

An Analysis of Morgoth's Conflicts and Their Impact on The Narrative Equilibrium in “*The Silmarillion*” (1977) By J.R.R. Tolkien

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the internal and external conflicts of Morgoth in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* (1977) and their impacts on the narrative equilibrium of Tolkien's broader literary framework. The research problems focus on three key points: identifying Morgoth's internal conflicts, examining his external conflicts, and explaining how these conflicts impact both his actions and the broader narrative. The primary objectives are to reveal how Morgoth's inner struggles, such as ambition, fear, and envy, and his external clashes with characters, societies, nature, and creations, function as the driving forces of the story. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, applying William Kenney's theory of internal and external conflict (1966) and Tzvetan Todorov's narrative structure (1977). The findings show that Morgoth's internal conflicts, his unbridled ambition, existential rebellion, fear of losing power, and jealousy toward other Valar directly shape his destructive actions. His external conflicts manifest as battles against other characters, societies, natural order, and creations, each of which aligns with distinct stages of Todorov's narrative model: disruption, recognition, attempt to repair, and the return to equilibrium. However, Morgoth's role as a permanent disruptor prevents a complete restoration of balance, not only in *The Silmarillion* but also across Tolkien's larger legendarium, including *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Thus, this research highlights how Morgoth's layered conflicts serve as both psychological and structural engines that define Tolkien's mythopoeic narrative.

Keywords: Internal Conflict, External Conflict, Narrative Structure, Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is understood as a creative form that reflects human experience through aesthetic and narrative structures (Wellek & Warren, 1949). In narrative fiction, conflict is a central element that drives plot development and shapes characters. Bell (2011) and McKee (1997) assert that conflict is an essential component of storytelling, functioning not only as a plot device but also as a representation of emotional and psychological struggle. Paris (1997) adds that conflict in fiction often mirrors real human dilemmas such as fear, ambition, desire, and guilt, which provide character depth as well as meaning to narrative events.

In *The Silmarillion* by J.R.R. Tolkien, conflict stands at the heart of the mythological history of Middle-earth. Among its many figures, Morgoth (Melkor) emerges as the most

destructive force, whose internal desire for supremacy and rejection of divine order triggers extensive external conflicts with the Valar, the Elves, and humankind. His rebellion reshapes the cosmology of Arda, destroys sacred creations, and initiates a series of wars that echo throughout Tolkien's legendarium. Morgoth functions not only as the primary antagonist; he becomes the narrative embodiment of conflict itself.

To examine these dynamics, this study employs William Kenney's (1966) conflict theory and Tzvetan Todorov's (1977) narrative structure. Kenney's framework distinguishes internal conflicts rooted in psychological tension, desires, fears, obligations, and expectations, and external conflicts arising from opposition to other characters, society, nature, or created forces. Meanwhile, Todorov's five-stage model: Equilibrium, Disruption, Recognition, Attempt to Repair, and Return to Equilibrium, explains how conflict propels and shapes narrative progression.

These two theories intersect productively: Kenney identifies the sources and types of conflict, while Todorov reveals how those conflicts restructure the narrative arc. In Morgoth's case, his internal turmoil fuels continual external aggression, creating a cycle of disruptions that prevents the achievement of full restoration. Thus, although Todorov's model presupposes the possibility of returning to equilibrium, Morgoth's antagonism demonstrates how a narrative can become trapped in a prolonged phase of disruption and shift into a mythological tragedy.

This study argues that Morgoth's internal and external conflicts not only shape his character but also structure the narrative architecture of *The Silmarillion* and exert long-term influence on Tolkien's broader mythology, including *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The novelty of this research lies in its dual theoretical approach, integrating Kenney's conflict analysis with Todorov's narrative structure to show how a single antagonist can destabilize and redirect an entire narrative universe. Whereas previous studies often focus on heroism, linguistics, or Tolkien's mythology, this research contributes a new perspective by highlighting how Tolkien's legendarium is built upon and continuously shaped by the unresolved conflicts within Morgoth himself.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the internal and external conflicts experienced by Morgoth in *The Silmarillion* and their impact on narrative equilibrium. Referring to Bendassolli (2014), qualitative research focuses on identifying themes that emerge through recurring ideas, concepts, and patterns. The initial stage of the research involved extensive reading of the primary text and supporting literature on conflict theory, narrative structure, and Tolkien studies. In line with Creswell (2014), this stage is essential for building the contextual understanding required before conducting deeper analysis. The preliminary review was used to identify thematic patterns and narrative elements related to Morgoth's conflicts, as well as to establish the theoretical foundation based on the works of William Kenney and Tzvetan Todorov.

Data collection was carried out through close reading and content analysis, highlighting sections that depict Morgoth's internal and external conflicts. Quotations, events, and descriptions were classified according to Kenney's categories of conflict, while narrative moments indicating disruptions of equilibrium were identified using Todorov's model. Referring to Miles and Huberman (1994), this process was conducted iteratively so that the categories could develop alongside the deepening understanding of the text.

Data analysis was performed by organizing and breaking the data into meaningful

units following the approach of Bogdan and Biklen (2007). The researcher interpreted how Morgoth's internal conflicts, such as his fear, duty, desire, needs, and expectations, and his external conflicts with the Valar, Elves, and Men, shaped the plot and produced narrative instability. Todorov's narrative structure was used to examine how Morgoth's actions shift the story from a state of equilibrium toward prolonged disruption. To ensure interpretive accuracy, the analysis was then consulted with the academic supervisor so that the study would possess sufficient theoretical rigor and depth.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

1. Morgoth's Internal and External Conflicts Based on Kenney's Theory in *The Silmarillion*

a. Morgoth's Internal Conflicts

The analysis shows that Morgoth's internal conflicts drive nearly all of his destructive choices and actions. These inner struggles arise from five psychological sources: desire, need, obligation, fear, and expectation, each of which aligns with Kenney's explanation of the triggers of internal conflict. The first internal conflict is Morgoth's excessive desire for power and domination.

"He had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for desire grew hot within him to bring into being things of his own." (Tolkien, 1977: 4)

This quote emphasizes that from the beginning of *The Silmarillion*, Melkor sought the Flame Imperishable not out of reverence for Ilúvatar's creation. But because of his ambition to create life according to his own will. His desire to insert his own themes into the Music of the Ainur reveals his inability to accept that creation is an act belonging solely to Ilúvatar. This creates inner tension: his awareness of his lower ontological status clashes with his ambition to rule and possess. The desire to dominate rather than participate becomes the seed of discord, first within his own heart and then throughout Arda. The second internal conflict is driven by Morgoth's need for recognition and superiority. Although he is the strongest of the Ainur, his power brings not peace but dissatisfaction.

"For he coveted Arda and all that was in it, desiring the kingship of Manwe and dominion over the realms of his peers. From splendor he fell through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself, a spirit wasteful and pitiless.

Understanding he turned to subtlety in perverting to his own will all that he would use, until he became a liar without shame." (Tolkien, 1977:23)

The quotation shows that Morgoth believes he deserves absolute authority, including Manwë's position, turning his natural pride into destructive arrogance. His inability to accept equality with the Valar causes him to pervert his own potential, abandoning his original glory and becoming "a spirit wasteful and pitiless." His need for superiority can never be fulfilled because it contradicts the fundamental structure of creation; this deepens his hatred and intensifies his inner fracture. On a deeper level, Morgoth experiences a conflict between obligation and personal ambition. As one of the Ainur, his cosmic duty is to serve Ilúvatar's design. Yet he rejects this obligation entirely. His longing for the Light is originally a legitimate spiritual desire that becomes corrupted when he insists on possessing it for himself alone, as stated in the quotation:

“He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness. And darkness he used most in his evil works upon Arda, and filled it with fear for all living things.” (Tolkien, 1977: 23)

This rejection of obligation results in moral disintegration: he descends “into Darkness,” replacing enlightenment with destruction. This conflict illustrates that Morgoth’s downfall is not merely the result of ambition, but a conscious refusal of the divine duty within him. Furthermore, Morgoth’s internal narrative is shaped by fear, an important yet rarely discussed aspect. Despite his great power, he is constantly filled with anxiety about losing control, influence, or authority. This fear drives his defensive aggression: the construction of Utumno, Angband, the Iron Mountains, and other fortresses is not only a product of strategic ambition but also paranoia. His fear compels him to secure territory and prevent other powers, especially the Valar, from threatening his dominance. Tolkien emphasizes this defensive obsession:

“In the north of the world Melkor had in the ages past reared Ered Engrin, the Iron Mountains, as a fence to his citadel of Utumno; and they stood upon the borders of the regions of everlasting cold, in a great curve from east to west. Behind the walls of Ered Engrin in the west, where they bent back northwards, Melkor built another fortress, as a defence against assault that might come from Valinor; and when he came back to Middle-earth, as has been told, he took up his abode in the endless dungeons of Angband, the Hells of Iron” (Tolkien, 1977: 135)

Thus, fear becomes the psychological engine that transforms inner insecurity into widespread external war. Finally, expectation plays a key role in shaping his inner turmoil. Morgoth expects to create as the Valar do, particularly Aulë, whose craftsmanship reflects Morgoth’s own potential. Morgoth is not only envious of Aulë’s creations but also of the harmony and humility accompanying Aulë’s devotion to Ilúvatar. His inability to achieve similar results or accept the limits of his creativity turns expectation into destructive envy. This envy then develops into hatred, and eventually into sabotage. His inability to meet the expectations he set for himself traps him in a cycle of continuous dissatisfaction, fostering further evil. Tolkien describes this envy and destructiveness:

“Melkor was jealous of him, for Aule was most like himself in thought and in powers; and there was long strife between them, in which Melkor ever marred or undid the works of Aule, and Aule grew weary in repairing the tumults and disorders of Melkor.

Both, also, desired to make things of their own that should be new and unthought of by others, and delighted in the praise of their skill. But Aule remained faithful to Eru and submitted all that he did to his will; and he did not envy the works of others, but sought and gave counsel. Whereas Melkor spent his spirit in envy and hate, until at last he could make nothing save in mockery of the thought of others, and all their works he destroyed if he could.” (Tolkien, 1977: 18)

Overall, these findings show that Morgoth’s internal conflicts, rooted in desire, pride, fear, and envy, are not isolated psychological tensions. Instead, they form a continuous chain

of motivation that defines all his subsequent interactions. Internal conflict becomes the foundation for external destruction, directly shaping the history of Arda.

b. Morgoth's External Conflicts

Morgoth's external conflicts are the concrete manifestations of his internal failures, according to Kenney's categories of external conflict: character vs character, character vs society, character vs nature, and character vs technology. This study finds that Morgoth functions not only as an antagonist to specific characters but also as a cosmic disruptor who destabilizes entire communities and natural structures. The most personal form of external conflict is Morgoth's conflict against other characters, particularly in his confrontations with Manwë and Fëanor. With Manwë, Morgoth's conflict is ideological and hierarchical:

"For he coveted Arda and all that was in it, desiring the kingship of Manwe and dominion over the realms of his peers." (Tolkien, 1977: 23)

Morgoth desires Manwë's position as king and views him as the primary obstacle to his ambitions. Their differing roles of Manwë ruling through harmony and Morgoth ruling through domination, become a symbol of the fundamental moral divide that initiates the entire chain of conflicts in Arda. Meanwhile, Morgoth's conflict with Fëanor centers on the Silmarils, which embody the Light Morgoth could never create. Jealousy and ambition intensify this conflict to the point of theft and murder, turning the Silmarils not only into objects of desire but also into catalysts of a great war. These personal conflicts directly shape the Disruption stage in Todorov's narrative structure. Morgoth also conflicts with societies, targeting people whose values and principles oppose his tyranny. His wars against the Noldor are not merely military aggression but also ideological confrontation:

"But thereafter there was peace for many years, and no open assault from Angband, for Morgoth perceived now that the Orcs unaided were no match for the Noldor" (Tolkien, 1977: 133)

Morgoth represents fear and domination, while the Noldor symbolize resilience, creativity, and freedom. This collective resistance forces Morgoth to adjust his strategies, fortify Angband, and develop more destructive armies. This conflict illustrates a societal recognition of Morgoth as a systemic threat, aligning with the Recognition stage in Todorov's model. Another significant finding is Morgoth's conflict with nature, a form of conflict rarely discussed yet highly important in mythological narratives. Morgoth not only opposes natural forces, but he also corrupts them:

"And Melkor sprang upon the mound; and with his black spear he smote each Tree to its core, wounded them deep, and their sap poured forth as it were their blood, and was spilled upon the ground." (Tolkien, 1977: 81)

His most devastating act, the destruction of the Two Trees of Valinor, permanently alters the world's structure of light. The balance of nature is disrupted on a cosmic level, and although the Valar attempt to repair it by creating the Sun and Moon, the restoration is partial and imperfect. Morgoth's war against nature demonstrates the extent of his rebellion not only against the Valar but against the metaphysical harmony of creation itself. In addition, Morgoth's manipulation of living beings shows a form of conflict with technology, which in Tolkien's mythology refers to corrupted or misused creation. Morgoth produces

biological and metaphysical weapons, such as Orcs, Balrogs, and Dragons, as instruments to expand and maintain his power:

"But in the north Melkor built his strength, and he slept not, but watched, and laboured; and the evil things that he had perverted walked abroad, and the dark and slumbering woods were haunted by monsters and shapes of dread." (Tolkien, 1977: 43)

These creatures embody twisted technology: the transformation of natural life into instruments of terror. Resistance against these beings in later ages of Arda becomes a long-term struggle to overcome the technological legacy Morgoth has corrupted. This prolonged external conflict corresponds to the Return to Equilibrium stage in Todorov's model, although the resulting equilibrium is temporary and never fully restored.

2. The Impact of Morgoth's Conflicts on the Narrative of *The Silmarillion* and the Broader Framework of Tolkien's Legendarium Based on Todorov's Theory

a. Morgoth's Conflict and the Application of Todorov's Narrative Structure

Todorov's five-stage narrative model: Equilibrium, Disruption, Recognition, Attempt to Repair, and Return to Equilibrium, functions as an effective framework for understanding the structural rhythm of *The Silmarillion* and observing how Morgoth's conflicts act as catalysts, escalations, and consequences within that rhythm. This study finds that *The Silmarillion* follows Todorov's framework, but in a distorted and imbalanced form due to the overwhelming influence of Morgoth. The story begins with a primordial equilibrium through the Music of the Ainur and the early shaping of Arda, when harmony, divine cooperation, and the purpose of creation form the foundation of the world. However, Morgoth's internal unrest, his desire for supremacy, autonomy, and the pursuit of the Flame Imperishable becomes the initial fracture within that harmony. His rebellion becomes the central Disruption of the narrative, evident in the marring of Arda, the destruction of the Two Lamps, the poisoning of the Two Trees, the theft of the Silmarils, and various acts of sabotage. These events are not isolated obstacles but layered ruptures that continually intensify and deepen the world's instability.

Morgoth's internal ambitions manifest as external aggression, creating a cyclical chain of catastrophes that alter the physical, moral, and metaphysical landscape of Arda. The Recognition stage becomes a collective awareness: the Valar realize that Arda cannot flourish under Morgoth's shadow, while the Noldor understand their position as his cosmic adversaries. Yet this recognition triggers further chaos, such as Fëanor's Oath and the first Kinslaying, all of which arise from Morgoth's manipulation and theft. Thus, Morgoth's conflicts ripple outward, generating subsequent conflicts among those who oppose him. Attempts to repair the damage appear in heroic actions such as Fingolfin's duel, the journey of Beren and Lúthien, Maedhros's Union, and Eärendil's voyage. Although heroic, these actions are reactive and unable to address the foundational corruption Morgoth has embedded into Arda. Each attempt treats the symptoms, not the original wound.

The Return to Equilibrium stage ultimately becomes partial and temporary. Although Morgoth is defeated in the War of Wrath and cast into the Void, Arda remains scarred. The world does not return to its original harmony but enters a fragile calm. Morgoth's influence persists through Sauron and through the lasting wounds on the land, its peoples, and the cosmic order. Within Todorov's framework, *The Silmarillion* becomes a unique case: equilibrium exists but is never fully restored. Morgoth's conflicts permanently reshape the

narrative structure, establishing a mythological tradition in which resolutions are incomplete and peace is always provisional.

b. The Broader Impact of Morgoth's Conflicts Across Tolkien's Legendarium

The impact of Morgoth's disruption extends beyond *The Silmarillion*. Tolkien constructs a mythology in which evil is genealogical rather than episodic; the catastrophes of later ages are continuations of the wounds Morgoth inflicted upon the world. In *The Hobbit*, Morgoth's legacy appears subtly yet significantly. Smaug's destructive nature descends from the first dragons created by Morgoth in the First Age, and the exile of the Dwarves reflects ancient patterns of ruin triggered by Morgothic corruption. The narrative rhythm of the novel reveals the disruption of Bilbo's equilibrium, the emergence of monstrous threats, and the creation of a limited new peace echoing far older patterns established during Morgoth's reign.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, his influence becomes even more explicit. Sauron is not an independent antagonist but Morgoth's most loyal servant, shaped by his master's ideology and methods. His desire to dominate Middle-earth, corrupt kings, manipulate nations, and bind the wills of other beings reflects Morgoth's original intent. Even the One Ring is conceptually an extension of Morgoth's desire to monopolize creative authority. Thus, the conflicts of the Third Age are structurally a continuation or echo of Morgoth's initial rebellion. Throughout Tolkien's mythology, the world repeatedly cycles through temporary states of equilibrium followed by new forms of disruption, each echoing the primordial fall initiated by Morgoth. The fading of the Elves, the collapse of great kingdoms, and the disappearance of wonder from the world all trace back to the damage he inflicted. Middle-earth becomes a world perpetually in recovery, unable to return to its original state because the initial corruption lies beyond restoration. Thus, it is evident that Morgoth is not merely the antagonist of *The Silmarillion*; he is the architect of the entire tragic trajectory of Middle-earth's history.

c. Implications of the Analysis for the Broader Framework of Tolkien's Legendarium

This study identifies three main implications for understanding Tolkien's narrative design through the combined use of Kenney's conflict theory and Todorov's narrative structure. First, Morgoth emerges as the central catalyst of narrative movement. Nearly all major conflicts in Tolkien's legendarium involving Elves, Men, Dwarves, and even later ages originate from Morgoth's rebellion. His internal conflicts, rooted in ambition and envy, become the initial source of all external conflicts that shape the history of Arda. Without Morgoth, the narrative tensions of the First, Second, and Third Ages would not take the form they do.

Second, Tolkien conceptualizes his world as governed by cycles of imperfect equilibrium. Although Todorov's structure remains applicable, the "return to equilibrium" stage repeatedly becomes unstable. Each narrative age attempts restoration, yet such restoration is never fully achieved. The consequence is a mythology shaped by loss, the fading of grandeur, and the gradual disappearance of beauty and magic. Reflecting a world that moves increasingly farther from its divine ideal.

Third, this analysis demonstrates that Todorov's theory is effective not only for mapping the internal structure of *The Silmarillion* but also for tracing the broader mythological architecture across Tolkien's works. By examining how conflict creates and sustains disruption, Todorov's model reveals a consistent structural pattern: harmony, fall, struggle, and partial healing. Morgoth is the original source of this pattern. His internal and

external conflicts leave traces that cannot be fully erased by the triumphs of later generations, shaping a mythological landscape permanently marked by the tension between order and chaos.

CONCLUSION

This study examines J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* by analyzing Morgoth's internal and external conflicts through William Kenney's conflict theory and Tzvetan Todorov's narrative structure. The findings reveal that Morgoth's internal conflicts, rooted in insatiable ambition, jealousy toward Ilúvatar, intellectual pride, and an obsessive desire for dominion, serve as the fundamental source of his destructive actions. These unresolved psychological tensions shape Morgoth as a being driven by corruption and defiance, making his inner turmoil the origin of all subsequent narrative disruptions. Externally, Morgoth's conflicts manifest through ongoing opposition to the Valar, the Elves, and humankind, as well as through the manipulation and betrayal of his own followers. His presence consistently destabilizes Arda, and each external clash reinforces his role as the primary antagonist who fractures the world's moral and cosmic order. These layers of conflict establish Morgoth not merely as a villain but as the embodiment of chaos within Tolkien's mythology.

Through Todorov's framework, this study demonstrates that Morgoth's actions propel the narrative from equilibrium into a state of prolonged disruption. Unlike the classical narrative pattern, equilibrium is never fully restored during his existence; harmony is achieved only after his banishment, not through transformation but through external intervention. His legacy extends beyond *The Silmarillion*, shaping later works such as *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* through the enduring influence of Sauron. Overall, this analysis shows that Morgoth's conflicts serve as the foundational force driving the mythological history of Tolkien's world. These conflicts generate narrative tension, establish mythic continuity across texts, and deepen thematic reflections on evil, ambition, and the fragility of cosmic harmony.

Based on the research process and analysis, the researcher recommends that future studies expand this inquiry by applying other theoretical approaches, such as archetypal, mythological, or psychological analysis, to other major characters in *The Silmarillion* or the wider Tolkien legendarium. Since this study demonstrates that Kenney's conflict theory and Todorov's narrative structure effectively reveal how Morgoth produces narrative disruption, the same framework may be used to compare conflicts in characters such as Sauron, Fëanor, or Túrin. Such studies would further enrich understanding of themes related to power, free will, and cosmic imbalance in Tolkien's works.

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