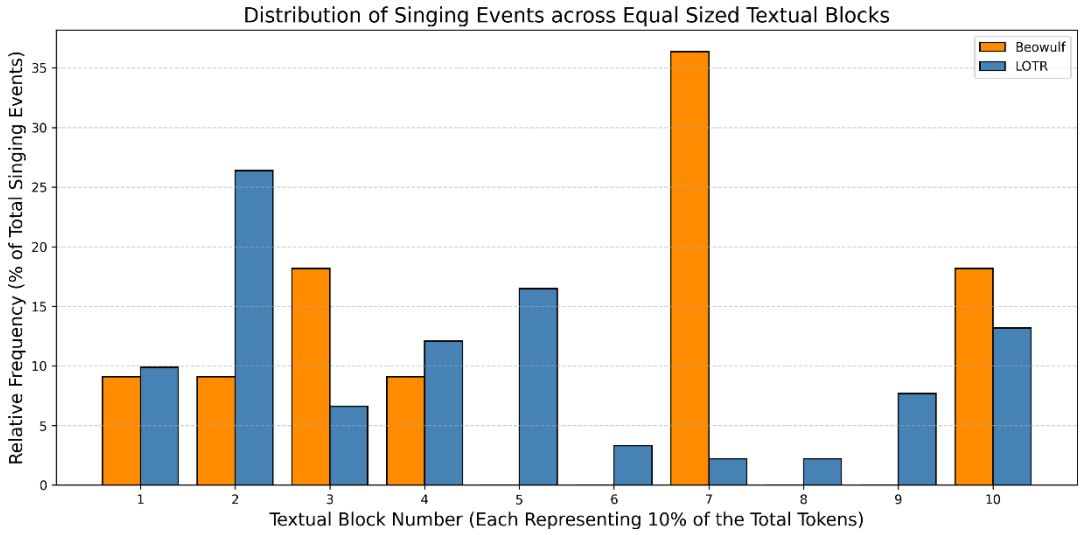


Figure 5.2: Distribution of *Beowulf* Singing Events (1% Blocks)

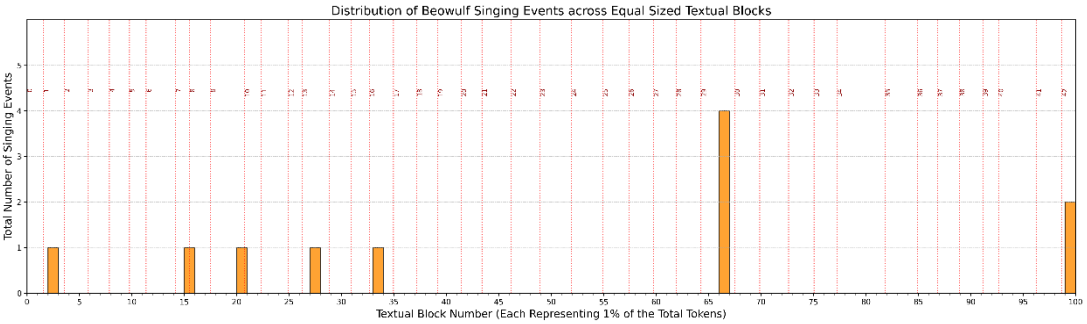


Figure 5.3: Distribution of *The Lord of the Rings* Singing Events (1% Blocks)

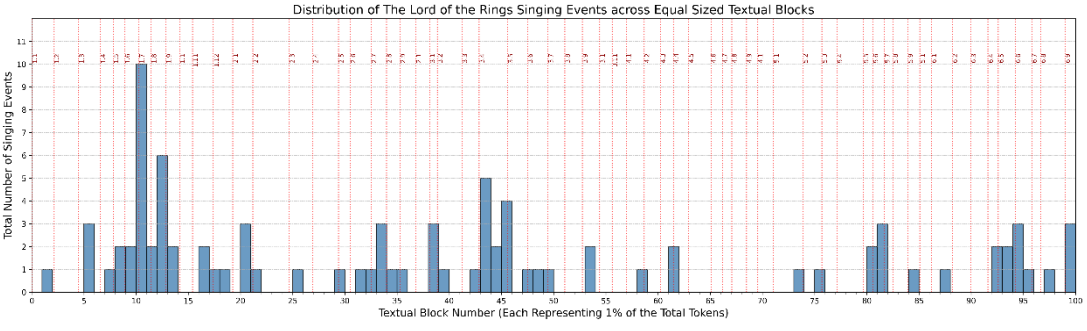


Figure 5.4: Relative Frequency of Singer Categories in Singing Events

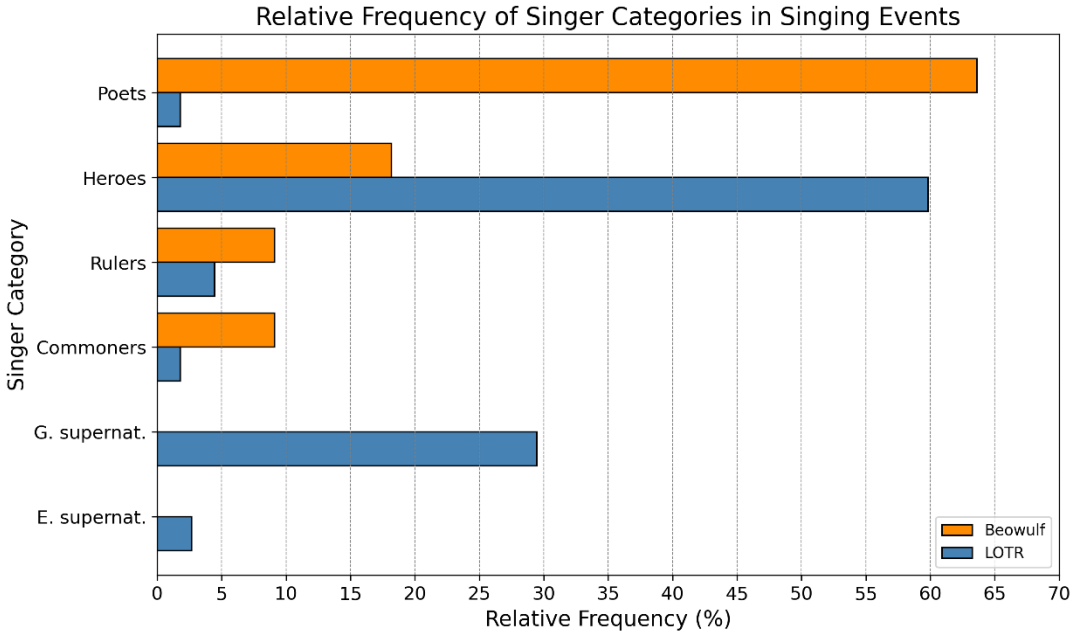


Figure 5.5: Relative Frequency of Song Categories in Singing Events

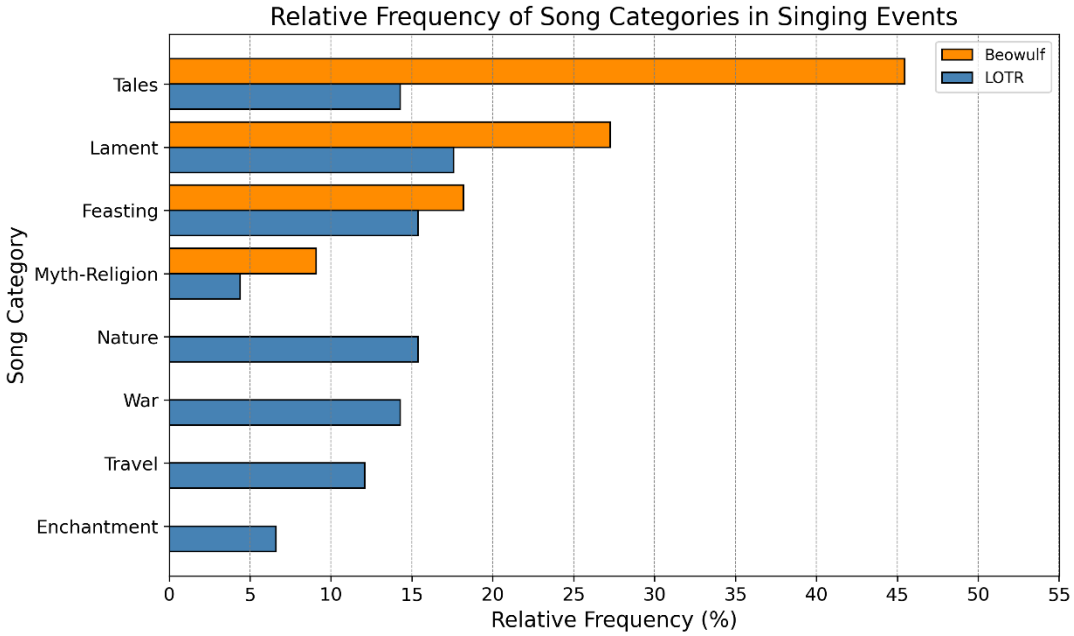


Figure 5.6: Heatmap of Singing in *Beowulf*

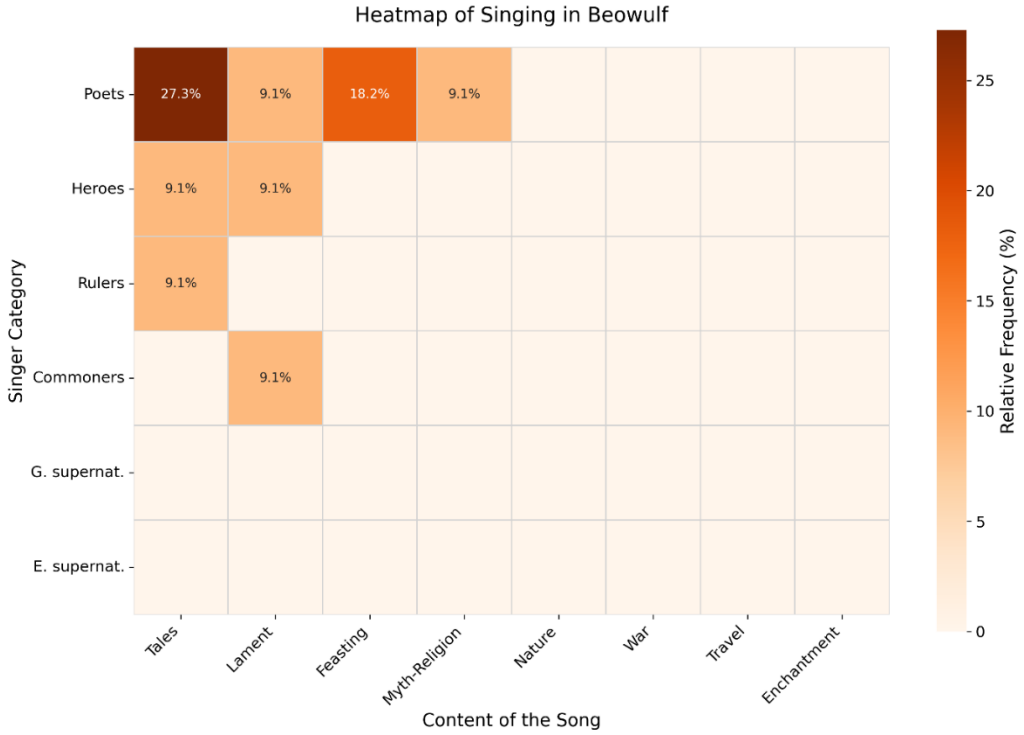
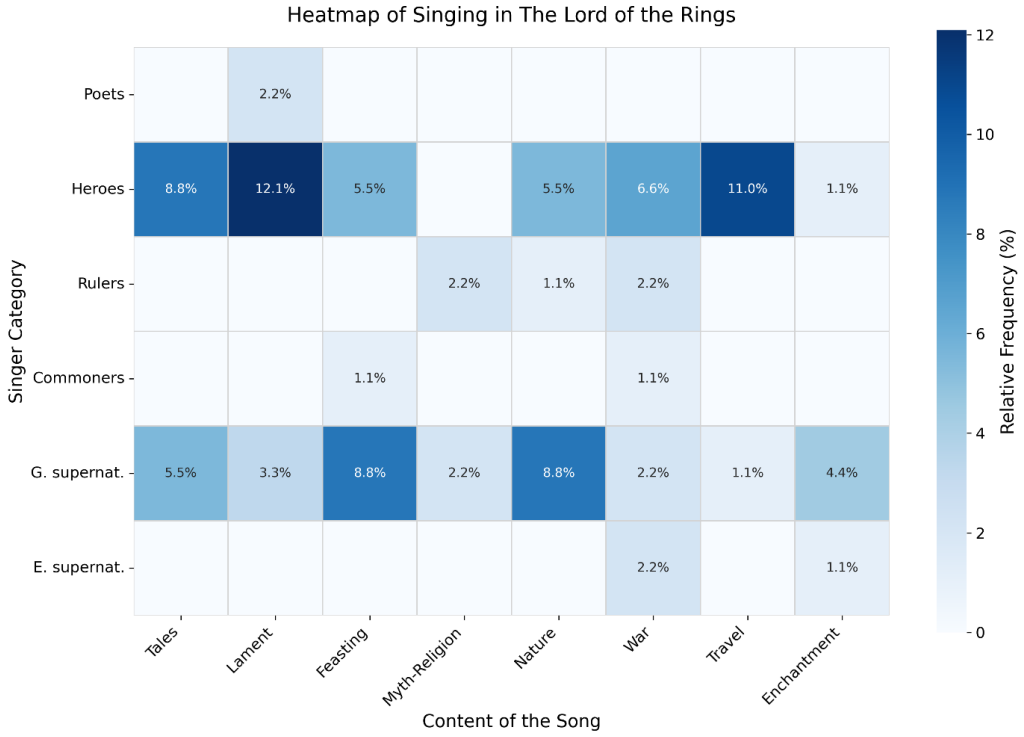


Figure 5.7: Heatmap of Singing in *The Lord of the Rings*



Appendix B3 – Burials

B3.1 Tables

Table B3.1.1: Frequency of Deceased Categories

Deceased category	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
Rulers	3	75	3	21,4
Heroes	1	25	8	57,1
E. supernat.	-	-	2	14,3
Animals	-	-	1	7,1

Table B3.1.2: Frequency of Burial Types Categories

Burial type category	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
Pyres	2	50	2	14,3
Mounds	1	25	7	50
Graves	-	-	2	14,3
Boats	1	25	1	7,1
Heaps	-	-	2	14,3

Table B3.1.3: Frequency of Objects Categories

Object category	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
Arms	9	56,25	11	78,6
Treasures	7	43,75	3	21,4

Table B3.1.4: Distribution of burial Events across Texts

Block	Beowulf (abs.)	Beowulf (%)	LOTR (abs.)	LOTR (%)
0-10%	1	25	-	-
10-20%	-	-	1	7,1
30-40%	1	25	1	7,1
40-50%	0	0	2	14,3
50-60%	0	0	6	42,9
80-90%	0	0	3	21,4
90-100%	2	50	1	7,1

B3.2 Figures

Figure 6.1: Distribution of Burial Events in *Beowulf* (1% Segmentation)

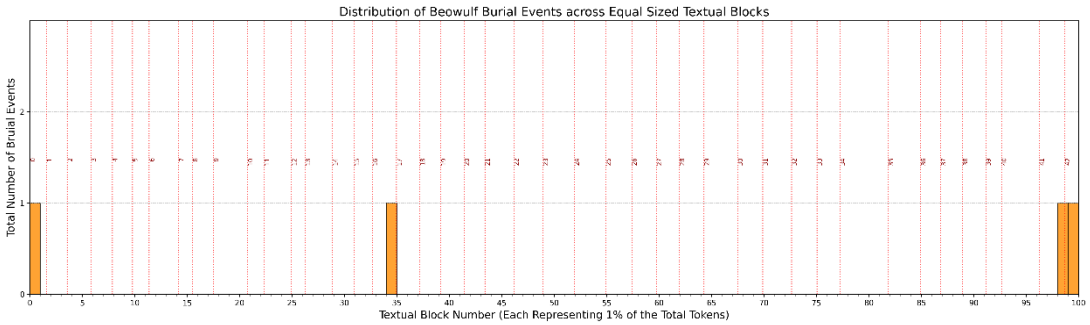


Figure 6.2: Distribution of Gift-Giving Events in *The Lord of the Rings* (1% Segmentation)

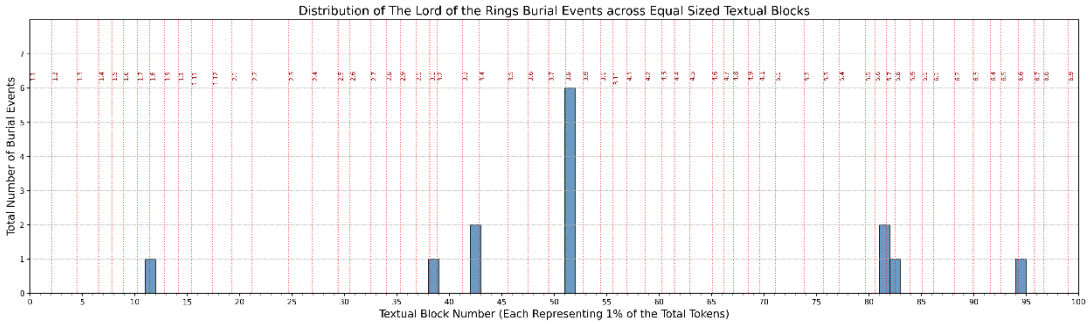


Figure 6.3: Relative Frequency of Deceased Categories in Burial Events

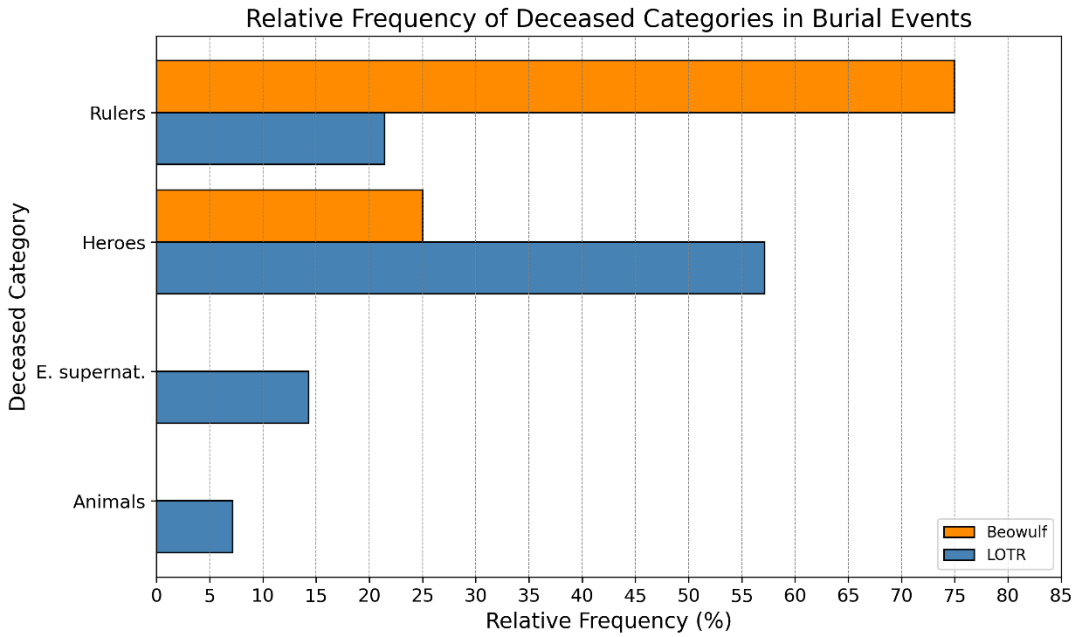


Figure 6.4: Relative Frequency of Burial Categories in Burial Events

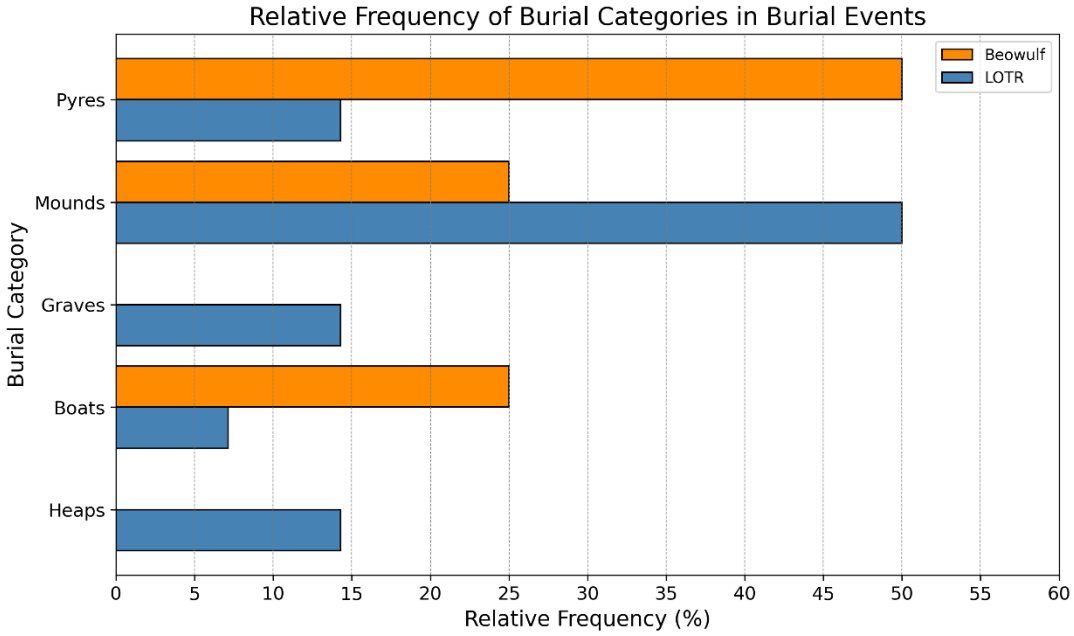


Figure 6.5: Relative Frequency of Object Categories in Burial Events