
Exile, Wyrd and the Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ideal in *The Wanderer* and Tolkien's *Quenta Silmarillion*

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1. Introduction

"If it has passed from the high and the beautiful to darkness and ruin, that was of old the fate of Arda Marred..."(1)

This is the note on which Tolkien ends the *Quenta Silmarillion*, which at once makes apparent the two perhaps most important undercurrents of his mythology: fate and ruin. Tolkien's study of *Beowulf* (2) can be seen as one important source of inspiration for these paramount qualities of Old English elegiac poetry, yet there is more Anglo-Saxon poetry that influenced him. In the mid-1930s, Tolkien was collaborating with E.V. Gordon on a critical edition of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, although Gordon passed away before their work could be published (3).

That Tolkien was inspired by *The Wanderer* is immediately made obvious by the famous *ubi sunt* passage:

Where is the horse now, where the hero gone?
Where is the bounteous lord, and where the benches
For feasting? Where are all the joys of hall?
Alas for the bright cup, the armored warrior,
The glory of the prince. That time is over,
Passed into night as it had never been. (4)

This is paraphrased by Tolkien as "The Lament of The Rohirrim" in *The Two Towers*, which also found its way – slightly rephrased and declaimed by Théoden – into Peter Jackson's recent movies:

Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?
Where is the helm and the hauberk, and the bright hair flowing?
Where is the hand on the harpstring, and the red fire glowing?
Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?
They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow;
The days have gone down in the West behind the hills into shadow. (5)

In this paper, I will first concentrate on the Old English elegy *The Wanderer* and analyze three important aspects of the poem: the motif of exile, the meaning of wyrd with its seeming dichotomy of pagan fate and Christian providence, and the depiction of the Anglo-Saxon warrior ideal. Afterwards, I will take a closer look at the *Quenta Silmarillion* and pertinent passages from the *History of Middle-earth* to show that these motifs and aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture are underlying, even defining themes of Tolkien's mythology, and to furthermore analyse what the fall and ruin of the Noldor might signify if seen in the context of this influence.

2.1 The Theme of Exile in *The Wanderer*

In the Old English poem *The Wanderer*, the loss of a tribal lord and subsequent exile are shown to be a common part of the lives of Anglo-Saxon warriors. The wanderer described in the poem speaks of his frustration as he is forced to search for a new lord during winter, and even his dreams of the joy he might find once more in the employ of a new lord prove to be no comfort to him in the end.

In the Anglo-Saxon warrior community, a man without a lord is without identity; it is his ties to lord and kin which define his role in society (6). This instability of the exile's situation is defined by images of motion in the poem as he is forced to "travel the exile's path" and "send his weary spirit over icy waves".

Yet the warrior's role does not end with exile; in fact, it seems to be a common experience as the exile recalls several "deaths of lords" in his life. Furthermore, there are certain rules the outcast has to follow: he has to "lock up his private feelings, however he might feel" to show the stoicism valued so highly in Anglo-Saxon culture. Also emphasized is the importance of controlling himself: a man must not be "too hasty in speech" or "quick to boast". The exile must not speak until he has found a resolution for his situation, a new lord to serve who will once again return to him his accustomed place in society, and thus restore his identity as a warrior.

The sense of isolation which the outcast experiences is heightened by the images of winter like the "ice-cold sea" and the fall of "snow and hail and frost"; the physical coldness the wanderer experiences thus equals the coldness in his heart caused by the loss of lord, friends and home. These images of winter are also apparent in the second part of the elegy, where the misfortune that the wanderer experiences leads him to reflect on the misfortune that befalls all men who have experienced their "share of winters". While the outcast warrior knows that his exile could be remedied by finding another lord to serve, he also knows that he could lose that lord as well, as all earthly joy is transient in the end.

Furthermore, the poem also describes a time of transition from a Germanic warrior society to a Christian society (7). Thus, the motif of exile of course also holds an allegorical Christian meaning of exile as men's life on earth after being outcast from Eden (8). This can be seen in the poem when the outcast warrior gradually realizes that only timelessness with God can in the end save him from the change and uncertainty that will always accompany man's life on earth (9).

Taking this into consideration, exile in *The Wanderer* depicts not only the reality of life in Anglo-Saxon society for a lordless thane, but gains a deeper meaning as depicting the way a man takes through life as he travels from this world to the next.

2.2 Wyrð: Pagan Fate and Christian Providence

A further important subject of Anglo-Saxon culture that is apparent in *The Wanderer* is the question of fate and free will, the dichotomy of God's providence and each man's individual responsibility for his life and deeds. While it used to be thought that the aspect of fate was the most important part of pagan belief, and that the mentions of the Christian God were only later

added as a framework to the Anglo-Saxon poems, nowadays, it is believed that *wyrð* soon gained a Christian meaning (10).

Old English *wyrð* has various meanings, only one of them the fatalistic 'fate'. A more general meaning would be a simple 'that which happens' or 'event', sometimes it may mean simply 'circumstance'. In *The Wanderer*, we can observe a further meaning which has shifted away from the event to that which caused the event, and *wyrð* could thus be translated as 'fate', 'fortune', 'providence' or even 'one's lot' (11).

A closer look at the two main aspects of the Anglo-Saxon worldview – one of which is fatalism, the other is the concept of a world in decline – helps to understand these shifting layers of meaning of *wyrð*.

The pagan worldview of Germanic mythology which the Anglo-Saxons shared taught that the world would soon meet its end in the Ragnarök, which neither men nor Gods can escape. In this context, *wyrð* is then that one fundamental power which in the end brings all creation to its destruction in the Ragnarök (12). This belief of living in the last age of the world was one that early Christians of that period shared, as they thought that their life on earth was little more than a pilgrimage to the next.

In *The Wanderer*, we find a more complex meaning of *wyrð* as a concept that can encompass both fate and providence. In the first lines of the poem, *wyrð* is fate and a concept separate to God's providence, as the narrator talks about how "the grace and mercy of the Lord" can be found, yet in the same sentence warns that "fate is relentless".

The outcast warrior described in the poem has had many brushes with this relentless fate, of which the recent loss of his lord is the most terrible. His feelings are those of one who "called to mind [...] deaths of lords" which suggests that this is a often-repeated experience for him, and as "no man may be wise before he's lived his share of winters in the world", he realizes that in the end, it is the recurring encounters with the force of *wyrð* that made him learn wisdom.

Thus, the seeming contradiction between the misfortune that befalls men and the "grace and mercy of the Lord" that is spoken of in the first lines of the poem can be resolved in the exile's conclusion that there is indeed a function to the many misfortunes that have befallen him, as those are what made him search for God's mercy.

In this way, the pagan understanding of *wyrð* has shifted and expanded, as what during earthly life is seen as inexorable fate, from the timeless perspective of God – or even from the point of view of the sage who has embraced the transient nature of the world and the belief in God's mercy – it is revealed to also be the working of providence (13).

2.3 The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ideal

The Anglo-Saxon warrior ethic can be summarized in the Germanic "heroic code" that is apparent in much of Old English poetry (14); the three most important features of this code are also apparent in the wanderer's description of his past life as a warrior serving his lord. The first key feature of the Anglo-Saxon warrior ideal is the reciprocal loyalty between retainer and warlord – the warrior serves his lord in battle and in return, he is rewarded with "gifts from the

throne" for his courage, with rings and torcs of "fair twisted gold" and also with public recognition for valor in battle when his lord "was wont to entertain him at the feast".

The second feature is a revenge obligation on behalf of both the warrior's kin and the warrior's lord. Thus, if the warrior's lord were killed in battle, it would be the retainer's duty to either avenge him or to find his own death in the attempt. The exiled warrior of *The Wanderer* speaks of how he had to wrap his "lord's remains in darkness of the earth" from which we might deduce that he lost his lord in battle; yet instead of dying a heroic death at his lord's side, he is left behind and seems to be ashamed of that fact. His monologue tells us that he "often had to tie in fetters [his] own troubled spirit", which gives the impression that he is still battling with himself over the death of his lord. His lord's death is a failure as his lord's sworn warrior for which he has to blame himself, and it has left him with "heart's wounds" that only grow heavier from contemplation during his isolation.

The third key feature of the Anglo-Saxon warrior ideal is courage, the duty to win fame in battle even and especially when victory seems impossible. The virtue of courage in the face of defeat is extolled in many Old English poems and can be observed in Beowulf's words that "fate often saves an doomed man when his courage is good" (15).

In *The Wanderer* we can see a different kind of courage in the exile's stoicism. Despite the winter's cold, he leaves his former home and the warmth of his dead lord's mead-hall to travel through snow and ice, at danger from both the elements and other hostile war-bands, for he is without the protection of his former lord now. Nevertheless, the exiled warrior meets this danger with courage, because he knows that "a weary heart cannot oppose inexorable fate". His lament takes the form of a monologue, as the warrior's code of conduct forbids him to complain about his misfortunes to another, and thus "those jealous of their reputation" have to keep silent about their fears.

The authoritarian structure of the Anglo-Saxon society is revealed in his memories of how in the past he received "the kind advice of his beloved lord", which he has to do without now. As long as he cannot find a new lord to serve, he will continue to be alone with his thoughts and his fears, as his honor forbids him from sharing those with others. Furthermore, he is without friends and kinsmen now; and as he calls his memories of them "floating spirits" they might have died in the same battle as his former lord. These friends and kinsmen were warriors like him, and only if another lord accepts his service will he know friendship again amidst the war-band.

3.1 Exile in the *Quenta Silmarillion*

A look at the table of contents of *The Silmarillion* is enough to show the importance of the motif of exile, for it is the aptly named chapter "The Flight of the Noldor" that deals not only with the theme of exile in its very name, but is also the axis on which rests all the "darkness and ruin" that come to pass in the Ages thereafter.

It is a messenger of Manwë who first uses the word 'exile' when he proclaims "But thou Fëanor Finwë's son, by thine oath art exiled" (16). Furthermore, the exiled Noldor accept this term as a description of themselves as becomes apparent in the following chapters, when it is told that "Fëanor and his sons came first of the Exiles to Middle-earth" (17), and that "Angrod son of Finarfin was the first of the Exiles to come to Menegroth" (18). The motif of exile here becomes

not simply a description, but is used as the sole identifying means of this people. Like the outcast warrior of *The Wanderer*, the Noldor in Middle-earth have lost their identity; the state of being exiled has superseded all others.

There are further parallels to be found in the use of the imagery of winter as well, for as the wanderer suffers cold, loss and danger on his journey, so the host of Fingolfin that is left behind without ships by Fëanor suffers many hardships in the crossing of the Helcaraxë. This far northern region of Arda is described as home to "vast fogs and mists of deathly cold, [...] clashing hills of ice and the grinding of ice deep-sunken" (19). It is a "desperate crossing in hardihood or woe" for the exiled Noldor, during which "Elenwë the wife of Turgon was lost, and many others perished also" (20).

Yet even for the host of Fëanor the crossing of the sea is not an easy one, for earlier, in retribution for the murder they wrought to gain the ships of the Teleri, "the sea rose in wrath against the slayers, so that many of the ships were wrecked and those in them drowned" (21), so that here the sea holds the same kind of meaning as it did in Old English poetry: not a symbol of freedom at all, but a hostile element that signifies danger and death.

Furthermore, as in *The Wanderer*, the exile of a fallen people of course also holds a Christian symbolism here, of which Tolkien was well aware:

In the cosmogony there is a fall: a fall of Angels we should say. Though quite different in form, of course, to that of Christian myth. These tales are 'new', they are not directly derived from other myths and legends, but they must inevitably contain a large measure of ancient wide-spread motives or elements. [...] There cannot be any 'story' without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall – at least not for human minds as we know them and have them. (22)

In "Exilic Imagining in *The Seafarer* and *The Lord of the Rings*" (23), Miranda Wilcox describes three levels of exilic dislocation: the temporal level, the spatial level and the spiritual (or figural) level; I will use the same differentiation to compare the exile of the Noldor in *The Silmarillion* to the imagery used in *The Wanderer*.

According to Wilcox, the temporal level of exile is found in the way the memory of a pleasant past conflicts with the sorrow of the present exile. Thus, memory is essential for the perception of exile; without this conflict between past and present there would be no pain or loss to be experienced in being exiled.

Although proud Fëanor refuses to look back after he is exiled, the greater part of the host of the Noldor led by his half-brother Fingolfin "often [...] looked behind them to see their fair city", and so "they carried thence memories of the bliss they had forsaken" (24).

Once they have arrived in Middle-earth and founded realms of their own, the exiled Noldor still cannot forget the beauty of Valinor they have left behind, for "at times Melian and Galadriel would speak together of Valinor and the bliss of old" (25), and Turgon began to "devise the plan of a city after the manner of Tirion upon Túna, for which his heart yearned in exile" (26).

Moreover, in Middle-earth even the preserving power of the immortal elves is subject to the transient nature of a mortal world. All that the Noldor create and build in their exile is ultimately fated to be destroyed. While the mortal outcast of *The Wanderer* can observe the crumbled ruins of Roman buildings, the immortal, exiled elves are forced to watch the work of their own hands, their realms and cities come to ruin and their kings die. Even Middle-earth itself, which they were supposed to adorn and heal (27), is changed and ravaged by the wars Morgoth wages when he causes "earthquakes in the north, and fire came from fissures in the earth, and the Iron Mountains vomited flame" (28).

The spatial level of exile is governed by the limitations of the body, and Wilcox points out that in *The Seafarer* as well as in *The Lord of the Rings*, the sea acts as a spatial symbol of the division between mortality and immortality.

In *The Silmarillion*, this experience of crossing the sea to find immortality – or the timeless unity with God – is reversed. Due to their exile, the immortal elves are forced to experience mortality to a degree, as has been ordained in the Doom of Mandos:

"Ye have spilled the blood of your kindred unrighteously and have stained the land of Aman. For blood ye shall render blood, and beyond Aman ye shall dwell in Death's shadow. For though Eru appointed to you to die not in Eä, and no sickness may assail you, yet slain ye may be, and slain ye shall be: by weapon and by torment and by grief". (29)

This degree of mortality they now suffer is also shown in the way that in Middle-earth, where Morgoth now wages war uncontested by the Valar, they are subject to captivity and torment, like Maedhros who is hung from a rock by his wrist, and can only be freed when Fingon cuts off his hand (30).

As Tolkien points out in a letter to Robert Murray, the elves are immortal, but not eternal (31), and in Middle-earth – though they will eventually be reborn after death – death has become a reality of life for them. Furthermore, by being part of a transient world the elves are forced to experience mortality through their environment; their own immortality is thus not regarded as superior to the mortality of Men, but instead the death of mortal Men is seen as Eru's gift to them (32).

Finally, Wilcox talks about the figural or spiritual level of exile, which is defined by her as estrangement from the divine and a rupture between the ideal and the fallen state.

As a mortal being on earth, the lordless thane of *The Wanderer* is a spiritual exile from God. In the same way, Wilcox describes the Noldor as spiritually exiled from the wisdom and power of the "divine Valar". Yet in this, I have to differ with her argument, as it should also be taken into account that the Valar do not inhabit the position of gods in Tolkien's mythology. They are fallible, and as part of Eru's creation even they cannot fully know the workings of divine providence. Indeed this can be seen most clearly in *The Converse of Manwë and Eru*, where Christopher Tolkien summarizes a manuscript that points out that Eru made it "plain to Manwë that the Valar should have contested Melkor's domination of Middle-earth far earlier, and that they had lacked *este!*: they should have trusted that in a legitimate war Eru would not have

permitted Melkor so greatly to damage Arda that the Children could not come, or could not inhabit it" (33).

The journey west over the sea thus cannot truly signify death for the elves, or the transition from an earthly to a spiritual realm; Valinor is no true Garden of Eden as it is part of Arda Marred, and death soon finds entry to this land of the Valar when Ungoliant poisons the Two Trees and Melkor slays Finwë. The spiritual exile of the Noldor is therefore not one that can be remedied by closeness to the Valar, although in Valinor, nature is more suited to elvish immortality – though not eternity: "Though all tides and seasons were at the will of the Valar, and in Valinor there was no winter of death, nonetheless they dwelt then in the Kingdom of Arda, and that was but a small realm in the halls of Eä, whose life is Time, which flows ever from the first note to the last chord of Eru" (34).

Nevertheless, this seeming contradiction proves to be another similarity to the elegiac atmosphere of *The Wanderer*, who despite his journey over the sea and through snow and ice cannot escape the transient nature of the world while he is in it. So as well it is for the elves, who despite their immortal nature are bound to the fate of Arda Marred, and true spiritual unity will for them only be achieved when after the Final Battle, a second Music of the Ainur will be sung and the world will be recreated as Arda Unmarred (35).

3.2 Fate and Providence in Tolkien's cosmogony

The *Quenta Silmarillion* ends in ruin – almost every character introduced has met his death in the long struggle against Melkor, and there is little consolation left but that this "was of old the fate of Arda Marred" (36). Yet in stark contrast to the fatalistic later chapters of the *Quenta Silmarillion*, the *Ainulindalë* – Tolkien's creation myth – is without question providential, for after the creation of the world, it is told that "to none but himself has Ilúvatar revealed all that he has in store, and in every age there come forth things that are new and have no foretelling, for they do not proceed from the past" (37). Furthermore, even though evil has entered the creation by the marring of the Music through Melkor, who obviously takes on the role of Lucifer here, Eru states that "he that attempteth [altering the music] shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined", and that Melkor's alterations are "but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory" (38). And indeed this providential worldview is soon proven true when the Valar begin to shape lands and continents, only to have all their efforts continuously corrupted by Melkor. Nevertheless, it is this which at last readies the Earth to be inhabited by the elves, although "all things were in hue and shape other than the Valar had at first intended" (39) – which, considering Eru's earlier words to Melkor, leaves us with the suggestion that, though this might not have been Eru's plan from the beginning, this first working of providence has twisted a deed of evil to the good.

This is the beginning of Tolkien's cosmogony, and while there are obvious parallels to be found to the Christian creation myth, especially in the providential world-view that is firmly established here, it is in the ending of Arda that the huge influence of Norse mythology becomes most obvious. While the *Quenta Silmarillion* – edited by Christopher Tolkien after his father's death – ends with the note that "if any change shall come and the Marring be amended, Manwë and Varda may know; but they have not revealed it, and it is not declared in the dooms of Mandos", there exist manuscripts which show that Tolkien had once planned to end with a prophecy about the Dagor Dagorath, the Last Battle:

When the world is old and the powers grow weary, then Morgoth, seeing that the guard sleepeth, shall come back through the Door of Night out of the Timeless Void; and he shall destroy the Sun and Moon. But Eärendel shall descend upon him as a white and searing flame and drive him from the airs. Then shall the Last Battle be gathered on the fields of Valinor. In that day Tulkas shall strive with Morgoth, and on his right hand shall be Fionwe, and on his left Túrin Turambar, son of Húrin, coming from the Halls of Mandos; and the black sword of Túrin shall deal unto Morgoth his death and final end; and so shall the children of Húrin and all Men be avenged.

Thereafter shall Earth be broken and re-made, and the Silmarils shall be recovered out of Air and Earth and Sea [...] In that light the Gods will grow young again, and the Elves awake and all their dead arise, and the purpose of Ilúvatar be fulfilled concerning them. (40)

This, now, is obviously a concept heavily influenced by the Ragnarök. There are not only superficial similarities like the destruction of the sun and moon, which in Norse myth will be swallowed by wolves, or the return of a foe long thought subdued – Fenrir in Norse myth, Morgoth in Tolkien's cosmology – but there is also a deeper similarity in tone and atmosphere. Dimond (41) argues that the aspect maybe most important in relation to Tolkien's world is the anticipation of the Christian era in the myth of Ragnarök itself, as written accounts of it only date back to a time when Christianity had already been introduced to Iceland by missionaries.

In this Norse myth, the gods are aware of the final battle that is to come, and although they know that they will be defeated, they still choose to fight this last battle. So as well it is in Tolkien's mythology, where the Marring of Arda cannot be amended, and nevertheless Valar, elves and Men live and fight in this marred world even though they know that there can be no true victory for their struggle against evil until at last the world is remade as Arda Healed.

This, in fact, is what Shippey calls a central pillar in Tolkien's 'theory of courage': "Ragnarök - the day when gods and men would fight evil and the giants, and inevitably be defeated. Its great statement was that defeat is no refutation. The right side remains right even if it has no ultimate hope at all" (42). Shippey then goes on to consider the implications of what this theory must have had on Tolkien's work, for according to this, the Northern mythology that fascinated Tolkien asked more of men than Christianity did, as it asked for courage and for doing what is right without reward: there is no heaven or salvation for men, so all that remains is the certainty of defeat at the end. Nevertheless, he also cautions that this 'theory of courage' seems to be driven by despair and heathen ferocity, which would have posed a problem for Tolkien as a Christian; this, then, according to Shippey, is why we find in *The Lord of the Rings* a courage that exists without the confidence of certain victory against evil, but which at the same time is tempered by wisdom, and untainted by rage and despair.

Applied to the story of the Noldorin Exiles as depicted in the *Quenta Silmarillion*, this poses the question whether one reason for the ruin of the Noldor might not be exactly this 'heathen ferocity' of pride, rage and despair at a fated defeat. After the sense of Providence firmly established in the *Ainulindalë*, fate and doom soon enter the story - the first instance of it occurs when the Valar bring the elves to their realm in Valinor, instead of letting them remain in Middle-earth as seems to have been Eru's plan for them (43). The next instance of the impending doom can be found in the remarriage of Finwë to Indis, after he lost his wife Míriel – to the immortal

elves, this is an unheard-of concept, yet Míriel had decided to stay in the halls of Mandos until the world is made anew, and Finwë did not want to remain alone (44).

This sets events in motion that lead – almost inevitably, it seems – to the exile and ruin of the Noldor, who will in the end lose almost all of their kings and noble houses to the struggle against Morgoth. And yet, even this doom that follows the exiled Noldor is in the end not simply fate, at least not in the way it is depicted in Old English poetry. The Anglo-Saxon approach to fate is described by Bertha Phillpotts as "the awful choice between two evils" (45), and the only choice that might be left is to either yield or try to resist the workings of fate, though there is no chance of success.

The events that set the doom of the Noldor into motion, however, are no such choices between two evils. Finwë need not have taken another wife after the death of Míriel, and later on, after Melkor and Ungoliant had poisoned the Trees, Fëanor need not have denied the Valar's request for the Silmarils, with which the light of the Two Trees could have been rekindled. These might have been difficult choices to make, for certainly it would have caused Finwë pain to remain alone until the end of Arda Marred, just as it would have caused Fëanor great pain to see his greatest work destroyed, as he was aware that he would never be able to make the like of them again. Yet these were choices open to them, as we can see in Fëanor's proud reply to the Valar: "This thing I will not do of free will" (46).

Here, then, it is made obvious that even though the doom of the Noldor might seem fated, free will has been available to them all, Valar and elves alike, and that their fate had been preordained only in as much as that in the world of Arda Marred, there will always be a taint of the evil of Melkor. And although the guidance of Eru seems absent in the world, even in the doom of the Noldor there is a hint of providence at work, for despite their exile and the death and defeat that awaited them, "the children of Indis were great and glorious, and their children also; and if they had not lived the history of the Eldar would have been diminished" (47).

3.3 Masculinity in the *Quenta Silmarillion*

The first time questions of gender and sex enter *The Silmarillion* is right at the very beginning of the creation of the world, when the Valar take on a body:

But when they desire to clothe themselves the Valar take upon them forms some as of male and some as of female; for that difference of temper they had even from their beginning, and it is but bodied forth in the choice of each, not made by the choice, even as with us male and female may be shown by the raiment but is not made thereby. (48)

Here, then, sex and gender are regarded as reliant on each other; gender is defined as a 'difference of temper', and from that either male or female temper stems their male or female sex. More importantly, it is emphasized that this not a conscious choice to be made – the almost all-powerful Valar from whose music arises the world and all life therein are restricted in what sex their body will take, and seemingly have no more power over it as elves or men will.

This conservative worldview is also apparent in elvish society, of which Tolkien's essay *Laws and Customs among the Eldar* (49) offers more details. Here as well there are clearly defined gender roles; even though the men and women of the Eldar are supposed to be equal, invention

and change is usually brought about by men, whereas healing is declared a field women excel in – although Tolkien explains this as caused by them abstaining from death in the hunt or war instead of this being a power of womanhood. Similarly, further differences are listed concerning a vast field of occupations such as lore, cooking and the art of metalworking, and while this is tempered by the declaration that "all these things [...] may at different times be pursued by any among the Noldor" (50), the long list still leaves a distinct impression of fixed gender roles, especially as in all the tales of *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, elvish women who take an active role are very rare, and with the exception of Lúthien, do not seem to engage in the war against Melkor.

The men among the Noldor, on the other hand, seem to be only defined by their roles as warriors, especially once they return as exiles to Middle-earth. Indeed there can be found many similarities to the Anglo-Saxon warrior society of *The Wanderer* – here as well, the warriors' ties to kin and lord play an important part, as can be seen in the example of Fëanor. He who is called "the mightiest in all parts of body and mind" (51) is also the first elf to draw a sword on another, and his half-brother Fingolfin at that, for there were rumors planted by Melkor that Fingolfin thought to supplant Fëanor in their father's regard. As their father Finwë is High-king of all the Noldor, this adds a political dimension to their quarrel, which is once more underlined when, later on, Fingolfin forgives his brother and tells him that "thou shalt lead and I will follow" (52), which bears a great similarity to the oath of a warrior to his lord.

The revenge obligation, another characteristic of the portrayal of warriors in Anglo-Saxon poetry, is further explained by Phillipotts as "an obligation which might be the holiest of all" (53), which was not simply just a surrender to passion, but most often a "deliberate sacrifice of wealth, happiness, even personal honor" (54). This description of the Anglo-Saxon hero must strike a chord in every person who has read the *Quenta Silmarillion* and perhaps wondered at the foolhardiness of Fëanor, who with one ill-considered oath led his entire people into ruin. And yet, if seen from the angle of Anglo-Saxon society, his rash actions and the oath he took suddenly gain a deeper meaning. Phillipotts explains that vengeance takes such a high place of importance in Anglo-Saxon poems because it strikes at the very foundations of human society – there is no institution which would punish someone who committed a crime, and thus retribution is the only way an affected individual can right a committed wrong (55).

For Fëanor as well, this is so, as he cannot bring himself to trust the Valar to right the wrong that was done. After all, Melkor was only able to kill his father Finwë and steal the Silmarils because the Valar thought Melkor changed and pardoned him instead of keeping him imprisoned, while Fëanor himself never trusted in Melkor's sudden change of mind. It is not only desire for vengeance that drives Fëanor then, but more importantly the warrior's duty to revenge someone who was both kin and lord to him, for which he will gladly dare "the wrath of the Valar and the evils of the road, that he might see the hour of his vengeance" - sacrificing happiness and honor indeed to fulfill his revenge obligation.

Further consideration of Fëanor's character shows another parallel to the depiction of Anglo-Saxon heroes, for his traits are exactly of that 'heathen ferocity' which Shippey mentions as problematic for Tolkien as a Christian. Yet unlike to the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings*, this ferocity is not tempered in *The Silmarillion*; there is despair and rage to be found in all the kings of the Noldor, and most of all it is apparent in Fëanor. He is the most brilliant and perhaps also the most flawed of all of Tolkien's characters, and he meets his death quickly – valiant as the heroes of Anglo-Saxon poetry, and just as certainly doomed, for ultimately, this pagan courage

built on despair has no place in Tolkien's world. "Thus even as Eru spoke to us shall beauty not before conceived be brought into Eä, and evil yet be good to have been", Manwë declares with Tolkien's openly pagan admiration of the doomed heroes and gods of Norse myth, and Mandos in answer utters Tolkien's final rejection of this philosophy: "And yet remain evil" (56).

4. Conclusion

"What the onefold Providence of God is, and what Fate is, what happens by chance, and what are divine intelligence, divine predestination, and human free will' – were not these questions which every thoughtful Anglo-Saxon must have pondered?" Phillipotts asks, and certainly Tolkien must have done so as well. More importantly, as I have shown in this paper, these questions are asked by the Noldor themselves, and answered by the ruin brought upon them both by fate and free will. And yet there is the working of providence as well, which will in later ages lead to the final defeat of Sauron, although this is not known to any of the Noldor.

The exile and ruin of the Noldor, then, if contemplated from the point of view of Anglo-Saxon culture, gains a new meaning, and the suffering of the greatest and most conflicted of the Noldor, Fëanor, leads to a new understanding. He is not simply doomed by his oath and by the workings of fate, but he is doomed by the very worldview that he represents. His 'heathen ferocity' and courage in the face of defeat which Tolkien so admired in the heroes of Anglo-Saxon poetry can ultimately have no place in his providential world, and thus Fëanor – and with him the Noldor – are doomed, although, as in Norse myth, their valiant deeds are "the matter of song until the last days of Arda" (57).

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27. "the old motive of their kind, the adornment of earth, and the healing of its hurts." Carpenter, "Letter 131," 151-152.
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30. "Therefore Morgoth took Maedhros and hung him from the face of a precipice upon Thangorodrim, and he was caught to the rock by the wrist of his right hand in a band of steel." Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Return of the Noldor" 122.
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43. "[...] and Mandos broke his silence, saying: 'So it is doomed.' From this summons came many woes that afterwards befell." Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Coming of the Elves and the Captivity of Melkor," 49.
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