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Unveiling and Embracing Monstrosity:
A Comprehensive Study of Monsters
in J.R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium

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To the moonlit child,
whose destiny is yet to be unveiled.

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Introduction

For plenty of reasons, I have always been fascinated with fictional monsters. This fascination lies primarily in the multifaceted appeal of monsters, which incorporates artistic, cultural, and psychological elements. In terms of aesthetics, monsters can subvert conventional ideas of shape and beauty, sparking curiosity that challenges cultural standards and inspiring audiences to contemplate the boundless potential of their imagination. Furthermore, monsters can incorporate a depth of narrative and symbolism that goes beyond their appearance. In addition to providing a framework for exploring the darker aspects of human nature and the intricacies of existence, monsters often serve as symbolic representations of real-life issues, enabling us to confront challenging concepts like morality and power. Whether depicted as symbols of chaos or as oppressed individuals seeking acceptance, they provide an extensive amount of material for storytelling that resonates on both emotional and intellectual levels.

The subject of monstrosity has gained widespread recognition in recent years as a result of scholarly research on monsters in literature, popular culture's retellings of supernatural creatures, and new theoretical frameworks that have redefined and reinterpreted notions of monstrosity. Consequently, monsters can be found in various types of media, including visual art, video games, novels, and movies. This dissertation focuses on literature, specifically investigating the influence exerted by J.R.R. Tolkien on the subject. This English writer, renowned as one of the primary authors in the fantasy genre, included an extensive array of monsters within his legendarium, a term that will be defined in chapter one. Drawing inspiration from several mythological and literary sources, he presented a nuanced portrayal of monstrosity, profoundly affecting the narratives within Arda, his fictional fantasy world, as well as several connections with several other

authors and literary sources. For this reason, this thesis will undertake an extensive examination of the theme of monstrosity in Tolkien's legendarium.

The dissertation will be structured into three chapters: first of all, a theoretical framework will be provided, encompassing Tolkien's substantial impact on the fantasy genre, his approach to myth-making, and an overview of his complex legendarium. The author's perspective on fantasy, sub-creation, and worldbuilding will be examined with particular consideration for Tolkien's essay *On Fairy-Stories*. The discussion will then shift to a critical analysis of Tolkien's relationship with monsters. The concept of monstrosity will be meticulously defined and explored, both in a general sense and within the context of Tolkien's literary works. Special attention will be paid to Tolkien's essay *Beowulf: The Monsters and The Critics*. The concluding section of this chapter will delve into Tolkien's primary influences regarding the idea of monstrosity, drawing from various historical periods and literary genres, encompassing the Renaissance, the Gothic, and the Victorian Age.

The most significant incarnations of monstrosity within Tolkien's legendarium will be covered in detail in the second chapter; characters from *The Hobbit* (1937), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), and *The Silmarillion* (1977) will be examined. Their literary provenance, linguistic importance, and relationship to the concept of evil will be taken into account. In particular, Hegel's Lord-Bondsman Dialectic will be employed to investigate the power dynamics between the Orcs and the Dark Lords of Arda. Prior to analyzing these monsters, an explanation concerning Tolkien's viewpoint of evil will be provided. Furthermore, the terms "Fall, Mortality, and the Machine," which are essential in comprehending the moral dynamics and notion of monstrosity in Tolkien's legendarium, will be accurately defined and explained. In the last part of the chapter, Tolkien's

monsters will be examined employing Hannah Arendt's philosophy and Adriana Cavarero's concept of identity as stated in *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*. The present analysis aims to clarify the differences between epic and novelistic characters, the former being represented by the majority of Tolkien's monsters and the latter by Gollum.

The third and last chapter will address the portrayal of J.R.R. Tolkien's monsters and notion of monstrosity in two significant cinematic adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*. The discussion will start with a theoretical introduction explaining how literary texts are adapted for visual media, specifically movies. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) and Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree* (1982) will be regarded as primary references for this introduction. The rest of the chapter will examine the animated film *The Lord of the Rings* (1978) directed by Ralph Bakshi and the cinematic trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) trilogy directed by Peter Jackson. In conclusion, special emphasis will be placed on the utilisation of music as a narrative device in representing monstrosity within the latter adaptation.

Chapter I

1.1 Tolkien's Mythopoeic Legacy: Foundation, Terminology, and Sub-Creation

One of the founding stones of contemporary fantasy literature lies in John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's magnum opus, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954). Tolkien's complex legendarium, which also includes *The Hobbit* (1937) and his posthumously published masterpiece, *The Silmarillion* (1977), has become a cornerstone that has influenced innumerable writers over the years. Readers still find great resonance in its vivid imagination, which not only endures but also retains an undisputed significance within the genre. Before delving into an extensive examination of the theme of monstrosity which intricately permeates all three of his principal literary works, it is crucial to establish a foundational understanding of his connection to both his legendarium and the concept of myth-making.

It is well acknowledged that Tolkien's legendarium is built on an exceptional linguistic foundation. Tolkien combined his vast knowledge of philology with actual languages and cultures to create a story that is both historically intricate and culturally immersive. As a result, his fictional world gained multiple layers of complexity and increased appeal and authenticity. As noted by John Garth[1] in the first chapter of Stuart D. Lee's *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, Tolkien was already fluent in Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Old English, Finnish, and Welsh by the time he was around twenty-one. During those same years, he also autonomously created Qenya, a constructed language primarily influenced by Welsh, but additionally inspired phonologically and grammatically by Latin, Greek, Finnish, Italian, and Spanish. Qenya will eventually be spoken by his fictitious Elves in his

[1] Stuart D. Lee, *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2022). 9-11.

legendarium. It was this deep-rooted study of the Germanic and Celtic traditions of the Northern world that made him realise England's lack of a native mythology. Therefore, Leslie A. Donovan[2] stated that Tolkien, driven by an impulse for authenticity and faithfulness in his writing, committed his literary efforts to preserving and enhancing English cultural legacy by taking on the ambitious task of reconstructing a "lost mythology" for England, incorporating elements from a plethora of pre-existing traditions. The qualities of myths and tales from Greek, Celtic, Romance, Germanic, and Scandinavian traditions were of great importance to Tolkien. Thus, he sought to develop an equivalent body of works that would be equally evocative. The multifaceted and complex world of Middle-earth that Tolkien constructed had its foundation in his meticulously constructed languages and his passionate relationship with philology. This innovative method emphasises how his philological understanding and admiration of language creation influenced his works:

> The invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stones' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. To me a name comes first and the story follows.[3]

The term "legendarium" was used by Tolkien to refer to the corpus of his mythopoeic writings. Since Tolkien failed to provide a precise definition, in order to understand this terminology, it is necessary to examine how he employed it in his correspondence. Tolkien initially alluded to the term "legendarium" in a 1951 letter to Milton Waldman, a publisher who had expressed interest in collaborating with him. In this long letter, Tolkien outlined an extensive summary detailing the elaborate history he crafted for Middle-Earth, including events covered in several essays and stories written before or coincided with his unpublished *The Lord of the*

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[2] Ibid., 94-95.
[3] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Harper Collins Co., 2023), 319.

Rings. In addition, he touched on a wide range of external topics in order to justify and explain his many years of commitment to writing deeply complicated and nuanced stories. In a specific passage, he says:

> Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story — the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths — which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be 'high', purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd.[4]

Tolkien will later coin a word with a likely deeply personal significance, one that eludes complete articulation: by mixing the term "legend" with the suffix "-arium" (meaning "thing or place relating to or connected with[5]"), "legendarium" acquires the literal meaning of "a legendary place." Despite remaining well-defined within the limits of his own mind, the use of this word did not find extensive utility within Tolkien's lexicon; rather, he reserved it for scholarly discussions regarding the genesis of his tales.

In 1954, the concept behind the "legendarium" reappeared within Tolkien's correspondence, specifically in a letter addressed to Peter Hastings. In this letter, the English author made a clear distinction between his legendarium

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[4] Tolkien, *Letters*, 203-204.
[5] "-arium," in *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed July 2, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/-arium

and the Primary World, our tangible reality. He highlights that ours is not a realm of legend, but rather the concrete environment in which we dwell:

> We differ entirely about the nature of the relation of sub-creation to Creation. I should have said that liberation ‘from the channels the creator is known to have used already’ is the fundamental function of ‘sub-creation’, a tribute to the infinity of His potential variety, one of the ways in which indeed it is exhibited, as indeed I said in the Essay. I am not a metaphysician; but I should have thought it a curious metaphysic – there is not one but many, indeed potentially innumerable ones — that declared the channels known (in such a finite comer as we have any inkling of) to have been used, are the only possible ones, or efficacious, or possibly acceptable to and by Him![6]

The core of Tolkien’s legendarium encompasses a range of more or less explicit allusions to classical culture and to themes particularly linked to Platonic philosophy. In this regard, it is worth noting how the structure followed by Tolkien in the process of sub-creation of his secondary world bears resemblance, in certain aspects, to the *Dialogues of Plato*: both authors moulded the secondary realities depicted in their works on some “elements of truth” borrowed directly from the Primary World. Similarly to Middle-earth, in *Plato’s Dialogues*, mythical storytelling primarily serves a pedagogical purpose regarding the philosophical issues under discussion. Consequently, most Platonic myths contain certain characteristics that directly allude to the genuine structure of reality, albeit possessing an epistemic status significantly inferior to dialectical discourse.

In the eighteenth century, several aspects of Neoplatonism were revived by the Romantic movement due to a preoccupation regarding the self. The rise of individualism, a major factor in the political turmoil of the time, was also noticeable in the literary exploration of the individual consciousness and the individual experience. Despite paradoxically and often leading to a sort of

[6] Tolkien, *Letters*, 282.

self-indulgent escapism, the Romantic movement offered a reshaping of the mimetic view of art and introduced a fresh perspective on imagination as a lamp illuminating worlds beyond empirical reality:

> the province and techniques of mimesis were being redefined in romantic literature. Self-awareness, with its alert attention to the subjective apprehension of external reality, involved an attendant concern with the representation of the interior processes of perception. It also led to a suspicion about the pretenses of mimesis, especially that version of mimesis which seemed to favor the external and material. Plato's notion that music is the most, sculpture the least mimetic of the arts gave priority to ideas rather than things. In Aristotle's *Poetics* the mimetic doctrine is set forward with the insistence that "the imitation of human actions" depends upon *proairesis* rather than merely *praxis*; mimesis must reveal, that is, the interior response, deliberation, and choice that precedes and determines the external action. Thus Schelling appeals to a venerable classical tradition when he tries to redeem the mimetic doctrine from that mode of definition which had limited it to representation of a merely external reality.[7]

Therefore, Tolkien's theory thus draws both on a Platonic understanding of a secondary reality of the Primary World and on a Neoplatonic Romantic conviction that the human imagination is capable of shedding light exclusively on that subordinate reality.[8] Schelling's appeal to a long-standing classical tradition in order to redeem mimesis from the confines of external reality can also be applied to Tolkien's incorporation of mythic and fantastical elements that convey significant insights about morality, human nature, and the inner struggle between good and evil; this goes beyond mere external representation, capturing the essence of human experience and perception in a way that resonates with the Romantic redefinition of mimesis.

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[7] Frederick Burwick, *Mimesis and its romantic reflections* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 10-11.

[8] Salvatore M. Ponzio, "Sub-creazione tolkeniana e demiurgia platonica. La nascita del cosmo tra l'Ainulindale e il Timeo," *Associazione Italiana Studi Tolkeniani* (2016): 4-5.

Furthermore, Tolkien's essay *On Fairy-Stories*, preceded by the related poem *Mythopoeia*, is "quite an important work[9]" for anyone wanting to understand his creative writing and the theoretical basis of his fiction. Tolkien begins his composition with the following opening:

> I propose to speak about fairy-stories, though I am aware that this is a rash adventure. Faerie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold. And overbold I may be accounted, for though I have been a lover of fairy-stories since I learned to read, and have at times thought about them, I have not studied them professionally. I have been hardly more than a wandering explorer (or trespasser) in the land, full of wonder but not of information.[10]

The author, however, proceeds in his discourse by promptly outlining his intentions for the essay, addressing three fundamental questions: What are fairy-stories? Where do they originate? And eventually, what purpose do they serve?

To counter the timeless critique based on the fictional or non-existent essence of fairy-stories, Tolkien, in his reflections on their nature, notes that:

> Faerie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.[11]

Tolkien strongly emphasizes that good fairy-stories are characterized by a profound realism, albeit of a curious nature. He is remarkably vexed by readings of fairy-stories that highlight their supposed unreality. The stories Tolkien refers to are those in which human, rational, and moral agency play central roles. In this regard, fairy stories encompass not only the fantastical but also the human, emphasizing the interaction of human moral agents

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[9] Tolkien, *Letters*, 320.
[10] J. R. R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories. Expanded edition, with Commentary and Notes* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008) 27.
[11] Ibid., 32.

within an implicitly suggestive background of a superior Other, shaping, and guiding the world towards the ultimate well-being of all. Two additional themes that prominently feature in Tolkien's discussion deserve attention: human desire and magic. Aligned with his well-attested Christian-Platonic beliefs, Tolkien's conception of fantasy is deeply erotically driven. He acknowledges that the primal desires of humanity form the essence of Faerie. Building upon this notion, Tolkien also asserts that "at least part of the magic that [the elves or fairies] wield for the good or evil of man is power to play on the desires of his body and his heart.[12]"

Regarding the origins of fairy-stories, Tolkien, while delineating the intrinsic connection between storytelling and human language, introduces his remarkable concept of sub-creation. He asserts that the tale, the incarnate mind, and language coexist within our world. Just as humans name things, they also conceive stories, almost through a parallel process. This leads to the nexus of fairy-stories; Tolkien is evidently focused on identifying the human sub-creating capacity as genuinely creative:

> Sub-creation, rather than either representation or symbolic interpretation of the beauties and terrors of the world - is, I think, too little considered.[13]

Words are the tools with which human creators bring things into existence, regardless of whatever act of creation to which the prefix "sub-" is attached.

In the third section of the essay, Tolkien delves into an exploration of the concept of sub-creation, opening with an examination of children as the traditionally assumed primary consumers of fairy-stories. He attests that adults have relegated these kinds of narration to children due to a lack of serious consideration for them in the modern world. He observes that this often stems from the assumption that children are more susceptible to fantasy: Tolkien refuses the argument put forth by the literary critic Andrew

[12] Ibid., 31.
[13] Ibid., 42.

Lang, who asserted that because fairy-stories are fantastical, children, who possess less knowledge about the “real” world, must be their intended audience:

> What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindliness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed.[14]

Tolkien claims that the purpose of fairy-stories is not to deceive readers into believing they are factual but their desirability. He also disputes the notion that children’s preferences greatly diverge from those of adults, drawing from his own childhood experience as validation. A child passionate about fairy stories is likely to derive even greater delight from them as an adult, being more capable of discerning their subtleties.[15]

According to Christina Fawcett, [16] Tolkien wrote extensively about the idea of Faerie, emphasising the danger and fascination of the supernatural in literature throughout earlier centuries. Although monsters are not frequently associated with fairies, they are with “Faerie,” or fairyland, the supernatural realm seen in fantasy literature where a wide variety of creatures may coexist. Despite defining Faerie as “a perilous land[17],” Tolkien

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[14] Ibid., 52.
[15] Nathan S. Lefler, “Tolkien’s Sub-Creation and Secondary Worlds: Implications for a Robust Moral Psychology”, *Journal of Tolkien Research*: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, Article 1 (2017): 3-7.
[16] Christina Fawcett, *J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity* (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2014), 67.
[17] Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 27.

failed to clarify the nature of that peril; rather, the danger lies in the ambiguity of this realm and its lack of established rules. Although the nature of the threat is ambiguous, there is always a threat there; in Tolkien's writings, the protagonist is always challenged and changed by the perils of travel. Faerie's fascination and peril, its power and unwritten rules, are all tools for education. Faerie, according to Tolkien, is a place "full of wonder but not of information.[18]" The realm of Faerie and fairy-stories are instructive, but not informative. In a narrative context, one gains knowledge by embracing fantasy and engaging in enchantment; the power is in the experience of secondary belief.

Tolkien's monsters are evocative of Faerie's ambiguity and intricacy. In the mind of Tolkien, the idea of a magical otherworld is essential to defining fairy-stories. He generally refers to the inhabitants of Faerie as elves rather than fairies:

> Fairy, as a noun more or less equivalent to elf, is a relatively modern word, fairly used until the Tudor period. [...] Stories that are actually concerned primarily with 'fairies', that is creatures that might also in modern English be called 'elves', are relatively rare, and as a rule not very interesting.[19]

Numerous writers adopted Tolkien's notion of the Faerie, which places the idea of imagination in spatial terms. Tolkien employs the term to allude generally to fictional supernatural realms within Western literature. Edmund Spenser's distinction between the fay and the monstrous marks the beginning of the separation between the two sides of the supernatural since the supernatural as a broad category has remained a problematic notion throughout literature for many centuries.[20]

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[18] Ibid., 27.
[19] Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 30, 32.
[20] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 78.

The most renowned contemporary scholar on the fairy in all its folkloric manifestations is Katherine Briggs. Drawing heavily on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies that aimed to catalogue the folklore of the British Isles, Briggs' *Encyclopaedia of Fairies* offers a list of mythological creatures together with definitions and historical contexts. Her monster discourse is particularly noteworthy because it suggests that the British fairy tradition incorporates various supernatural forms:

> GIANTS and DRAGONS generally absorb the greater part of the monsters of British fairy-lore. […] Less formal creatures occupy the imagination of both the Celts and the Saxons, HAGGES of extraordinary hideousness, with their eyes misplaced and hair growing inside their mouths, the DIREACH, with one leg, one hand and one eye, the skinless NUCKELAVEE, the shapeless BROLLACHAN and BONELESS and water monsters like the AFANC and the BOOBRIE; these are felt to be more satisfactory than the mathematical conceptions of the heralds.[21]

It is evident that Briggs, writing shortly after Tolkien passed away in 1973, examines monstrosity as a subset of the greater category of supernatural beings and connects the presentation of tales of monsters with what Tolkien would conceive as Faerie.

To further explore the discourse concerning his influences, in the aforementioned letter to Milton Waldman Tolkien also eloquently highlighted his creative endeavour as "a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story[22]". Tolkien's scholarly approach to myth-building was deeply rooted in the philological and anthropological studies of the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, his emphasis on mythology aligned with both Romantic and modernist currents within the English literary tradition. In the early twentieth century, modernist writers like T. S. Eliot and James Joyce leaned on mythologies and writings of the past as a relief for the turbulent

[21] Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 301-303.
[22] Tolkien, *Letters*, 203.

times of modernity. Similarly, Tolkien reacted to the changes of modernity by turning to mythological, classical, and medieval motifs, but went beyond using such legendary narratives to organize representations of contemporary reality: in order to delineate his legendarium, he expertly blended them with an abundance of entirely new material to create a comprehensive interwoven new mythology of his own.[23]

In line with typical mythological narratives, Tolkien's legendarium commences with a cosmogonical tale illustrating the genesis of Eä, the universe, and Arda, the world within it, where Middle-earth finds its place. Eä comes into existence through harmonious music orchestrated by the sole and ultimate entity known as Eru Ilúvatar, who is assisted by the Ainur, "angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres (of rule and government, not creation, making or re-making)." Tolkien regards the Ainur as "of the same order of beauty, power, and majesty as the 'gods' of higher mythology.[24]" This harmonious scenario is disrupted by Melkor, the sole Ainu who chooses to introduce disharmony into Ilúvatar's musical composition. Arda will be marked by persistent conflicts primarily caused by Melkor's endeavours to augment his power, pride, and influence. This satanic figure, which will be properly examined in the second chapter, holds pivotal significance within the dissertation's aim, being the initial catalyst for the introduction of the concept of evil into Eä, a concept strictly intertwined with the notion of monstrosity. Ilúvatar subsequently permits several Ainur to reside within Arda, where they assume the mantle of the Valar, immortal entities entrusted with the governance of Arda's natural phenomena and the protection of its inhabitants from Melkor's evil schemes. The principal inhabitants of Tolkien's world

[23] Lee, *Companion*. 79-81.
[24] Tolkien, *Letters*, 206.

encompass the immortal Elves (the First-Born), the mortal Men, and subsequently, the Dwarves and other races, including the Hobbits.

Tolkien constructs his narrative employing a vertical arrangement reminiscent of the Great Chain of Being, an ancient Greek Neoplatonic concept of the universe that exerted significant influence during the European Renaissance and the early modern period. This concept encompasses three fundamental characteristics of the universe: the concept of plenitude is the first, according to which everything possible in the universe, if not inherently contradictory, is existent. The second one, the principle of continuity, maintains that the universe comprises an endless array of forms, each sharing at least one attribute with its adjacent forms. This array ascends in a structured order from the most basic form of life to the "ens perfectissimum," or God, following the third principle, linear gradation.[25] Tolkien not only outlines the societal and moral order of the supernatural entities responsible for shaping Arda but also delineates the cultural divisions and behavioural conventions of its inhabitants. Unlike early cultural mythologies of our world, Tolkien's narrative encompasses a broad spectrum of peoples, languages, cultures, and landscapes. Within the legendarium, temporalities are also intricately layered: past and present historical events are continuously referenced and, therefore, intertwined. This internal fusion of mythology and history serves to reflect a unique cultural personality, endowing Arda with a profound historical background and link to the supernatural. As an outcome, characters and events within Tolkien's legendarium often encapsulate this mythic and literary heritage and essence.[26]

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[25] Arthur Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea (1st ed. Routledge, 2009) 52, 56, 59.

[26] Lee, *Companion*, 93, 96-97.

From Melkor's demonic rebellion to the angelic nature of the Ainur, and the fall of Númenor, which echoes the fall of man in Genesis, Christian lore is clearly ingrained in Tolkien's legendarium, despite he "did not intend his work to argue, illustrate or promulgate Christianity."[27]

This extensive preamble to Tolkien's legendarium was essential for elucidating the environment in which the primary focus of this thesis will unfold. After mentioning Tolkien's profound connection to myths and legends, as well as his concept of sub-creation and his relationship with fairy-stories, it will be clarified how these elements will serve as the foundation for the exploration of the theme of monstrosity within his literary works. His reconstruction of an intricate "lost mythology" for England, integrating elements from various traditions, sets the stage for the emergence of monstrous beings, villains, and supernatural creatures within his narrative.

[27] Catherine Madsen, "'Light from an Invisible Lamp': Natural Religion in The Lord of the Rings" in *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: a Reader* (University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 35-47.

1.2 Understanding Monstrosity: Historical Perspectives and Theoretical Foundations in Tolkien's Works

Tolkien's discussion on the notion of monstrosity can be situated within the early twentieth-century debate regarding popular literature versus "high" or erudite literature. During this period, genres like fantasy, science fiction, or fairy tales were often relegated to the category of popular literature, developing the perception that they did not warrant rigorous academic analysis. This perspective also extended to monsters like Frankenstein's creature and vampires, which were not regarded as integral parts of the literary canon but were instead grouped with popular literary genres such as penny dreadfuls.[28] Rather, Tolkien, as a medievalist, deserves recognition for his scholarly shift towards the study of monsters in literature—not just as repulsive, supernatural creatures with an antagonistic role in the narrative or as examples of the author's unadulterated aesthetic taste, but as worthy subjects deserving of investigation in and of themselves. Tolkien affirmed that there must be a legitimate reason if they occasionally take centre stage in important literary works. He believed that a story full of fantastic beasts or monsters should not be deemed of less literary value than a tragedy with only human characters and realistic themes.

In 1936, Tolkien delivered a renowned lecture in honour of Sir Israel Gollancz at the British Academy on *Beowulf*—an Old English epic poem composed between the seventh and tenth centuries, including monsters including dragons, Grendel, and Grendel's mother. In this lecture, although acknowledging the substantial contributions of previous commentators on the poem, Tolkien highlighted what he considered to be a significant oversight in their analyses. This lecture would later be

[28] A cheap novel of violent adventure or crime. "Penny dreadful." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, accessed May, 10, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/penny%20dreadful

published in the same year as an essay titled *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, which is an essential reading to fully understand the theoretical foundations of Tolkien's relationship with monstrosity. This essay, which contains Tolkien's radical departure from the scholarly trends of the early twentieth century, represents a substantial first step towards what is now known as "monster theory." Tolkien, however, never employed this terminology. Therefore, it is vital to discuss and clarify both the notion of monstrosity and monster theory before adequately delving into the content of the following section of the thesis. Regarding morphology, Heinz Adolf Mode's definition of monsters is worth quoting:

> Thus we define a "monster" as a new shape resulting from a combination—usually in visual form, but sometimes only in words—of characteristic components or properties of different kinds of living things or natural objects. It is therefore characteristic of the "monster" that it does not occur in nature, but belongs solely to the realm of the human imagination, and also that its shape forms an organic entity, a new type capable of life in art and in the imagination.[29]

David Gilmore noted that the etymology of the English term "monster" can be traced back to the Latin word *monstrum*, which, similar to the word *teras*, implies a portent or a prodigy. Concurrently, it may originate from the verb *monstrare* which means to show, or from *monere*, to warn. Hence, monsters are creatures that reveal, predict, show or make evident. The ancient Romans, continuously alert to portents, employed *monstra* within religious practices to encompass all anomalous phenomena seen as celestial signs or omens, rather than exclusively denoting creatures of fright. In antiquity, monstrosity was designated based on an admonition, *monitus*, as it served as an indicator pointing towards something symbolic.[30] Evidently, from the beginning of documented time, monsters have been ingrained within a

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[29] Heinz Mode, *Fabulous Beasts and Demons* (New York: Phaidon, 1973), 7.
[30] David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press., 2003) Ix, 9.

semiotic culture of divination, metaphorical representation, and the conveyance of deeper meanings or insights. In contemporary discourse, much of the original semantic and religious connotations associated with the term have dissipated. Presently, the word “monster” typically conveys the notion of fictional beings characterized by their intimidating, oversized, and repulsive features. However, monsters continue to serve as harbingers of something profound, carrying with them a depth of spiritual and metaphorical implication transcending mere fearfulness: even though linguistic shifts have occurred, the fundamental essence of monstrosity as an intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical problem has endured relatively unchanged.[31]

Nowadays, the majority of people’s formative experiences with monsters occur during childhood when kids may begin to relate to teraphobia, which can be simply defined as “the fear of monsters.” The term “teraphobia” has its roots in the Greek words “tero,” which means monstrous or strange being, and “phobia,” denoting a state of fear or anxiety. Teraphobia in kids frequently manifests as something vague: the child’s dread can not only be afraid of vampires or werewolves but also of a hideous creature that dwells in their wardrobe or beneath their bed. Considering many individuals picture creatures or aliens emerging from the dark, teraphobia often leads to a fear of the dark. In this life stage, monsters emerge just as embodiments of terror, protagonists of nightmares, stirring a potent blend of adrenaline and excitement.[32] Nevertheless, it is in adulthood that the monsters that once lurked under beds take on new shapes and implications: as we face a broader spectrum of life experiences and societal influences, we are capable of accepting that monsters are not just merely menaces from the outside, but also mirror images of our own inner demons or cultural issues. These

[31] Gilmore, *Monsters*, Ix, 9-10.
[32] Lisa Fritscher. 2023. Coping With Teraphobia or the Fear of Monsters. Verywell Mind. https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-fear-of-monsters-2671891?print

creatures start appearing as metaphors for life's complexities, encouraging self-analysis and introspection, rather than just terror. It is through renowned novelistic characters like Mary Shelley's creature or thanks to feminist retellings of myths, such as the story of Medusa, that we can fully embrace this change of meaning. Arguably, the vast majority of monsters provide evidence of Freud's notion of aggressive instinct, indicating the existence of a violent impulse: as David Gilmore suggests, people have always and everywhere been haunted by ogres, werewolves, dragons, vampires, or cannibal giants. Despite being horrific, monsters are more than just representations of beastliness; their peculiar features stimulate both repulsion and fascination. This fascination has heavily grown in importance over the recent centuries, inspiring in people a sense of both fear and allure—a dichotomy that can be encapsulated by the word "empathy:"

> For most people monsters are sources of identification and awe as well as of horror, and they serve also as vehicles for the expiation of guilt as well as aggression: there is a strong sense in which the monster is an incarnation of the urge for self-punishment and a unified metaphor for both sadism and victimization (after all, the horrible monster is always killed off, usually in the most gruesome manner imaginable, by humans). We have to address this issue of dualism, of emotive ambivalence, in which the monster stands for both the victim and the victimizer.[33]

Furthermore, throughout history, the advent of monsters has been accompanied by a profound desire to understand them: as summarised by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock in *The Monster Theory Reader,* the theoretical studies of monstrosity and their meanings, have primarily established themselves along three routes: mythology, teratology, and psychology. The mythological route examines mythical and fantastical creatures. In the first century CE, Pliny the Elder documented various "monstrous races" in his *Naturalis Historia*. By the Middle Ages, Pliny's accounts had become a

[33] Gilmore, *Monsters*. 4-5.

significant part of the Western perspective, continuing into the Renaissance. These descriptions often reflected ethnocentric views, making the observers' language, culture, and physical appearance the standard. This tradition ascribed monstrous traits to those deemed "other," locating them on the margins of the known world. Regarding teratology, Ambroise Paré's 1593 work, *On Monsters and Marvels*, stands out as a prominent early modern attempt to theorize "monstrous" births—those that diverged from the standard human look. These anomalies comprised what we now classify as birth defects or congenital abnormalities, as well as part-human, part-animal progenies, and even entirely animal births, which are more difficult to diagnose retrospectively. Paré listed the supposed causes of these monstrous births, combining scientific reasoning with religious or supernatural explanations. Psychology, on the other hand, often identified as the most recent approach to theorizing monsters, explores how humans manifest monstrous or inhuman behaviour. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories, particularly regarding the Unheimlich, have significantly influenced monster theory: the monster can be understood through Freud's concept of the "return of the repressed," wherein our suppressed desires and impulses resurface to haunt us. Freud's framework is also valuable for investigating monsters that render the familiar strange or, like doppelgängers, confront us with creepily similar versions of ourselves. In the twentieth century, postmodernist scholars and activists rejected and reevaluated traditional theories, developing an alternative route based on attending to or speaking from historically marginalized experiences, like the feminist, queer, and postcolonialism ones. It was out of the impulses to unpack how identity is culturally constructed and to flip hierarchies on their heads that monster theory was officially born. These endeavours to deconstruct cultural constructions of identity and invert established hierarchies led to the formal advent of monster theory. Monster theory was officially named as such in

1996 by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Thereafter, what was once a minor field of study, disdained as not properly academic, achieved substantial significance. Similar to the monsters it investigates, monster theory continues to transform, infiltrating new areas of research and adapting to new cultural changes. What Andrew Jeffrey Weinstock maintains provides assistance in demonstrating the issues associated with generalisation and the broad application of monster theory:

> One difficulty confronting monster theory researchers, however, has been the dispersed nature of the scholarship, a difficulty exacerbated by the transnational and transdisciplinary nature of the investigation. Like the monsters it theorizes, monster theory transgresses categorical boundaries, spreading out into different disciplines. What monsters are, where they come from, what they mean, and the cultural work they do are questions that have preoccupied philosophers, theologians, psychologists, physicians, and cultural critics. Because all cultures have their own monsters, monster theory is by necessity an international endeavor, and one that, bearing in mind shifting cultural norms and expectations, must tread carefully when it comes to broad generalizations (the same monster resonates differently in different times and places). And because monsters and monstrosity appear in contexts ranging from art to medicine and religion to sociology and beyond, the theorization of monsters and their meanings has followed suit, with historians and anthropologists, queer theorists, and even computer scientists all attempting to think through what monstrosity is and how it functions.[34]

Although most targeted and extensive research on monsters came to light after 1980, the early twentieth century contains several instances of monster theory: its cornerstone is provided by the aforementioned J.R.R. Tolkien's 1936 essay *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*.

As stated before, this essay originally appeared as a lecture provided in honour of Sir Israel Gollancz on November 25, 1936, at the British Academy for Humanities and Social Sciences. In this acclaimed lecture, Tolkien

[34] Jeffrey A. Weinstock, *The Monster Theory Reader* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020) 2.

addressed *Beowulf* and its critics, acknowledging its earlier contributors while also emphasising significant omissions from their readings. Tolkien countered the dominant *Beowulf* readings, stating scholars ought to avoid focusing exclusively on linguistic, historical, or political issues. He argued that *Beowulf*, a text that was investigated primarily as a historical text should be also reclaimed as a piece of literature rather than solely a valuable source of linguistic or cultural knowledge. Renowned for its argumentative power, Tolkien conceived the "Allegory of the Tower:"

> A man inherited a field in which was an accumulation of old stone, part of an older hall. Of the old stone some had already been used in building the house in which he actually lived, not far from the old house of his fathers. Of the rest he took some and built a tower. But his friends perceived at once (without troubling to climb the steps) that these stones had formerly belonged to a more ancient building. So they pushed the tower over, with no little labour, in order to look for hidden carvings and inscriptions, or to discover whence the man's distant forefathers had obtained their building material. Some suspecting a deposit of coal under the soil began to dig for it, and forgot even the stones. They all said: 'This tower is most interesting.' And even the man's own descendants, who might have been expected to consider what he had been about, were heard to murmur: 'He is such an odd fellow! Imagine his using these old stones just to build a nonsensical tower! Why did not he restore the old house? He had no sense of proportion.' But from the top of that tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea.[35]

In *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, Michael D.C Drout stated that, in Tolkien's allegory, the *Beowulf* poet is depicted as a man who builds a tower out of ancient songs and lays, and the later critics are compared to friends who push the structure over.[36] According to Tom Shippey, this allegory implies that nobody understood the

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[35] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," *in Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (HarperCollins; New Ed, 2007), 7-8.
[36] Michael D. C. Drout, *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment* (Routledge; 1st edition, 2013), 58.

real intention of the *Beowulf* poet before Tolkien.[37] J.R.R. Tolkien's essay primarily aimed to reiterate the moral and dramatic significance of the poem's monstrous characters—figures that were often disregarded in previous analyses of the text or deemed to be the poet's error of judgment:

> I shall confine myself mainly to the monsters – Grendel and the Dragon, as they appear in what seems to me the best and most authoritative general criticism in English.[38]

While Tolkien does not clarify the term "monster," it implies he is referring to creatures with an aberrant size or form opposed to Beowulf and the poem's main characters. These beings, who represent moral conflict as well as physical antagonism in the narrative, are the main subjects of Tolkien's discussion. Therefore, according to Tolkien, critically reconsidering the text through the lens of monsters represented the key to grasping the core of *Beowulf*. Consequently, Tolkien replies to the criticisms issued by the eminent *Beowulf* scholar W.P. Ker and his pupil R.W. Chambers, who, in Tolkien's viewpoint, did not adequately acknowledge the poem as a literary work. A considerable part of *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* is dedicated to refuting Ker's interpretation in his *The Dark Ages*. Ker regarded the monsters as a juvenile mistake, but Tolkien, on the other hand, showed how vital they are to the framework of the epic poem. Specifically, he pointed out that dragons were a rarity in Northern European poetry. The "dignity" of Beowulf, that Ker and Chambers both acclaimed, according to Tolkien, is a result of the poem's main theme, which has a strong connection to the monsters' presence. By addressing "the struggle in different proportions, so that we may see man at war with the hostile world, and his inevitable overthrow in Time,[39]" Tolkien went on claiming that the *Beowulf* poet chiefly focused on the theme of Beowulf's inevitable defeat

[37] Ibid., 58.
[38] Tolkien, *B: M&C*, 6.
[39] Ibid., 18

and death. Tolkien, an expert in old Germanic languages, theorised that this epic poem was something more than just a syncretic amalgam of elements coming from both Christian and pagan lore: although *Beowulf* contains numerous overtly Christian allusions, the gloomy and pagan Norse notion of fate, or "wyrd," is what remains firmly at its centre. According to Tolkien, the author of *Beowulf* was probably a Christian monk from Scandinavia who had a thorough awareness of the customs and historical background of the Norse context and "one thing he knew clearly: those days were heathen—heathen, noble, and hopeless[40]." Tolkien, therefore, claimed:

> The monsters had been the foes of the gods, the captains of men, and within Time the monsters would win. In the heroic siege and last defeat men and gods alike had been imagined in the same host. Now the heroic figures, the men of old, hæleð under heofenum, remained and still fought on until defeat. For the monsters do not depart, whether the gods go or come. A Christian was (and is) still like his forefathers a mortal hemmed in a hostile world. The monsters remained the enemies of mankind, the infantry of the old war, and became inevitably the enemies of the one God, ece Dryhten, the eternal Captain of the new. Even so the vision of the war changes. For it begins to dissolve, even as the contest on the fields of Time thus takes on its largest aspect. The tragedy of the great temporal defeat remains for a while poignant, but ceases to be finally important. It is no defeat, for the end of the world is part of the design of Metod, the Arbiter who is above the mortal world. Beyond there appears a possibility of eternal victory (or eternal defeat), and the real battle is between the soul and its adversaries. So the old monsters became images of the evil spirit or spirits, or rather the evil spirits entered into the monsters and took visible shape in the hideous bodies of the þyrsas and sigel-hearwan of heathen imagination.[41]

Tolkien devoted an extensive amount of space in his essay articulating this argument, arguing that it is incorrect to regard Beowulf just as the hero of a heroic lay. Instead, Tolkien affirmed that the author of Beowulf

[40] Ibid., 22.
[41] Ibid., 22.

portrayed the protagonist as “a man, and that for him and many is sufficient tragedy[42],” despite the work’s prominent use of monsters and pagan motifs. Tolkien deduced that the Christian poet was trying to convey with this pagan fictional world that man’s world is hostile to happiness and existence and that man is ultimately destined to die; beneath what we recognise today as typical monstrous motifs of the horror genre lay a more accurate horror and tragedy. While Beowulf used an iron shield to ward off the monsters in the epic poem, the Christian poet recognised that this shield was “not yet the breastplate of righteousness, nor the shield of faith for the quenching of all the fiery darts of the wicked[43].” In conclusion, Tolkien interpreted the main theme of *Beowulf* as addressing both the universal and unavoidable death of all humans in the real world as well as the specific and inevitable death of a warrior within his fictional narrative[44].

As Matthew Woodcock argues in *Elf Fashioning Revisited*, Tolkien’s defence of *Beowulf* monstrous figures’ importance has been key to the establishment of monster theory as a filter through which contemporary culture can be examined:

> Monsters […] function as symbols or signifiers that lead a reader to apprehend a more transcendent reality. As Cohen proposes, “a monster exists only to be read”. Modern monster theory draws much from psychoanalytic and postcolonial approaches and offers a sophisticated critical framework and vocabulary for reading the monstrous in the works of Spenser and his contemporaries. At heart, however, it is still working from the same essential starting point as J.R.R. Tolkien’s famous 1936 lecture—turned—essay “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics.” Tolkien argued that the dragon in Beowulf functions as a means of alienating a reader from

[42] Ibid., 18.
[43] Ibid., 23.
[44] Drout, *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 56-58.

a purely literal reading of the poem and thus serves to signal the text's polysemous nature.[45]

As noted by Christina Fawcett, Tolkien's effort to redeem Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the Dragon from critical negligence is where monster theory initially emerged. These monstrous figures in *Beowulf* demonstrate the poem's quality as a work of art as opposed to a straightforward historical account; they also reveal the elaborated mingling of ancient traditions with the development of Christian influence. As stated by Tolkien, monsters reveal the significant intersections between cultural sources rather than just being a tool to investigate a culture. In the same way that Tolkien's creatures represent the synthesis of past narratives and modern concepts, the monsters in *Beowulf* represent a linking point between the past and the present.[46]

The amount of scholarly research done on the monstrous characters in *Beowulf* has increased substantially since 1936. Scholars delving into *Beowulf's* language, kingship, inheritance, scripture, and culture frequently employ notions of monstrosity to support their conclusions. Nowadays, a lot of contemporary academics discuss the text's supernatural characters directly; for instance, Ruth Waterhouse's *Beowulf as Palimpsest* explores how Grendel influenced other writings and demonstrates the universality of monstrosity. The way that monstrosity is perceived and defined is influenced, according to Waterhouse, by the cultural values of the time in which the monster is interpreted and decoded. The monster is precisely conceived by Waterhouse as a nexus point between history and belief; analyzing past monsters through the lens of modern ones can shine a new light on them, showing how monstrosity is culturally defined.[47]

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[45] Matthew Woodcock, *Elf Fashioning Revisited: A Response to Maik Goth*. (Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate, 2010) 217.
[46] Christina Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 174-175.
[47] Ruth Waterhouse, "Beowulf as Palimpsest." in *Monster Theory*. Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. Minneapolis, (MN: University of Minnesota, 1996). 26-39.

These critics have highlighted the changing attitudes toward these figures in modern scholarship by focusing their research on characters that were previously disregarded by the scholars Tolkien criticised in his lecture.[48]

Highlighting its monsters' value, Leticia Siverio González[49] discussed *Beowulf's* bipartite structure inspired by both his early combat with Grendel and his later battle with the Dragon. Even Tolkien argued that nothing better illustrates the concept of *lif is læne* ("life is a loan[50]") than these distinct confrontations with monsters. While other critics have subdivided the poem into three parts, considering each of Beowulf's encounters with Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the Dragon, Tolkien emphasizes the overarching theme of mortality through the bipartite structure. This structure not only highlights Beowulf's journey from youthful heroism to the inevitable decline of old age but also reinforces the poem's meditation on the ephemeral nature of human life. In the first part of the poem:

> Hrothgar, as wealthy and powerful king, orders the construction of a mead-hall which is later called Heorot. There, he shares the wealth of war with his warriors and celebrates the victories of war. These celebrations disturb a giant monster called Grendel, who is annoyed with the loud and exaggerated celebrations of the humans at Heorot. When night falls, Grendel comes from the darkness of his swamp to Heorot, takes thirty men as a trophy and returns to his lair at the swamp. Grendel's attacks go on for twelve years. The mead-hall and its dwellers are devastated. The news about the misfortunes of the Danish king is extended in form of bard songs, which reach the home of Beowulf, a warrior from the southern Sweden tribe of the Geats. Being as strong as thirty men, Beowulf decides to help Hrothgar and sets off to Heorot followed by his retinue.[51]

[48] Christina Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 173-174.
[49] Leticia Siverio González, "The Use Of Monsters In Beowulf" (BA thesis, Universidad de La Laguna, 2015), 18-26.
[50] Tolkien, *B: M&C*, 19.
[51] González, "The Use Of Monsters In Beowulf," 14.

When the night comes after Beowulf's arrival, Grendel bursts into Heorot:

> All the warriors but Beowulf are asleep. The monster takes one warrior and eats him and, when he is about to take Beowulf's body too, the Geat grabs the monster's hand, breaking his fingers. Here their battle stars. The monster pulls away from the hero to save his hand, but Beowulf is stronger, and the monster learns that he has made a mistake; he is afraid of that human but unnatural strength. Terrified, Grendel keeps pulling till his arm comes out from his body, tendons and blood emerging from the dismembered body. The monster escapes deadly wounded and his arm is hung in Heorot's ceiling.[52]

During their confrontation, the two characters are depicted very differently: Beowulf appears as a man in his prime—displaying remarkable strength and seemingly endless endurance. Conversely, Grendel is described with Old English words *ellengaést* "fierce creature", *gaést* "creature," *fífelcynne* "race of monsters," and *wonsaélí wer* "unblessed creature." The reason behind the monster's attack on Heorot is envy, Grendel was envious of the joyful sounds of companionship and a bard's song about the creation of the world arising from the meadow hall. It is important to draw attention to the contrast between the bard's song about Genesis and Grendel's presentation. The bard praises the beauty of creation, but he noticeably leaves out any discussion of the emergence of monsters, stressing the disparity between the peaceful world and Grendel's evil presence. This contrast draws attention to the idea of good versus evil as well as the appearance of chaos and monstrosity in Heorot's ordered environment. According to Jeffrey Cohen in *The Use of Monsters and the Middle Ages*:

> The monster is being used as what could conveniently be called an illustrative antithesis, that is, as an embodiment of the textual suppositions' opposites.[53]

Grendel is regarded as a monster because of his dissimilarities in appearance and his disregard for societal norms. Despite his human-like look, he stands

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[52] Ibid., 15.

[53] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *The Use of Monsters and the Middle Ages* (Selim 2, 1992), 66.

out by his enormous stature and enormous strength. His unclothed hands, employed in combat instead of traditional weapons, and his lack of clothing—aside from a glove in which he hides his prey—all serve to highlight his odd nature. The narrator does not precisely classify Grendel but associates him with malevolent progeny, including elves, evil spirits, and giants. This is consistent with Cohen's third thesis:

> "they [monsters] are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions. […] In the face of the monster, scientific inquiry and its ordered rationality crumble"[54]

Due to his enormous head and steel-clawed hands, we can speculate whether Grendel is a hybrid creature combining animal and human features and demonic or gigantic essence.

Furthermore, Heorot's peace is temporary. Grendel's mother appears in Heorot seeking vengeance for his son's death. She is pursued by Beowulf to her underwater cave, where they fight fiercely. Beowulf kills Grendel's mother with a magic sword found in her lair and brings her head back to Heorot as a prize. Even though Tolkien refrained from discussing Grendel's mother, I contend that she qualifies in *Beowulf* as one of the three monsters. Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother further demonstrates his extraordinary strength and valour, exemplifying what Tolkien refers to as his "first achievement[55]". These sequences emphasise Beowulf's physical prowess as well as the tragedy of human existence, as Beowulf battles not for the love of life but rather for recognition and posterity. His conflicts accentuate the ephemeral aspect of existence and the fact that "life is a loan." Beyond the fact that Grendel's mother resembles a woman, we don't know

[54] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (NED-New edition. University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 6.
[55] Tolkien, *B: M&C*, 28.

anything about her physical appearance. This lack of information encourages reflection on the subject of gender roles; Alexandra Olsen contended that Grendel's mother's portrayal subverts traditional gender roles and draws attention to the complexity of the poem's monstrous characters:

> Traditionally, the study of gender roles in Beowulf has been based on the assumption that, since men were responsible for public functions like king, warrior and avenger, they also held the power in the world of the poem. Women, it was assumed, held more passive and private roles as hostesses, peaceweavers, and ritual mourners and were therefore marginalized by the poet.[56]

These traditional feminine roles are embodied by Wealhtheow, the queen; instead, Grendel's mother, who embodies a stereotypically masculine role by seeking revenge for her son, fails to reflect them. Therefore, she is defined as a monster by this gender role reversal. She sets herself outside of social conventions and emphasises her monstrous portrayal through her actions. The poem presents Grendel's mother as a warlike woman who significantly deviates from the social norms imposed on women in her society. While Grendel battles with his bare hands, Grendel's mother wields a dagger to try to kill Beowulf. In the end, Beowulf is forced to employ a magical blade to kill her since his ordinary sword is useless against her: her blood is so poisonous that it melts the sword's blade, hence special magical assistance is needed to defeat her. Although the poem addresses vengeance from a Christian perspective, the difficulties in killing the second monster may be related to the idea that vengeance is still cherished and respected in Germanic warrior societies.

In Beowulf's final encounter with a monster, this time with the dragon, Tolkien observed that "Disaster is foreboded. Defeat is the theme[57]." At this stage of the narrative, Beowulf is an old man, and both his reign and life are

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[56] Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Gender Roles," in *A Beowulf Handbook*. (Eds. Robert Bjork and John D. Niles. Exeter: University of Exeter, 1998). 313.
[57] Tolkien, *B: M&C*, 30.

coming to an end, regardless of the dragon's presence. The last battle represents Beowulf's final struggle and, as Tolkien noted, the "inevitable victory of death," in contrast to the prior conflicts, which symbolised his crowning achievements and seemingly endless youth.[58] As so, Beowulf becomes a tragic figure without having to mimic the hero of a conventional tragic epic. Like any other person, he has a tragedy of living, fighting, and dying—a sufficient tragedy for all. The final monster's appearance deviates from the conventional Western portrayal of dragons because it is limbless and spits fire. This monster in *Beowulf* maintains the positive role that dragons have historically been given: it looks after a hoard that the last surviving member of a departed tribe had hidden in a cave. The warrior wanted all the wisdom and strength of his dying tribe to rest in peace, guarded by this creature, so he returned the treasure to the earth. As a result, the dragon's function—preserving the legacy of the dead—is one of legitimate protection. Furious, the dragon burns everything it encounters outside after realising its hoard has been altered. The dragon, like Grendel and Grendel's mother, is driven by human impulses; however, this time, greed drives the creature to attack the community. But since he is protecting its hoard, his raids must be interpreted as defensive. The fact that all three of the monsters in this poem only attack at night is a trait they have in common. This attribute may be linked to their marginalisation in the human world and their punishment for dwelling on the margins of it. Regarding the monster's moral reading, it is possible that this dragon served as a warning to society about pride since the hoard did not benefit the dragon, Beowulf, or society as a whole. Moreover, since Satan morphed into a snake in the Garden of Eden, we may speculate that there is a relationship between the dragon and Satan, even though this is not stated explicitly in the poem.[59]

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[58] Ibid., 32.
[59] Leticia Siverio González, "The Use Of Monsters In Beowulf," 18-26.

In conclusion, the argument that Tolkien advanced in *Beowulf: The Monster and the Critics* deserved to be further supported by this in-depth analysis of the monsters in *Beowulf* and the variety of interpretations they promote. Tolkien's groundbreaking essay not only revitalized and changed scholarly approaches to Beowulf but also changed the way monsters in literature are examined. It challenged preconceived notions that minimized the significance of monsters as historical curiosities or merely allegorical devices, focusing instead on the symbolic and thematic depth of these monsters. As mentioned in the first part of this subchapter, Tolkien's essay represents a substantial first step towards what is now known as "monster theory," a field of study that focuses on how monsters serve as dynamic representations that intersect on existential, psychological, and cultural issues.

1.3 Beyond Middle-earth: Tolkien's Later Influences on Monstrosity

Regarding the notion of monstrosity, although a substantial portion of Tolkien's literary influences stem from Anglo-Saxon and Norse traditions, his legendarium also illustrates the impact of more modern and recent works. Although Tolkien does not explicitly cite later literary works, his writings subtly echo authors from various periods. As a matter of fact, this concluding subchapter aims to specifically examine these later influences.

The Renaissance, the Gothic, and the Victorian eras will all be covered in the following section, along with their representative texts and authors. The Renaissance part will encompass the literary period from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, with Shakespeare as its central author. Conversely, the term "Gothic" refers to the literary mode that emerged in the eighteenth century as a reaction to the dominant classical forms of art and literature. The discussion will centre on Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, and Horace Walpole. Lastly, the Victorian era will be examined, with a focus on George MacDonald, Christina Rossetti, and Charles Dickens' writings and their influences on Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

In this particular section, Christina Fawcett's seminal work *J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity* will be taken as a model and particularly into consideration. Her dissertation stands as one of the few complete studies delving deeply and exclusively into Tolkien's relationship with monstrosity, providing invaluable insights essential to this thesis.

1.3.1 Monstrosity in the Renaissance: James I and Shakespeare

As Fawcett[60] has pointed out, the combination of fairy lore and monstrous imagery from late mediaeval romances was maintained in the early Renaissance concept of monstrosity. Nevertheless, James I's treatise *Daemonologie* (1597) effectively opposed the moral significance of figures like monsters and faeries. While discussing a wide range of supernatural figures, including witches, demons, and fairies, *Daemonologie* consistently conveys the notion that believing in these entities is bad. James I asserted that the fairy is a product of superstitious Catholic culture and serves only as an ethical symbol for the immoral practices perpetuated by Catholicism. Fairies are presented as essentially demonic and treacherous to humanity because of their magical nature, even though they are not explicitly depicted as performing evil practices. James I's condemn of witchcraft and fairies exposes the superstitions spread by the Roman Catholic Church in England and challenges historical superstitions and false folklore. He expresses his concern about these phenomena in his opening remarks:

> The fearefull aboundinge at this time in this countrie, of these detestable slaues of the Deuill, the Witches or enchaunters, hath moved me (beloued reader) to dispatch in post, this following treatise of mine, not in any wise (as I protest) to serue for a shew of my learning & ingine, but onely (mooued of conscience) to preasse thereby, so farre as I can, to resolue the doubting harts of many;[61]

According to *Daemonologie*, fairies and monsters became misidentified as incarnations of evil during the Renaissance. And yet, despite James I's rejection of witchcraft, fairies and other magical creatures abound in early modern plays, such as those by William Shakespeare. The Bard

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[60] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 71-72, 76-78.
[61] King James I, Daemonologie. (*Project Gutenberg*, https://sdamaranathachurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Daemonologie-King-James-I-England.pdf, June 29, 2008), xi.

combined humorous themes and enticing supernatural creatures both in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* positioning them in remote historical contexts or in physically inaccessible locations, like ancient Greece or an unknown Mediterranean island. In the narrative environment crafted by Shakespeare, the fairy is a supernatural menace but not of a monstrous nature. The human characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are subject to manipulation by the fairies, who additionally influence the plot and create conflict. For the most portion of the play, they stay in the woods and only come out into the civilised world at night to bless the joyous couples. Shakespeare effectively integrates folkloric figures—like Robin Goodfellow and the Fairy King and Queen—with classical figures like Theseus, Hippolyta, and Titania, who is reminiscent of the moon goddess Diana. Bottom stands out as the only hybrid-monster in the play. Although at first, he seems arrogant and irritable, his natural politeness and kindness defy the usual hideous qualities of savagery throughout the story. The fairies are the main source of action, also heavily influencing the humorous aspects of the play. The comedy is amplified by Bottom as well, given his exaggerated subservience to Titania's servants:

> Monsieur Cobweb, good Monsieur, get you your weapons in hand, and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle; and good monsieur, bring me the honey bag. Do not fret yourself too much in the action, monsieur; and good monsieur, have a care the honey bag break not. I would be loath to have you overflown with a honey bag.[62]

Shakespeare's characterization of the fairies indicates that they are not harmful because even Bottom, who has been transformed by Puck into a courteous monster and then persuaded by Titania, returns to his former form. Likewise, in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare decided to focus the narrative on magic, spirit beings, and perceived monsters. In the play, magic is a vital but

[62] William Shakespeare, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," *The Necessary Shakespeare*. Ed. David Bevington. (New York: Longman, 2002), IV.i.10-7.

transitory and confined element that is marked by its amorality. Thus, magic is temporally confined to the island: at the ending of the story, Prospero resolves not to bring his magical skills to Milan, an act of atonement and a symbol to reclaim his former life:

> But this rough magic
> I here abjure, and when I have required
> Some heavenly music – which even now I do –
> To work mine end upon their senses that
> This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.[63]

Just like in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the magical and fairy elements are placed in the island, in a safe, isolated space. The central fairy-figure of the play, Ariel, who should be a frightening creature, is lessened and acts exclusively under human control. While Ariel is able to control weather, transform his physical shape and become invisible, he is still under Prospero's authority. Therefore, the supernatural is not threatening or dangerous, as James I asserted; it is, instead, within man's influence. Conversely, Caliban, who has always been read either as a monster or an island native, as supernatural or colonized character. Caliban is clearly humanoid in his shape but carries with him deformity and difference: he is exotic; Stephano and Trinculo call him a monster and describe him as a hybrid, and is, according to Prospero, a 'lying slave'[64]. But despite this unflattering explanation of Caliban's appearance, he is still given a sympathetic voice: he speaks eloquently to justify his rebellion and shows the audience unexpected depths to his character in his reflection on his

[63] William Shakespeare, "The Tempest." *The Necessary Shakespeare*. Ed. David Bevington. (New York: Longman, 2002), V.i.50-7.
[64] Ibid., I.ii.347.

dreams and the music of the island. Shakespeare creates a figure that can be read as monstrous, malicious and evil, or else abused and misunderstood.[65]

Despite Tolkien's well-known antipathy towards Shakespeare, the concept of monstrosity in Shakespeare's works finds resonance in the author's depictions of monsters. The way that Shakespeare and Tolkien incorporated literary, folkloric, and mythological elements is reminiscent of one another. Moreover, the manner in which Tolkien depicted characters like Gollum resembles how Shakespeare handled characters like Caliban and Bottom, who transcended straightforward readings of monstrosity. As a matter of fact, Gollum's tragic shift from the hobbit-like Sméagol into a creature consumed by his One Ring obsession evokes compassion as well as horror. Ultimately, supernatural forces and human agency frequently intersect within Tolkien's legendarium; characters like Gandalf possess immense power, yet they are governed by human moral and ethical principles, reflecting a balance like the one Shakespeare illustrated through Ariel and Prospero's master-servant relationship.

Through the lens of this comparison, it is evident that Tolkien, like Shakespeare, delves further into themes of power, morality, and the complexity of the human (or non-human) experience regarding the concepts of evil and monstrosity.

[65] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 71-72, 76-78.

1.3.2 Gothic Monstrosity: Walpole, Shelley, and Stoker

As noted by Anna Kędra-Kardela and Andrzej Sławomir Kowalczyk, the eighteenth century in Europe, known as the Enlightenment era, was marked by the rise of the realistic novel and the development of poetry constrained by rigid formal and structural rules.[66] However, beneath the surface of these dominant principles lay the rapidly increasing pre-Romantic movement. This movement, by critiquing rationalism and challenging the stringent conventions of the Enlightenment, advocated innovation, individuality, and creativity: a significant indicator of these shifts was the advent of the Gothic novel. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto. A Gothic Story* (1765) is widely recognised as the inaugural Gothic novel. Although many Gothic conventions derived from earlier centuries—such as the violence intrinsic to the Elizabethan drama, the supernatural elements of pagan Nordic and Celtic mythology, and the exoticism found in eastern tales—Walpole established a general framework for the Gothic genre in the Preface to the 1765 edition of *The Castle of Otranto*. This general rule situates the narrative in medieval times, often in a European Catholic country. The atmosphere of mystery and terror is produced through the setting, which includes distant, inaccessible, and dark locations such as ruins, abbeys, crypts, caves, or forests. It is further enhanced by weather conditions like fog, wind, and thunderstorms, and by various horrific events including murders, rapes, and conspiracies. Supernatural phenomena also play a key role, ranging from bleeding portraits to demonic apparitions. The Gothic plot typically features characters such as the villain, the damsel in distress, and a noble hero whose emotions are often conveyed through passionate speeches. Common motifs within the Gothic convention include dreams, omens, prophecies,

[66] Anna Kędra-Kardela, and Andrzej Sławomir Kowalczyk "The Gothic Canon: Contexts, Features, Relationships, Perspectives," in *Expanding the Gothic Canon: Studies in Literature, Film and New Media*, 13–39. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 15-23.

vengeance, and insanity.[67] Tolkien's legendarium, though primarily situated within the high fantasy genre, intricately weaves numerous Gothic conventions that profoundly deepen the storytelling; a remarkably salient aspect is the setting. Middle-earth, with its medieval foundations, reflects the distant, dark locations quintessential to Gothic fiction: fortresses such as Barad-dûr and Minas Morgul are not merely physical structures but embodiments of pervasive evil; the eerie forests of Mirkwood and Fangorn, along with the spectral Paths of the Dead, further enhance this atmosphere of mystery and terror, drawing clear parallels to the remote, inaccessible settings advocated by Walpole. Echoing the Gothic aesthetic, Tolkien's pseudo-medieval setting is also defined by an ancient past. As Nick Groom articulated:

> The earliest Gothic novels adopted this style of the mediaeval infused with ancient spirits.[68]

As observed by Katarzyna Ferdynus, in *The Lord of the Rings*, the past persistently haunts the characters' thoughts and profoundly influences their actions.[69] Throughout their journey, the Fellowship repeatedly stumble upon remnants of foregone eras as they pass through ruins of ancient cities, fortresses, watchtowers, and forests, as well as rivers that once witnessed pivotal historical occurrences. Their conversations are imbued with references to legends and they regularly sing or recite old ballads and poems. The history of Tolkien's universe is characterized by a series of recurring cycles, each initiated by the false assumption of the period's representatives that Evil has been permanently vanquished. This erroneous statement invariably facilitates the resurgence of Evil, which, although it may reappear in a diminished form each time it is defeated, progressively the Forces of

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[67] Kędra-Kardela, Kowalczyk "The Gothic Canon," 15-23.
[68] Nick Groom, *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81.
[69] Katarzyna Ferdynus, *The Shadow of the Past. The Lord of the Rings and the Gothic Novel* (New Horizons in English Studies, 2017), 37-40.

Good also decrease. The end of the Third Age in Middle-earth, as illustrated within *The Lord of the Rings* narrative, presents a world of shadows—a diminished reflection of its former glory: once noble races, such as the Dúnedain and Elves, have lost much of their knowledge and power; the return of Sauron, the supreme embodiment of Evil, who begins to reclaim his lost power, postures a supreme menace to the entire world; Saruman, the most powerful of the wizards, betrays the forces of Good, altering Isengard—a valley once adorned with avenues, fruitful trees, and flowing streams—into a fortress. The past is a source of the world's decline and the challenges the characters face. Isildur, the original keeper of the Ring, had the chance to destroy it but chose instead to keep it, setting the stage for future turmoil; the wizards failed to detect Saruman's betrayal and, due to a series of misguided decisions, could not prevent Sauron's resurgence. This deterioration of the world, both in Gothic novels and Tolkien's legendarium, reflects the anxieties and traumas of the present.[70] The past plays a crucial role as a source of terror in Gothic literature, and this is mirrored in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, where the past also manifests with a monstrous and ghostly appearance; Sauron, the Dark Lord, initially took the form of the "Necromancer," a dreadful sorcerer, and later assumed the form of a red, burning Eye atop Barad-dûr, the fortress of Mordor, maintaining a relentless watch over Middle-earth. Characters, even in their dreams or visions, perpetually sense the Eye's untiring gaze upon them:

> But suddenly the Mirror went altogether dark, as dark as if a hole had been opened in the world of sight... In the abyss there appeared a single Eye that slowly grew, until it filled nearly all the Mirror. So terrible was it that Frodo stood rooted, unable to cry out or to withdraw his gaze. The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing.[71]

[70] Ferdynus, *The Shadow of the Past*, 37-40.

[71] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: Harper Collins, 2005), 364.

Fawcett in her dissertation identifies two substantial correlations between Tolkien's and Walpole's most renowned works.[72] In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien implicitly acknowledges his inspiration from *The Castle of Otranto* in two specific instances. First, Mordor's terrifying architecture mirrors that of Otranto's. Upon first arriving in Mordor after his struggle through Shelob's lair, Sam reflects on the Two Watchers at Cirith Ungol:

> They were like great figures seated upon thrones. Each had three joined bodies, and three heads facing outward, and inward, and across the gateway. The heads had vulture faces, and on their great knees were laid clawlike hands. They seemed to be carved out of huge blocks of stone, immovable, and yet they were aware: some dreadful spirit of evil vigilance abode in them. They knew an enemy.[73]

Though it lacks two watches, the Castle of Otranto does include one spectral figure: an enormous suit of armour. Bianca tells Manfred and Fredric about her vision:

> I am sure I had not gone up three steps, but I heard the rattling of armour; for all the world such a clatter as Diego says he heard when the Giant turned him about in the gallery-chamber. [...] for, as I was saying, when I heard the clattering of armour, I was all in a cold sweat. I looked up, and, if your Greatness will believe me, I saw upon the uppermost banister of the great stairs a hand in armour as big as big. I thought I should have swooned.[74]

Both Cirith Ungol and the Castle of Otranto are haunting places that have been tainted by the evil that resides there; though the armour is a mobile threat that haunts the castle and the Watchers are static, the threat of the animated object is present in both texts and must be overcome by the characters.

Second, Boromir's temporary corruption and attempt to steal the ring parallel Manfred's madness in his pursuit of Isabella. While Manfred betrays his wife

[72] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 84-88.
[73] Ibid., 902.
[74] Horace Walpole, "The Castle of Otranto." in *Three Gothic Novels* (Ed. E.F. Bleiler. Toronto: Dover Publications Inc, 1968), 97.

and family, Boromir similarly fails to uphold his duties within the Fellowship. Manfred’s words reveal his view of Isabella as an object of his desire and something he believes he deserves. In a similar vein, Boromir, when he loses his self-control, speaks of expectation and entitlement. He proclaims that the Ring is Gondor’s only hope, demanding it from Frodo:

> How it angers me! Fool! Obstinate fool! Running wilfully to death and ruining our cause. If any mortals have claim to the Ring, it is the men of Númenor, and not Halflings. It is not yours save by unhappy chance. It might have been mine. It should have been mine.[75]

Dracula and Frankenstein’s creature, two iconic characters from the Gothic era, exemplify and embody another kind of monstrosity. Both began as human beings but become alienated as a result of their reanimation and their defiance of natural and scientific principles; despite this, they are nonetheless given the chance to express themselves; the creature, in particular, is often portrayed in the text as a rather sympathetic character. Chris Baldick observes the following about Mary Shelley’s book:

> The monster’s most convincing human characteristic is of course his power of speech. […] The decision to give the monster an articulate voice is Mary Shelley’s most important subversion of the category of monstrosity. As we have seen, the traditional idea of the monstrous was strongly associated with visual display, and monsters were understood primarily as exhibitions of moral vices: they were to be seen and not heard. For the readers of Frankenstein, though, as for the blind DeLacey, the visibility of the monster means nothing and his eloquence means everything for his identity.[76]

Baldick challenges the idea that an eloquent individual may be genuinely monstrous, yet Frankenstein’s monster proves his dreadful nature by deeds rather than words. His elegant voice, though, lessens his monstrosity in the reader’s eyes. This narrative technique had a big impact on Tolkien, who

[75] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 399.
[76] Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity and Nineteenth-century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 45.

provided many of his monsters in Middle-earth the ability to talk. This gives these creatures additional personality and complexity, without necessarily softening their portrayal—Orkish language, for example, commonly emphasises their grotesque nature. Similarly, Dracula, a human who has died and returned to drink the blood of the living, makes extensive use of his voice to further his monstrous nature; his alluring words are an instrument of wickedness that tempts his victims while he remains concealed. In contrast to the creature's voice in *Frankenstein*, which arouses feelings of empathy and raises a prospect of salvation, the vampire employs words as tools of seduction to coerce confidence and trust. Gothic literature complicates the role of the monster, portraying it as both a symbol of damnation and potential redemption. Tolkien, in his depiction of monstrosity, mirrors this intricacy. Although Vampires are present in Tolkien's legendarium, features belonging to the Gothic vampire can be perceived also in other Middle-Earth monsters, especially in the behaviour of characters like Gollum. When Gollum hunts Frodo and Sam into Emyn Muil, his unsettling physical appearance evokes Harker's accounts of Dracula's descent from the castle window:

> What I saw was the Count's head coming out from the window. I did not see the face, but I knew the man by the neck and the movement of his back and arms. […] I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over the dreadful abyss, face down with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow, but I kept looking, and it could be no delusion. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones, worn clear of the mortar by the stress of years, and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall.[77]

[77] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*. (Ed. Maud Ellmann. Oxford: OUP. Print, 1996), 34.

This scene is nearly perfectly mimicked by Gollum as he descends from the crags. The haunting tone persists despite the altered setting:

> Down the face of a precipice, sheer and almost smooth it seemed in the pale moonlight, a small black shape was moving with its thin limbs splayed out. Maybe its soft clinging hands and toes were finding crevices and holds that no hobbit could ever have seen or used, but it looked as it if was just creeping down on sticky pads, like some large prowling thing of insect-kind. And it was coming down head first, as if it was smelling its way.[78]

However, Gollum lacks Dracula's physical prowess and persuasive proficiency, among other characteristics; he is a damaged individual corrupted both physically and psychologically by the Ring.[79]

[78] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 613.
[79] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 84-88.

1.3.3 Victorian Monstrosity: Dickens, Rossetti, and MacDonald

This subchapter will focus exclusively on one of Tolkien's specific works, *The Hobbit*, which features a type of monster in particular, goblins. The goblin race's portrayal in *The Hobbit* is a foundational depiction of a group later identified as Orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*. This underscores the unique and significant role goblins play within *The Hobbit*'s narrative. In Tolkien's legendarium, goblins are dehumanized into symbols of evil, establishing a standard against which goodness is defined across Middle-earth's diverse races.[80] Tolkien's monsters evolve across his stories, reflecting different tones and themes. In *The Hobbit*, there is a sense of levity even in the representation of monstrosity, whereas *The Lord of the Rings* presents a much darker and more sinister depiction. Mischievous or evil goblins were part of the inventory of fairy creatures amply used in Victorian paintings, illustrations and literature – and this was, of course, the time J.R.R. Tolkien was born and grew up. In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien's Goblins are not described in detail, but we first encounter them coming out of the earth, literally springing out of a crack in the cave where Bilbo and the Dwarves have found temporary shelter. The concept of goblins dwelling underground occupies a central theme in George MacDonald's children's fantasy novels *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*; scholars have extensively noted MacDonald's influence on Tolkien in this regard.

Furthermore, while Tolkien's physical descriptions of goblins differ from those in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, he briefly alludes to this influential Victorian female writer; Rossetti's portrayal of goblin movements is echoed in the attack on the Great Goblin under the Misty Mountains in

[80] Katelyn Stine, "Goblins, Greed, and Goodness: The Symbolic and Narrative Degradation of Goblins within The Hobbit," *English: Individual Authors: J.R.R. Tolkien* (2015): 1.

The Hobbit. When Rossetti's goblins approach Laura, the poet-narrator describes them as follows:

> Flying, running, leaping,
> Puffing and blowing,
> Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
> Clucking and gobbling,
> Mopping and mowing.[81]

While Tolkien's vocabulary differs from Rossetti's, his array of descriptors mirrors her tone and characterization. In *The Hobbit*, goblins initially display unity, singing as they escort their prisoners through the Misty Mountains. However, Gandalf's attack plunges them into chaos, much like Rossetti's goblins, who also break up when faced with opposition. As the wizard shows up, Tolkien's goblins react to the fire's scattering sparks as follows:

> The yells and yammering, croaking, jibbering, and jabbering; howls, growls and curses; shrieking and skriking, that followed were beyond description.[82]

Tolkien's portrayal in *The Hobbit* also shares similarities with the goblins in the aforementioned George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, written over sixty years earlier. Both sets of goblins are creatures dwelling in subterranean caverns, avoiding light and detection by surface inhabitants. Unlike the goblins in Rossetti's and Tolkien's works, however, MacDonald's monsters do not sing. Instead, Curdie's song and his fellow miner's frequent reminders to remember his rhymes stand out. Curdie sings when she meets Irene and Lootie for the first time after dusk:

> Ring! dod! bang!
> Go the hammers' clang!
> Hit and turn and bore!
> Whizz and puff and roar!

[81] Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market* (Representative Poetry Online, Department of English, 2002), 332-336.
[82] J.R.R Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (London: Harper Collins, 2014), 76.

Thus we rive the rocks,
Force the goblin locks.—
See the shining ore!
One, two, three—
Bright as gold can be!
Four, five, six—
Shovels, mattocks, picks!
Seven, eight, nine—
Light your lamp at mine.
Ten, eleven, twelve—
Loosely hold the helve.
We're the merry miner-boys,
Make the goblins hold their noise.[83]

The sound of the music is so displeasing to the goblins that the goblin prince threatens violence in response to Curdie's singing. Curdie's song closely resembles the verses found in both Rossetti's and Tolkien's works, yet it serves as a tool of the hero rather than the antagonist.[84]

Tolkien's *The Hobbit* also exhibits notable similarities to Charles Dickens' "The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton," found in chapter twenty-nine of *The Pickwick Papers*. In Dickens' tale, the sexton, Gabriel Grub, despises Christmas and children. On Christmas Eve, as he digs a grave for the next funeral at the church, he encounters the goblin king and is abducted by goblins. They take him to a cave, where he is shown visions of family love, goodwill, and charity while also suffering physical abuse. This story is often seen as the prototype for *A Christmas Carol*, with Gabriel Grub serving as the precursor to Ebenezer Scrooge, undergoing a supernatural experience that transforms him. Dickens' goblins are described as having "long, fantastic legs" and "sinewy arms," they "leer maliciously" and "laugh

[83] George Macdonald, *The Princess and The Goblin* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1920) 35-36.
[84] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity. 90-91.

shrilly." They appear as a troop, much like the Goblins in *The Hobbit* who jump out all at once. Both sets of goblins are physically abusive; Dickens' goblins beat and kick Gabriel, while Tolkien's goblins are similarly violent. Both groups of goblins share an evil-sounding "Ho, ho!" laugh. Eventually, the goblin king seizes Gabriel, and they sink underground. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo dreams of the cave floor giving way beneath him, Gandalf, and the Dwarves, only to awaken and find it happening in reality as Goblins lead them down to Goblin-town.

This is the scene in which Gabriel discovers that he is in a cave:

> Gabriel Grub…found himself in what appeared to be a large cavern, surrounded on all sides by crowds of goblins, ugly and grim; in the centre of the room, on an elevated seat, was stationed his friend of the churchyard [the goblin king].[85]

This instead is the scene in which the Hobbit and the Dwarves arrive at Goblin-town:

> …the dwarves… stumbled into a big cavern. It was lit by a great red fire in the middle, and by torches along the walls, and it was full of goblins. They all laughed and stamped and clapped their hands… There in the shadows on a large flat stone sat a tremendous goblin with a huge head, and armed goblins were standing round him…[86]

The aesthetic, tone and even diction between the two stories show striking similarities.

[85] Charles Dickens, "Chapter 29" in *The Pickwick Papers* (The Literature Network. https://www.online-literature.com/dickens/pickwick/29/, 1836).
[86] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 72.

Chapter II

2.1 Evil and Monstrosity: Fall, Mortality, and the Machine

This chapter will offer an in-depth investigation of the theme of monstrosity concerning Tolkien's main works, with special attention to the primary monstrous incarnations that inhabit Arda. But first, two essential concepts intricately woven throughout Tolkien's legendarium also related to monstrosity require to be defined.

Considering Tolkien's Christian background, many scholars have highlighted that Tolkien was heavily inspired by Saint Augustine of Hippo in his depiction of evil and, by extension, monstrosity. As noted by Perry Neil Harrison,[87] Augustine wrote that "evil is only a privation of a good, even to the point of nonentity;"[88] therefore, evil is not the result of a force, but merely the absence of good where good could possibly have existed. According to the Augustinian doctrine, there is no such thing as a "natural evil" and no external entity that opposes God and generates it; essentially, regarding the theme of evil, Saint Augustine rejected the Manichean perspective. To further refute Manichaeism, Augustine underlined that God did not create the world from an already-existing substance. Instead, God created the world *ex nihilo*, from nothing, and evil results from humanity's propensity to twist its innate goodness. According to Tom Shippey,[89] Tolkien employed two different religious viewpoints to convey his perspective on the notion of evil. The first one, the Augustine-inspired, aims to identify evil as *privato boni*, the absence of good. To support his argument, Shippey

[87] Perry Neil Harrison, "Tolkien, Augustinian Theodicy, and 'Lovecraftian' Evil," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 42: No. 2 (2024): 7.
[88] Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. (Image Books, 1960), 3.7.12, 85.
[89] Harrison, "Tolkien, Augustinian Theodicy," 8-9.

referred to Tolkien's orthodox Catholicism—which shared Saint Augustine's assertion that evil is not an independent power opposed to the Christian God but rather one of the "dreadful twistings and distortions of the good creation."[90] Shippey, however, additionally relied on a Manichean interpretation, pointing out that Tolkien created a confrontation between the powers of Good and Evil, equal and opposite by providing the Ring with complete autonomous power; there is "no real difference" between these "supposedly opposing powers," Shippey argues, but it is also "a matter of chance which side one happens to choose."[91] Although Tolkien displayed an implicit preference for an Augustinian perspective of evil, Shippey maintained that the author did not always follow this path and occasionally permitted his evil to take on a dualistic, Manichaean form. Ralph Wood, nevertheless, refuted this aspect of Shippey's observation, claiming that:

> Tolkien is a radical anti-dualist whose Augustinian understanding of evil reveals it to be far more terrifying and dangerous than anything Manichaeism can imagine. Precisely because it has no proper basis, no true and logical existence, no explicable source, evil is horribly irrational—hence the Christian refusal to accord evil proper existence and even, in the strict sense, to "believe" in it.[92]

In contrast, Wood indicated that most of the creatures that Tolkien associated with evil seem to be more in line with Saint Augustine's definition of evil as "twisted good." In fact, monsters such as Gollum, Orcs, Trolls, and Melkor all easily fit within this perspective; still, Ungoliant's personality seems to complicate things, particularly given her vague origins;[93] this will be clarified in her dedicated subchapter. This examination of Tolkien's alignment to Augustinian and/or Manichean conceptions of evil opens the way for a deeper examination of other underlying themes of his

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[90] Ralph Wood, "Tolkien's Augustinian Understanding of Good and Evil: Why The Lord of the Rings is not Manichean." *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature, and Theology*, edited by Trevor Hart and Ivan Khovacs, (Baylor University Press, 2007): 86.
[91] Ibid., 87.
[92] Ibid., 87.
[93] Harrison, "Tolkien, Augustinian Theodicy," 7-10.

legendarium. To fully comprehend the nature of evil and monstrosity in Tolkien's legendarium, it is essential to also consider his views on the concepts of "Fall, Mortality, and the Machine;" acknowledging the fundamental moral and philosophical issues that Tolkien addressed, as well as the nature and sources of evil and corruption in Arda, in which the notion of monstrosity is deeply ingrained, requires an understanding of the meanings behind these three concepts. Each of these interconnected terms serves as a lens for analyzing the corruption and distortion of natural laws that affect Arda. In the aforementioned 1951 letter to Milton Waldman, in which he stated his general intentions for the legendarium, Tolkien also identified "Fall, Mortality, and the Machine" as the three main aspects of his mythology:

> Anyway, all this stuff is mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine. With Fall inevitably, and that motive occurs in several modes. With Mortality, especially as it affects art and the creative (or as I should say, sub-creative) desire which seems to have no biological function, and to be apart from the satisfactions of plain ordinary biological life, with which, in our world, it is indeed usually at strife. This desire is at once wedded to a passionate love of the real primary world, and hence filled with the sense of mortality, and yet unsatisfied by it. It has various opportunities of 'Fall'. It may become possessive, clinging to the things made as 'its own', the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. He will rebel against the laws of the Creator – especially against mortality. Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective, – and so to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents — or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognised.[94]

[94] Tolkien, *Letters*, 204-205.

From his earliest cosmological narratives to his most recent ones, Tolkien consistently promoted the notions of "Fall, Mortality, and the Machine" as the cornerstone of his legendarium. These themes further elucidate Tolkien's intricate world-building and his philosophical and theological perspectives.

As John R. Holmes pointed out,[95] the word "Fall" obviously carries Christian connotations, specifically Augustinian, although Tolkien had different kinds of fallenness in mind. There is both universal and personal evidence of Fall in all of Tolkien's works and characters. Nevertheless, many mythological systems share the loss of a primordial connection to a creator, and Tolkien's Middle Earth is undoubtedly one of them. Melkor is the epitome of this fall; once the mightiest Ainur, his disobedience against Eru Ilúvatar renders him the first Dark Lord, initiating chaos and evil across Arda. Melkor's downfall from a being of enormous potential to the utmost villain sets the stage for the subsequent horrors in Arda and is vital for the emergence of monstrosity. Melkor's greatest lieutenant, Sauron, experiences a comparable fall; he mirrors his master's path through his lust for power and subsequent descent into evil. The crafting of the One Ring to subjugate others perfectly embodies Sauron's fall and the growing magnitude of his tyrannical allure. Both Mortals and Elves suffer from falls that result in monstrosity; Fëanor's rebellion and Númenor's downfall serve as instances of how arrogance and hostility to the divine can have disastrous and terrible outcomes. These falls highlight a recurring theme: how transgression turns good into evil. Conversely, despite being presented as a nobleman who fervently believes in the majesty of his realm, Boromir betrays the Fellowship and assaults Frodo in an attempt to acquire the Ring. The most remarkable instance probably involves Sméagol who falls into such a miserable condition that Frodo and Sam fail to identify him as a Hobbit.

[95] Tolkien, *Companion*, 142-143.

Though it is prevalent in Tolkien's work, the association between "Fall" and "Mortality" is primarily recognised in Christianity. As Tolkien wrote to Waldman, learning about death encourages short-lived characters like Hobbits and Men to "become possessive, clinging to the things made as [their] own" and drives them "to a passionate love of the real primary world."[96] Tolkien's depiction of monstrosity heavily emphasises mortality and Men's attitude towards it; Men are limited in their lifespan, in contrast to the immortal Elves. Therefore, as the Nazgûl demonstrate, in Arda, the fear of death and the subsequent desire for immortality typically lead to horrific consequences: the Ringwraiths, who were once pride kings of men, succumbed to the Rings of Power's allure and became Sauron's undead servants, personifying the horrible fate that affects those who attempt to escape mortality unnaturally.

Due to its refusal to accept death, the mortal creature develops a thirst for power, which gives rise to the third term, "The Machine." According to Tolkien, machines are morally neutral; an immoral desire to make "the will more quickly effective"[97] could render a machine potentially evil. In Tolkien's legendarium, the notion of the Machine reflects the inappropriate use of technology and the subjugation of nature and free will, which frequently results in monstrosity. This theme emphasizes and alludes to Tolkien's opposition to industrialization and mechanization, which he saw as destructive forces. Concerning Tolkien's own experience, he openly revealed his antipathy towards industrialization:

> The country in which I lived in childhood was being shabbily destroyed before I was ten, in days when motor-cars were rare objects (I had never seen one) and men were still building suburban railways. Recently I saw in a paper a picture of the last

[96] Ibid., 204-205.
[97] Ibid., 205.

> decrepitude of the once thriving corn-mill [Sarehole Mill] beside its pool that long ago seemed to me so important.[98]

On the other hand, the alteration of the natural world into something horrific and unnatural is symbolised by Saruman's transformation of Isengard into an industrial fortress in *The Lord of the Rings*; Saruman himself undergoes a moral as well as physical alteration, turning into an immoral version of the great wizard he once was. In Tolkien's legendarium, Orcs are the perfect personification of "The Machine;" created by Melkor through the corruption of Men or Elves, they were later continuously exploited both by Saruman and Sauron. These creatures are raised for warfare and employed as weapons of mass destruction, leading us to Tolkien's opinion regarding the theme of dehumanisation and the loss of free will. Another essential aspect of Tolkien's legendarium that reinforces the concept of "The Machine" is magic, a notion that both some of Tolkien's characters and readers commonly misunderstand. In a draft letter to Naomi Mitchison,[99] Tolkien clarifies this ambiguity by juxtaposing two Latinized Greek terms: *goeteia*, which means deceiving the subject into thinking that a physical change had occurred, and *magia*, which refers to the ability to cause a physical change in the real world. While *goeteia* is generally considered "bad" and *magia* "good," Tolkien noted that both are employed in both good and bad ways in his legendarium; therefore, the ethical value of magic must be determined by the motivation behind it.

As previously stated, while Tolkien did not explicitly provide his definition of monstrosity, in *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, he implicitly referred to creatures with an aberrant size or form antithetical to Beowulf and the epic poem's main characters. These beings, who represent moral conflict as well as physical antagonism in the narrative, are the main subjects

[98] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Foreword to the Second Edition" in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (George Allen & Unwin, 1966), 11-12.
[99] Tolkien, *Letters*, 295-296.

of Tolkien's lecture and, by extension, of his legendarium. Jonathan Evans[100] distinguished between two categories of monsters in Tolkien's legendarium: the first is composed of humanoid but distorted creatures like Trolls, Orcs, and Balrogs; the second features instead creatures similar to those found in the natural world, such as the dreadful Werewolves and Wargs, spiderlike creatures like Ungoliant and Shelob, and hybrid monsters like the Watcher in the Water. These two broad classifications, nonetheless, are insufficient to adequately convey the complexity, depth, and variety of the notion of monstrosity found in Tolkien's legendarium. In Middle-earth, monstrosity is not limited to physical abnormality; rather, it encompasses a range of attributes and allegorical implications. Indeed, a more accurate representation of Tolkien's views on monsters can be found in the following passage from *Beowulf: The Monsters and Critics*:

> The distinction between a devilish ogre, and a devil revealing himself in ogre-form—between a monster, devouring the body and bringing temporal death, that is inhabited by a cursed spirit, and a spirit of evil aiming ultimately at the soul and bringing eternal death (even though he takes a form of visible horror that may bring and suffer physical pain)—is a real and important one.[101]

This statement, which is more broadly directed at the concept of the monster than at the monsters in *Beowulf*, helps us to realise that there are different ways to interpret Tolkien's monstrosity: either as actual physical beings that inflict physical harm and "temporal death," or as manifestations of evil spirits aiming to corrupt the soul and bring eternal damnation. However, this is merely a brief introduction; this ramification will be further expanded in the following subchapters, where each monster will be thoroughly examined, considering sources of inspiration, metaphorical meanings, and their impact on Tolkien's narrative.

[100] Jonathan Evans, "Monsters" in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. Ed. Michael D. C. Drout (Routledge, 2006): 433–434.
[101] Tolkien, *B: M&C*, 35-36.

2.2 A Critical Insight on Tolkien's Monsters

2.2.1 Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman

This first subchapter directly connects to the previously quoted passage. My investigation regarding Tolkien's monsters begins by focusing on three specific characters: Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman, who, despite lacking traditional monstrous traits and presenting more humanlike qualities, epitomize Tolkien's notion of monstrosity. These characters, exemplifying Tolkien's concept of the "Fall," embody a particular type of evil and monstrosity rooted in their spirits and actions, which will be revealed as crucial to the emergence of the majority of monsters across the different ages of Arda.

Melkor is the first and primary catalyst for evil and monstrosity in Tolkien's legendarium, thus he is the first figure examined. From the time before Arda was created until the Third Age, Tolkien's fictional world was so heavily influenced by Melkor's malevolent influence that it was able to corrupt—with the assistance of his lieutenants—thousands of other entities inhabiting the legendarium.

According to Foster,[102] having been bestowed with more power and knowledge by Eru Ilúvatar than all his kindred, Melkor was the greatest of the Ainur. Though wise in all things, Melkor has a particular aptitude for craft knowledge. Melkor, frustrated with Ilúvatar's gradual designs, aspired to bring things into being himself. Consequently, he explored the Void searching for the Flame Imperishable, Ilúvatar's creating spirit adopted by him to craft the Ainur and Eä. During his lonely travels, he began to think differently from his kindred, leading to the discord of the Ainulindalë, from which Eä, the material Universe, originated. Therefore, Melkor started

[102] Robert Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth: The Definitive Guide to the World of J.R.R. Tolkien* (HarperCollins, 1993), 252-254.

incorporating his own discordant elements into the music, clashing with Ilúvatar's original Theme and leading some other Ainur to attune their music to his.[103] In response to Melkor's attempts to dominate, Eru introduced new Themes, each more beautiful and powerful than the previous ones; the Third Theme in particular was so pure that no one could overpower it, not even Melkor. Finally, with a strong chord, Eru stopped the music and admonished Melkor, explaining that all music, including Melkor's discord, originated in him and thus no one could really rebel against it. Though humiliated and furious, Melkor concealed his emotions and later expressed his desire to enter Arda pretending to guide it in Ilúvatar's honour. Nevertheless, his true ambition was to dominate and subjugate all Arda's inhabitants, especially the Children of Ilúvatar. In his struggles to reach ultimate domination, his ambition shifted from Light to Darkness; Melkor gained notoriety as a colossal, terrifying, dark entity who corrupted even many of the Maiar, the lesser Ainur, into subservience.[104] His creative faculties focused on deceit, distortion, imitation, and chaos. Melkor covertly erected Utumno, his personal fortress in the far North not long after the Valar created the two Lamps, which were employed in the First Age for lighting the Arda. He avoided the Valar's attack by destroying the Lamps, but they were made aware of him by the blight that spread over Arda. Subsequently, by forging weapons, breeding monsters (such as Dragons, Trolls, Orcs, Werewolves, and Vampires), and expanding his dominion, Melkor constructed another stronghold, Angband, as his primary defence against the Valar. Moreover, Melkor encrusted the Silmarils in his Iron Crown, three jewels that shone with the light of the Two Trees[105] and were regarded as "the greatest works of craft ever produced by the Children of

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[103] J.R.R Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), 4-5.
[104] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 23.
[105] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 68-69.

Ilúvatar;"[106] this served as a symbol of his authority across Middle-earth. Grond, his mace, was his main weapon in combat; clad in black, he styled himself the King of the World. Melkor was most widely known in Middle-earth as Morgoth, the Dark Lord, or the Master of Lies.[107] *The Silmarillion* recounts several wars fought between Melkor and the forces of good; these wars included the numerous conflicts in the First Age, primarily concerning the Valar's continuous attempts to capture Melkor, but also the War of the Jewels. These battles culminated in the War of Wrath, in which Melkor was ultimately vanquished by the Valar and expelled from Eä into the Void with the aid of Men and Elves. Yet the shadow of his malice and his lies remained in the hearts of Elves and Men even in the later ages of Arda.

Tolkien's characterization of Melkor is more complex than just a basic villain; his fall from grace is driven by pride and an ambition for independence, which is comparable to the Christian Satan. Their respective names bear a striking resemblance: Tolkien intended the term *Morgoth* to mean "dark enemy,"[108] while the Hebrew term *satan* is a generic noun that means "adversary."[109] Apart from this etymological similarity, Tolkien directly associated his character with Satan during an interview, calling Morgoth "the Devil:"

> There are in existence a very large collection of legends about the world of the past, particularly after the exiled Elves came back and conducted their war against the Devil in the north-western part of this world we live in.[110]

The mediaeval literary tradition of employing hideous characters to symbolise vice and transgression was maintained throughout the Restoration era. Conversely, authors like John Milton altered these figures, imbuing them

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[106] Ibid., 356.
[107] Ibid., 254.
[108] Ibid., 270.
[109] Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16.
[110] Stuart D. Lee, "Tolkien in Oxford (BBC, 1968): A Reconstruction," *Tolkien Studies*, Volume 15, 2018, pp. 115-176, (West Virginia University Press. 2018): 154.

with complexity and tragic dimensions. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan, conventionally represented in Christian theology as the most irredeemable figure appears as an epic hero presented by the author as a fallen warrior resisting a tyrannical ruler. Milton offers a poetic narrative of the celestial war in Heaven, Satan's banishment, and his journey to Eden, where he allures Eve into disobedience. Remarkably, Milton's descriptions of Satan's fall and expulsion from Heaven bear striking parallels to Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, specifically concerning Melkor's fall and exile. This analogy invites consideration of Milton's potential influence on Tolkien's legendarium. As Tom Shippey observes *"The Silmarillion*, with its exile from paradise, its ages of misery, and its Intercessor, is a calque on Christian story, an answer to *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*."[111] Concerning Melkor's fall, as noted by Zach Watkins,[112] once Ainulindalë concluded, Ilúvatar notified Melkor that his symphonic rebellion was futile, for "no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me [Ilúvatar], nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempted this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined."[113] According to Ilúvatar, Melkor was limited to fulfil exclusively his portion of the plan, no matter how much he tried to distort Arda's designs; whatever evil was caused by Melkor would be eventually converted to a greater good. This exchange is reminiscent of an implied discussion in *Paradise Lost*, Book I; Satan addresses Beëlzebub after his fall to Hell and says:

> If then [God's] Providence
> Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
> Our labor must be to pervert that end,

[111] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 176.
[112] Zach Watkins, "Satan and The Silmarillion," *The Grey Book*, Volume 1 (2005), 2-3.
[113] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 5-6.

And out of good still to find means of evil.[114]

It seems that Satan is aware of God's plan to turn Satan's evil into the ultimate good, yet he is determined to ruin it by spreading greater evil into the world. Melkor may have similarly responded to Ilúvatar since Melkor and Satan clearly despised Eru's/God's plans and had a propensity towards evil and to alter things that already exists. Due to their rebellious deeds and disdain for their creators, Melkor and Satan both fall. Though their falls are physically different—Satan was banned from Heaven and fell into Hell for nine days, while Melkor chose to live in Arda and was progressively excluded from Valinor—if "fall" was to be read metaphorically, then they would display striking similarities. The fall of Melkor is described in depth in a particular section of the "Valaquenta:"

> From splendour 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. 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.[115]

Whether interpreted literally or figuratively, the account of Melkor's fall is remarkably reminiscent of Milton's epic portrayal of Satan. In fact, Lewis's comment that "in the midst of a world of light and love, of song and feast and dance, [Satan] could find nothing to think of more interesting than his own prestige"[116] presents some similarities with the first sentence of the passage above.

Conversely, as Pelc pointed out,[117] the primary villain of *The Lord of the Rings* is Sauron, who was also limitedly featured in *The Silmarillion*. In the

[114] John Milton, "Paradise Lost." *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. 1st ed. Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1978), 1.162-5.
[115] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 23.
[116] C.S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford UP, 1970), 96.
[117] Tomáš Pelc, Power, Deception, Destruction of Environment, and Rebellion against God as Evil in the Works of J. R. R. Tolkien (BA thesis, Masaryk University, 2020), 26-28.

First Age, he was one of the Maiar of the Valar Aulë; however, Melkor eventually corrupted him making him "only less evil than his master in that for long he served another and not himself."[118] Despite being Melkor's chief lieutenant and in charge of his army, Sauron gained notoriety as the second Dark Lord only after Melkor was defeated. Subsequently to this event, while recreating an Orcs' army, Sauron shapeshifted into a fair-skinned individual; under the guise of Annatar, he infiltrated and seduced many groups of Elven smiths engaged in the creation of magical rings, assisting them to eventually ensnare the Free Peoples. Eventually, the Rings of Power were forged thanks to Annatar's primary employ of the crafting abilities he had acquired during his former service to Aulë, who was nicknamed "The Smith;"[119] although these Rings were adopted by the Elves to enhance their powers, they were not aware that Annatar in secrecy created the One Ring, one of the most powerful and dangerous artefacts ever existed in Middle-earth. Thanks to the One Ring, which held a great amount of his essence and power, Sauron was able to dominate the minds of those who carried the other Rings.

The appearance of the One Ring marked the beginning of the war fought between Sauron against Elves and Men. However, at the end of the Second Age, Sauron was captured by the Númenórean forces, becoming Ar-Pharazôn's slave. In Númenor, Sauron employed his deceiving and corrupting skills to influence Ar-Pharazôn's mind, becoming his first advisor. Ar-Pharazôn, under Sauron's influence, decided to attack Valinor, causing in return the destruction of Númenor. After escaping the devastation of the city, Sauron went back to Mordor and declared war on the Free Peoples of Middle-Earth, but Isildur, the king of Gondor, vanquished him. However, since Sauron's essence was tied to the One Ring, even though he lost it, he managed to survive.

[118] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 24.
[119] Ibid., 381.

During the events narrated in *The Hobbit*, Sauron dwelled in the Dol Guldur fortress hiding his identity under the guise of the Necromancer. In one of the last sections of the book, Saruman and the White Council, a group of Middle-earth Elves and Wizards investigating the evil spread by the Necromancer, drove him out of this stronghold, forcing him to retreat to Mordor. There, Sauron openly proclaimed himself, restored the fortress of Barad-dur, and prepared to unleash his great armies of Orcs, Ringwraiths, Trolls, Haradrim, Easterlings, and fouler monsters upon Gondor and the other realms of the North. Even without the Ring, its mere presence in Arda gave Sauron the power to dominate. During the Third Age, he most manifested as the menacing, ghostly and incessantly ever-searching Red Eye, leading his forces at a distance.[120] At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron was eventually defeated thanks to Frodo who threw the One Ring into Mount Doom.[121] In a letter, Tolkien stated:

> In my story I do not deal in Absolute Evil. I do not think there is such a thing, since that is Zero. I do not think that at any rate any 'rational being' is wholly evil. Satan fell. In my myth Morgoth fell before Creation of the physical world. In my story Sauron represents as near an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible. He had gone the way of all tyrants: beginning well, at least on the level that while desiring to order all things according to his own wisdom he still at first considered the (economic) well-being of other inhabitants of the Earth.[122]

More than any other character in the legendarium, Sauron experiences a peculiar metamorphosis. According to Abbot,[123] he first appeared in the legendarium as a monster of a lesser calibre than Morgoth, the first Dark Lord and the main foe of the First Age. Then, after Melkor's downfall, he ascended to become, in a way, the only ruling Dark Lord in Middle-earth.

[120] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 342-346.
[121] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 949.
[122] Tolkien, *Letters*, 350.
[123] Joe Abbott, "Tolkien's Monsters: Concept and Function in The Lord of the Rings (Part III): Sauron," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 16: No. 3, Article 8. (1990): 51.

Therefore, Morgoth in *The Silmarillion* is conceptually identical to Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*. Sauron's Mordor corresponds to Melkor's Angband; the fortress-tower of Barad-dur plays the same role as Morgoth's Thangorodrim. Ultimately, both Melkor and Sauron possess a chief. lieutenant of Maia origin. As Abbot noted,[124] Sauron was able to shapeshift and appear in a variety of forms to achieve his goals. Nonetheless, assuming any one of these forms—a Werewolf, Vampire, or even "that of a man of more than human stature" in which he "could appear as a commanding figure of great strength and body"[125]—would seriously weaken him at pivotal moments, in which everything depended on his survival. Moreover, Sauron's greatest attributes were undoubtedly cunning and deceit. When he infiltrated among the Elven smiths in *The Silmarillion*, he decided to shapeshift, change his name and present himself as "the Lord of Gifts"[126] while assisting them with their crafts. There is a noteworthy aspect about his modus operandi in this specific sequence: the Rings of Power were in fact not made by Sauron, but only under his guidance, and therefore they are not a corruption of something else, like all Melkor's creations. However, the linking point between the two Dark Lords is their wicked purposes. The Rings of Power of the Free Peoples indeed served to increase their powers, but eventually, they "also were subject to the One."[127] This corruptive aspect is further evident and more successful with the Nine Rings Sauron distributed among Men. These Men achieved great power, and prestige through their Rings, but they progressively were more and more corrupted by them. Therefore, because every Ring of Power was subject to the One Ring, these Men's lives and powers became tied to Sauron's,

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[124] Abbott, "Tolkien's Monsters," 56.
[125] Tolkien, *Letters*, 467.
[126] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 343.
[127] Ibid., 345.

becoming his main servants, the Ringwraiths. This act of corruption displays a similarity with Melkor capturing Elves and transforming them into Orcs.

The most effective way to clarify Sauron's deceptive abilities is to examine how The One Ring functions, since "much of the strength and will of Sauron passed into that One Ring."[128] The most evident quality of The Ring is its ability to make its bearer invisible, like how Sauron and other Ainur were able to walk the lands unseen. But as *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* repeatedly demonstrate, The Ring's major trait is represented by its ability to influence people's minds. In *The Hobbit*, Gollum, who had been carrying The Ring for several centuries, is the first person to reveal this power. It is stated that Gollum used The Ring either to hunt Orcs for food or "when he could not bear to be parted from it any longer."[129] This points to a potentially addictive quality of The Ring. Moreover, the reader witnesses another aspect of the artefact once Frodo offered the One Ring to the Elven Queen Galadriel, whose "heart has greatly desired to ask what [Frodo] offer[ed]."[130] Although Galadriel declined this offer, she acknowledged that she desired The Ring, indicating a significant allure contained in the artefact.

The most obvious explanation for the power of this artefact is that it is possible that Sauron's supernatural abilities were shared by the Ring, allowing him to control other people's minds. However, as Pelc noted, "even Sauron's power was not strictly magical, his power to persuade others was described merely as a very crafty speech, thus the Ring's power must be the same."[131] despite not being able to speak, The Ring can influence others via suggestion, therefore mirroring the power of his creator: The Ring allures its bearers, making them believe it will enable them to accomplish their aspirations and desires. This is implied to be the cause of Frodo's eventual

[128] Ibid., 344.
[129] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 95.
[130] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 365.
[131] Pelc, *Power*, 28.

refusal to destroy the Ring at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*[132]: Frodo's motivation for the entire journey came from the Ring's promise to give him the ability to save the Shire.[133] Therefore, with the great power the Ring bestows upon its bearer, even the noblest of intentions could have disastrous consequences for the entire universe. In conclusion, although Sauron shares almost every quality with Melkor, deception and trickery seem to be displayed more effectively by him. Additionally, this concise examination of the Ring provides an understanding of Tolkien's perspective on power, implying that Tolkien believed that even the most morally upright persons may be corrupted by it.[134]

The last character discussed in this subchapter is Saruman the White. As Foster pointed out,[135] Saruman was the greatest of the five Istari, a group of Maiar known as Wizards who were sent by the Valar to Middle-earth to assist the Free Peoples during their conflicts against Sauron. Saruman the White was the oldest Istari, followed by Gandalf the Grey; each of the Istar had a distinct colour and rank within the Order. In the Third Age, Saruman was granted lordship over Isengard, a strategically located fortress erected by the Númenóreans but eventually taken over by Gondor. By living in Isengard, he was meant to be faithful to the realm of Gondor and fight against Sauron, the second Dark Lord. Nonetheless, aspiring to obtain Sauron's power, Saruman claimed the fortress as "his own and began to fortify it, replacing its grass and trees with stone and machinery."[136] In Isengard, he gathered Dunlendings and Orcs, who started to threaten Rohan and the Fangorn forest as his minions.

Although Saruman was initially one of Sauron's opposers, he serves as an example of how an antagonist, in this case Sauron, may turn a good

[132] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 945.
[133] Tolkien, *Letters*, 347.
[134] Pelc, *Power*, 26-28.
[135] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 341-342.
[136] Ibid., 213.

character into a villain. Saruman originally intended to employ the One Ring for himself because he thought it would help him to defeat the Dark Lord. Nonetheless, he eventually allied with him, sharing his pride, lust for power, and corruption. Saruman shares almost all of the traits that are associated with Sauron, including cunning, cleverness, deception, the art of corruption, distorted sub-creation, and greed. Saruman's primary trait as a monster and villain is exemplified by the way he abuses nature, illustrating his total depravity in antithesis to the harmony displayed in Tolkien's natural world. During the Third Age, Saruman's fortress, Isengard, which was formerly an idyllic location, was turned into a major industrial centre; Saruman's mining and metalworks enterprises affected and polluted the land and the nearby rivers. In order to breed the Uruk-hai and fuel his forges meant to build his war machines, Saruman additionally ordered massive deforestation in the forest of Fangorn; this further showcases his ethical corruption and lust for power. The Last March of the Ents, a rebellion led by Treebeard and groups of tree shepherds known as the Ents, was triggered by these wicked deeds; a striking contrast between Saruman's devastating industrialism and the Ents, who personify the ancient and sentient aspects of nature, is highlighted by this event. Admonishing the White Wizard, Treebeard states:

> 'There was a time when he was always walking about my woods…his face, as I remember it…became like windows in a stone wall: windows with shutters inside. I think that I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far that they serve him for the moment. Now it is clear he is a black traitor.'"[137]

As Sophie Butler[138] argued, this indicates that Saruman also had a bond with the Ents and the natural world; industrialism and militarism only

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[137] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 473.
[138] Sophie Butler, "Environmentalism in J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings", *English: Individual Authors: J.R.R. Tolkien*. (2022), 8-9.

corrupted him after his mind became totally controlled by pride and power; he turned into an agent of evil, exploiting trees much like Orcs only to promote his own interests and advance his self-progression. Since Isengard and Saruman's demise symbolize the inevitable advancement of time and the results of negligent stewardship, Saruman's narrative serves as an alert for Tolkien's readership. Saruman's dreadful deeds allow the audience to immediately identify Tolkien's depiction of industrialization—particularly in terms of deforestation—as a mirror of what our own society has turned into. Therefore, Saruman epitomizes how corrosive the search for eternal progress can be, "turning a wizard and previous protector of the forest into the nearest clearest threat to nature."[139]

A trait displayed by Saruman is that he "rejects the old wisdom in favour of his own."[140] The term "transgression" serves as a crucial link between the three characters discussed in this first subchapter and underscores their monstrosity. The primordial source of evil in the legendarium is Melkor; his transgression is represented by his rebellion against Ilúvatar and his will to dominate the creative process and modify it to suit his own desires. His rebellion represents a significant act of violation of both Ilúvatar's ultimate harmony and the natural order. The unchecked desire for power and independence is exemplified by Melkor's destructive inclinations and ravenous lust for dominance. In addition to causing pain and suffering, his deeds contaminated the world and should serve as a cautionary tale about the consequences of excessive pride and subjugation. A similar path of transgression is undertaken by Sauron, Melkor's chief lieutenant. He is first drawn to Melkor's vision of dominance-based order, though he was initially a Maia of Aulë. Enslaving the free peoples of Middle-earth is the ultimate goal of Sauron, creating and employing the One Ring to subjugate all the

[139] Ibid., 9.
[140] R. M. Bardowell, "J. R. R. Tolkien's creative ethic and its Finnish analogues," *Journal of the fantastic in the arts*, 20(1(75)), 91-108, (2009): 104.

other Rings of Power. Trickery and deception, elements adopted to strengthen his own power, emphasise Sauron's monstrosity. The dangers of a corroding desire for supremacy are reflected in Sauron's deceitful strategies and tireless ambition for dominance. Saruman's transgression arises from his arrogance and rejection of his original purpose: since the Istari "were forbidden to dominate the peoples of Middle-earth or to match Sauron's power with power,"[141] Saruman's fall commenced when he attempted to compete with Sauron by becoming the One Ring's master. His ambition drives him to forsake his initial goal of assisting Middle-earth, demonstrating how the abuse of power induces moral degradation. He surpassed every title within the Order of Wizards because "his pride grew even more rapidly than his power";[142] in fact, he even went by the name of Saruman the Many-Coloured during the events narrated in *The Lord of the Rings*. As Cohen stated:

> the monster of prohibition polices the borders of the possible […] Every monster is in this way a double narrative, two living stories: one that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing what cultural use the monster serves. The monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot—must not— be crossed.[143]

In conclusion, these characters serve as cautionary tales, emphasizing the dangers associated with transgressing natural order and morality, as well as warning against the destructive power intrinsic to the craving for dominance and supremacy. Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman are not monstrous exclusively because of their dreadful deeds, but especially for the moral and spiritual corruption that drives them.

[141] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 215.
[142] Ibid., 342.
[143] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 13.

2.2.3 Ungoliant and Shelob

This section will address the role of Spiders in Tolkien's legendarium, with particular emphasis on two figures: Shelob and Ungoliant. Middle-earth Spiders are eight-legged creatures that closely resemble real-life arachnids, albeit many of them grow to enormous sizes; Tolkien included these creatures in each main work of his legendarium. The term for "spider" in Sindarin, one of the made-up Elvish languages created by Tolkien for his writings, is *Ungol*;[144] several names, including Cirith Ungol, Ungoliant, and Torech Ungol, possess this root. While Brian Attebery[145] pointed out that Tolkien developed most of his monsters to be radically opposed to other creatures or characters—for instance, the Orcs are the corrupted version of the Elves—his Spiders do not possess any counterpart among the inhabitants of Middle-earth; as opposed to freedom and light, they are instead always linked to darkness.

Several scholars have suggested that Tolkien's childhood experience of being bitten by a tarantula in South Africa served as the inspiration for the frightening and monstrous gigantic Spiders found in *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. However, as he made clear in his correspondence, Tolkien found no reason to accept this interpretation.[146] He stated explicitly that the reason he included Spiders in *The Hobbit* was to scare his son Michael, who was afraid of them. In an interview, Tolkien declared:

> I put in the spiders largely because this was, you remember, primarily written for my children (at least I had them in mind), and one of my sons [Michael] in particular

[144] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Unfinished index for The Lord of the Rings," in *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*, Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull (William Morrow; First Edition., 2005), 490.
[145] Brian Attebery, "Structuralism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (Ed. Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 81-90.
[146] Tolkien, *Letters*, 316.

> dislikes spiders with a great intensity. I did it to thoroughly frighten him and it did![147]

According to Fawcett,[148] in terms of the portrayal of his primary Spiders, Tolkien's knowledge of mythology suggests that he was most certainly aware of the Greco-Roman mythological ancestress of all spiders, Arachne. According to the Greek myth, Arachne won a weaving competition against Athena, and the goddess, enraged and envious, turned her into a spider. Nonetheless, this depiction of a talented individual contradicts what Tolkien attributed to his Spiders; Tolkien seems to recall more the Renaissance representations of spiders, emphasising the spider's capacity to poison rather than its display of virtue and diligence. In the legendarium, Spiders are presented by Tolkien as embodiments of greed and evil and put sharply in contrast against the archetypal morality and light.

It is possible to trace back one of the earliest instances of spider-shaped monster appearances before the creation of Arda; although the origin of Ungoliant, a spirit that assumed the appearance of a colossal spider, is not clarified in *The Silmarillion*, it seems that this creature has existed since before Middle-earth:

> The Eldar [Elves] knew not whence she came; but some have said that in ages long before she descended from the darkness that lies about Arda, when Melkor first looked down in envy upon the Kingdom of Manwë, and that in the beginning she was one of those that he corrupted to his service.[149]

As Harrison pointed out, there might be several ways to explain Ungoliant's background;[150] she may have been a Maia who was corrupted to serve Melkor, but other plausible theories suggest she may have been generated from darkness. As demonstrated by the phrase "some have said," Tolkien

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[147] From an interview of J.R.R. Tolkien on January 15, 1957, by Ruth Harshaw for the "Carnival of Books" radio show.
[148] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 131.
[149] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 76.
[150] Harrison, "Tolkien, Augustinian Theodicy," 8-11.

chose to deliberately cloud Ungoliant's origins and raise the possibility that she was a creature outside the known realm of cosmology. This choice makes it impossible to categorically interpret Ungoliant as an instance of "twisted good," since the reader is unable to identify the "good" from which Ungoliant has deviated; however, since the inhabitants of Arda have encountered something that they are unable to comprehend, they tried to interpret things in their own ways. One exception in Tolkien's Augustinian conception of evil is revealed by the origin of this monster.[151] Given that Ungoliant might have arisen from the darkness that surrounds Arda, Ungoliant may embody a form of creation *ex nihilo*, a being created, quite literally, from nothingness. The possibility that Ungoliant formed—possibly already ravenous and corrupt—in a way that ignores the audience's and the characters' conceptions of reality is extremely relevant, as it complicates the premise of a Creator who only creates out of "overflowing goodness."

Although Ungoliant complicates Tolkien's Augustinian evil, she shares qualities with the conception of evil offered by another American horror mythopoeic writer, H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft's evil, rather than portraying a displaced good or resulting from humanity's failure to be entirely good, is inherently associated with unknowable entities who existed outside of human comprehension of the spatiotemporal world; these Lovecraftian unknowable beings dwelt beyond human comprehension, and as such, humankind incorrectly labelled them as "evil." For instance, Lovecraft describes Azathoth, the main deity in his mythos, as follows:

> [O]utside the ordered universe [is] that last amorphous blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the center of all infinity—the boundless daemon-sultan Azathoth, whose name no lips dare speak aloud, and who gnaws hungrily in inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond time […].[152]

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[151] Harrison "Tolkien, Augustinian Theodicy," 8-11.

[152] H.P. Lovecraft, "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath." in *The New Annotated H.P. Lovecraft: Beyond Arkham*, edited by Lesley S. Klinger (Liveright, 2019): 331.

Lovecraft's horrors originated from nothingness without reason through an outpouring of chaos. The gap between human understanding and these "evil" entities is one of the key elements of the literary genre of "cosmic horror," a sub-genre of the type of horror fiction that points to unknown forces that not only threaten physically, but also fundamentally disrupt the world's natural order.

Many of the features that define cosmic horror and Lovecraftian evil are shared by Ungoliant. Both the descriptions of Ungoliant's origins and the above description of Azathoth focus on the relationship between each entity and the darkness outside of the accepted cosmological world-space and, consequently, the boundaries of comprehension. In either case, the "mystery" of the being is intrinsically linked to its existence outside of the "known" world; for example, Azathoth's "unlighted chambers beyond time" are innately inaccessible and incomprehensible, and Ungoliant's origins remain unknown even to the Valar due to her residence in the dark. Furthermore, the possibility that Ungoliant originated *ex nihilo* from the darkness shares similarities to the chaotic origins of YogSothoth, another key character in Lovecraft's mythos who emerged from the "Nameless Mist" outside of the cosmos.[153]

Tolkien most likely did not take inspiration directly from Lovecraft's writings. However, he did read at least Lovecraft's short story "The Doom that Came to Sarnath," which was part of the collection *Swords and Sorcery*. A copy of this collection was given to Tolkien by L. Sprague de Camp. However, Tolkien's correspondence fails to mention his opinions on Lovecraft's short story, but Holly Ordway observed that the author "was distinctly unimpressed"[154] with the works in the collection, stating that "all

[153] Harrison "Tolkien, Augustinian Theodicy," 8-11.
[154] Holly Ordway, Tolkien's Modern Reading: Middle-earth Beyond the Middle Ages (Word on Fire Academic, 2021), 330.

the items seem poor in the subsidiary (but to me not unimportant) matters of nomenclature."[155]

According to George Foster,[156] in *The Silmarillion*, Melkor began planning with Ungoliant's aid his revenge against the Valar shortly after he escaped Valinor. It is noteworthy that Tolkien depicted this alliance as another act of corruption carried out by Melkor rather than just a mutual decision. Despite having originated from darkness, her relationship with Melkor increasingly corrupted her nature. As Ungoliant desired and hated light, she agreed to help Melkor poison Laurelin and Telperion, the Two Trees of Valinor that provided the light for the realm of the Valar. Therefore, cloaked in her Unlight, an impenetrable darkness that engulfed and destroyed all light, Ungoliant and Melkor attacked Valinor; Melkor slayed the Two Trees with his black spear while Ungoliant drained the Trees of their sap, poisoned them, and drank the Wells of Varda dry. Even though she finished emptying the trees, her hunger persisted:

> And still she thirsted, and going to the Wells of Varda she drank them dry; but Ungoliant belched forth black vapours as she drank, and swelled to a shape so vast and hideous that Melkor was afraid.[157]

When they reached Middle-earth after this malicious deed, Ungoliant began to suspect that Melkor intended to abandon her to proceed to the Angband ruins alone. Therefore, she forced him to feed her with multiple gemstones of the Noldor; devouring these gems made Ungoliant grow to such a monstrous size that even the Dark Lord was terrified of her. Being the sole creature in Middle-earth to have ever-frightened Melkor, Ungoliant maintains a unique place among Tolkien's monsters. This horrific enlargement drove Melkor to fearfully exclaim that he was no longer in need

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[155] Lyon Sprague de Camp, "Letters." Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature, vol. 13, no. 4, (1987), 41.
[156] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 403-404.
[157] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 80.

of her assistance. Consequently, he was abruptly overpowered by Ungoliant, who entangled the Dark Lord in a web to strangle him; but as Melkor's anguished screams resonated through the mountains, the Balrogs underneath Angband responded by coming forth and quickly came to save their master, forcing Ungoliant to flee. It is certain that Ungoliant eventually found other eight-legged creatures to breed with;[158] nonetheless, it remained unclear what occurred to her in the end:

> Of the fate of Ungoliant no tale tells. Yet some have said that she ended long ago, when in her uttermost famine she devoured herself at last.[159]

Among Ungoliant's offspring, the most notable is the last one, Shelob, who lives in an intricate network of tunnels, haunting Cirith Ungol's pass on the borders of Mordor. Like her progenitor, Shelob has offspring; although smaller in size, they possess a vicious intellect too and spread as far north as Mirkwood and Dol Guldur. Notably, during the events narrated in *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins encounters and faces Shelob's offspring in Mirkwood and it is due to this fight that he names his sword Sting. This is useful to highlight a connection with their mother who in *The Lord of the Rings* is frequently described as "having a sting" and "stinging."[160] Shelob makes her first consistent appearance in *The Two Towers* when Gollum abandons Sam and Frodo in her lair in order to take the One Ring from their garments and bones—items Shelob typically left behind after killing and eating her victims. During this sequence, Shelob succeeded in injecting a lethal venom into Frodo's neck, leaving him in a vegetative state; Sam instead employed the Phial of Galadriel's magic power to blind her and cause her to impale herself on Sting, a tactic that allowed him to defeat her. Shelob is given an accurate physical description after she attacks Sam:

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[158] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 403-404.
[159] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 86.
[160] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 728-729.

> Most like a spider she was, but huger than the great hunting beasts, and more terrible than they because of the evil purpose in her remorseless eyes. Those same eyes that he had thought daunted and defeated, there they were lit with a fell light again, clustering in her out-thrust head. Great horns she had, and behind her short stalk-like neck was her huge swollen body, a vast bloated bag, swaying and sagging between her legs; its great bulk was black, blotched with livid marks, but the belly underneath was pale and luminous and gave forth a stench. Her legs were bent, with great knobbed joints high above her back, and hairs that stuck out like steel spines, and at each leg's end there was a claw.[161]

Like Caliban's story is left unfinished at the end of *The Tempest*, Tolkien chose not to provide an account concerning the ultimate fate of this wounded creature who is forced to flee to her lair after the fight with the brave Hobbit. Middle-earth Spiders are not provided with a distinctive tongue by Tolkien, although they are perfectly able to communicate. Westron (the Common Speech) is employed to portray Shelob's thoughts and the words of Ungoliant and the Mirkwood Spiders; however, there are short instances in which their language is explored. When it comes to verbal skills, the Spiders of Mirkwood are not as equally proficient as their progenitors; Shelob is capable of persuading Gollum, and Ungoliant to negotiate with Melkor.[162]

One of the most common phobias, arachnophobia, or the irrational fear of spiders, affects 2.7% to 6.1% of individuals globally; the majority of people are usually extremely afraid of real-life spiders, even though they are relatively innocuous in size and attitude.[163] Conversely, Tolkien's Spiders are repeatedly endowed with a wicked intellect and monstrously enlarged. This alteration of a familiar creature resulting in a disturbing synthesis of the known and the unknown recalls what Freud defined as "the uncanny:"

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[161] Ibid., 725.

[162] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 131-136.

[163] Seim RW, Spates CR, "The prevalence and comorbidity of specific phobias in college students and their interest in receiving treatment," Journal of College Student Psychotherapy. 24:49–58, 2009

> uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed.[164]

According to Freud, the uncanny originates from repressed desires or fears coming to the surface. Spiders often symbolise deep-seated anxieties like being trapped or being preyed upon. Tolkien's gigantic spiders serve as vehicles for these buried fears, embodying qualities that heighten their immediateness and intensity. Tolkien evokes feelings of fright and revulsion by exaggerating and distorting every day and generally harmless creatures into something monstrously massive and horrific. This effect elicits an uncanny response.

According to Christopher Hansen,[165] Ungoliant and Shelob are the epitome of the "monstrous feminine," which is the role that women in Middle-Earth acquire when they are unable to be rehabilitated into the male-dominated standards of docility, obedience, and subservience. In addition to being hideous on the outside, Ungoliant and Shelob are even more monstrous due to their non-monogamous and dominant sexuality, which goes against Tolkien's natural order. As a devoted Catholic, Tolkien made explicit in his correspondence that he could only tolerate sexuality inside the confines of marriage:

> There you will observe that you are really committed (with the Christian Church as a whole) to the view that Christian marriage – monogamous, permanent, rigidly 'faithful' – is in fact the truth about sexual behaviour for all humanity: this is the only road of total health (including sex in its proper place) for all men and women.[166]

[164] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, David McLintock, and Hugh Haughton. 2003. (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 148.
[165] Christopher Hansen, "The Monstrous Feminine: Ungoliant, Shelob, and Women in Tolkien's Middle-Earth". *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies*, no. 34 (November 2021): 5-8. https://doi.org/10.15290/10.15290/CR.2021.34.3.01.
[166] Tolkien, *Letters*, 82.

Additionally, Tolkien argued that sexual attraction made even platonic friendships between men and women nearly impossible. Consequently, adherence to Catholic binary gender ideals defines the "proper woman." Both Shelob and Ungoliant evoke the "monstrous feminine" in various ways. For instance, Ungoliant's sexual reproduction is regarded as one of the most terrible events in Arda's annals; her hideous progeny is the outcome of an improper union, one which spread evil throughout the world. In Tolkien's writings, improper unions are consistent and always end tragically for those involved. Finwë's two marriages—to Míriel and Indis, for instance—cause rivalry and evil deeds among his sons, particularly Fëanor, whose disapproval of Finwë's marriage to Fëanor's stepmother Indis can be seen as a catalyst for the sins Fëanor subsequently committed.[167] It's noteworthy that neither men nor the women they chose turn into monsters when they engage in polyamory or other improper relationships; a woman only turns monstrous when she is dominant over men or she voluntarily initiates a sexual relationship. So, Tolkien believed that monogamy was the ideal state of being, and violating it caused one to become unnaturally alienated from the natural order; Shelob and Ungoliant are even more alienated from it because they perpetuate "many" improper unions when the majority of the characters only have one. Shelob in *The Two Towers* is monstrously outstanding for various reasons. Tolkien himself clarified in his correspondence that Shelob is a Westron name, meaning "female spider" by combining the English word *she*, "a female" with the dialectal English term *lob*, "spider."[168] Shelob is defined by her femininity and monstrosity, both in her name and in her appearance; her deviant sexuality and her frightening children enhance her monstrous nature, as previously explained regarding Ungoliant.

[167] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 65-67.
[168] Tolkien, *Letters*, 270.

Furthermore, in the legendarium, each character who positively gives birth is in a monogamous relationship, regardless of any love chemistry or character development:

> As such, we see the courageous warrior Éowyn rather forcefully (by the author) placed into marriage with Faramir; similarly, Arwen is to marry Aragorn; Lúthien is to marry Beren; and Samwise is to marry Rosie Cotton; and these are only a few examples. There are not "friendships" between women and men, for that is unable to occur due to the nature of sexual attraction and its use by the "devil" as his "favourite subject," and so sexual intercourse in non-Catholic marriages (like Finwë's second marriage) or outside of wedlock to create "bastards of miserable mates" (like Ungoliant and Shelob) leads to the monstrous feminine in the world of Middle-Earth.[169]

In conclusion, Ungoliant and Shelob serve as both sources of horror and monstrosity in Tolkien's narrative and, as independent female characters who are not subservient to males, they also serve as cautionary tales about what women should not be according to Tolkien's Catholic worldview.

[169] Hansen, "The Monstrous Feminine," 8.

2.2.4 Werewolves, Wargs, Vampires, and Bats

Werewolves and vampires are arguably the most iconic monsters of the 19th-century Gothic tradition. These creatures do exist in Tolkien's legendarium, although the author was inconsistent in providing the audience with details regarding their features, genealogy, and characterization. Furthermore, because their roles in Tolkien's novels are not particularly noteworthy, scholarly research on these monsters is essentially nonexistent. Nevertheless, considering the importance of vampires and werewolves in literature, it is significant to recollect what information Tolkien offered in his works.

From a chronological point of view, the first mention of Werewolves can be found in the *Grey Annals*, around the year 1330 of the Age of Starlight, when Middle-earth was illuminated exclusively by the light of the stars:

> The evil creatures came even to Beleriand, over passes in the mountains, or up from the south through the dark forests. Wolves there were, or creatures that walked in wolf-shapes, and other fell beings of shadow.[170]

As the Moon would not be created until after the year 1500 of the First Age, it is clear that Tolkien chose not to associate it with his Werewolves.[171] In the legendarium, no mention of Lycanthropy is found. The most widely accepted definition of Lycanthropy, outlined by Baring-Gould, is the following:

> What is Lycanthropy? The change of man or woman into the form of a wolf, either through magical means, so as to enable him or her to gratify the taste for human flesh, or through judgment of the gods in punishment for some great offence.[172]

The werewolf has often been portrayed in literature and folklore as a man who, under the full moon, transforms into a wolf-like creature either because of a malicious force or after being cursed by another werewolf. The Old

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[170] J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien, *The War of the Jewels: Book 11* (HarperCollins, 1995), 12.
[171] Ibid., 30.
[172] Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Book of Werewolves: Being an Account of a Terrible Superstition* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 9.

English word *werwulf*, composed of *wer* "man" + *wulf* "wolf," is where the term *werewolf* originates.[173] While they are not the typical half-wolf, half-man monsters, Tolkien's Werewolves at the same time can and cannot be included in this terminology; in the legendarium, Werewolves are presented as wolves with minds equivalent to those of Men and Elves. Additionally, in *The Silmarillion* Tolkien describes them as "fallen beasts inhabited by dreadful spirits that he [Sauron] had imprisoned in their bodies."[174] This raises issues regarding their origin; it is possible that Werewolves were Maiar corrupted by Melkor, which would explain their intelligence.

During the First Age, these creatures were the servants of the Dark Lords dwelling in the fortresses of Utumno, Angband, and Tol-in-Gaurhoth, also known as the "Isle of Werewolves."[175] Depicted as "a dread beast, old in evil, lord and sire of the werewolves of Angband,"[176] Draugluin is the first named Werewolf in the legendarium. Dwelling in Tol-in-Gaurhoth with his master Sauron, Draugluin possessed the ability to speak and immense power. He was ultimately killed by Huan, the Hound of Valinor, during the Quest for the Silmaril, when Beren entered Angband covertly using his skin. Draugluin was not the strongest Werewolf, even though he was portrayed as the progenitor of all subsequent Werewolves. As it is narrated in *The Silmarillion*, when Morgoth learned of Draugluin's death, he decided to create a Werewolf to slay the Hound of Valinor; the creature in question was Carcharoth, the most powerful and ferocious Werewolf that ever existed. As the gatekeeper of Angband, Carcharoth got involved in the Quest for the Silmaril when Beren and Lúthien had to get past him to enter the fortress. In

[173] "Werewolf" in *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed July 12, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/werewolf
[174] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 192.
[175] Ibid., 181.
[176] Ibid., 205.

this scene, Beren attempted to stop the beast by holding out the seized Silmaril as Lúthien tried to enchant him with magic:

> But Carcharoth looked upon that holy jewel and was not daunted, and the devouring spirit within him awoke to sudden fire; and gaping he took suddenly the hand within his jaws, and he bit it off at the wrist.[177]

In what is regarded as one of the most terrible events to have ever affected Beleriand, Carcharoth would tear off Beren's hand and gobble the Silmaril, consequently devastating an enormous portion of the region. Tormented by the pain caused by the power of the Silmaril inside him, the Werewolf proceeded south, destroying everything in his way as he went through Beleriand. Carcharoth finally reached Doriath, where, like Draugluin, he was ultimately killed by Huan.[178] Considering Tolkien's proficiency in Norse mythology, we can presume—even though the author never confirmed it—that Fenrir, the son of Loki and the giantess Angrboða, served as the primary inspiration for both Draugluin and Carcharoth. In Norse mythology, Fenrir is regarded as the ancestor of all wolves, just as Draugluin is of all Werewolves in Tolkien's legendarium. Carcharoth is about as strong as the mythological wolf and remarkably, the event described in the paragraph that was quoted above bears comparison to the instance where the God Tyr attempted to trick Fenrir who, in return, bit off his hand.[179]

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf by saying to Frodo that "not all [Sauron] servants and chattels are wraiths! There are orcs and trolls, there are wargs and werewolves,"[180] provides evidence that Werewolves are still present in Middle-earth during the Third Age, serving Sauron alongside the Wargs.

[177] Ibid., 214.
[178] Ibid., 219.
[179] Gianna Chiesa Isnardi, *I Miti Nordici* (Longanesi & C., Milano, 1991), 578.
[180] Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, 222.

According to J. S. Ryan,[181] the Wargs are wolf-like creatures who appear in *The Hobbit*; they are characterised as huge, evil and intelligent wolves that served Sauron in the Second and Third Ages. In *The Hobbit*, a pack of Wargs, headed by a large grey wolf, allied with the Orcs to hunt down Gandalf, Bilbo, and the Dwarves. Moreover, Wargs constituted the fifth army in the Battle of the Five Armies fought in the last part of the novel. It is impossible to make assumptions concerning the presence of any Werewolf in this army; however, although they were capable of speaking, it is not difficult to imagine that several packs of Wargs were organised by a higher being. Regarding the etymology of the term *warg*, Tolkien wrote in a letter:

> Warg is simple. It is an old word for wolf, which also had the sense of an outlaw or hunted criminal. I adopted the word, which had a good sound for the meaning, as a name for this particular brand of demonic wolf in the story. [182]

In terms of conjecture, this etymological cross that combines the natural wolf with a concept associated with the human condition may implicitly suggest that the Wargs descended from the First Age Werewolves; also, their demonic features further differentiate them from standard wolves indicating a possible genealogical connection to Draugluin.

Moreover, the only named Vampire in the legendarium is Thuringwethil. This name first appears in Tolkien's epic poem *The Lay of Leithian*, which Tolkien began composing in 1925 before eventually abandoning it unfinished in 1931. In the poem, Thuringwethil is simply the name Lúthien takes for herself speaking to Morgoth while disguised as a bat.[183] In *The Silmarillion*, Thuringwethil appears like a proper character during the First Age:

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[181] J.S. Ryan, "Warg, Wearg, Earg, and Werewolf: A Note on A Speculative Tolkien Etymology". *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 23 (July, 1986): 25-26.
[182] Tolkien, *Letters*, 521.
[183] J. R. R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand: The History of Middle-earth*. (London, HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 306.

> She was the messenger of Sauron, and was wont to fly in vampire's form to Angband; and her great fingered wings were barbed at each joint's end with an iron claw.[184]

We know little else about this character aside from this brief mention. "The fingered wings" suggest a giant vampire bat, rather than the classical humanoid vampire coming from the Gothic tradition. Later in the narrative of *The Silmarillion*, Sauron, being a shapeshifter, adopts the forms of a Werewolf and a Vampire during his fight against Lúthien and Huan at Tol-in-Gaurhoth.[185] It was in this battle that Thuringwethil probably died. Sauron's capacity to command creatures such as Werewolves and Vampires emphasises his status as a true Dark Lord able to subdue even the most terrifying creatures. The "Index of Names" of *The Silmarillion* defines Thuringwethil as a "Woman of Secret Shadow" and indicates that she "took the form of a great bat"[186] which suggests her shapeshifting nature; this seems consistent with a corrupted Maia much like Sauron himself. To further enhance this reading, in *The Lay of Leithian* the tale of "The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor" is explained:

> It is said that with Manwë and Varda there entered the world 'many of those lesser Vali who loved them and had played nigh them and attuned their music to theirs, and these are the Manir and the Suruli, the sylphs of the airs and of the winds.[187]

This passage refers to and paraphrases its poetic counterpart contained in the poem, in which these sylphs of the airs are described as "sylphine maidens of the Air whose wings in Varda's heavenly hall in rhythmic movement beat and fall."[188] This helps us to infer that Thuringwethil could probably have been one of the Air spirits that once hovered in Varda's celestial mansion before being corrupted, along with other Maia and lesser spirits, by

[184] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 210.
[185] Ibid., 210.
[186] Ibid., 424.
[187] Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand*, 306.
[188] Ibid., 306.

Melkor's rebellion. Therefore, as confirmed by Foster,[189] Thuringwethil could very well be a lesser Maia in the service of Sauron, fitting perfectly in the concept of Tolkien's "Fall."[190] However, we can only infer this from this particular detail found within *The Lay of Leithian*, as it is not mentioned in *The Silmarillion*. Similarly to the Werewolves, Tolkien made no mention of Vampires in his later works. Nevertheless, during The Battle of the Five Armies fought in the last part of *The Hobbit*, a swarm of Bats allied with the Orcs and descended upon the battlefield. Later in this sequence, the narrator tells us:

> Soon actual darkness was coming into a stormy sky; while still the great bats swirled about the heads and ears of elves and men, or fastened vampire-like on the stricken. [191]

Just as the Wargs could have evolved from the Werewolves, these Bats that emerged from Dol Guldur during the battle could be descendants of Middle-earth Vampires, to which Thuringwethil belonged; also, being these creatures vampire bats, we can also assume that they might be Thuringwethil's offspring. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo and the Dwarves come across the Spiders of Mirkwood, who are Shelob's progeny; as stated in the previous subchapter, Shelob is in turn a descendant of Ungoliant, a spirit that took the form of a spider. Thus, the fact that Ungoliant's offspring and Thuringwethil's presumed descendants are portrayed in the same novel as less sophisticated but as living in swarms suggests a connection between these two monsters of *The Silmarillion*.

[189] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 384.
[190] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 384.
[191] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 328.

2.2.5 Trolls

According to Foster,[192] Melkor devised the Trolls during the First Age from an undisclosed source; presumably, they were modelled after Ents, much as Orcs were a distorted version of Elves. Trolls are depicted as strong, large—possibly as big as Ents—unintelligent, and innately hideous. Their primary feature is greed, but they also slaughter for pleasure and exhibit cannibalistic attitudes; they also have thick skin and black blood. Additionally, when exposed to sunlight, the majority of Trolls turn to stone. Though even Sauron employed Trolls in the Second and Third Ages, their application was limited due to their lack of intelligence.

At least four distinct Troll strains are displayed in the legendarium: the Stone-trolls of the Trollshaws, the Cave-trolls of Moria, the Hill-trolls of Gorgoroth, and the Olog-hai.

Mainly because they speak a debased Westron, Stone-trolls seem to be the most human of all.[193] Considering they can speak Westron, Bert, Tom, and William—the Trolls that Bilbo Baggins and the Dwarves meet in *The Hobbit*—probably belong to this subrace. Noteworthy, these three Trolls try to trap the Dwarves in bags, recalling the sequence in *Beowulf* in which Grendel employs a glove to carry his human prey; additionally, Grendel and his mother in the epic poem could be regarded as trolls due to their cannibalistic tendencies.[194]

Hill-trolls are ferocious and terrifying creatures that roar like beasts as they charge into battle and crush their opponents with enormous hammers. They appear to be covered in hard scales.

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[192] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 391-392.
[193] Ibid., 391.
[194] "Tolkien Society Anglo-Saxon Study Pack 2," The Tolkien Society, accessed July 13, 2024, https://www.tolkiensociety.org/app/uploads/2016/11/Anglo-Saxon-Part-2.pdf

Cave-trolls, who dwell in gloomy cavernous areas, possess flat, toeless feet and skin covered in dark green scales. These are servants of Sauron, who some five hundred years before the War of the Ring sent them to live in the Mines of Moria; As the Fellowship of the Ring passes through Moria in the events of *The Lord of the Rings*, they stumble upon a Cave-troll.[195]

Undoubtedly the fiercest Troll subrace is represented by the Olog-hai who dwell in southern Mirkwood and the Mordor highlands; although their origins remain unknown, Tolkien himself confirmed in Appendix F of *The Lord of the Rings*[196] that they were bred by Sauron throughout the Third Age. Since the Olog-hai are significantly clever and able to withstand the sunlight, they may be considered an improved version of the Trolls' subraces, lacking all of their weaknesses. They are covered in sharp black scales and are used to fight with bucklers and huge hammers. Regarding etymology, *Olog-hai* is a phrase coming from Barad-dûr's Black Speech; *hai* means "folk," while *olog* means "troll." Given their enhanced characteristics and linguistic resemblance, it could be argued that the Olog-hai symbolise what the Uruk-hai represent to the Orcs: upgraded monsters purposefully created by Sauron and his lieutenants to spread evil, dominance, and monstrosity throughout Middle-earth without the flaws and weaknesses of the creatures that served as models.[197]

The troll is a figure with roots in Scandinavian mythology, although it may be found in many other cultures. As Jakobsson stated,[198] trolls are featured in several literary works, including the *Poetic Edda's* "Bárdur saga" and the *Prose Edda's* "Vǫluspá," where they are interchangeably associated with giants, or jötnar. Etymologically, the word *troll* originates from the word

[195] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 392.
[196] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Of Other Races," in *The Lord of the Rings*, (London, United Kingdom: Harper Collins, 2005), 1132.
[197] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Words, Phrases and Passages in Various Tongues in The Lord of the Rings," in *Parma Eldalamberon XVII* (Elvish Linguistic Fellowship, 2007), 136.
[198] Ármann Jakobsson, "History Of The Trolls? Barðar Saga As An Historical Narrative." in Saga-Book of the Viking Society (University College London, 1998), 62.

trold, which denotes an evil spirit, a magician, a giant monster, or an evil person; it appears in both the Icelandic and Finnish languages.[199] The traditional portrayal of trolls in Norse mythology is that of larger, less intellectual beings that dwelt underneath the surface, inhabiting caves, mounds, or hills.[200] These features are shared also by Tolkien's Trolls; in *The Hobbit*, the three Trolls are depicted as roaming in the wooding area of the Trollshaws and emerging at night to challenge the adventurer's journeys. Their way of living is a marker of their monstrosity, symbolizing the intrusion of chaos and evil into the orderly world of Middle-earth:

> Similar to other cultural myths, monsters inhabit spaces beyond or at the limits of human control. These take the form of natural occurrence: forests, rivers, mist, seas, etc. When the hero ventures to these lands, he/she encounters manifestations of monstrosity. Clear narrative markers differentiate the realms of natura and supra natura, and cause the hero to lose his/her sense of the known.[201]

This quotation is useful to emphasise how these Trolls violate human boundaries and convey fears of the unknown, which is central to the human experience. Moreover, Kathryn Hume pointed out another essential quality of the monsters of the Norse sagas, namely their ability to fulfil certain narrative functions employed to test and define heroism:

> Whether giant or dwarf, dragon or draugr, the supernatural creatures function as foils for the hero, and in the sagas, the hero's confrontation with a monster follows one of four patterns: (1) The monster exists to test the protagonist and to affirm his status as professional hero. (2) The monster preys upon society, thus letting the hero put his strength to the service of others. (3) The supernatural being serves as a comic or ironic device for reducing exaggerated heroes to more human stature. (4) The monster forms part of a deliberate comment on the nature of heroism. This last use

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[199] T. Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology: Illustrative of the Romance and Superstition of Various Countries* (London: Wildwood Press, 1981), 94.
[200] Robin Veenman, "Norse Monstrosities in the Monstrous World of J.R.R. Tolkien" (BA thesis Tilburg University, 2019), 34.
[201] Suzanne Swanson, "Monstrous Heroism and the Heroic Monster" (MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2023), 11.

invites critical reflection from the audience, as well as naive, immediate excitement.[202]

Within their mythological context, trolls, commonly referred to as jötnar, are frequently employed to test the gods' and heroes' greater might and valour. Thor is perfectly illustrates this concept; the god of thunder's many fights with the jötnar, such as his duel with Hrungnir, [203] serve to prove his strength and establish his credibility as a deity and protector of humanity. In the Norse sagas, these creatures symbolise chaos and danger that heroic individuals must endure in order to preserve order and protect their people. We can observe that Tolkien drew heavily from these mythological motifs when he shaped his Trolls, even though their characterization gradually changed from *The Hobbit* to *The Lord of the Rings*. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins's inventiveness and cunning are challenged by the three Trolls; for the hero, this encounter is a vital turning point in his growth from a hesitant Hobbit to a brave burglar. In this particular event, William, Bert, and Tom's quarrelsomeness and foolishness are the ultimate cause for their defeat; these elements additionally provide a moment of comic relief, which contrasts with the nobler qualities of heroism that Bilbo starts to embody. On the contrary, Trolls in *The Lord of the Rings* lack personality and most of the unique traits found in *The Hobbit*. In addition to Orcs and Uruk-hai, Trolls are employed in the narrative as tools of Sauron's power to highlight the industrial and dehumanising aspects of his monstrosity. Starting with the Troll of Moria, who serves as the first test of the Fellowship's capacity to cooperate and survive against a terrifying enemy, Trolls are gradually incorporated into the following battles, where they heavily become involved in the concept of "The Machine," essential to Tolkien's portrayal of monsters.

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[202] Kathryn Hume, "From Saga to Romance: The Use of Monsters in Old Norse Literature," *Studies in Philology* (1980), 3.

[203] Giorgio Dolfini, Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (Milano: Biblioteca Adelphi, 1975), 125-158.

2.2.6. The Watcher in the Water and the Nameless Things

The Watcher in the Water is a multi-tentacled monster that, at least during the course of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, watches over Moria's West-gate; it exclusively appears in the chapter "A Journey in the Dark," when the Fellowship approaches the Doors of Durin shortly after failing to cross the Pass of Caradhras.[204] As Gandalf opens the gate pronouncing the Elvish word for "friend," the Watcher emerges from the dark, stagnant lake placed outside the gate (formed when the Sirannon river was dammed by the Dwarves), attacking the heroes:

> Out from the water a long sinuous tentacle had crawled; it was pale-green and luminous and wet. Its fingered end had hold of Frodo's foot, and was dragging him into the water. Sam on his knees was now slashing at it with a knife. The arm let go of Frodo, and Sam pulled him away, crying out for help. Twenty other arms came rippling out. The dark water boiled, and there was a hideous stench.[205]

Symbolizing the lurking threats and dangers of Middle-earth, this abrupt encounter intensifies the sense of danger and urgency, driving the Fellowship to rush into Moria and hinting at the challenges they will face within the Mines. The Watcher in the Water, whose real identity and source of inspiration are still a mystery, is one of the most enigmatic monsters in Tolkien's legendarium. Few morphological data are available for theorization because the Watcher is just partially visible as most parts of his body are submerged. According to Jérémie Bardin and Isabelle Kruta,[206] considering Tolkien's affinities with mythology, this creature's appearance might have been influenced by the terrifying Lernaean hydra; also, it could possibly be a heavily altered dragon. One of the most plausible hypotheses based on its anatomy links the Watcher to the Kraken, a

[204] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 419.
[205] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 308.
[206] Jérémie Bardin, Isabelle Kruta, "The Watcher Between Two Waters" in *The Science of Middle-earth: A New Understanding of Tolkien and his World*, ed. by Roland Lehoucq, Loïc Mangin, and Arnaud Rafaelian (Pegasus, 2021), 356-363.

mythical creature that is associated with cephalopods—more specifically, with a gigantic octopus or squid. The term "tentacle" as employed by Tolkien, appears to allude to the arms of cephalopods, which are frequently sinuous and viscous, allowing them the mobility consistent with the Watcher's assault on the Fellowship. Nonetheless, in *The Lord of The Rings*, this monster possesses at least twenty-one appendages, significantly more than any real-life squid or even the mythological Kraken. Additionally, another element shared by the Watcher and many cephalopods, especially those that dwell in deep waters, is bioluminescence, which is primarily generated by specific organs, but also by bacteria living symbiotically with these creatures. The environment in which the Watcher dwells, however, provides a compelling argument against the "cephalopod" theory, given the fact that all cephalopods—real and fictional—live only in salt water. This ambiguous classification is precisely what further demonstrates the Watcher's monstrosity:

> This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions.[207]

After they have passed the Doors of Moria, Frodo asks Gandalf what the monster that just attacked them was; he answers:

> I do not know,' answered Gandalf; 'but the arms were all guided by one purpose. Something has crept, or has been driven out of dark waters under the mountains. There are older and fouler things than Orcs in the deep places of the world.' He did not speak aloud his thought that whatever it was that dwelt in the lake, it had seized on Frodo first among all the Company.[208]

Not even the most knowledgeable member of the Fellowship and a Maia, Gandalf, knows what that creature's nature is; but as this passage makes

[207] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6.
[208] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 309.

clear, the monster had already chosen to target Frodo before the Fellowship, indicating that the One Ring indeed influenced it. This creature is hostile, but we do not know the reason behind its behaviour; “The Watcher was definitely evil, but it is unclear whether he was under the control of Sauron or the Balrog,” added Foster.[209]

Another interpretation that connects this monster to the Nameless Things—some of the most mysterious beings in Middle-earth—emerges considering the ambiguity surrounding the Watcher’s loyalty to either Sauron or the Balrog and the difficulty of categorizing it. According to Tolkien’s legendarium, the Nameless Things are dangerous and malevolent entities that do not fear nor follow the Dark Lords. These creatures are said to dwell in the darkest depths of Middle-earth, as stated in *The Hobbit*, where their existence is first hinted at:

> There are strange things living in the pools and lakes in the hearts of mountains: fish whose fathers swam in, goodness only knows how many years ago, and never swam out again, while their eyes grew bigger and bigger and bigger from trying to see in the blackness; also there are other things more slimy than fish. Even in the tunnels and caves the goblins have made for themselves there are other things living unbeknown to them that have sneaked in from outside to lie up in the dark. Some of these caves, too, go back in their beginnings to ages before the goblins, who only widened them and joined them up with passages, and the original owners are still there in odd comers, slinking and nosing about.[210]

It is unclear how old these creatures are, but from the quoted passage, it appears that they existed before any goblins dug tunnels through the mountains around Goblin-Town. Additionally, according to the tenth volume of *The History of Middle-earth*, the Nameless Things were likely there since the very creation of Arda:

[209] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 419.
[210] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 84.

> "Out of the discords of the Music — not directly out of either of the themes, Eru's or Melkor's, but of their dissonance with regard one to another — evil things appeared in Arda, which did not descend from any direct plan or vision of Melkor: they were not 'his children'; and therefore, since all evil hates, hated him too."[211]

This passage illustrates how Eru's and Melkor's dissonance during Ainulindalë directly generated some evil things which were not linked to or subdued to any of Melkor's plans, like the majority of Arda's monsters; rather, they despised him, since "all evil hates." Therefore, it can be argued that both the Nameless Things and Ungoliant seem to be included among these evil things. While almost the totality of these Nameless Things remains an absolute mystery, the Watcher in the Water could be the only one of them to decide to reveal himself to the world. As Gandalf comes back as Gandalf the White in *The Two Towers*, we are given a final insight into the Nameless Things. This is what he tells the three hunters about his duel with the Balrog:

> 'We fought far under the living earth, where time is not counted. Ever he clutched me, and ever I hewed him, till at last he fled into dark tunnels. They were not made by Durin's folk, Gimli son of Glóin. Far, far below the deepest delvings of the Dwarves, the world is gnawed by nameless things. Even Sauron knows them not. They are older than he. Now I have walked there, but I will bring no report to darken the light of day. In that despair my enemy was my only hope, and I pursued him, clutching at his heel. Thus he brought me back at last to the secret ways of Khazad-dûm: too well he knew them all. Ever up now we went, until we came to the Endless Stair.'[212]

Here, Gandalf reiterates what was pointed out about the Nameless Things, something which he "will bring no report to darken the light of day;" the Balrog, having spent countless years living in these remote locations, was familiar with these dark tunnels inhabited by the mysterious Nameless Things. Although Sauron was among the Maiar when the world was created, here it is stated that he was unaware of these ancient evil creatures.

[211] Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 405-406.
[212] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 501.

2.2.7 Barrow-wights, Ringwraiths, and the Dead Men of Dunharrow

In his legendarium, Tolkien included several undead creatures, such as Ghosts, which are reflections of their former selves, Wights and Wraiths. Tolkien claims that two terms—*hröa* and *fëa*—are essential for understanding the concepts behind the ideas of life, death, and the natural order of Arda. Therefore, they are also closely linked to the depiction of undead entities. The *fëa* and the *hröa*, which Tolkien defined as "the indwelling spirit of an incarnate being"[213] and "the body of an incarnate being,"[214] respectively, are what make up all sentient beings in his conception. The *hröa* is the physical vessel that interacts with the outside world, while the *fëa* is its animating spirit, the essence that confers life and consciousness. A natural and balanced existence depends on these two elements being in harmony with one another. Nevertheless, the undead monsters in Tolkien's legendarium, existing in an unnatural and generally malevolent limbo, disturb and pervert that natural relationship.

The Barrow-wights are among the most well-known undead creatures in the legendarium. Appearing exclusively in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, they present themselves as shadowy creatures with a pale, icy light glimmering from what would be their eyes;[215] they are also recognized for wearing gold rings that rattle on their thin fingers and for exhibiting a deep, cold and hollow voice.[216] According to Foster,[217] these monsters were evil spirits sent from Angmar to the Barrow-downs, where they tormented the cairns of the destroyed Dúnedain kingdom of Cardolan and attempted to entrap people to sacrifice them. Although the true nature of these monsters remains

[213] Christopher Tolkien, *Index: The History of Middle-earth*. (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 158.
[214] Ibid., 233.
[215] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Le Avventure di Tom Bombadil* (Bompiani, 2008), 20.
[216] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 130, 140.
[217] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 34-35.

unclarified, in *The Lord of the Rings* it is mentioned that "a shadow came out of dark places far away, and the bones were stirred in the mounds;"[218] in this case, the *hröa* of the long-dead are forcibly brought back to life by the *fëa* of the Barrow-wights. Due to this desecration of the *hröa*, defying the natural order's planned division of body and spirit after death, these monsters are the result of a corrupted and distorted union. In the first part of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin get stuck in the Barrow-downs and are nearly killed by these creatures who sought to lure them with a song to a living death like their own; however, Tom Bombadil, who appears to have total control over the Barrow-wights and who, according to *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, had managed to escape them on a few occasions with his incantations, comes to the Hobbits' rescue at the last moment.

As stated by Fawcett,[219] being both spectral and corporeal, the Barrow-wights resemble the draugr, an undead creature featured in several Norse sagas; most notably, in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, the protagonist decides to challenge Kar, a tomb-dweller who was sentenced for a life of greed to remain with his treasure after his death, struggling with anyone who enters his barrow. Although Tolkien's Barrow-wights are not physically similar to Kar, they share his wealth and evil nature; like dragons, the Barrow-wights are bound to the treasure they guard and haunt in the barrow. As Tom dispels their barrow, it becomes evident how much these creatures are tied to this earthly tether:

> Tom went up to the mound, and looked through the treasures. Most of these he made into a pile that glistened and sparkled on the grass. He bade them lie there "free to all finders, birds, beasts, Elves or Men, and all kindly creatures"; for so the

[218] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 130.
[219] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 144-146.

> spell of the mound should be broken and scattered and no Wight ever come back to it.[220]

In contrast to the Norse sagas, Tolkien's Wights are vanquished with a song rather than with a physical fight. Barrow-wights have no lasting impact on *The Lord of the Rings* narrative; they briefly appear to show Tom Bombadil's immunity to all forms of evil pervading Middle-earth. Neither the Wraiths nor the Wights are anything but evil beings that pose a menace to the heroes as they travel through Middle-earth; neither group of monsters displays any sign of repentance or redemption nor offers any moral guidance.

Another distinctive portrayal of undeath is provided by the Ringwraiths, or Nazgûl. As Foster explained,[221] the Nazgûl represent Sauron's primary servants; originally, these monsters were just Men, but during the Second Age, after receiving each one of the Nine Rings of Power by Sauron, they became easily corrupted due to their thirst for power and desire to overcome mortality:

> Nine he gave to Mortal Men, proud and great, and so ensnared them. Long ago they fell under the dominion of the One, and they became Ringwraiths, shadows under his great Shadow, his most terrible servants.[222]

After having turned into Wraiths, the Nazgûl became the primary tools of Sauron's machinations; they were employed as scouts, messengers, and to terrify the Dark Lord's opponents with their piercing, loud and frightening cries. The Ringwraiths are most powerful at night and in desolate areas, yet they are terrified of fire; their combined strength at night is almost equal to that of Gandalf. These monsters, as originally Men, are able to speak Westron, but still, they primarily employ the Black Speech. Furthermore, in addition to their unnatural immortality and nocturnal strengthening, the Ringwraiths display a few more features that associate them with traditional

[220] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 145.
[221] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 282-283.
[222] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 51.

vampires. They appear to fear water,[223] much like Dracula, and "at all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it."[224] Regarding their true nature, the Nazgûl's undeath is marked by the complete domination and enslavement of their *fëa* by Sauron's malevolent force; on the other hand, even though they are devoid of actual *hröa*, they still retain a spectral presence that instils terror and fright. Their existence is a distortion of the innate relationship between the body and the soul, a distortion that leads to the loss of humanity and identity and to extreme spiritual corruption; this is demonstrated by the fact that any sword that came into contact with a Nazgûl would melt, and only weapons imbued with specific spells could injure these monsters. The Ringwraiths are apparently blind, but they possess an acute sense of smell. Additionally, they are invisible to the naked eye and can be seen only by their black clothing. The Witch-king, the strongest of the Ringwraiths, proves this point:

> The Black Rider flung back his hood, and behold! he had a kingly crown; and yet upon no head visible was it set. The red fires shone between it and the mantled shoulders vast and dark. From a mouth unseen there came a deadly laughter."[225]

On a cloudy day or in dim light, the Wraiths are completely invisible; and yet, under direct sunlight, these monsters become barely discernible, like a shadow. A Hobbit wearing the One Ring displays traits analogous to a common Wraith, who, as a result of extended exposure to one of the Rings of Power, continuously dwells in a limbo between the spiritual and physical dimensions. This is shown by the sequence in which Bilbo tries to leave Gollum's cave while being invisible due to the One Ring:

[223] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 189.
[224] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 214.
[225] Ibid., 829.

> the sun came out from behind a cloud and shone bright on the outside of the door—but he could not get through. Suddenly one of the goblins inside shouted: "There is a shadow by the door. Something is outside!"[226]

The Ringwraiths play a major role in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, where they were are by Sauron to the Shire to search for the One Ring and its bearer; because they rode fast black horses, they were known as the Black Riders at the time. After having wounded Frodo on Weathertop, who still managed to escape from them, these monsters reappear in the subsequent parts of *The Lord of the Rings* while riding flying beasts. The Nazgûl take part in the Siege of Gondor and the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, in which the Witch-king is killed; the remaining Ringwraiths are destroyed with their Rings, once the One Ring is destroyed at the end of the story.[227] The Nazgûl are vital monsters in the legendarium because they represent the first significant threat that the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* have to deal with, they present a unique type of undeath, and they embody each one of the concepts behind the terms "Fall, Mortality, and the Machine."

In Tolkien's legendarium, the Oathbreakers, or the Dead Men of Dunharrow, provide an alternative perspective on undeath. Just like the Ringwraiths, the Oathbreakers were initially Men; when Gondor was founded, the King of these Pre-Númenórean people, who would subsequently be known as the King of the Dead, pledged allegiance to Isildur. However, they were corrupted by Sauron during the Second Age; as they worshipped The Dark Lord, they could not fight for Isildur against him. Therefore, they broke their oath and refused to take part in the final battle between Sauron and the Last Alliance. Due to their betrayal, they were sentenced by Isildur to live as spirits in and around the White Mountains until his heir summoned them to keep their vow. In the Third Age, guided by their king, the Oathbreakers

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[226] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 105.
[227] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 282.

haunted the area above Dunharrow, especially the Paths of the Dead. These monsters play a significant role in the events narrated in *The Return of the King*. In order to overcome the army of Mordor at the siege of Gondor, Aragorn summons them to repay their debt by defeating the Corsairs of Umbar.[228]

Tolkien's Dead Men of Dunharrow are a great example of the ghost as a spiritual commentary figure. The Oathbreakers, in contrast to the Barrow-wights, are not corporeal beings; their *hröa* have decayed, leaving only their fëa attached to the material world. Because of their curse, they are unable to pass on to the afterlife, which keeps their spirits in a restless, undead state. Unlike the Nazgûl and Wights, who have completely lost their identity due to corruption, these ghosts are echoes of their former selves; their undeath emphasizes the moral and spiritual consequences of betrayal and the disruption of the life-death cycle.

As Fawcett has suggested,[229] the Oathbreakers are not completely corrupted, they are just weak warriors and cowards, exemplifying unwanted traits. All they have to do to escape their purgatorial state is play the part they vowed to perform but never did: fight for their king. They must bravely follow their true leader's command and redeem themselves. The Dead Men of Dunharrow are an outstanding instance of Christian redemption since, during a time of weakness, they became idolaters and served Sauron. Nevertheless, there is still hope for them; they just have to prove their repentance by following their true king when he returns. Only their bravery and redemption will they set themselves free from their earthly sins and be relieved from their agony.

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[228] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 83.
[229] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 153-154.

2.2.8 Balrogs and Dragons

As noted by George Foster,[230] the Balrogs, also known as Valaraukar, were once Maiar, lesser spirits at the service of the Valar. During the creation of Arda, they were persuaded and corrupted by Melkor, supporting the Dark Lord's rebellion:

> For of the Maiar many were drawn to his splendour in the days of his greatness, and remained in that allegiance down into his darkness; and others he corrupted afterwards to his service with lies and treacherous gifts. Dreadful among these spirits were the Valaraukar, the scourges of fire that in Middle-earth were called the Balrogs, demons of terror.[231]

These monsters are spirits of fire, as the passage above points out, and they carry whips of flame; yet they are also covered in darkness. After their master was vanquished in the Battle of the Powers, the Balrogs and other creatures under Melkor's command fled to Angband, leaving the fortress of Utumno, their first dwelling.[232] The greatest Balrog to have ever walked Middle-earth is Gothmog, named the "Lord of Balrogs," during the First Age. He was Melkor's most valuable servant and his primary lieutenant, serving as High-captain of Angband. Gothmog fought many battles in Morgoth's name, and he was directly responsible for the deaths of two High Kings of the Noldor; he killed Fëanor in Dagor-nuin-Giliath and slayed Fingon during the Nírnaeth Arnoediad. Furthermore, during the destruction of Gondolin, Gothmog even managed to slay Ecthelion, but he was in turn killed by him. Originally, the number of Balrogs was supposed to be enormous—roughly a thousand.[233] But this number was drastically lowered as the legendarium became more internally consistent; in the end, Tolkien said that "there should

[230] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 31, 172.
[231] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 23.
[232] Ibid., 49.
[233] Christopher Tolkien, *The Lost Road and Other Writings: The History of Middle-earth*. (London, HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 314.

not be supposed more than say 3 or at most 7 ever existed."[234] The Balrogs actively participated in the Wars of Beleriand, but the majority of them were destroyed in the Great Battle; the few that survived took refuge underground. In the third age, the Dwarves discovered the most significant Balrog in J.R.R. Tolkien's narrative at the root of a mithril-vein in Khazad-dûm. Having caused the demise of two Dwarven kings, Durin VI and Náin I, this demonic monster earned the title of "Durin's Bane." During the event narrated in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the protagonists are forced to pass through the Mines of Moria to proceed in their quest, not knowing that the Balrog is dwelling under the Dwarven realm. After a series of bloody encounters with the Orcs, they are attacked by Durin's Bane, who forces them to a hasty escape. In order to ensure his friends' safe escape, Gandalf decides to confront the creature on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm:

> Something was coming up behind them. What it was could not be seen: it was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it. It came to the edge of the fire and the light faded as if a cloud had bent over it. Then with a rush it leaped across the fissure. The f lames roared up to greet it, and wreathed about it; and a black smoke swirled in the air. Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left it held a whip of many thongs.[235]

Joe Abbott claims that the Balrogs possess traits that are typical of Northern mythology, particularly those of Surtr, the gigantic guardian of Muspelheim, one of the nine worlds of Norse mythology, and the land of fire. In *Vǫluspá* Stanza 52, Surtr is presented as a demon, a "god of the slain" who wields a

[234] J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring: The History of Middle-earth*. (London, HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 80.
[235] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 329.

sword and a “sviga laevi.”[236] We know that the Balrog of Khazad-dûm carries a similar blazing sword. “Sviga laevi” can be defined as “switch-bane:”

> In Norse poetry this "switch-bane" serves as a kenning for "the fire"; this is an image that Tolkien would certainly have been familiar with, and it is a short step from "a switch (of fire) for death" to the "whips of flame" characteristic of the Balrogs.[237]

Furthermore, in *Perilous Realms*,[238] Marjorie Burns linked Gandalf and Durin’s Bane to the fire giant Surtr and the god Freyr, who, in the Prose Edda, fought each other during Ragnarök across the rainbow bridge Bifrost, here represented by the Bridge of Khazad-dûm.

Two pivotal functions are accomplished by this encounter with Durin’s Bane: it provides Gandalf, the established hero, a proper and essential exit, and it clears the path for Aragorn, the new hero, to grow. We know that Gandalf is one of the Istari, an order of Wizards composed of five Maiar sent to Middle-earth by the Valar during the Third Age to assist the Free People against Sauron’s malignity. Even the Dark Lord himself feared Gandalf.[239] Since *The Hobbit*, Gandalf has always been portrayed as one of the most formidable and unconquerable characters. An insight into the reason Tolkien chose to construct such a convincing and plausible scene in which such a great character gets killed can be found in *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics:*

> It would really have been preposterous, if the poet had recounted Beowulf's rise to fame in a 'typical' or 'commonplace' war in Frisia, and then ended him with a dragon. Or if he had told of his cleansing of Heorot, and then brought him to defeat and death in a 'wild' or 'trivial' Swedish invasion![240]

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[236] Joe Abbot, (1989) “Tolkien’s Monsters: Concept and Function in The Lord of the Rings (Part 1) The Balrog of Khazad-dum,” *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 16: No. 1, Article 5 (1989): 20.
[237] Ibid., 20.
[238] Marjorie Burns, *Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien’s Middle-Earth* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 58-59.
[239] Abbot, “Tolkien’s Monsters: The Balrog of Khazad-dum,” 24.
[240] Tolkien, *B: M&C*, 31-32.

It could be argued that, similarly, a mere group of Orcs could not have given Gandalf such a compelling climax. If Gandalf must die, which is essential to Aragorn's growth, the greatness of this character deserves a great enemy and a noble death; therefore, Durin's Bane provides such a function. Tolkien felt that the *Beowulf* poet, at the very least, supported the idea that a single, unique foe will always be more powerful than a group of opponents. Tolkien recognized that also for his own fictional characters. Throughout the First Age, the reader frequently encounters the Balrogs alongside Dragons; this is no coincidence because Tolkien possessed a great reverence for these mythological serpent-like creatures:

> As for the dragon: as far as we know anything about these old poets, we know this: the prince of the heroes of the North… was a dragon-slayer. And his most renowned deed, from which in Norse he derived his title Fafnisbani, was the slaying of the prince of legendary worms.... [T]he story... had these two primary features: the dragon, and the slaying of him as the chief deed of the greatest of heroes....[T]he dragon in legend is a potent creation of men's imagination, richer in significance than his barrow is in gold.[241]

In Tolkien's legendarium, the Balrogs hold a similarly esteemed position:

> drakes and worms are the evillest creatures that Melko has made, and the most uncouth, yet of all are they the most powerful, save it be the Balrogs only.[242]

Due to their Maiar essence, the Balrogs possess similar features to the Istari; but, although these monsters fell from the Ilúvatar's spiritual hierarchy, they maintained their immense power. For this reason, the Grey Wizard has to vanquish a monster whose strength is potentially equal to his. The fight between Gandalf and Durin's Bane is a crucial part of *The Lord of the Rings* narrative because it not only provides an epic temporary removal of the undisputed leader of the Fellowship, but also allows the future king to grow

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[241] Tolkien, *B: M&C*, 16.
[242] Christopher Tolkien, The Book of Lost Tales II. The History of Middle-earth (Boston: Houghton, 1984), 85.

by offering him the autonomy to make decisions that will affect those who come after him.[243]

As Foster clarified,[244] Tolkien's Dragons are malicious monsters found in the northern regions of Middle-earth. They are depicted as enormous, strong, scale-covered, and long-lasting creatures; their words are persuasive and alluring, and their gaze could deceive anyone. Morgoth most likely began breeding Dragons in Angband during the First Age. Three different types of Dragons are known to exist in Tolkien's legendarium: the first, the Uruloki, are the fire-drakes of the North and were the most common in the First Age; they are capable of breathing fire but could not fly. Known as the "Father of Dragons," Glaurung was the first and fiercest of the Uruloki and the greatest monster of Morgoth's forces; he was likely the ancestor of all the Dragons. Glaurung plays a major role in *The Children of Húrin*. Being restricted to the Ered Mithrin, the second breed is the Cold-drakes, who most likely did not possess fire-breathing abilities. The Winged Dragons—who could also breathe fire—are the third breed. The largest Winged Dragon to have ever lived in Middle-earth was Ancalagon, also known as "The Black," whose appearance is limited to the Great Battle, which signalled the end of the First Age. During the Third Age, the fiercest Winged Dragon is Smaug, the primary antagonist of *The Hobbit*. After learning of the richness of the Dwarven city of Erebor, Smaug decides to destroy the nearby city of Dale driving away the Dwarves from their Kingdom beneath the Mountain; all of that just out of greed. He enjoys his treasure for almost two centuries until Bilbo, Thorin and his company arrive to reclaim the city; Smaug is ultimately killed by Bard the Bowman.

Even though draconic creatures were initially introduced in ancient Near Eastern mythologies and Mesopotamian art, and were predominantly

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[243] Abbot, "Tolkien's Monsters," 24-26.
[244] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 10, 93, 165, 361.

featured in numerous folklores, the modern Western conception of the dragon originated from religious texts and medieval bestiaries. Although bestiaries contained fantastic creatures, most of them were believed to be real or existed in old times; additionally, bestiaries were attached to each creature's allegorical meaning. The *Aberdeen Bestiary*, an illustrated bestiary from the twelfth century, depicts the dragon as a serpent-like creature that is eating an elephant. Combining the Christian message of deception and pride with a zoological explanation of the dragon's origin, this creature is associated with both Satan and the animal category of serpents.[245]

According to Fawcett, [246] the dragon, as a bestiary figure, is an emblem of vice, recognizable by its deceitfulness and greed; Tolkien responded to the critique regarding the dragon in *Beowulf* by stating:

> [a] dragon is no idle fancy. Whatever may be his origins, in fact or invention, the dragon in legend is a potent creation of men's imagination, richer in significance than his barrow is in gold. [...] More than one poem in recent years [...] has been inspired by the dragon of *Beowulf*[247]

Since their first appearance in Middle-earth, Dragons have been presented as more than just beasts; Tolkien's Dragons are cunning, powerful, and clever monsters capable of overpowering their opponents both mentally and physically. Similarly to Dracula, Glaurung is able to hypnotize and attract his victims:

> Glaurung withheld his blast, and opened wide his serpent-eyes and gazed upon Túrin. Without fear Túrin looked in those eyes as he raised up his sword; and straightaway he fell under the dreadful spell of the dragon, and was as one turned to stone. Thus long they stood unmoving, silent before the great Doors of Felagund. Then Glaurung spoke again, taunting Túrin. "Evil have been all your ways, son of Húrin," said he. "Thankless fosterling, outlaw, slayer of your friend, thief of love,

[245] "Folio 65v - De serpentibus; Of snakes. De draconibus; Of the dragon," University of Aberdeen, accessed July 29, 2024, https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f65v
[246] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 137-144.
[247] Tolkien, *B: M&C*, 16.

usurper of Nargothrond, captain foolhardy, and deserter of your kin." [...] And Túrin being under the spell of Glaurung hearkened to his words, and he saw himself as in a mirror misshapen by malice, and he loathed what he saw.[248]

Glaurung's primary weapon is his cunning and ability to manipulate his adversaries; instead of using fire to destroy Túrin, he employs words. Túrin's confidence and feeling of self are undermined by Glaurung's power, which also distorts his perception of reality. One of the main attributes of the dragon in *Beowulf*, and in Norse mythology is intelligence. In Tolkien's legendarium, intelligence and strategic thinking are essential to Bilbo when mentally challenging Smaug in *The Hobbit*; when Bilbo first meets the Dragon in the Lonely Mountain, he skilfully avoids the creature's questions with a series of cryptic responses, telling the truth about his experiences without ever revealing his identity. After that, the narrator praises Bilbo for his wordplay:

This is of course the way to talk to dragons, if you don't want to reveal your proper name (which is wise), and don't want to infuriate them by a flat refusal (which is also very wise). No dragon can resist the fascination of riddling talk and of wasting time trying to understand it.[249]

Wordplay and pompous language are two elements both Smaug and Glaurung like using. Tolkien's dragons resemble the idea of the dragon in Norse mythology as a superior monster that the hero must slay, even though they do not transform like Fafnir of the *Volsunga Saga*. They are, on the contrary, massive, intelligent, and strong creatures. Dragons have a distinct vocabulary and diction that sets them apart from other creatures; through language use, they convey their self-aggrandizing, confidence, and dominance. In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien describes the power a Dragon's voice possesses:

[248] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Children of Húrin* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 178-179.
[249] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 259.

> That is the effect that dragon-talk has on the inexperienced. Bilbo of course ought to be on his guard; but Smaug had rather an overwhelming personality.[250]

The Dragon is not mentioned to have a native tongue; instead, Smaug and Glaurung are both excellent tricksters who speak the language of their victims. Smaug and Glaurung are both tenacious antagonists bringing destruction both through physical attacks and the careful revelation of information. Although Smaug uses cunning speech to extract information from Bilbo, his main weapon is his physical force, adopted in *The Hobbit* to destroy cities of Men and Dwarven realms. In *The Children of Húrin*, on the other hand, Glaurung's manipulation is demonstrated by his use of information as a weapon. Within the narrative, Glaurung is aware of the incest between Níniel and Túrin. After informing Níniel of her sins, she consequently jumps from a waterfall to end her life; Brandir then tells Túrin about this, to which Túrin reacts by killing him and himself.[251]

In conclusion, Tolkien provides his Dragons with an intricate kind of monstrosity: on the one hand, their physical prowess draws attention to their destructive potential and the disastrous impacts they can have on Arda; on the other, their persuasive use of language highlights their most dangerous and monstrous quality, which is their intellect. Therefore, the Dragons of Middle-earth, particularly Glaurung and Smaug, are not just hideous beasts that must be slain, but clever, cunning, and greedy monsters that pose a multitude of threats.

[250] Ibid., 261.
[251] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 137-144.

2.3 Hegel's Lord-Bondsman Dialectic: Orcs, Goblins, Uruk-hai, Half-orc, and Goblin-men

According to Foster,[252] the most widely recognized feature of Orcs and Uruk-hai, who are closely bound to the Dark Lords of Middle-earth, is their status as slaves and interchangeable minions. Frequently, these humanoid creatures are portrayed as faceless and dreadful monsters, lacking personality and being motivated almost solely by their masters' desires. From their macabre origin to their evil employment in the narrative, Orcs and Uruk-hai seem to epitomize Tolkien's concept of "The Machine," which can be closely associated with monstrosity.

The Orcs' first appearance in the legendarium is in *The Silmarillion*. In the First Age, some of the first Elves in Middle-earth were captured by Melkor, who by torturing and corrupting them with his dark power, turned them into Orcs inside the fortress of Utumno. Thus, "in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes,"[253] Melkor bred this monstrous race. Because Ilúvatar was the only entity that truly held the creative power to bring new life into existence, Melkor, as a sub-creator, was forced to rely on corrupting, manipulating, and distorting already existing creations. In a 1954 correspondence, Tolkien clarified:

> I have represented at least the Orcs as pre-existing real beings on whom the Dark Lord has exerted the fullness of his power in remodelling and corrupting them, not making them. That God would 'tolerate' that, seems no worse theology than the toleration of the calculated dehumanizing of Men by tyrants that goes on today.[254]

Being abuses of his highest privilege, and creatures begotten of sin and naturally wicked, Orcs would be "the vilest deed of Melkor, and the most hateful to Ilúvatar."[255] Tolkien's worldview and the world he created with the

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[252] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 305-306.
[253] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 47.
[254] Tolkien, *Letters*, 291.
[255] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 47.

omniscient and benevolent Ilúvatar as its God do not align with the idea of beings with actual *fëa* held as irredeemable, even though he was inconsistent in offering an exhaustive account of this issue regarding the majority of his monsters. Fortunately, one of Tolkien's letters includes an answer that applies to both Orcs and Trolls:

> I think it must be assumed that 'talking' is not necessarily the sign of the possession of a 'rational soul' or fëa. The Orcs were beasts of humanized shape (to mock Men and Elves) deliberately perverted I converted into a more close resemblance to Men. Their 'talking' was really reeling off 'records' set in them by Melkor. Even their rebellious critical words - he knew about them. Melkor taught them speech and as they bred they inherited this; and they had just as much independence as have, say, dogs or horses of their human masters.[256]

The idea that Orcs are soulless creatures resembling beasts, wholly dependent on their master, much like dogs or horses, is raised by this passage. If Orcs were descended from Elves, Tolkien continues, then their fëa, or "soul," would go to the Halls of Mandos and be held there until the end of the world.[257] Thus, we may hypothesize about an even more terrible and unnatural occurrence that would be genuinely deserving of being considered Morgoth's most wicked deed. The Orcs' "souls," once belonging to Elves, could have been driven out by Melkor's corruption. There is evidence that supports this theory. In *The Nature of Middle-earth*, Tolkien wrote as follows:

> Incarnate bodies die also, when their corporeal coherence is destroyed. But not, by necessity, when or because the fëa departs. Usually the fëa departs only because the body is injured beyond recovery, so that its coherence is already broken. But what if the fëa deserts a body which is not greatly injured, or which is whole? It then, it might be thought, remains a living corporeal body, but without mind or reason; it becomes an animal (or kelva), seeking nothing more than food by which its corporeal life may be continued, and seeking it only after the manner of beasts, as

[256] Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 410.
[257] Ibid., 410-411.

> it may find it by limbs and senses. This is a horrible thought. Maybe such things have indeed come to pass in Arda, where it seems that no evil or perversion of things and their nature is impossible.[258]

Tolkien proceeded by stating that the act of separating the body from the soul—with the body continuing to exist—was, in fact, carried out by both of the Dark Lords.

> For it is recorded in the histories that Morgoth, and Sauron after him, would drive out the fëa by terror, and then feed the body and make it a beast. Or worse: he would daunt the fëa within the body and reduce it to impotence; and then nourish the body foully, so that it became bestial, to the horror and torment of the fëa.[259]

The notion that a creature's very soul would be reduced to impotence within the body is reasonable. Taking the Orcs as an example, we may have "souls" trapped within these deformed, horrific bodies, only able to experience torment until they could possibly be freed from death and flee to the Halls of Mandos. An additional indication of this is proven by a distinction displayed by between the Orcs and the Dwarves—other creatures not considered Children of Ilúvatar. Aulë the Smith, a Vala, was their creator. Like Melkor, Aulë "was unwilling to await the fulfilment of Ilúvatar's designs,"[260] and since he lacked the ability to bring things into existence, the Dwarves were subject to his will. Due to this act, Aulë was reproached by Ilúvatar; the Vala admitted that he just wanted to create more life and, displaying repentance, lifted his hammer to destroy the Dwarves. However, he was stopped by Ilúvatar, who pitied his child, decided to include his creations in his plan for Arda, therefore providing them actual *fëa*.[261] As a result, their physical existence would be entirely subordinate and devoted to the evil will of their masters, becoming almost non-sentient beasts exploited during wartime and for dreadful enterprises.

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[258] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Nature of Middle-earth*, ed. Carl F. Hostetter (London: HarperCollins, 2021), 272.
[259] Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 80.
[260] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 37.
[261] Ibid., 37-39.

Over the years, the Orcs proliferated, consisting of the majority of Melkor and Sauron's infantry forces.[262] Being bred in the mockery of Elves, Orcs shared their relationship with death; therefore, they did not die naturally. On the other hand, Orcs were typically "short, squat, and bow-legged, with long arms, dark faces, squinty eyes, and long fangs."[263] Like Trolls, most of them were weakened by the sunlight. They were proficient in forging weaponry, digging tunnels, and other practical activities. They enjoyed drinking blood and eating raw flesh, but also ate men, ponies, and other Orcs. They liked killing and they hated all things of beauty, but they detested each other as much as they did everyone else. There existed numerous Orkish tribes, and cooperation was greater during wartime when thousands of Orcs under the Dark Lords' command, could act almost like a single entity. There is no mention of female Orcs or Orkish tribal structures; it was implied that Orcs simply spawned. For intra-tribal communication, the Orkish tribes created extremely primitive languages, weak in grammar yet rich in curses; they were primarily made up of combinations of words coming from other languages, such as a debased form of Westron and Black Speech. Following the destruction of Morgoth, Orcs tribes managed to survive in the Misty Mountains and other places. During the Second and Third Ages, they served as Sauron's main servants, but they were employed even by Saruman in all his enterprises.[264]

When it comes to Goblins, in Tolkien's legendarium, this creature is simply an Orc. While Goblins appear to be smaller and inhabit the Misty Mountains in adaptations such as Peter Jackson's, the terms "Goblin" and "Orc" are used interchangeably in Tolkien's writings.[265]

[262] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 305-306.
[263] Ibid., 305.
[264] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 305-306.
[265] Ibid., 305-306.

The Uruk-hai, a new strain of Orcs, are introduced during the Third Age.[266] The phrase *Uruk-hai* literally translates to "Orc folk" or "Orc people" since it combines the Black Speech terms *uruk*, meaning "Orc," and *hai*, meaning "folk." They were first bred in Mordor by Sauron, though Saruman would also breed them in Isengard. The Uruk-hai appear as an enhanced form of Orcs; while their ferocity is well known, the Uruk-hai's most remarkable characteristic is their apparent ability to withstand sunlight, much like the Olog-hai. The Uruk-hai thought of themselves as superior to other Orcs since they were larger, faster, stronger, and smarter than their standard counterpart. As such, their primary employment during wartime was as soldiers. The Uruk-hai's origins are unknown; Treebeard wondered in *The Two Towers*:

> I wonder what [Saruman] has done? Are they Men he has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be a black evil!'[267]

Regarding Saruman, his actions extended beyond the mere creation of the Uruk-hai; among his servants, there were Goblin-men and Half-orcs.[268] Half-orcs were taller than Men but had sallow faces and squint eyes; they appeared to be the result of a combination between Men and Orcs. They served as spies and warriors. These Half-orcs were among the Dunlendings who fought alongside Saruman in the Battle of the Hornburg, where most were destroyed. After Saruman's defeat, those who remained were among those who went into exile and became the ruffians who took over the Shire at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. Conversely, although Goblin-men are listed separately from them, they share many similarities with Half-orcs. They got involved in the Battle of the Hornburg and were also resistant to sunlight. In order to understand how Saruman produced these new Orc breeds, the following passage from *Morgoth's Ring* may be useful:

[266] Ibid., 404-405.
[267] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 473.
[268] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 185.

> It became clear in time that undoubted Men could under the domination of Morgoth or his agents in a few generations be reduced almost to the Orc-level of mind and habits; and then they would or could be made to mate with Orcs, producing new breeds, often larger and more cunning. There is no doubt that long afterwards, in the Third Age, Saruman rediscovered this, or learned of it in lore, and in his lust for mastery committed this, his wickedest deed: the interbreeding of Orcs and Men, producing both Men-orcs large and cunning, and Orc-men treacherous and vile.[269]

Therefore, it is evident that the Orcs of Middle-earth emerged with a single purpose: to serve the dark powers in their conflicts with the Men, Elves, and Dwarves of Middle-earth, from their original creation by Morgoth to their later versions bred by Saruman and Sauron.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Lord-Bondsman Dialectic, a central argument in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, provides a pertinent framework for examining the dynamics of power and dependence in the relationships between Saruman, the Dark Lords, and their servile creations, the Orcs and Uruk-hai. In Hegel's dialectic, a primitive consciousness becoming a "bondsman" is dominated by another consciousness, a "lord," through forced labour and unequal recognition. According to Hegel, and as noted by Miikka Jaarte,[270] although the lord has control, this relationship is inherently unstable, as the bondsman's subjugation prepares him to one day become a "truly independent consciousness,"[271] while the lord is reduced to "a sad and dependent figure."[272]

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* aims to describe the development of human consciousness, passing through several flawed patterns of consciousness, towards the ultimate "standpoint of true Science."[273] Hegel refers to these

[269] Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 418-419.
[270] Miikka Jaarte, "Colonial Slavery, the Lord-Bondsman Dialectic, and the St Louis Hegelians." *Hegel Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (2024): 43–64. https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2024.3, 45-48.
[271] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 193.
[272] Jaarte, "Colonial Slavery," 47.
[273] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 5.

collective consciousness patterns as a community's "Spirit" (Geist). The Lord-Bondsman Dialectic represents one of the earliest stages in this process, where consciousness, having failed to comprehend the external world, turns to self-consciousness. Hegel argues that self-consciousness requires external validation, which is achieved through a life-or-death struggle in order to obtain recognition;[274] in the end, the winner of the struggle becomes lord, the loser bondsman.[275] Recognition necessitates acknowledging another's subjectivity as a limit on one's practical reasoning. However, the recognition between the bondsman and the lord is unstable and not freely given, therefore leading to an unequal and incomplete relationship. On the one hand, to the bondsman, the lord is something he "cannot utilise for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord what the first does to it."[276] On the other, the bondsman is employed by the lord for his own advantage. Therefore, it follows that the recognition between the lord and bondsman is inevitably "one-sided and unequal."[277]

Miikka Jaarte categorizes Hegel's argument into two theses: the "Lord-Thesis" and the "Bondsman-Thesis." The Lord-Thesis asserts that as long as "the lord retains his power over the bondsman, then he cannot reach self-consciousness."[278] The recognition the lord receives is unsatisfying because it is not freely given; true recognition must be freely given.[279] Hegel concludes that the lord must set the bondsman free and recognize him to achieve self-consciousness. Hegel further generalizes that self-consciousness is only satisfied in a community of mutual recognition, free of lordship; bondage involves unequal recognition, therefore it prevents the lord from achieving true self-consciousness.

[274] Ibid., 185-189.
[275] Ibid., 190-196.
[276] Ibid., 182.
[277] Ibid., 191.
[278] Jaarte, "Colonial Slavery," 47.
[279] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 191-192.

Concerning the Bondsman-Thesis, Hegel contends that the bondsman can only achieve self-consciousness through adequate subjugation, which serves as a form of education (Bildung) toward the full development of the human Spirit:

> Through obedience one learns to command. This means to acquire power over the contingency of one's desires, and the true command consists in what is just and rational […] [In this obedience] there is a negation of inner self-seeking, and with this negation of particularity the will emerges as a universal.[280]

Part of the value of bondage is that it breaks the bondsman's ability to pursue immediate desires, allowing him to develop power over the contingency of his inclinations. Following the lord's external will train the bondsman in constraining his self-will, which will be useful when he eventually follows the dictates of reason and justice. However, Jaart claims that "if the bondsman has not experienced adequate bondage, he cannot reach self-consciousness."[281] According to Hegel, "bondage" is a specific type of oppression distinguished by two elements: forced labour and unequal recognition. For bondage to be educative, however, certain conditions must be met. The bondsman learns three things through labour that the lord does not: he learns to fear death, to obey external discipline, and to express himself by labouring in the external world. Hegel contends, however, that this relationship results in a dramatic reversal of fortune, with the bondsman poised to become a "truly independent consciousness"[282] and the lord spiritually stagnant. In conclusion, the Bondsman-Thesis states that experiencing adequate bondage is not just helpful but necessary for the bondsman's growth and education towards the achievement of the standpoint of true Science.

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[280] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827–1828*, trans. R. R. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 192.
[281] Jaarte, "Colonial Slavery," 48.
[282] Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 193.

This dialectic, which is essential to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, highlights the transformative potential inherent in the experience of subordination and offers a framework for comprehending the evolution of consciousness through a power-dependency relationship; through this lens, we can critically assess the nature of domination and recognition related to the concept of monstrosity in Tolkien's legendarium.

In Tolkien's world, Saruman, Sauron, and Morgoth recall Hegel's lords, as they dominate vast numbers of beings, forcing them into servitude through fear and coercion, therefore establishing a "one-sided and unequal"[283] relationship. Yet, their control is fundamentally unstable, as their power highly depends on their minions. Especially during the Third Age, given their physical limitations, it is extremely crucial that Saruman and Sauron can only accomplish their terrible deeds exclusively thanks to their monsters, given their physical limitations: Sauron, often appearing in a non-physical form, and Saruman, who operates from a distance, embody the ultimate dependency on their minions to execute their will, closely aligning with Hegel's assertion that the lord's authority is precarious, rooted in an unequal relationship with the bondsman. The Orcs and Uruk-hai, on the other hand, act as the bondsman. According to Hegel, the bondsman's eventual realisation of true independence depends on his experiences defined by fear of death, discipline, and labour. The goal of this bondage is to educate the bondsman, to break his ability to pursue immediate desires and prepare him for eventual self-consciousness. It is true that Orcs are subjugated to forced labour, external discipline and fear of death by their masters, but Tolkien's depiction of these dreadful creatures introduces a crucial deviation from Hegel's dialectic: the intrinsic monstrosity and ontological nature of these beings. The Orcs and Uruk-hai, in contrast to the bondsman in Hegel's dialectic who possesses the capacity for spiritual development and eventual

[283] Ibid., 191.

independence, are made expressly to serve and embody evil. From the moment of their birth, Orcs are subjected to constant dehumanization and instrumentalization by their lords who turn them into instruments of their wicked ambitions. This fundamental difference prevents them from achieving the development that Hegel describes:

> It is true, of course, that Morgoth held the Orcs in dire thraldom; for in their corruption they had lost almost all possibility of resisting the domination of his will. So great indeed did its pressure upon them become ere Angband fell that, if he turned his thought towards them, they were conscious of his 'eye' wherever they might be; and when Morgoth was at last removed from Arda the Orcs that survived in the West were scattered, leaderless and almost witless, and were for a long time without control or purpose. This servitude to a central will that reduced the Orcs almost to an ant-like life was seen even more plainly in the Second and Third Ages under the tyranny of Sauron, Morgoth's chief lieutenant. Sauron indeed achieved even greater control over his Orcs than Morgoth had done.[284]

Orcs without a master are, as this passage emphasizes, "scattered, almost witless, and without control or purpose;" their existence is intrinsically tied with servitude, without which they become something resembling beasts.

While it is true that Orcs and Uruk-hai endure fear of death, external discipline, and labour in the external world, all of which are essential to the bondsman's spiritual development, the outcome is the opposite of what Hegel intended to demonstrate with his dialectic: the Orcs' fear of death, instead of advancing a deeper understanding of self-consciousness, perpetuates their subjugation and enhances their reliance on their masters. Moreover, the discipline they experience is solely for the purpose of efficient subjugation and war, not for any educative or transformative purpose. Unlike the Hegelian bondsman, who internalizes discipline as a step towards self-mastery and rational autonomy, the Orcs remain trapped in a cycle of

[284] Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 419.

obedience, violence, and subservience. Lastly, the labour performed by Orcs and Uruk-hai is directed towards destruction and domination rather than creative expression or self-realization. Hegel's dialectic involves recognizing the limitations of the lord's imposed will and developing one's own rational autonomy. Tolkien subverts this pattern, though, since the Orcs' intrinsic monstrosity—defined by their nature, origins, and purpose—precludes them from achieving what Hegel's bondsman might. They are created to be slaves and instruments of evil, lacking the essential capacity for the spiritual and intellectual growth that Hegel describes. Their bondage is not a stage in the development towards independence but a permanent condition of their being.

The Dark Lords in Tolkien's legendarium share certain characteristics with Hegel's conception of the lord, particularly in their role in preventing their bondsmen, the Orcs, from being victims of immediate desires. By imposing fear, discipline, and forced labour, the Dark Lords restrain the Orcs' impulsive tendencies and keep them focused on their masters' goals. This analysis becomes more nuanced when we consider specific instances in *The Lord of the Rings* where Orcs act out of egoism and greed, such as fighting over material objects or attempting to eat the Hobbits just for personal gain. In *The Return of the King*,[285] after Frodo and Samwise pass Minas Morgul, and the Ring-bearer is bitten and paralyzed by Shelob's venom, Shagrat, a commander of the Tower of Cirith Ungol meets another company led by the Orc Gorbag. After discovering Frodo's paralyzed body, although they realize there had to be more than one intruder, namely Sam, they decide to take the Hobbit to the Tower. Because Shagrat does not trust any of Gorbag's or his soldiers, Frodo is kept in the Tower's highest chamber. When the prisoner is searched, Shagrat and Gorbag fight over possession of the artefacts: a Mithril

[285] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 897-915.

shirt, an Elvish cape, and a Barrow-blade; Gorbag especially wants the Mithril shirt:

> Shagrat's company had seemed to be about forty, and Gorbag's more than twice as large; but of course Shagrat's patrol had only been a part of his garrison. Almost certainly they were quarrelling about Frodo, and the spoil. For a second Sam halted, for suddenly things seemed clear to him, almost as if he had seen them with his eyes. The mithril coat! Of course, Frodo was wearing it, and they would find it. And from what Sam had heard Gorbag would covet it.[286]

As a result, a fight that involves everyone in the Tower breaks out. After the battle, Sam discovers that most of the Orcs had died and that Shagrat had fled down the stairs with a bundle of Frodo's possessions after killing Gorbag. Eventually, the two Hobbits are able to proceed in their quest to Mount Doom after Sam saves Frodo. It is interesting to observe how Shagrat, one of the main characters involved in this violent quarrel, acts towards another one of his kindred:

> 'You won't go again, you say? Curse you, Snaga, you little maggot! If you think I'm so damaged that it's safe to flout me, you're mistaken. Come here, and I'll squeeze your eyes out, like I did to Radbug just now. And when some new lads come, I'll deal with you: I'll send you to Shelob.' […] 'I'm not going down those stairs again,' growled Snaga, 'be you captain or no. Nar! Keep your hands off your knife, or I'll put an arrow in your guts. You won't be a captain long when They hear about all these goings-on. I've fought for the Tower against those stinking Morgul-rats, but a nice mess you two precious captains have made of things, fighting over the swag.' 'That's enough from you,' snarled Shagrat. 'I had my orders. It was Gorbag started it, trying to pinch that pretty shirt.'[287]

It is evident in this passage that Shagrat's actions are driven exclusively by his desire to keep and protect the Mithril shirt. Despite being the "Captain of the Tower of Cirith Ungol," and the Orc who "kept Sauron's mail,"[288]

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[286] Ibid., 902.
[287] Ibid., 905-906.
[288] Ibid., 311-332.

Shagrat temporarily disobeys his Lord's commands in order to act in a greedy and egoistic way. He claims ownership of the Mithril shirt, accusing Gorbag of provoking the quarrel. He would stop at nothing to safeguard this material object, even if it meant murdering his own comrades and weakening Sauron's forces. It is noteworthy that Shagrat appears to emulate his lord Sauron's actions when interacting with the other Orc, thereby reiterating his captaincy and asserting his superiority over his kindred. Interestingly, the other Orc interacting with Shagrat is named Snaga, a term given by Tolkien to "lesser Orcs."[289] Therefore, we can assume that here, the Orc, as a result of his bondage, affirms his identity as a temporary lord instilling the fear of death in a lesser Orc. These actions can be seen as brief glimpses of independence, though they are not aligned with the higher self-consciousness Hegel envisioned for the bondsman. Instead of striving for spiritual or intellectual autonomy, the Orcs just pursue material objects or mimic their lords' behaviour, which represents the only form of independence their inherent monstrosity allows them to seek. Therefore, these ephemeral moments of independence from their lord's will and interaction with the external world just serve to reinforce the Orcs' natural condition and as corrupted instruments of evil.

In conclusion, while Hegel's Lord-Bondsman Dialectic can be employed to analyze the dynamics of power concerning the Dark Lords and Orcs in Tolkien's legendarium, the critical distinction lies in the Orcs' monstrous nature. Hegel envisioned the bondsman's bondage as a transformative process leading to true self-consciousness. Tolkien's Orcs, in contrast, created expressly for servitude and evil, lack the potential for such transformation, permanent condition of bondage and their incapacity for spiritual growth.

[289] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 362.

2.4 The Novelistic Gollum and The Epic Monsters

It is no coincidence that Gollum is the final character examined in this chapter. Among the monsters in Tolkien's legendarium, Gollum stands out as an intriguing exception because he is one of the few Tolkien's characters who can legitimately play the parts of both the monster and the hero—a notion that in this case is directly related to this creature's dual personality and internal struggle.

According to Foster,[290] Sméagol was born on the banks of Anduin and was the nosiest member of a respectable Stoorish family (one of the three Hobbit breeds); he was passionate about traditions, and diving into deep ponds. During a boat ride, he claimed for himself a ring that his friend Déagol found at the bottom of the river. Following what appeared to be a cordial approach, he killed Déagol, concealed his body, and went back home, discovering that the ring could make him invisible. Due to his improper behaviour and the problems he caused within his family, he is expelled and forced to wander north to the Misty Mountains; there, he found shelter, surviving on fish and occasional Orcs he captured employing the One Ring; by limiting the use of the Ring to this extent, he avoided becoming a Wraith. Sméagol's body progressively corrupted over the years, becoming a pale, tiny, and emaciated creature with flat feet, long, thin hands with clammy fingers, and big, glowing green eyes. But since he spent so much time underground, he acquired outstanding hearing, smell, and sight. Déagol's murder, his expulsion from his family, his life of isolation and the corrupting influence of the One Ring heavily contributed to the development of a split personality; as time passed, Sméagol's original self was gradually eclipsed by the Gollum persona.

[290] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 167-169.

Interestingly, Oronzo Cilli[291] reveals that Sméagol's name derives from the Old English term *sméah*, an adjective meaning "creeping in, penetrating." It is etymologically related to the word *smial*, a title also applied by the Anglo-Saxons to the Biblical Cain known for having murdered his brother Abel in Genesis. Regarding the origin of the name Gollum:

> Gollum got his name from the sound he made when he spoke, "the horrible swallowing sound in his throat." The hypothesis of Douglas Anderson, who annotated *The Annotated Hobbit*, is that Tolkien got the name Gollum from *gull* or *goll*, the Old Norse word for gold. One inflected form would be *gollum* (gold, treasure, something precious).[292]

After almost five hundred years, in *The Hobbit*, Gollum stumbles upon Bilbo in a cavern near Goblin Town after inadvertently losing the Ring; the two play a riddle-game, in which the Hobbit unfairly prevails. Gollum's frustration for the loss subsequently intensifies when he discovers that Bilbo had stolen his Precious, triggering the creature to kill the Hobbit, who still manages to escape. Three years later, Gollum's need to retrieve the Ring pushes him out of the Misty Mountains, leading him to wander for seven years until being captured by Sauron's forces, to whom under torture he reveals information about Bilbo and the Shire. After that, Gollum was captured by Aragorn, who delivered him to King Thranduil to be interrogated by Gandalf. However, after succeeding in escaping from the Elves, he found refuge in Moria, where he came across the Fellowship and decided to follow the Ring-bearer. Gollum appears as one of the main characters in *The Two Towers*; Sam and Frodo succeed in taking him off-guard in the Emyn Muil. After a brief confrontation, Sméagol manages to instil compassion in Frodo; motivated by his desire to serve the Ring-bearer, the temporarily tamed creature then decides to guide the two Hobbits on their quest. *The Return of*

[291] Oronzo Cilli, *Guida completa al mondo di Tolkien* (Vallardi A., 2022), 92-93.
[292] Woody Wendling, "The Riddle of Gollum: Was Tolkien Inspired by Old Norse Gold, the Jewish Golem, and the Christian Gospel?", Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings, Article 23, (2008), 1.

the King concludes with Gollum and Sméagol's death. Despite ultimately succeeding in reobtaining his Precious, through a sequence of abrupt events, this creature falls into the Cracks of Doom, destroying both the Ring and himself, guaranteeing Sauron's defeat.[293]

According to Woody Wendling,[294] there are various possible sources for Tolkien's conception of Gollum. Tolkien might have been influenced by Richard Wagner's operatic ring cycle, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, especially by Arthur Rackham's illustrated editions published in 1910 and 1911, which had an impact even on C.S. Lewis. Gollum's characterization recalls the dwarf Alberich; they are both subterranean aquatic creatures and they both share an obsession with rings or other invisibility-granting powerful artefacts. Curiously, Tolkien's portrayal of Gollum shares a lot of similarities with Mary Shelley's description of Frankenstein's monster. For example, Tolkien repeatedly employs the adjectives "miserable" and "wretched" to characterize Gollum; the notion of redemption, which will be examined in the last chapter of the thesis, highlights Gollum's primary connection to Frankenstein's monster. Given that Tolkien's lecture on *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* was provided in 1936 and that the first edition of *The Hobbit* was released in 1937, it is safe to affirm that Grendel could be considered one of the main inspirations for Gollum. Tolkien stated that "Beowulf is among my most valued sources; though it was not consciously present to the mind in the process of writing."[295] Gollum and Grendel are both pitiable creatures who dwell in lairs and are associated with water and caverns. Grendel is also supposed to be descended from Cain's race;

[293] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 167-169.
[294] Wendling, "The Riddle of Gollum," 6.
[295] Tolkien, *Letters*, 41.

Cain also killed his sibling, just like Gollum murdered Déagol.[296] According to John M. Bowers, without Grendel, "we wouldn't have Gollum."[297]

Gollum serves as the epitome of Tolkien's concept of "Fall;" contrarily to other monsters of the legendarium, Sméagol was not inherently evil; he was just an ordinary individual with common flaws and desires. However, the One Ring's evil power began affecting him soon after it was discovered in the Anduin's waters. More complexity to this character's background is added by Sméagol's murder of Déagol, which marks the end of his innocence and the start of his physical and mental transformation into Gollum. Due to his obsession with the One Ring, Sméagol's life became shortly and exclusively devoted to the relentless protection and subsequent pursuit of this artefact; his moral compass is constantly undermined by the Ring's influence, leaving him in a state of misery and inner turmoil. Gollum's dual personality, which only allows remnants of Sméagol to resurface from time to time, emphasizes the tragic aspect of his fall and the ongoing struggle between his original self and the enslaving influence of the Ring. This creature's dualistic nature is further reflected in the text by his change in name during the narrative; as highlighted by Christina Fawcett,[298] although the narrative voice does not, Gollum accepts his previous name when he is reminded of his life before the corruption:

> 'Sméagol,' said Gollum suddenly and clearly, opening his eyes wide and staring at Frodo with a strange light. 'Sméagol will swear on the Precious.'[299]

Samwise is one of the first characters to acknowledge the character shifts in Sméagol/Gollum; he provides him with his own set of names, Slinker and Stinker, which are neither complimentary nor positive, especially since Sam

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[296] Susan Wendling, Woody Wendling "A Speculative Meditation on Tolkien's Sources for the Character Gollum," *Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings*, Vol. 8, Article 28 (2012), 5.
[297] John M. Bowers, *The Western Literary Canon in Context* (Chantilly, VA: The Great Courses, 2008), 18.
[298] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 156-160.
[299] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 618.

and Gollum's relationship recalls that of Ariel and Caliban, as Tolkien stated in his correspondence.[300] Nevertheless, they capture the changing aspects of Sméagol's behaviour in the narrative.

One of the main ways that Tolkien sets Gollum apart from the other characters and further complicates his status as a monster figure is through his language. His speech patterns are distinct from those of every other character in the legendarium, as evident by his opening lines in *The Hobbit*:

> "Bless us and splash us, my preciousssss! I guess it's a choice feast; at least a tasty morsel it'd make us, gollum!" And when he said gollum he made a horrible swallowing noise in his throat. That is how he got his name, though he always called himself 'my precious'.[301]

The distinction in the use of language serves to separate Sméagol and Gollum's personas further. On the one hand, Sméagol's speech recalls his Hobbit-like origins; it is more coherent, gentler, and imbued with a sense of vulnerability and servility. His voice possesses an almost imploring tone, particularly when speaking to Frodo; this tone reveals a deep-seated desire to be understood, trusted, and recognized as more than simply the corrupted monster. On the other hand, Gollum is completely under the evil influence of the Ring; his speech patterns are characterized by broken and repeated sentences, which reflect his tortured mental state; Gollum also frequently refers to himself in the third person, which heightens the impression of his disjointed identity. Gergely Nagy further defined and investigated Gollum's language:

> He speaks with a general phonetic and syntactic simplicity, which Chance calls "baby talk", referring to himself in the plural ("we," "us"), with much repetition. His talk (usually with a strong sibilant character) is often interrupted by the gulping sound (transcribed as "gollum"). Repetitiousness, the automatism of language, reflects Gollum's deterioration into a state of control by corporeal drives and

[300] Tolkien, *Letters*, 111.
[301] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 86.

conditioned reflexes, while the sibilance of his phonology derives from a sort of physical conditioning: the lack of articulation (because his language for a long time did not function as communication, being only monologue for which no clear articulation is necessary) and the need for whispered and concealed speech.[302]

Gollum exclusively speaks the language he learned in his youth, prior to his corruption, even while interacting with creatures conversing in the Black Speech. Gollum employs language not as a means of communication; it is a speech act to provide consolation and fill the emptiness inside of him; his speech does not depend on a listening audience, it is self-serving.[303]

A general assumption when discussing monsters is that their wickedness is not derived from their decision or actions but is instead an inherent part of their nature. What makes most of the monsters different from traditional villains is their lack of any origin story or actual fall from grace; without corruption, there is no hope for redemption. It is precisely the theme of redemption that renders the character of Gollum a liminal figure, neither a monster nor a hero:

> He was desperate. He must get away, out of this horrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He must fight. He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering.[304]

This passage from *The Hobbit*, which recounts Bilbo's escape from Gollum's cave, highlights how dehumanized and monstrous Gollum is; he is described as a "foul thing" that must be defeated. Simultaneously, Gollum's liminality is revealed when Bilbo understands that the monster hasn't

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[302] Gergely Nagy, "The "Lost" Subject of Middle-earth: The Constitution of the Subject in the Figure of Gollum in The Lord of the Rings." *Tolkien Studies*. 57-79 (2006): 59-60.
[303] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 156.
[304] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 101-102.

actually attempted to kill him or threatened to do so, presenting him as a more human figure and introducing moral ambiguity. Gollum is a character divided between two worlds, neither fully evil nor fully deserving of mercy. He is more than just a monster. This moment of pity is crucial. This is what Gandalf tells Frodo about this event in *The Fellowship of the Ring*:

> 'Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity.' […] He deserves death.' 'Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it.

Gollum's capacity to change makes him unique from other monsters. He still has hope for redemption, and, throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, he displays a desire to return to that earlier state of innocence. This sense of hope regarding Gollum's redemption is expressed by Gandalf in this passage, but also and especially by Frodo throughout his interactions with the creature in the subsequent parts of the story.[305]

Monsters such as Shelob, the Balrogs, or the Ringwraiths are external threats possessing specific roles and allegiances within the broader narrative of good versus evil. On the other hand, Gollum plays a more complex and nuanced role that reflects the internal conflict that all characters—and hence, all humanity—experience.

A more in-depth analysis of Gollum, also taking as a comparison all the other monsters included in Tolkien's legendarium, can be provided through the lens of Adriana Cavarero's work *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti* (1997).

[305] Fawcett, J.R.R. Tolkien and the morality of monstrosity, 156-159.

The Italian philosopher examines how narration shapes identity in the first four chapters of her book, comparing prominent epic and mythological heroes to novelistic characters. The focus of her examination is the relationship between identity and the desire for narration—how other characters reveal the protagonists' stories, therefore impacting how these heroes perceive and construct their identities. The first discussed character is Oedipus; as summarised by Giorgia Scandagliato:

> Oedipus hears the story of his own birth, of which he was ignorant, from a messenger. The man professes to be the shepherd who received him from a servant of Laius, who had been ordered to abandon the infant on Mount Cithaeron in order to avoid the fulfilment of the prophecy whereby he would murder his father and commit incest with his mother. Although the order had been given by Queen Jocasta herself, the mother of the child, the shepherd pitied the baby and gave him to another shepherd, so that he could take care of him. The servant and the messenger reconstruct the events in front of a now adult Oedipus, who has become King of Thebes; in this moment, Oedipus discovers that he is the son of Laius and Jocasta, and that the prophecy has come to reality. He has, in fact, killed his father during a quarrel on the way to Thebes, and has married his mother, with whom he has had two daughters.[306]

Consequently, Scandagliato[307] emphasised how Cavarero separated Oedipus' life into two phases: the "false" story where Oedipus is ignorant of his origins and relationship with the other characters, and the "true" story—involving murder and incest—revealed to him through the narratives of others, such as the servant, the messenger, the diviner Tiresias and Jocasta. Once the circumstances of his birth and the reconstruction of the events are disclosed, Oedipus retrieves a story, a story that makes him comprehend and

[306] Giorgia Scandagliato, "'The proud people, deathless but doomed, from far beyond the sea' An application of György Lukács's The Theory of the Novel to J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings" (MA thesis, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, 2024), 76-77.
[307] Ibid., 77.

define his actions and identity. Therefore, from his actions emerges a story that holds the meaning of his identity:[308]

> Le azioni che Edipo ha compiuto sono sempre le stesse – un omicidio, un matrimonio – ma il loro senso è cambiato. Se prima Edipo si credeva un altro, ora, avendolo finalmente appreso dal racconto della sua storia, egli sa invece chi è. La forma edipica del *gnothi seauton* non consiste, appunto, in un esercizio di introspezione, bensì nel sollecitare il racconto esterno della propria storia.[309]

The same dynamic is reflected in the *Odyssey*. After being shipwrecked on the island of Scheria and rescued by the Phaeacians, Ulysses remains reticent about revealing his identity until the singer Demodocus recounts the story of the Trojan horse, which profoundly moves Ulysses and compels him to reveal his true self:

> In the same way, in which Oedipus receives the story of his birth, parricide, and incest from Jocasta, the servant and the messenger, Odysseus hears his adventures told by the singer; and here, too, narration on the part of other character goes together with a new form of self-awareness.[310]

The recounting of Ulysses' adventures by another character provides him with a new form of self-awareness, as he now comprehends the significance of his past actions, which he had not fully grasped when experiencing them. Cavarero continues clarifying the meaning behind this event:

> Né l'azione stessa né l'agente, ci suggerisce Hannah Arendt, bensì la storia che l'agente, nel suo agire, si è lasciato indietro: ossia la sua storia di vita. Nel sentire la sua storia Ulisse, allora, si commuove. Non solo perché dolorose sono le vicende narrate, ma perché quando le aveva vissute direttamente non ne aveva compreso il significato. Quasi che, agendo, fosse preso dalla contestualità degli accadimenti. Quasi che, ogni volta, fosse catturato nel presente dell'azione che spezza la serie

[308] Adriana Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti* (Castelvecchi, 2022), 19.
[309] Ibid., 22. "The actions that Oedipus has performed are always the same–a murder, a marriage–but their meaning has changed. If before Oedipus believed himself to be a different person, now, having heard the account of his story, he learns who he is. The Oedipal form of the *gnothi seauton* does not consist, in fact, in an exercise in introspection, but in soliciting the external account of one's own story." [my translation]
[310] Ibid., 79.

> temporale del prima e del dopo. Ora, invece, nel racconto dell'aedo, i tempi discontinui di quell'accadere si dipanano in una storia. Ora Ulisse viene a riconoscersi nell'eroe di questa storia. Acquisendo appieno il significato della storia narrata, acquisisce nozione anche di chi ne è il protagonista. Dunque, prima di sentire la sua storia, Ulisse non sapeva ancora chi è: il racconto dell'aedo, il racconto di un altro, finalmente, gli svela la sua identità. Ed egli, nel cavo purpureo del suo mantello, piange.[311]

Cavarero's reading is rooted in Hannah Arendt's thought, according to whom identity requires the other for recognition:

> Prima ancora che un altro possa rendere tangibile l'identità di qualcuno raccontandone la storia, molti altri sono stati infatti spettatori del costitutivo esporsi dell'identità medesima al loro sguardo. Detto altrimenti, l'esistente umano, in quanto è unico e tale si mostra fin dalla nascita, è appunto l'esposto.[312]

Arendt's theory, which Cavarero incorporates, posits that "Being and Appearing coincide."[313] Humans are naturally exposed to other people's gaze from their birth, and it is because of this exposure that their unique identity is recognized. Therefore, this law, which is both ontological and phenomenological, suggests that an individual's identity and essence are inextricably connected to how they others to others. Cavarero concludes that identity's expositive and relational aspects are indistinguishable, making what cannot be exposed non-existent.[314] Arendt stresses that this exposure is not passive; rather, it involves an active display of identity through words

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[311] Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi*, 25-26. "Neither the action itself nor the agent, Hannah Arendt suggests, but the story that the agent, in his action, has left behind: that is, his life story. Hearing his story, Ulysses, then, is moved. Not only because the events narrated are painful, but because when he was experiencing them directly, he had not understood their meaning. As if, while acting, he had been caught by the contingency of the present action which breaks the temporal series of before and after. Now, however, in the story of the aedo, the discontinuous times of those events are organised into the story. Now Ulysses recognizes himself as the hero of this story. By fully acquiring the meaning of the story, he also acquires the notion of who is the protagonist. Therefore, before hearing his story, Ulysses did not yet know who he was: the story of the aedo, the story of another, finally reveals his identity to him. And he, concealed in his purple cloak, weeps." [my translation]

[312] Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi*, 28. "Even before anyone can make someone's identity tangible by telling his story, many others have in fact been spectators of the constitutive exposure of identity itself to their gaze. In other words, human existence, being unique and showing itself as such from birth, corresponds to what is exposed." [my translation]

[313] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt Inc, 1978), 19.

[314] Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi*, 29-30.

and actions. According to Arendt, each person reveals who he or she is to other people by acting in front of them in an interactive theatre where each individual is at the same time actor and spectator.[315] This interactive theatre is defined by Arendt as "politics," because active revelation to others through acts and words offers a space that is plural, and therefore political, to identity.[316] This interpretation of identity provided by Arendt enables us to read Oedipus and Ulysses as heroes who present themselves as champions of action, in whom the impulse of self-revelation is exalted.[317]

This notion received further development by Maurice Blanchot, who contended that the interdependence of essence and appearance implies that a hero who does nothing is nothing at all because the hero's fundamental essence emerges in the action that reveals him.[318]

Ultimately, the requirement for self-revelation through action serves as an expressive instrument for them but also is what sets epic characters apart from novelistic characters. According to Cavarero, characters in modern novels actually exist before and regardless of their actions due to their psychology:

> Arendt sottolinea più volte come il protagonista della storia narrata sia chi si è mostrato nelle azioni da cui la storia medesima è risultata. Per dirla con il lessico di Roland Barthes, nell'idea arendtiana di narrazione "il personaggio è sempre l'agente di una azione", dipende da essa e a essa si subordina. Al contrario di quanto avviene nel romanzo moderno – dove il personaggio incarna un'essenza psicologica e diventa una "persona", ossia "un essere pienamente formato, anche nel caso in cui non faccia niente e naturalmente, anche prima d'agire"[319]

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[315] Ibid., 31.
[316] Ibid., 31.
[317] Ibid., 32.
[318] Maurice Blanchot, *L'infinito intrattenimento* (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), 493.
[319] Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi*, 41. "Arendt repeatedly emphasizes how the protagonist of the story is the one who has shown himself in the actions from which the story itself has resulted. To use Roland Barthes's words, in Arendt's idea of narration "the character is always the agent of an action," he depends on it and subordinates himself to it. On the contrary to what happens in the modern novel–where the character embodies a psychological essence and becomes a "person," that is, "a fully formed being," even in the case in which it does nothing and, naturally, even before acting." [my translation]

Novelistic characters are not required to demonstrate their identity through action; the independent existence of psychology and interiority is experienced by characters in novels as strictly interconnected with their identity.[320]

This analysis can be applied to Tolkien's legendarium, but there is a premise to be done: Cavarero, while considering the relationship between identity and the desire for narration, took into examination epic heroes, therefore, the antithesis of monsters. Nevertheless, examining how Cavarero and Arendt juxtapose how epic and novelistic characters express their identities might offer an in-depth analysis of Tolkien's depiction of monstrosity. In Tolkien's legendarium, the identity of most monsters is indeed heavily tied to their actions and evil deeds. From the very beginning of the origin of evil before the creation of Arda to the almost random encounters the protagonists have in the story, for these monstrous beings, their actions—murder, destruction, deception—are not just expressions of their identity; they are the very means by which their identity is constructed and recognized. From Melkor's first rebellious and evil act prior to the creation of Arda to the protagonists' seemingly unplanned encounters throughout the narrative, the identities of the majority of monsters in Tolkien's legendarium are, in fact, tightly linked with their evil deeds and actions. Aligning with Cavarero's theory, derived from Arendt, that identity in epic characters is revealed exclusively through actions, these monstrous beings employ murder, destruction, and deception to construct and establish their identities rather than merely as tools to express them.

In the case of Melkor, his identity as the ultimate monster is primarily demonstrated through his outstanding acts of rebellion, destruction, and corruption—his defiance during the Ainulindalë, his corruption of Arda, and

[320] Ibid., 76-83.

his continuous wars against the Children of Ilúvatar. Although Melkor's characterization as a villain is further enhanced by Tolkien's narrative exploration of his internal desires and fall, these actions serve to define him as the Dark Lord. The same concept can be applied even to Sauron and Saruman: Sauron's creation of the One Ring, his manipulation of others, and the widespread destruction he causes are all actions that affirm his identity as the Dark Lord. Saruman's betrayal and his turn to evil are also actions that mark his fall and solidify his identity as a monster.

On the other hand, the Watcher in the Water's attack on the Fellowship accomplishes little more in the story than proving its evil nature as a living threat. This creature's identity is revealed in its sudden and brutal action, asserting its presence as a monster in Middle-earth, without which its identity would remain vague and undefined.

The Balrog of Moria, Durin's Bane, is the quintessential incarnation of this concept. Its identity as a terrifying, ancient evil is solidified through its confrontation with Gandalf. The act of killing Gandalf is not just a plot point, it is a definitive assertion of the Balrogs' malicious nature, whose monstrosity is not an inherent trait but one that must be actively demonstrated and affirmed through violence. This is consistent with the notion that monstrosity in Tolkien's legendarium is dynamic and needs to be continually reinforced through action.

Even though these characters and creatures must commit evil acts to define and affirm their identity as monsters, this does not mean that they are incapable of reflection. They may display behavioural traits, just like many epic characters. And, like them, they must act in order to exist.

Lastly, all the monsters included in Tolkien's conception of "The Machine" can effectively fit into Cavarero's theory regarding epic characters. The Orcs, for instance, as foot soldiers of these Dark Lords, must perform acts of

destruction and cruelty to maintain their identity as creatures of evil. Tolkien's perspective on the topic of dehumanisation and the loss of free will is revealed by the fact that these monsters are bred exclusively for war and employed as weapons of mass destruction. As weapons, their monstrosity and identity in the narrative are performative, constantly enacted through their actions.

Of all the monsters in Tolkien's legendarium that can be read as epic characters, only one monster stands out as a novelistic one: Gollum. Gollum's identity and monstrosity are revealed in a more nuanced way than the other monsters, who methodically act in order to demonstrate their existence. While his past deeds—murdering Déagol, and his obsession with the Ring—do define him in some ways, Gollum's true monstrosity and characterization are revealed through his internal conflict and duality, which are expressed in narrative sections that do not directly advance the plot but deepen the reader's understanding of his character. These sections are essential because they reveal an alternative kind of monstrosity—one that is tied to identity through introspection rather than external action. In *The Two Towers*, Gollum led Frodo and Sam across the Dead Marshes that encircled Mordor; he was familiar with this area:

> Gollum turned to the right, southward more or less, and splashed along with his feet in the shallow stony stream. He seemed greatly delighted to feel the water, and chuckled to himself, sometimes even croaking in a sort of song.
>
> *The cold hard lands*
> *they bites our hands,*
> *they gnaws our feet.*
> *The rocks and stones*
> *are like old bones*
> *all bare of meat.*
> *But stream and pool*
> *is wet and cool:*

so nice for feet!

And now we wish——[321]

This passage provides an insight into Gollum's multifaceted identity by emphasising how fractured and contradictory his personality is. By enjoying the water and singing a croaking song, Gollum exhibits his childish, even innocent side, serving as an implicit resemblance of what Sméagol once was—a simple, light-hearted individual connected to nature. Still, the harsh descriptions of the biting cold lands in the song's lyrics also allude to the darker and menacing sides of his identity. The rocks and stones that resemble "old bones all bare of meat" indicate a sick and troubled mind that is fixated on the cruelty and lack of nourishment he has experienced. Thus, Gollum's identity appears as a perpetual conflict between these two sides: the corrupted creature obsessed with bitterness and suffering, and the traces of his previous self that still finds joy in ordinary things like water. This brief solitary moment of relative calm serves to briefly present this monster's tragic nature, which embodies both pitiable vulnerability and lurking threat. Rather than driving the plot forward in a conventional sense, this passage also acts as a moment of interiorization for Gollum adding layers of complexity to Gollum's identity and enabling the reader to perceive him not exclusively as an antagonist or monster but also as a deeply conflicted being.

The Two Towers also presents an everyday exchange between Gollum and Sam concerning food:

> What's taters, precious, eh, what's taters?' 'Po – ta – toes,' said Sam. 'The Gaffer's delight, and rare good ballast for an empty belly. But you won't find any, so you needn't look. But be good Sme´agol and fetch me the herbs, and I'll think better of you. What's more, if you turn over a new leaf, and keep it turned, I'll cook you some taters one of these days. I will: fried fish and chips served by S. Gamgee. You couldn't say no to that.' 'Yes, yes we could. Spoiling nice fish, scorching it. Give

[321] Tolkien, The Lord of The Rings, 620.

> me fish now, and keep nassty chips!' 'Oh you're hopeless,' said Sam. 'Go to sleep!'[322]

In this exchange with Sam, Gollum's rejection of cooked food in this conversation with Sam—he would much rather eat raw fish—highlights his alienation from Hobbit society and culture. This sequence highlights Gollum's monstrosity by drawing a contrast between his primitive inclinations and Sam's more domestic beliefs. This is where Gollum's identity is revealed through his disdain for normalcy and his attachment to the abnormal and grotesque. The tension between the remnants of Sméagol, who might be tempted by the simple pleasures of life like food and friendship, and the dominant Gollum, who rejects such offerings in favor of his darker impulses is illustrated through this passage. This conversation concerns much more than simply food; it is an internalisation of Gollum's identity crisis. Sam's casual kindness and the homely image of a simple meal starkly contrast with this monster's corrupted nature, which finds such common pleasures revolting. Another pivotal event in Gollum's intense mental struggle is revealed by Tolkien when he and the Hobbits are taken prisoner by Faramir and his Rangers. Gollum comes across the Forbidden Pool in the Ranger's hiding place while searching for fish:

> Fissh, nice fissh. White Face has vanished, my precious, at last, yes. Now we can eat fish in peace. No, not in peace, precious. For Precious is lost; yes, lost. Dirty hobbits, nasty hobbits. Gone and left us, gollum; and Precious is gone. Only poor Sme´agol all alone. No Precious. Nasty Men, they'll take it, steal my Precious. Thieves. We hates them. Fissh, nice fissh. Makes us strong. Makes eyes bright, fingers tight, yes. Throttle them, precious. Throttle them all, yes, if we gets chances. Nice fissh. Nice fissh!' So it went on, almost as unceasing as the waterfall, only interrupted by a faint noise of slavering and gurgling.[323]

[322] Ibid., 654-655.
[323] Ibid., 686.

Understanding Gollum’s identity requires comprehending this inner monologue; it underscores how this monster’s connection to the Ring has originated a duality in which Gollum's darker tendencies overpower Sméagol’s more innocent side. The tragic aspect of his character—an individual caught in a cycle of obsession and self-destruction—is further demonstrated by the way his thoughts alternate between common pleasures, like eating “fissh,” and evil desires, like murdering to obtain the Ring. Concerning the previous discussions, this section reaffirms the central idea in Cavarero’s analysis—that identity is developed and disclosed by novelistic characters through interiority; Gollum's evil and monstrosity are not simply evident in his actions but in his very being.

In conclusion, Gollum’s identity and monstrosity contrast with the other monsters in Tolkien’s legendarium; Gollum is a psychological monster, who reveals to the reader through his fragmented and contradictory interiority in sequences that do not directly advance the plot. Gollum’s interiority, which is portrayed during events that appear unimportant or unrelated to the main plot, is precisely what makes Gollum Tolkien’s most tragic and sophisticated monster.

Chapter III

3.1 Linda Hutcheon and Gérard Genette: Theoretical Premises Regarding Adaptations

This chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of Tolkien's monstrosity as represented in some of the well-known cinematic adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*. However, before delving into the proper content of the chapter, a premise regarding the concepts of adaptation and intertextuality must be provided; Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) and Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree* (1982) will be regarded as primary references.

As Hutcheon stated, according to its dictionary meaning, "to adapt" is to adjust, to alter, to make suitable."[324] Hutcheon introduces her work by debunking a series of cliches concerning the evaluation of adaptations:[325] one of the primary causes of the denigration of adapters and adaptations was represented by a hierarchy among genres that resulted from the (post-) Romantics' recognition of original creations and the creative genius. This hierarchy, which included logophilia, or love of the word as sacred, and iconophobia, or suspicion of the visual, saw literature as axiomatically superior to any adaptation due to its longstanding status as an artistic medium.[326] Nonetheless, Hutcheon contends that despite being regarded as inferior and secondary products, nowadays adaptations have become a popular and integral part of our culture, due to the emergence of new media and their commercial appeal. Hutcheon therefore features a variety of adaptations, including songs, films, video games, and even books.[327]

[324] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 7.
[325] Ibid., 3-4.
[326] Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2000): 58.
[327] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 3-4.

Although Hutcheon defines adaptation as a process of creation and reception as well as a product, she also asserts that this phenomenon is further defined from three distinct but intertwined perspectives.[328] First, "adaptation can be described as an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works."[329] This process of "transcoding" can include changing the medium (from poetry to film) or the genre (from epic to novel), as well as the context. For instance, presenting the same story from a different point of view can result in a distinctly different interpretation. Second, an adaptation can be defined as "a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging;"[330] Employing the term "appropriation," Hutcheon refers to the act of taking ideas from texts in order to create a new one for a different purpose. "Salvaging" instead refers to the act of preventing an old text from being forgotten, or honouring a previous text. Third, an adaptation can be described as "an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work."[331] Therefore, through our recollections of past works that resonate through repetition with variation, we experience adaptations as palimpsests. According to Hutcheon,[332] learning to view adaptations simultaneously as both a product and a process, makes it possible to analyze adaptations beyond a discourse on fidelity. In fact, "as a product, an adaptation can be given a formal definition, but as a process—of creation and of reception—other aspects have to be considered."[333] Adapting can involve appropriating someone else's story and filtering it through one's own sensibility, interests, and skills. Thus, before being creators, adapters are interpreters first. There exist numerous reasons for adaptors to select a specific story and subsequently transcode it into a different media or genre. Nonetheless,

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[328] Ibid., 7-9.
[329] Ibid., 8.
[330] Ibid., 8.
[331] Ibid., 8.
[332] Ibid., 15-20.
[333] Ibid., 15-16.

regardless of the motivation, adapting is an act of appropriation or salvaging from the perspective of the adapter which always involves two processes: interpretation and the subsequent creation of something new. Considering the long tradition of imitation or mimesis in the West, Aristotle believed that imitation was an instinctive human behaviour and the source of people's pleasure in the arts.[334] Particularly, imitating famous works of art was meant to serve as a pedagogical model as well as to profit from the authority and prestige of the past. However, it accomplished both, resulting also in a form of creativity. Similarly to classical imitation, adaptation involves personalizing the adapted material rather than merely copying it directly. What one does with the other text in both cases is innovative. If the reader, spectator, or listener is familiar with the adapted text, then adaptation is necessarily a form of intertextuality; we compare the work we are experiencing with the work we already know in an ongoing dialogical process.[335] According to Hutcheon, "texts are said to be mosaics of citations that are visible and invisible."[336] Similarly, it is frequently apparent to the audience that a work is an adaptation of more than one particular text. For example, modern *Dracula* movies are frequently seen as adaptations of other past films as much as they are of Bram Stoker's novel. Moreover, in providing a methodological framework to discuss the adaptation process, Hutcheon displays a series of questions: what? Who? Why? How? Where? When?

Regarding the first query, there are various ways for media to convey meaning to an audience. Thus, by asking "What?" one might examine how particular adaptations express their meanings. Film is typically considered the most inclusive and synthesizing of performance forms:

[334] Rudolf Wittkower, "Imitation, eclecticism, and genius," in *Aspects of the eighteenth century*, ed. Earl R. Wasserman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965): 143.
[335] Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," 64.
[336] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 21.

> "A composite language by virtue of its diverse matters of expression—sequential photography, music, phonetic sound and noise—the cinema 'inherits' all the art forms associated with these matters of expression … —the visuals of photography and painting, the movement of dance, the décor of architecture, and the performance of theater."[337]

Hutcheon claims that the transition from telling to showing—more especially, from a lengthy, intricate novel to any kind of performance—is typically seen as the most arduous transposition; a novel must be condensed, reduced in size and, in complexity to be dramatized. Although most discussions about film adaptation allude to a simplistic reduction of scope regarding length, details and commentary, a performance adaptation, in the move from telling to showing, must be dramatized; this means that speech, actions, sounds, and visual images must substitute description, narration, and represented thoughts. Character conflicts and ideological differences must be audible and visible. Re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plots are inevitable during the dramatization process. Employing a multitrack medium that can both direct and expand perception possibilities with the help of the mediating camera is one of the main benefits films have over other performative adaptations of novels.

Regarding the "Who?",[338] a change from a solitary to a collaborative mode of creation is necessary when transitioning to a performance mode; television and films are arguably the most complex media in this sense. Similarly to staged performances, the adaption is embodied by the performers. Some actors acknowledge that, although obviously needing to follow the screenplay, they look at the adapted text for context and inspiration, particularly when playing well-known literary characters. Therefore, actors can bring their individuality to the characters, providing them with glances and gestures coming from their imaginations. The film and television editor,

[337] Ibid., 61.
[338] Hutcheon, A Theory of Adaptation, 80-85.

who supervises the adaptation process in a manner no one else does, also participates in the different stages of the adaptation. However, none of the participating artists—actor, editor, scriptwriter, composer, designer, cinematographer, etc.—are typically regarded as the main adapter of a movie or television production:

> It is hard for any person who has been on the set of a movie to believe that only one man or woman makes a film. At times a film set resembles a beehive or daily life in Louis XIV's court—every kind of society is witnessed in action, and it seems every trade is busy at work. But as far as the public is concerned, there is always just one Sun-King who is sweepingly credited with responsibility for story, style, design, dramatic tension, taste, and even weather in connection with the finished product. When, of course, there are many hard-won professions at work.[339]

As this passage highlights, that Sun-King is evidently the director; in movies, a director's taste, preoccupations, and stylistic signatures are what stand out and become recognizable. Although many other people are involved in this complex process of creation, it emerges from both press statements and reviews that the director bears the ultimate responsibility for the overall vision and, consequently, for the adaptation as a stand-alone artistic creation.

By asking "Why?"[340] and analyzing the adapter's motivation generates new possibilities for discussion. Rather than focusing only on whether the adaptation is similar to the original, scholars can address the economic benefits of adapting, the legal restrictions associated with the process, and any political or personal messages that the adapter wanted the audience to see in his or her retelling.

By posing the question "How?",[341] Hutcheon refers instead to the audience's reaction and interaction with the adaptation. Those in the audience who have seen previous iterations of the adapted story are able to notice the changes in

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[339] Michael Ondaatje, *The conversations: Walter Murch and the art of editing film* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2002), xi.
[340] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 85-86.
[341] Ibid., 114.

each version they recall. Hutcheon argues that the appeal of adaptations lies in the interaction between different versions and their forms—a retelling of a familiar story, but variations. Asking "How" enables the investigation of how forms impact the adapted story's experience for the knowing and unknowing audience. Novelizations of well-known video games or films, for instance, could let knowing audience "fill in the gaps"[342] by offering more insight into the thoughts of the characters. Nevertheless, occasionally this is overdone, and the resultant adaption becomes meaningless without knowledge of or reference to the original source material. According to Hutcheon, an adaptation needs to appeal to both the knowing and unknowing audiences. Hutcheon makes specific reference to the film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* and examines how the addition of images and music can permanently alter the audience's perception of the story:

> In the move from print to performance, in particular, characters (hobbits) and places (Middle Earth) become incarnate in a way that conditions how we imagine them in a literary work like Tolkien's Lord of the Rings when we return to reread it. Our imaginations are permanently colonized by the visual and aural world of the films. But what if we have never read the novels upon which they are based? Do the novels then effectively become the derivative and belated works, the ones we then experience second and secondarily? For unknowing audiences, adaptations have a way of upending sacrosanct elements like priority and originality.[343]

This specific passage is crucial for my dissertation, as in Tolkien's legendarium, monstrosity is portrayed through extensive descriptions that appeal to the reader's imagination; the reader is given the opportunity to create their own mental representations of monsters, based on their own fears and interpretations. On the other hand, famous adaptations such as Peter Jackson's significantly alter the perception of monstrosity through the incorporation of striking visual and auditory elements. Thanks to these

[342] Ibid., 121.
[343] Ibid., 121-122.

additions, the adapted monsters are no longer mental constructs but become visually realized. Even when they return or approach for the first time the books, the audience's perceptions of these characters may be irreversibly shaped by this audiovisual depiction, which becomes deeply embedded in their minds. Consequently, the novels' textual descriptions may be eclipsed by the monstrous visual experiences offered by these movie adaptations, giving the books the impression of being an extension of the films rather than the original source material.

"Where?" and "When?"[344] refer to examining the contexts in which the adaptation was created and acknowledged:

> Malcolm Bradbury suggests, even without any temporal updating or any alterations to national or cultural setting, it can take very little time for context to change how a story is received. Not only what is (re)accentuated but more importantly how a story can be (re)interpreted can alter radically. An adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum. Fashions, not to mention value systems, are context-dependent.[345]

Hutcheon suggests that adaptations follow a "theme and variation"[346] structure, which means repeating certain elements but with differences. In adaptations, changes are unavoidable and can happen for various reasons, such as the demands of the form, the unique vision of the person adapting the work, the preferences of the audience, and the context in which the adaptation is created and received. There has always been a process of adapting one culture to another; it began when the Romans started adapting Greek theatre and has continued in many places, eras, societies, and cultural contexts. Hutcheon takes as a reference the story of a gypsy called Carmen; this story, not appearing as a recognized classic with some universal

[344] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 142-146.
[345] Ibid., 142.
[346] Ibid., 142.

truth at its core, does not seem in any way able to transcend its time and place of development. Therefore, it would not seem to be a prime candidate for multiple adaptations. Nonetheless, stories like Carmen change in different contexts, taking on several meanings depending on them; in the context of a story about ethnic otherness, Carmen may be represented as a femme fatale victimizer; in a story about sexual politics, she may be represented as an admirably strong and independent woman. Therefore, what the story fundamentally is depends on the politics of the specific contexts of creation and reception.[347] In conclusion, according to Hutcheon,[348] the adapted text is not merely a reproduction of the original work; rather, it is an interpretation and recreation, frequently often in a new medium that requires creative transposition. This process involves not only translating the story and its world into a different form but also adapting to the unique demands of the genre and medium, such as the shift from text to film, where visual and auditory elements take precedence over written description. The adapter's unique perspective and talent are also crucial in this process. As a result, the adapted work becomes a new creation, shaped by combining the original story and the adapter's unique interpretation and expression.

To further elucidate the relationship between an adaptation and its source, it is necessary to refer to Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*. In the opening page of his work, Genette defines the subject of poetics as not the text considered in its singularity, but rather "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts."[349] Genette defines this textual transcendence of the text as transtextuality. Moreover, Genette subdivides transtextuality into five interwoven categories: intertextuality, meaning the "relationship of copresence between

[347] Ibid., 153-167.
[348] Ibid., 84.
[349] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 1.

two texts or among several texts,"[350] and includes the practices of quotation, plagiarism and allusion; paratextuality, defined as the "relationship that binds the text properly speaking, taken within the totality of the literary work, to what can be called its *paratext*: a title, a subtitle, […] prefaces, postfaces, […] notes, epigraphs; illustrations, book covers and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic, [that] provide the text with a variable setting and sometimes a commentary;"[351] metatextuality, which means the union of a "given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it);"[352] architextuality, or the "types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres—from which the text arises."[353] The last category is hypertextuality, which refers to "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of a commentary."[354] Although literature is the main focus of Genette's research, he argues that hypertextuality is not exclusive to the written word; employing music and visual arts as examples, Genette claims that hypertextual practices apply to all forms of art, with the condition that each form's distinctive qualities must be taken into consideration and that no "rash attempt [is made] to fit them into the grid of the categories of literary hypertextuality."[355] Genette's notion of hypertextuality complements Hutcheon's view of adaptation as a process:

> Every hypertext […] can be read for itself without becoming perceptibly agrammatical; it is invested with a meaning that is autonomous and thus in some manner sufficient. But sufficient does not mean exhaustive. In every hypertext there

[350] Ibid., 1.
[351] Ibid., 3.
[352] Ibid., 4
[353] Ibid., 4.
[354] Ibid., 5.
[355] Ibid., 391.

> is […] ambiguity […]. That ambiguity is precisely caused by the fact that a hypertext can be read both for itself and in relation to the hypotext."[356]

The adaptation, like Genette's hypertext, can be understood as an autonomous creation while also being intrinsically linked to its source. Thus, both a recognition of the text's new context and an acknowledgement of the intertextual dialogue it maintains with its predecessor are required. In addition, Hutcheon introduces the notion of the mode of engagement, which focuses on how different audiences experience narration. Regarding how "adaptations allow people to tell, show or interact with stories,"[357] Hutcheon specifies that:

> Each mode […] *has* its own specificity, if not its own essence. In other words, no one mode is inherently good at doing one thing and not another, but each has at its disposal means of—media and genres—and so can aim and achieve certain things better than others.[358]

Hutcheon then further differentiates each mode, which will be crucial to understand the analysis of the major cinematic adaptations of Tolkien's works: in the telling mode, the characteristic mode of narrative literature, "our engagement begins in the realm of imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the […] words of the text and […] unconstrained by the limits of the visual or the aural."[359] On the other hand, the showing mode, typical of films and plays, employs a variety of elements besides language to convey meaning. These elements include the direct perception of gestural and visual representations as well as music and sound, which evoke emotions, produce associations, and either support or contradict the verbal.[360]

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[356] Ibid., 397.
[357] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 22.
[358] Ibid., 24.
[359] Ibid., 23.
[360] Ibid., 22-23.

3.2 Ralph Bakshi: *The Lord of the Rings* (1978)

According to Kristin Thompson,[361] the 20th century's animation industry, especially concerning the fantasy genre, was dominated by Walt Disney. His animated adaptations of children literature's works like *Peter Pan* and fairy tales like *Sleeping Beauty* or *Cinderella* were extremely popular at the time. As stated in his correspondence, Tolkien seemed to despise Disney's adaptations, considering them the embodiment of everything he did not want his novel adaptations to resemble.[362] There are two potential approaches for an adaptation of *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*:[363] live-action with sophisticated special effects, or feature-length animation. Regardless, a high-budget film would be essential to capture the grandeur found in Tolkien's legendarium. Despite being highly popular in the UK, Tolkien's works did not have a widespread audience in the years after their release, particularly in the US, to support a large-scale cinematic production. Adaptations didn't really become a topic of curiosity until Tolkien's Ballantine paperbacks sparked a significant increase in interest in the middle of the 1960s. In the meantime, a 12-minute short adaptation of *The Hobbit* came out in 1967, directed by Gene Deitch and produced by William Lawrence Snyder. However, the existence of the short remained unknown for decades.[364] Despite Tolkien's disapproval, Disney owned *The Lord of the Rings* film rights for ten years, until 1968, when it was passed on to United Artists. At UA, both Stanley Kubrick and John Boorman tried to conceive a screenplay adaptation of the novel, but they proved to be unsuccessful and unreleasable. Ralph Bakshi made his animation debut in the United States in the mid-1970s with the X-rated[365] films *Fritz the Cat*, *Heavy Traffic*, the divisive *Coonskin*,

[361] Lee, *Companion*, 514-515.
[362] Tolkien, *Letters,* 20-21.
[363] Lee, *Companion*, 515.
[364] Ibid., 518-519.
[365] (of movies, electronic images, books, magazines, etc.) containing very rude language or pictures or

and the financially successful *Wizards*. He then pushed UA to allow him to adapt *The Lord of the Rings* into an animated movie.

Thus, the first cinematic adaptation of Tolkien's best-known novel is Bakshi's controversial *The Lord of the Rings* (1978), defined in the director's official website as "an adaptation of J. R. R. Tolkien's high fantasy epic *The Lord of the Rings*, comprising *The Fellowship of the Ring* and the first half of *The Two Towers*."[366] Originally, Bakshi and the producer agreed to a two-part version of the story. However, when the movie came out in 1978, the second part, which was already in production, was halted, and never completed, because of a budget dispute.[367] Bakshi's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* starts with an account of Sauron forging the Ring and ends at the battle of Helm's Deep, where a narrator abruptly ends the story by telling the audience that Frodo and his allies have won the battle and vanquished the forces of evil. Although the second part of the movie adapting the events of *The Return of the King* was never released, the adapted events are almost entirely faithful to the novel's main plot: due to the removal of numerous potentially independent units, the narrative became less episodic and more linear; the conclusion was also greatly shortened, creating the impression of an ended plot arch. Andrea Testa[368] highlighted significant changes in character adaptation within the film, where some figures were altered to the point of being almost unrecognizable: Sam was presented by Bakshi as a cowardly and immature Hobbit, Aragorn was portrayed with characteristics akin to a Native American warrior, and Saruman was renamed "Aruman" to avoid confusion with Sauron, while being dressed in red. In addition to these aesthetic or behavioural alterations, several events and characters were

information about sex that is generally considered offensive. "X-rated." Cambridge Dictionary, accessed August, 20, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/x-rated

[366] "Films.," Bakshi Productions, Inc.: Ralph Bakshi Animation, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.bakshistudio.com/lord-of-the-rings

[367] Ibid.

[368] Andrea Testa, *The Genesis and the Legacy of The Lord of the Rings* (BA thesis, University of Padua, 2022), 29-30.

changed or entirely removed. Concerning the part adapting *The Fellowship of the Ring*, significant portions of the Hobbits' journey through the Shire were excluded from Bakshi's film: Crickhollow, Gildor, the Old Forest, Tom Bombadil, and the Barrow-Downs—independent events that, although significant in the novel, do not significantly impact the main plot—are not present. On the other hand, Bakshi's movie emphasises the Hobbits' encounter with the Black Rider before arriving in Bree, the Ringwraiths' attack on Weathertop, and their assault on the path to Rivendell, despite the Barrow-wights having been left out. In this animated version, Legolas plays the role that Glorfindel occupied in the novel; after coming across Aragorn and the Hobbits, he helps Frodo, who has been hurt by a Morgul blade, to reach Rivendell. Concerning instead the part adapting *The Two Towers*, the major changes are represented by the removal of crucial characters like Arwen and Eowyn, whose absence also eliminated fundamental parts of the story. Ultimately, it was decided against making a sequel because of these questionable choices, budget disputes, several animation mistakes, problems with dialogue synchronization, and a superficial representation of Tolkien's intricate world-building.[369]

As with his earlier works, Bakshi's *The Lord of the Rings* is centred on rotoscoping, a technique developed by Max Fleischer in 1917 that includes tracing drawings or paintings over enlarged frames of the film scenes previously shot in live action.[370] Therefore, Bakshi could take advantage of the complexity that live-action cinema can capture without having to deal with the high costly production expenditures of a live-action movie. The use of the rotoscoping technique is particularly remarkable in the first half of the movie, offering realistic and nuanced character movements and noteworthy subtle facial expressions. In contrast, in the second half, the plot

[369] Ibid., 29-30.
[370] Ernest Mathijs, Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in Global Context (Wallflower Press, 2006), 155.

becomes difficult to follow for the audience not familiar with Tolkien's works; the film focuses on the most significant parts of *The Lord of the Rings* while ignoring crucial background information. As a result, the combat scenes appear confusing and ambiguous, not clearly displaying who is winning. As Kristin Thompson pointed out,[371] animated films had not, up until that point, shown extensive battle scenes involving hundreds of characters; rotoscoping was employed by Walt Disney Pictures to some extent to depict just human figures, such as Snow White and Cinderella. Although both critics and admirers had mixed feelings about this experimental technique's use, Bakshi asserted in an interview that the rotoscoped images produced a realism appropriate for the project:

> This is live action with the design of animation. It's like taking Ben-Hur and painting a realistic version of each scene. The thing about the movie – why the technique will be different – is that it's not a cartoon but rather the first realistic painting in motion.[372]

Regardless of its outcome, Bakshi intended for the movie to be a series of "moving paintings," with backgrounds inspired by Wyeth, Rembrandt, Brueghel, and Winslow Homer.[373]

Four distinct monster categories—the Watcher in the Water, the Balrog, the Orcs, and the Ringwraiths—will be considered while analyzing the concept of monstrosity in relation to Bakshi's *The Lord of the Rings*. In Bakshi's adaptation, the Watcher in the Water maintains the same frightening appearance and function as in Tolkien's novel, attacking the Fellowship with its tentacles as they approach the entrance to the Mines of Moria. However, unlike the novel, the creature's body is never shown; only its tentacles are seen, heightening the feeling of mystery and lurking danger. Bakshi also

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[371] Lee, *Companion*, 521-522.
[372] Stephen Zito, "Bakshi among the Hobbits." *American Film* (September, 1978): 60–61. 61.
[373] Mathijs, *Lord of the Rings*, 155.

underscores the Watcher's role as a gatekeeper as, after the Fellowship enters, the creature actively seals the doors of the Mines.

Figure 1 - The Watcher in the Water in *The Lord of the Rings* (1978) - 0:58:36

Especially since we don't see the monster's body, Bakshi's depiction of the sequence may have been influenced by another one from George Lucas' movie *Star Wars* (1977), which was released one year before his adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*. The Dianoga, a giant tentacled creature from *Star Wars* lore that can be found in many sewage systems, is the protagonist of this scene.[374] When Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and Chewbacca, the main characters in Lucas' film, sneak inside the Death Star to save Leia, they are thrown into a garbage compactor, where the Dianoga attacks Skywalker by dragging him beneath the murky water and attempting to strangle him. Since we exclusively see the tentacles of these two monsters assaulting the main characters, both sequences share many similarities in evoking a sense of lurking danger; Bakshi, however, did not release any comment regarding the portrayal and possible inspiration for this scene. And yet considering the impact Star Wars had on popular culture when it was released in 1977, Bakshi may have been implicitly influenced by *Star Wars* when he decided to portray the Watcher in the Water scene.

[374] Terryl Whitlatch, *The Wildlife of Star Wars: A Field Guide* (Chronicle Books Llc, 2001), 157.

The function that the Balrog, or Durin's Bane, plays in the movie is the same as in the novel; in Bakshi's adaptation, the Fellowship, once inside the Mines of Moria, is forced to battle a series of Orcs in order to escape; the graphic and gore depictions of these fights serve as the main indicator for the adult-targeted audience of the movie. The climax of these violent clashes is reached at the Bridge of Khazad-Dûm, where the Balrog first appears.

The setting, however, is far less solemn than it is in the novel: instead of looking like a hall full of pillars belonging to an ancient Dwarven realm,[375] it resembles more a real-world mine.

Figure 2 – The Balrog in *The Lord of the Rings* (1978) - 1:04:49

Since the Balrog does not appear to be made of shadow and fire, this monster's depiction seems to be more tangible than Tolkien's abstract description. Nevertheless, the whip and the flaming sword are kept by Bakshi. According to Scandagliato,[376] the Balrog's appearance resembles a winged lion, which suitably recalls Tolkien's use of the word "mane" in *The Fellowship of the Ring*:

> With a rush it leaped across the fissure. The flames roared up to greet it, and wreathed about it; and a black smoke swirled in the air. Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire, in

[375] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 328.
[376] Giorgia Scandagliato, "Envisioning Middle Earth: Ralph Bakshi's adaptation of The Lord of the Rings" (BA thesis, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, 2024), 30-31.

> its left it held a whip of many thongs. (...) It drew itself up to a great height, and its wings were spread from wall to wall.[377]

This animated Balrog presents itself as a monstrous hybrid, with a human torso, bat-like wings and the face of a lion. Given its physical hybridity, Bakshi's Balrog seems to recall another monster's appearance: the Manticore,[378] a Persian mythological creature that featured a human head, a lion's body, and a scorpion's tail. In modern times, Manticores can also be seen with wings. Christian bestiaries included this monster extensively, employing the Manticore as a symbol for the devil. The notion of hybridity associated with the devil, both personified by the Manticore and the Balrog, was extensively used in Medieval theology and iconography, as Victoria Burns-Price pointed out:

> Demons appear as hybrid and monstrous forms in other theological contexts, beyond that of the female-headed serpent in Genesis. [...] there were other common elements to the way in which demons were represented. This includes demons as hybrid compilations of other creatures and with overtly monstrous features, including unusual colourings, bat-like wings, enlarged limbs and teeth, or horns.[379]

In Medieval iconography, the hybrid nature of demons incorporating the animalistic served to emphasize their otherness and stark contrast to the Christian ideals of humanity made in God's image. This hybridity highlighted the inherent conflict between demons and the reality Christianity seeks to establish. Such depictions are intentionally designed to provoke fear, using monstrous, hybrid forms to immediately convey their demonic and supernatural essence, thereby deterring people from transgressing moral and religious boundaries.[380] Bakshi's portrayal of the Balrog implicitly reflects this idea. This creature's demonic, animalistic, and hybrid nature is what

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[377] Ibid., 329.
[378] Beryl Rowland, *Animals with human faces; a guide to animal symbolism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 125-126.
[379] Victoria Burns-Price, "The Hybridity of Demons: Perceptions of Demons in Medieval Theology and Iconography," *Reading Medieval Studies* Vol. XLVII (University of Reading, 2021): 66.
[380] Ibid., 67-68, 71.

makes it so monstrous, contrasting both thematically and visually with Gandalf's character; with its human torso, bat-like wings, and lion-like face, the Balrog visually incarnates the chaotic and evil forces that are opposed to Gandalf's virtue and righteousness. This recalls how the Devil was portrayed in Medieval times as being opposed to Christianity's divine purity. Bakshi, although providing a visual alteration to this scene, was able to recall what Tolkien conveyed in the novel. In conclusion, a crucial detail regarding the Balrog must be noted. During the sequence in which the Fellowship explore the Mines of Moria searching for an exit, they come across a giant demonic skull, employed in the narrative exclusively as a background frame.

Figure 3 - Gandalf in front of the giant skull in *The Lord of the Rings* (1978) - 0:59:0

This skull stands as a mysterious and unexplained element within the film; while it does not directly correspond to the Balrog the Fellowship will encounter later in the narrative, this creature's skull aligns closely with Peter Jackson's later portrayal of the Balrog in his 2001 film *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Although Jackson stated that "our film is stylistically very different and the design is different,"[381] Bakshi's movie has been cited as an inspiration for the director's film trilogy.[382] Therefore, he might have

[381] Peter Jackson, "Director's Commentary," *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2001
[382] Ibid.

conceptualised his own Balrog using this skull as a visual aid, rejecting the monstrous hybrid's design in favour of a demonic appearance more akin to the novel's descriptions.

As in Tolkien's legendarium, Bakshi's adaptation accurately portrays the Ringwraiths as emissaries of Sauron, sent from Mordor to hunt down the Ring-bearer. At first, they show up as Black Riders, creepy black silhouettes with red eyes that are shrouded in dark capes.

Figure 4 - A Ringwraith in *The Lord of the Rings* (1978) - 0:17:49

In a specific scene set in the Shire, the Hobbits come across one of these monsters on a black horse while travelling along the road. Sensing the presence of the One Ring, the Ringwraith forces the Hobbits to hide behind a large tree-bole. This scene notably diverges from the original source: in Tolkien's novel, the Ringwraith never dismounts; instead, it simply sniffs the air and surveys the area before riding off.[383] In contrast, the film takes a different approach by having the Nazgûl dismount and search for the Hobbits on foot, moving with a slow, zombie-like walk. After failing to find them, the Nazgûl goes back to his horse and rides away. Bakshi appears to have chosen this zombie-like walk to emphasize the Ringwraiths' undead nature—a decision that accentuates their unsettling, otherworldly qualities. The Nazgûl exhibit an additional departure from Tolkien's legendarium later

[383] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 78.

in the film, during the ambush at Weathertop: when Frodo wears the Ring, they are not depicted as spectral beings, but as creatures wearing armour beneath their robes; this armoured appearance will be maintained even during the pursuit on the road to Rivendell.[384] Therefore, although initially faithful to Tolkien's depiction, Bakshi eventually alters the essence of the Ringwraiths, portraying them as black knights rather than spectral beings. This shift visually strips them of their ghostly, ethereal quality, though they remain ominous and threatening. By focusing on a more tangible, zombie-like form of undeath, Bakshi's interpretation diverges from the more spectral nature of the Ringwraiths in Tolkien's work.

In this animated adaptation, the Orcs stand out as some of the most peculiar creatures, diverging significantly from their literary counterparts. While they fulfil the same narrative function as in Tolkien's novels—serving as expendable minions attacking the protagonists in groups, therefore incarnating Tolkien's concept of "The Machine"—their visual portrayal introduces a noteworthy different interpretation of their monstrous nature. In the legendarium, Orcs are described as "short, squat, and bow-legged, with long arms, dark faces, squinty eyes, and long fangs."[385] However, Bakshi visually reimagines them as black silhouettes with fangs and red eyes, wearing primitive clothing and horned helms. This design choice reflects a shift in the corruption tied to their origins. Whereas Tolkien envisioned Orcs as sentient, evil beings twisted from the Elves by Melkor's malevolence, Bakshi's depiction strips them of any trace of humanity, rendering them more animalistic in appearance and behaviour.

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[384] Bakshi Productions, Inc.: Ralph Bakshi Animation, "Films." https://www.bakshistudio.com/lord-of-the-rings?pgid=j8mh4v9y-0bdcae1b-463c-450a-80bd-5c65c4d791fc

[385] Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*, 305-306.

Figure 5 – Orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* (1978) - 1:28:02

This animalistic portrayal is further emphasized through their lack of individual characterization: despite their ability to speak, the Orcs' dialogue in the film is reduced to confused mumbling, grunting, and animal-like noises. Their exaggerated movements, amplified by the use of rotoscope animation, frequently lead to comic relief, which undermines the fearful atmosphere they are intended to evoke.

Inga Lill Røsberg[386] draws attention to these monsters' dehumanization: during the Battle of Helm's Deep, Bakshi portrays Uruk-hai and Orcs as faceless, uniform groups. They are accompanied by drummers and hornblowers, but no apparent leader is involved. Although more visually human and provided with teeth and not fangs, Bakshi's Uruk-hai wear masks resembling gorilla faces, stripping them of any individuality or emotion. While their bodies might hint at fear, rage, or monstrosity, their expressionless faces convey only a sense of pathetic subjugation, transforming them into symbols of enslaved beings devoid of identity, personal feelings, or will. In strong contrast to this portrayal, Tolkien's original vision shows that even the most corrupted beings, despite their dependency on their masters, possess a distorted semblance of their former

[386] Inga Lill Røsberg, "Hva gjør film til god fortelling? En analyse av virkemidler og karakterbeskrivelser i filmene The Lord of the Rings (1978) og The Lord of the Rings (2001-2003) av Ralph Bakshi og Peter Jackson" (BA thesis, NTUNU, 2013), 70.

humanity. Conversely, Bakshi's Orcs and Uruk-hai visually and narratively lack any human characteristics and are shown more as savage, beastly beings than as the evil, corrupted entities that Tolkien imagined. Instead of embodying the tragic fall from grace, as seen in Tolkien's legendarium, Bakshi's Orcs appear as mere beasts, devoid of the human-like essence that originally defined their corruption.

In *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*,[387] Noël Carroll references Mary Douglas' ideas from *Purity and Danger*[388] regarding the emergence of impurity as a result of cultural categorization violations. Douglas explains that creatures like lobsters are seen as impure because they blur the lines between categories—crawling, typically an earthbound trait, is applied to a sea creature, making it a category mistake. Similarly, insects with four legs and wings are loathed for combining features from both flying and terrestrial species. Carroll applies this idea to horror genre creatures, arguing that they arouse terror because they are difficult to classify—for instance, they are frequently hybrid species, such as werewolves and humanoid insects, or they are both living and dead, like ghosts and zombies. These monsters are unsettling because they exist in a state of interstitiality, crossing the boundaries of cultural categories. Carroll and Douglas' concepts can also be applied to Bakshi's portrayal of Tolkien's monsters, such as the Balrog, Orcs, and Nazgûl, visually depicted as interstitial creatures. Lacking deep characterization in the movie, their monstrosity is conveyed through actions and physical appearance: the Balrog's animalistic hybridity, the Nazgûl's zombie-like walk that visually blurs life and death, and the Orcs' bestial, animalistic behaviour, despite their humanlike forms all make them interstitial figures and, therefore, unsettling monsters.

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[387] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (Routledge: Chapman and Hall Inc., 2004), 31-32.
[388] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 57-58.

3.3 Peter Jackson: The Lord of the Rings Trilogy

This section will examine *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) film trilogy, produced and distributed by New Line Cinema in collaboration with WingNut Films and directed by the New Zealander director Peter Jackson. Filmed in live action but with extensive computer-generated characters and effects, this massive movie trilogy was produced with a 270-million-dollar budget. In addition, the movies were shot simultaneously in eighteen months, involving a cast of 2,400 actors.[389] The audience and critics' response was overwhelmingly positive: while *The Fellowship of the Rings* (2001)[390] and *The Two Towers* (2002)[391] won a total of six academic awards, *The Return of the King* (2003) achieved eleven academy awards, "winning in every category in which it was nominated."[392] Nevertheless, Tolkien enthusiasts and scholars have been significantly split regarding this adaptation, according to Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond.[393] While some praised and acknowledged the movies' deviations from the original source as a valid way to interpret Tolkien's work or as adjustments required for a different medium, others thought the films were significantly problematic even when viewed as a motion picture alone. Criticism frequently concerned the alteration or omission of characters and sections of Tolkien's novel, an overemphasis on violent action, and the excessive use of special effects. Nonetheless, Jackson's efforts aided in increasing sales of Tolkien's works

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[389] "Lord Of The Rings Premieres," CBS News, accessed 30, August 2024, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/lord-of-the-rings-premieres/

[390] "Nominees & Winners for the 74th Academy," Wayback Machine, accessed 30, August 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20140907043052/http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/oscarlegacy/2000-present/74nominees.html

[391] "Nominees & Winners for the 75th Academy," Wayback Machine, accessed 30, August 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20120305050909/http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/oscarlegacy/2000-present/75nominees.html

[392] "Too Many Endings, Man: How *The Lord of the Rings* Conquered the Oscars," Vanity Fair, accessed August 30, 2024, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/lord-of-the-rings-movies-oscars-20-years

[393] Christina Scull, Wayne G. Hammond, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide* (HarperCollins, 2017), 68.

to astonishing levels.[394] Apart from these initial remarks, Jackson's trilogy was remarkably faithful to the essence of the original material and, more crucially, to the message that Tolkien wished to convey with his works. Jackson started demonstrating his remarkable respect for Tolkien's works even in the early stages of the first movie's development:[395] when the film production and distribution company Miramax Films offered Jackson the chance to realize a live-action adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* in the 1990s, he turned them down because they wanted to include the whole story in just one movie. Having already a trilogy structure in mind, the New Zealander director declined the offer and waited until New Line Cinema agreed to produce a three-part film, perhaps aware of all the issues Bakshi faced with the never-produced sequel to his animated adaption. Jackson was also aware that understanding and portraying faithfully Tolkien's legendarium is a challenging task; according to Tolkien himself, "it would be easier to film The Odyssey. Much less happens in it."[396] Furthermore, Rayner S. Unwin, the publisher of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, stated:

> To be a convincing story, you've got to know what you're talking about in every detail. You've got to know what the geology, the geography, the history, which Tolkien had already mapped out years and years before. It was as real to Tolkien as history.[397]

For this reason, "*The Lord of the Rings* had taught [Jackson] that fantasy must be treated as if it was reality, not a movie."[398] Jackson considered it "an English myth, created by an English writer, an Oxford Don, but interpreted

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[394] Ibid., 339.
[395] Peter Jackson, "From Book to Script," The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2001
[396] Ian Nathan, *Anything You Can Imagine: Peter Jackson and the Making of Middle-earth* (HarperCollins, 2019), epigraph.
[397] Peter Jackson, "From Book to Script"
[398] Nathan, Anything You Can Imagine, 54.

by real New Zealanders."[399] As previously stated, it can be argued that Bakshi's animated movie served as Jackson's main source of inspiration to start creating his trilogy. Jackson acknowledged that it was Bakshi's animated film that motivated him to read *The Lord of the Rings* for the first time; but he also mentioned that:

> I saw Bakshi's Rings when it first came out and, at the time, I hadn't read the book. As a result, I got pretty confused! I liked the early part – it had some quaint sequences in Hobbiton, a creepy encounter with the Black Rider on the road, and a few quite good battle scenes – but then, about half way through, the storytelling became very disjointed and disorientating and I really didn't understand what was going on. However, what it did do was to make me want to read the book – if only to find out what happened![400]

Nevertheless, he defined Bakshi's film as a "brave and ambitious attempt."[401] In addition, Jackson's trilogy's structure, which is very similar to Bakshi's work, is another example of this inspiration: scenes like the one in which the Black Rider searches for the Hobbits in the Shire, for instance, are exactly as Bakshi depicted them in his film. Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Ring* includes a low-angle shot of a Hobbit shouting "Proudfeet!" at Bilbo's birthday party, which is taken directly from *The Lord of the Rings* (1978); Jackson deliberately included it as a homage to Bakshi's film, which he considered "a brilliant angle."[402] However, after learning that the live-action movie was highly inspired by his own, Bakshi accused Jackson of ignoring this influence:

> Peter Jackson did say that the first film inspired him to go on and do the series, but that happened after I was bitching and moaning to a lot of interviewers that he said

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[399] Ibid., 389.
[400] Brian Sibley, *Peter Jackson: A Film-Maker's Journey* (HarperCollins, 2006), 57.
[401] "Peter Jackson at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood," Wayback Machine, accessed 30, August 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20061009173240/http://www.conlanpress.com/resources/peter_jackson_on_Tolkien_inspiration_2-6-04.mp3
[402] Peter Jackson, "Director's Commentary," *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2001

> at the beginning that he never saw the movie. I thought that was kind of fucked up.[403]

Moreover, while Bakshi praised the special effects, he claimed that Jackson "didn't understand"[404] Tolkien. He also stated:

> I haven't seen all the films. In some respects I feel good that Peter Jackson continued and went on, and in some respects I feel bad that Saul Zaentz, the producer, and various people never called me, thanked me, or asked my permission to do the movie. […] So I have many mixed feeling about it. […] I'm glad Peter Jackson had a movie to look at – I never did. And certainly there's a lot to learn from watching any movie, both its mistakes and when it works. So he had a little easier time than I did, and a lot better budget.[405]

Aside from Jackson and Bakshi's controversial relationship, as Drout noted, Jackson succeeded in maintaining all the elements required to fully comprehend Tolkien's novel:

> Sauron's threat to Middle-earth, the dangerous quest of Frodo to destroy the Ring, Aragorn's efforts to reclaim his kingship, the machinations of Saruman, the journey and break-up of the Fellowship, the vital role of Gollum, the contributions of Treebeard and the Ents and of Faramir, the major battles at Helm's Deep and Minas Tirith, the encounter with Shelob, Frodo and Sam's escape from Cirith Ungol, their wretched journey toward Mount Doom, the diversionary battle before the Black Gate of Mordor, the destruction of the Ring and death of Gollum, the rescue of Frodo and Sam, the coronation of Aragorn, and the departure of Frodo and the Great Ones at the Grey Havens.[406]

Important details of the novel's atmosphere were also kept by Jackson, including the bucolic portrayal of the Shire, Bilbo's birthday party, the threat posed by Ringwraiths and the Balrog, the culture of Rohan, the background

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[403] Ign Filmforce, "A Brief Interview with Ralph Bakshi – What does Ralph think of Peter Jackson's LOTR?," IGN, May 26, 2004, https://www.ign.com/articles/2004/05/26/an-interview-with-ralph-bakshi
[404] Cliff Quickbeam Broadway, "The Bakshi Interview: Uncloaking a Legacy," TheOneRing.net., April, 20, 2015, https://www.theonering.net/torwp/2015/04/20/97766-the-bakshi-interview-uncloaking-a-legacy/
[405] Ign Filmforce, interview.
[406] Drout, J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia, 305.

of the Dead Men of Dunharrow, and many others. Although Jackson maintained the elements mentioned above, the movie's rhythm and structure forced him to compress and accelerate the duration of some events, including the time between Gandalf giving the One Ring to Frodo and returning to unveil its inscription, which is seventeen years in the book; the search for Merry and Pippin by the Three Hunters; and the journey of Sam and Frodo across Mordor lands. Although compressed, these events still conveyed the aura of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.[407] As regards monstrosity, Jackson consistently displayed a fascination with portraying monsters even before directing his trilogy, as seen in movies like *Bad Taste* (1987) and *Brain Dead* (1992); He further stated:

> ...I wanted to become a film-maker the moment I saw [the original King Kong at age nine]... Actually, I wanted to become a monster-maker first," Jackson corrects himself, "because I didn't really know what directing was.[408]

Therefore, "one of the motivations for [Jackson] to make *The Lord of the Rings* was the monsters."[409] According to Sharin Schroeder,[410] Jackson constantly argued in favour of giving the monsters significant roles in his trilogy, even though New Line would have preferred to cut the Watcher in the Water and originally asked for as little Gollum as possible. In other words, the portrayal of monsters was central to Jackson's vision of Middle-earth. The director struggled to include as many monster scenes as possible: he started working on the Moria Cave-troll two years before actually filming its scene, stating that he wanted to create a monster that felt real, designing a rational physiology to represent a humanoid creature that could physically exist. In addition, Jackson wanted it to look clumsy, big, stupid and not evil:

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[407] Ibid., 305.
[408] Sharin Schroeder, "It's Alive! Tolkien's Monster on the Screen," in *Picturing Tolkien* (Mc Farland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011), 162.
[409] Peter Jackson, "Weta Digital," *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2001
[410] Schroeder, "It's Alive!," 162-163.

he pictured it as a creature imprisoned by the Goblins with a mother who was hoping in vain that her child would appear somewhere else in the Moria Mines.[411] The meticulosity employed for the sets, props, digital effects, and costumes heavily contributed to Jackson's monsters' appeal: [412] Jackson worked closely with Weta Workshop, a special effects and prop company, and Weta FX, a digital visual effects and animation company, to achieve the desired "realism," horror reactions, and faithfulness. Therefore, there were sequences in the trilogy with striking animated visuals, like the Watcher in the Water and the Balrog's sequences: the former was given a more "monstery" appearance, digitally shaped to resemble a proper menacing sea monster rather than just a frightening set of tentacles; the latter, on the other hand, possessing lava cracks in his skin and gas explosions all around him, was given a fiery, shadowy and unquestionably more demonic appearance than Bakshi's Balrog.[413] In addition, Gollum was rendered realistic and empathetic with motion-capture. Nonetheless, certain digital monsters like the Ents, Trolls, Wargs, and Nazgûl, often appeared less realistic than others, especially during the major battles.[414] The Uruk-hai, Goblins, and Orcs are among the monsters that notably stand out visually: by opting to employ real actors in combination with a masterful use of prosthetics rather than relying solely on CGI, Jackson created creatures that felt palpably authentic, not only enhancing their physicality but also ensured their timelessness; even more than twenty years after the trilogy's release, audiences are still captivated with the realism of these monsters.

[411] Jackson, "Weta Digital"
[412] Drout, J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia, 306-307.
[413] Jackson, "Weta Digital"
[414] Drout, J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia, 306-307.

3.3.1 Jackson and Frankenstein: Saruman, Lurtz, and Gollum

According to Schroeder,[415] Jackson's creative process recalls that of Victor Frankenstein not because he extracted only the elements of Tolkien's novel he needed, but also because his way of adapting makes extensive use of stitching scenes together—often repurposing them for different parts of the story. This Frankensteinian approach, as the director and the screenwriter Philippa Boyes acknowledged in their commentary of *The Return of the King*, frequently resulted in the loss of "the experience of the book as a whole."[416]

Like Tolkien and Shelley, while Jackson subtly displays a fascination with the concept of monster-making linked to the idea of sub-creation, he also condemns the creation of monsters by the characters within the narrative. However, unlike Tolkien, who became more and more preoccupied with the moral implications of his monsters, Jackson exhibits a more detached viewpoint: although he drew extensively from Tolkien's writings, Jackson was also heavily inspired by the lengthy tradition of cinematic monsters; his main goal was to create monsters that felt "real," without necessarily tackling the morality associated with many of them. Jackson's monstrous portrayal of the Uruk-hai as products of inhuman breeding serves as an excellent example of this process, as it severely limits empathy for them. In contrast to Tolkien's legendarium, where this monster-breeding happens offscreen, the audience witnesses the creation of these monsters in Isengard during a scene where Saruman watches his Orcs extract the Uruk-hai from mud and slime. As noted by Schroeder,[417] the main purpose of visually depicting these

[415] Schroeder, "It's Alive!," 171-172.
[416] Peter Jackson, "Director's Commentary," *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2001
[417] Schroeder, "It's Alive!," 173-176.

monsters' breeding was to introduce Lurtz, the first leader of the Uruk-hai; Lurtz is a non-canonical character played by Lawrence Makoare.

Figure 6 - Lurtz, the leader of the Uruk-hai in
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (Extended Edition, 2001) - 1:17:42

The first thing Lurtz does is strangle the Orc that extracted him out of the mud; the other Orcs stare horrified, while Lurtz looks for his creator, who is standing there watching him with a barely discernible proud smile. Here, Victor Frankenstein's inhuman and unnatural creation process could be linked to Saruman's. Notably, Jackson chose Christopher Lee to play Saruman, stating in the audio commentary for *The Fellowship of the Ring* that "It was a great thrill working with Christopher because I'd always been a fan of the old Hammer horror movies."[418] What the audience may not realize is that this breeding sequence serves to close a Frankensteinian circle: *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) was the first of these Hammer horror movies, in which Lee played a monster born to kill; here instead, Lee gets the chance to create his own monster. However, unlike Shelley's Victor, he does not turn away from his creation. Instead, much like Peter Cushing's character in *The Curse of Frankenstein*, he decides to educate Lurtz. When

[418] Jackson, "Director's Commentary"

the White Wizard explains to Lurtz how the Orcs were originally created, he states:

> SARUMAN: Do you know how the Orcs first came into being? They were Elves once, taken by the Dark Powers, tortured and mutilated [Lurtz roars]. A ruined and terrible form of life. [Lurtz's eyes look down.] And now ... perfected. My fight ing Uruk-hai! Whom do you serve?
> LURTZ: Saruman![419]

The screenwriters Boyens and Walsh link Saruman's creation of Lurtz to that of the mad scientist who pretends to be God, without explicitly mentioning Frankenstein:

> BOYENS: The whole thing we were constantly trying to show is one of the reasons why Saruman has fallen is just as Melkor fell, the original spirit of evil within the world fell, is because of the jealousy of the power of life, the power of creation, and he's play ing God, and that's what I love about the look in his eye in that scene between Saruman and Lurtz as he says "and now perfected," meaning that he is, he has that power, that power is now in him.
> WALSH: Genetic engineering.[420]

Jackson claimed that Lurtz was designed to be a central figure in the first movie of the trilogy; the audience needed a physical antagonist in addition to a "disembodied eye and an absent wizard."[421] Commenting the battle scene at the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Jackson observed:

> a character like Lurtz comes in handy because we could now make it personal, that it wasn't just an anonymous Uruk that was shooting Boromir with the arrows, it was this creature called Lurtz that we sort of knew, and we hated him already.[422]

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[419] Peter Jackson, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2001
[420] Jackson, "Director's Commentary"
[421] Schroeder, "It's Alive!," 176.
[422] Jackson, "Director's Commentary"

Despite his frightening look, Lurtz's human-like features—tallness, muscles, dark skin and long hair—make the audience wonder where his Otherness lies. Lurtz, in contrast to CGI monsters and thanks to prosthetics, appears very similar to a human being: he is not an ancient demon, and he does not walk on all fours like Gollum. Mainly because of his anthropomorphic appearance, Lurtz could embody some qualities linkable to the Uncanny, playing on a familiar/unfamiliar dichotomy; the audience may feel uneasy since they see him as someone who looks so much like them. Therefore, the director had to do a lot of work to prevent the audience from sympathizing with Lurtz: his monstrosity is then defined and enhanced by his lack of background and language and by his violent nature. Throughout the entire movie, Lurtz says just four different words:

> "Saruman," when asked whom he serves, and "Find the halflings!" when he and the other Uruk-hai are doing their best to literally destroy the Fellowship. All of Lurtz's other communications consist of snarls, growls, and roars. Although Lurtz looks more like a man than the Orcs, he speaks less. Since Lurtz is also absent from Tolkien's original creation, none of Tolkien's language, no memory from the book, can make him more sympathetic.[423]

Because Lurtz's use of language is limited by Jackson, his capacity to use his "powers of eloquence and persuasion"[424] to influence the audience is compromised. Lurtz is therefore one more in a long series of Frankensteinian cinematic monsters; like James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), in which the creature is reimagined to be mute, Jackson eliminates the monster's language as well as his background and original innocence. Lurtz can clearly understand everything his creator says, although his snarls in response to Saruman appear to undermine his intellect. Therefore, he appears to be a monster who does not speak because he deliberately chooses not to do that. Both the novel and movie adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*, like Shelley's

[423] Schroeder, "It's Alive!," 180.
[424] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. 1818. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 176.

Frankenstein, illustrate how language can generate empathy in the audience as effectively as visuals. In *The Peoples of Middle-earth*,[425] Tolkien asserted that a creature's language type reveals how corrupt it is; Orcs, for instance, are so corrupt that their language is constantly deteriorating. Therefore, as Schroeder further noted,[426] Lurtz's monstrosity, enhanced by his limited use of language, stands as "a clear contrast to Tolkien and Jackson's other most anthropomorphic monster, the highly verbal Gollum."[427]

Rather than using language to differentiate between man and monster, as he did with Lurtz, when it comes to Gollum, Jackson aimed to illustrate how interchangeable their concepts are by having Frodo and Gollum speak the same language, exactly as Shelley does with Victor and his creature. In *Frankenstein*, the creator and the creation are associated through a similar language pattern that concerns evil spirits and fiends: "anguish and despair had penetrated into the core of my heart; I bore a hell within me, which nothing could extinguish,"[428] says Victor Frankenstein. Similarly, Victor is told by his creature a few chapters later that "I, like the arch fiend, bore a hell within me."[429] In Jackson's adaptation, a unique visual and linguistic relationship between Frodo and Gollum, in which the latter starts sharing "knowledge with Frodo about what it's like to carry this ring, information that Sam can never know,"[430] is set up by the screenwriters and the director. In particular, Frodo's obsession with the Ring intensifies in Jackson's *The Two Towers* to the point where he hardly ever eats or sleeps. This is displayed by a conversation that takes place in the Ithilien woodlands, in which Frodo angrily tells Sam, "The Ring was entrusted to me. It's my task! Mine! My own!" and Sam responds, "Can't you hear yourself? Don't you know who

[425] J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth: The History of Middle-earth*. (London, HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 21.
[426] Schroeder, "It's Alive!," 180-182.
[427] Ibid., 180.
[428] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 64.
[429] Ibid., 104.
[430] Jackson, "Director's Commentary"

you sound like?"[431] Jackson therefore decides to depict the two characters as visual doubles. By voluntarily referring to Gollum as Sméagol, Frodo, acting as his double, manages to disarm him verbally. In Jackson's adaptation, Frodo's addressing Gollum as "Sméagol" is not the casual "Gollum, or Sméagol if you wish"[432] that we find in Tolkien's novelistic counterpart. Rather, it is a crucial element that provides Gollum with a level of humanity: by giving this monster a name, "Frodo calls him out of the nameless monsterhood to which Frankenstein's creature had been consigned."[433] Sam is given an additional explicit elucidation for this doubling by Frodo, who remarks, "I have to believe Gollum can come back,"[434] as he realizes he is increasingly becoming influenced by the One Ring: Frodo could become a flesh-and-blood Gollum or a spectral wraith as a result of the Ring's influence. Therefore, Jackson draws on Tolkien's use of language to illustrate that, in terms of monstrosity, there is no turning back when the monsters are unable to defend themselves with language.[435]

In highlighting the theme of redemption, Jackson visually emphasizes the internal struggle between Gollum and Sméagol through both his monologues and through his relationship with Frodo, making the conflictual dichotomy between his two sides increasingly clear to the audience. Throughout the movies, Gollum's duality is reflected in his physical appearance and speech: when the Gollum persona takes control, his facial expressions become twisted and sinister, and his language mirrors this shift with bitterness and malice. Conversely, when Sméagol emerges, his features soften, his behaviour becomes more childlike and joyful, and he speaks with loyalty and affection towards Frodo. This visual and emotional contrast helps the

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[431] Peter Jackson, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2001
[432] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 640.
[433] Schroeder, "It's Alive!," 182.
[434] Jackson, The Two Towers
[435] Schroeder, "It's Alive!," 180-182.

audience to easily distinguish between the two conflicting sides of his personality, with Gollum's eyes serving as a key indicator of which persona is in control. As the narrative unfolds, Gollum's split personalities increasingly impact his plans and actions; this tension reaches a peak in *The Return of the King*, when Frodo, having momentarily escaped Shelob's clutches, is forced into a confrontation with Gollum, heavily obsessed with retrieving the Ring. Frodo prevails in this fight saying "I have to destroy it Sméagol. I have to destroy it for both our sakes."[436] His addressing the creature as "Sméagol" momentarily brings Sméagol to the surface, making him acknowledge his past evil deeds. Frodo's compassionate appeal shifts the tone of the scene entirely, making the audience believe—if only for a moment—that Gollum may be capable of redemption. The way Sméagol gazes at Frodo in response, combined with his softened expression, suggests a flicker of hope that he might have finally broken free from the One Ring's evil influence.

Figure 7 - Gollum/Sméagol in
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (Extended Edition, 2003) - 2:15:42

However, Gollum's darker side quickly takes back control, ending this brief glimpse of hope for redemption. In a final struggle, Gollum attacks Frodo

[436] Peter Jackson, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2001

and ultimately falls from the mountain. When Frodo and Sam arrive at Mount Doom, Gollum reappears, just like in the novel.

Frodo, now fully influenced by the Ring's power, refuses to destroy it:

> 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. 'Precious, precious, precious!' Gollum cried. 'My Precious! O my Precious!' And with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell. Out of the depths came his last wail Precious, and he was gone.[437]

This sequence and Gollum's eventual death are depicted slightly differently in the movie. The novel describes Gollum as "dancing like a mad thing [...] his eyes lifted up to gloat on his prize" after he bites off Frodo's finger to retrieve the Ring. Jackson's adaptation also features Gollum dancing, but a closer look at his eyes, facial expressions, and body language reveals a significant alteration: in that brief moment, it appears that Sméagol, rather than Gollum, has resurfaced. His joy is not malicious or gloating; instead, he simply dances and smiles, enjoying that long-awaited moment. Rather than being the monster responsible for the eventual downfall of Middle-earth, Sméagol therefore appears to the audience as a childlike figure enjoying a fleeting victory, recalling the image of the innocent Stoor he once was. This sudden shift in behaviour mirrors the final chapter of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where the creature, upon finding Victor dead, sets aside his hatred and begins to praise the man he once hated:

> "That is also my victim!" he exclaimed: "in his murder my crimes are consummated; the miserable series of my being is wound to its close! Oh, Frankenstein! generous and self-devoted being! what does it avail that I now ask

[437] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 946.

> thee to pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all thou lovedst. Alas! he is cold, he cannot answer me."[438]

Both scenes depict tragic figures momentarily reclaiming their lost innocence in their final moments. This implies that Gollum may have undergone a significant internal transformation as a result of his relationship with Frodo during the movie, enabling Sméagol to ultimately emerge when he eventually obtains the Ring. We can argue that, had Gollum survived the destruction of the Ring and perhaps shared Frodo's fate of bittersweet freedom, he might have found redemption, just as Frankenstein's creature puts aside his obsession and hatred after Victor's death. The way Gollum dies in the film is also different from the novel: Frodo attacks him instead of falling while he is dancing; the two fight until Gollum gets pushed into the fire. During this fight, the audience is left in a moral limbo, unsure of who the real enemy is, as a result of Gollum's innocent, childish dance and Frodo's previous refusal to destroy the Ring. It appears their roles as doubles have been reversed: Gollum, in this happy moment, seems more like the sorrowful Sméagol than the dreadful monster he has become, while Frodo, totally influenced by the Ring's power, appears as a villain. It is worth noting that when refusing to destroy the Ring, Frodo's facial expression not only recalls Isildur's but also most notably Gollum's. Although good ultimately triumphs with the Ring's destruction, the audience cannot help but feel empathy for Gollum, particularly due to his facial expressions, which reflect Sméagol's lost innocence rather than Gollum's malevolence. Gollum is no longer just the monster but rather a person deserving of compassion and redemption because of this complexity, resulting in a tragic ambiguity.

In Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, a subtle visual detail during the Eagles' arrival at Mount Doom offers a final glimpse into Gollum's potential redemption. In the novel, after the destruction of the One Ring,

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[438] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1831 (Oxford, 2013), 219.

Gandalf is assisted by Gwaihir, the Lord of the Eagles, alongside two other Eagles, Landroval and Meneldor, to rescue Frodo and Sam.[439] Although not explicitly mentioned, the Eagles may have also been intended to save Gollum. However, Jackson introduces a slight variation in the film that suggests a deeper implication regarding Gollum's fate: when we examine the scene closely, we notice that Gandalf's Eagle rescues Frodo, while the second one saves Sam; the third Eagle, intriguingly, doesn't directly participate in their rescue, just appearing to search for another survivor before departing. This detail raises an important question: if that third Eagle wasn't meant to rescue Gollum, why was it there at all? Its presence would lack visual purpose if not for this possibility. In this way, Jackson's interpretation may suggest that Gandalf's line from the book— "there is not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it"[440] —is given greater weight in the movie. Jackson's adaptation, therefore, adds a layer of nuance, suggesting that even at the very end, Gollum's redemption was still a possibility.

Figure 8 - The Eagles rescue Frodo and Sam in
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (Extended Edition, 2003) - 3:39:51

[439] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 951.
[440] Ibid., 59.

3.3.3 Conveying Monstrosity through Music

Hutcheon[441] argued that while theorists typically focus on the visual when discussing adaptation from print to performance media, the aural aspect is equally significant. For the adapter, as Walter Murch noted, music in films "functions as an emulsifier that allows you to dissolve a certain emotion and take it in a certain direction,"[442] or as "a collector and a channeler of previously created emotion."[443] Hence, soundtracks of films emphasize and guide the audience's reactions to characters and actions, highlighting and evoking emotional responses, as well as connecting inner and outer states more subtly than through camera associations.

Jackson desired more for his film trilogy than merely a soundtrack. Stating that he wanted the music to reflect Tolkien and to bring the world of Middle-earth to life,[444] he relied on Howard Shore, who composed, orchestrated, conducted, and produced the score for *The Lord of the Rings* film series between 2000 and 2004. As Ian Nathan noted,[445] Shore saw possibilities in three distinct ways to tell the same story: book, film, and music. Serving "the needs of the story, not his own musical ego,"[446] he was committed to creating a score that would both serve and transcend Jackson's visuals. Claiming that his music "is opera-like in its concept and its scope,"[447] Shore worked in a significantly more traditional way than the current trend for well-known but anonymous scores. *The Lord of the Rings* soundtrack, according to Madeline Haddad,[448] extensively depended on leitmotifs, or "any music—

[441] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 40-41.
[442] Ondaatje, *The conversations*, 103.
[443] Ibid., 122.
[444] Peter Jackson, "Music For Middle-Earth," *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2001
[445] Nathan, *Anything You Can Imagine*, 389.
[446] Ibid., 389.
[447] Ibid., 392.
[448] Madeline Haddad, "Even Darkness Must Pass: An Ethical Commentary and Musical Analysis of The Lord of the Rings Score," *The Macksey Journal*: Vol. 2, Article 139 (2021): 11-14.

melody, melody-fragment, or distinctive harmonic progression—heard more than once during the course of a film,"[449] to evoke the moral and ethical aspects of Tolkien's legendarium. Translating the intricacy of Tolkien's writings into a musical narrative that captured the rich depth of Middle-earth was an enormous undertaking for Shore:

> Thus, in preparation for composing, he surveyed centuries' worth of Western music for stylistic gems, examined elements of folk music from Celtic, Middle-Eastern, and African traditions, and researched performers and instruments from all over the world. Six of Tolkien's languages were employed to be sung by the performers: Sindarin and Quenya of the Elves, Khuzdul of the Dwarves, Adûnaic and Old English of Mankind, and Sauron's Black Speech of Mordor.[450]

Over ninety motifs were employed in Shore's score to represent various characters, cultures, locations, or concepts, highlighting the cultural relationships within Tolkien's world and emphasizing the central themes of his novels: for instance, the Hobbits have a Celtic-influenced theme, while the Men of Rohan and Gondor have minor-mode melodies reflecting tragedy and hope, and the Elves' themes are chromatic with Eastern influences. As far as monstrosity is concerned, both Mordor and Isengard have distinct motifs in the trilogy score. According to Matthew David Young[451] Isengard's motif is probably the most reminiscent of Tolkien's legendarium; it is very percussive and features a very harsh, low brass melody, recalling the author's description of Orcs' instruments in the book.[452] In the percussion section of this motif, Shore also chose to include an anvil. Because this instrument is exclusive to this motif, its inclusion may allude to the relationship between the evil area of Middle-earth and their industrial tendencies.

[449] Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), 26.
[450] Haddad, "Even Darkness Must Pass," 12.
[451] Matthew David Young, "Projecting Tolkien's Musical Worlds: A Study Of Musical Affect In Howard Shore's Soundtrack To Lord Of The Rings" (MA thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2007), 33-34.
[452] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 323.

Because monsters were given such importance and individuality by Shore and Jackson in particular, each monstrous category has its own motif in the soundtrack. For instance, Jackson envisioned Shelob's scene as a unique section of *The Lord of the Rings,* requiring distinct treatments:[453] the creature's ravenous hunger, primal rage, eerie scuttling, and ancient, festering consciousness—all aspects of her disturbing femaleness—were brought to life through a fusion of Howard Shore's composition and Weta Digital's evolving spider design. For the theme "Shelob's Lair," Jackson[454] sought a soundscape that felt utterly distinct from the rest of the film, reminiscent of Cronenberg's famous horror movie *The Fly*, of which Shore composed the soundtrack. Therefore, Jackson pushed him to incorporate more electronic elements, creating an unearthly, alien atmosphere that marked Shelob's lair as an entirely separate world within Middle-earth. In a similar vein, Jackson meticulously assisted Shore in arranging the motif for the Balrog's scene in the Mines of Moria.[455] Considering the ancient Dwarven setting, for the theme "The Bridge of Khazad-dûm" it was decided to incorporate choirs of Polynesian singers, specifically Māori or Pacific Islander singers, to evoke a specific pompous as well as terrifying feeling. This choir made up of sixty men chanting Dwarvish verses, carried an otherworldly resonance embodying a powerful, primal energy. This sound, evocative of kapa haka, the traditional Māori action songs, was designed to feel raw and elemental and aid in making this scene feel like a distinct experience within the broader narrative. In terms of Gollum's motif, [456] it was made up of two parts that each represented a different aspect of the character. In the same way that Gollum was removed from the Shire and

[453] Nathan, *Anything You Can Imagine*, 383.
[454] Jackson, "Music For Middle-Earth"
[455] Ibid.
[456] Peter Jackson, "Music For Middle-Earth," *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2002

transformed into something else, Shore came up with the idea to incorporate a sound that was taken from the Hobbiton's score section. Shore therefore employed the hammered dulcimer, one of the instruments previously adopted in musically shaping the Shire, as a solo instrument for the motif "Gollum's Song," primarily because of its tremolo-like, jittery sound and feeling.[457] In conclusion, to demonstrate the meticulous attention given to musically shaping monstrous characters, places, and events throughout the trilogy, Shore's choices about how to shape the pivotal moments in which these manifestations of evil were dispelled and defeated must be examined. To counteract the overwhelming darkness that threatens to prevail, Shore decided to employ exclusively Ben Del Maestro's soloist voice, who in 2003 was a young boy soprano. Therefore, frenetic visual actions on-screen were juxtaposed by this pure and angelic voice without the major orchestra.[458] In the motif "Isengard Unleashed," Shore draws a symbolical connection between the Riders of Rohan, led by Théoden, charging into battle, and the Ents, led by Treebeard, marching forth to destroy Isengard: signifying the victory of nature and humanity over industrialized evil, Del Maestro's voice serves as a symbol of hope. In a similar vein, his voice accompanies Gandalf's dramatic arrival at Helm's Deep in "Forth Eorlingas." At last, in *The Return of the King*, Del Maestro's voice is crucial in the motif "Osgiliath Unleashed," employed when Gandalf rides forth to confront the Nazgûl and their Fellbeasts, embodying the power of light and goodness to banish evil. In this scene, the music, intertwined with Del Maestro's voice, creates a moment where monstrosity is driven back, and the hope of Middle-earth emerges. Therefore, in order to counterbalance and repel monstrosity, Shore chose to employ one of the purest elements—a child's angelic voice.

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[457] Ibid.

[458] Peter Jackson, "Music For Middle-Earth," *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Special Extended Edition) New Line Cinema, WingNut Films. The Saul Zaentz Company (licensor) (d/b/a Tolkien Enterprises) under license to New Line Productions Inc. 2003

Conclusions

This thesis aimed to critically and extensively examine Tolkien's depiction of the notion of monstrosity. As discussed in the first chapter, Tolkien's essay *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, which represents a substantial first step towards what is now known as "monster theory," serves as a central element to fully comprehend the theoretical basis of his relationship with monstrosity. While Tolkien does not clarify the term "monster" in the essay, he uses it to refer to creatures with aberrant size who represent moral conflict as well as physical antagonism in the narrative. However, in Middle-earth, monstrosity is not limited to physical abnormality; rather, it encompasses a range of attributes and allegorical implications. This is also evident from Tolkien's primary influences regarding his idea of monstrosity, who drew from various historical periods and literary genres such as the Renaissance (James I and Shakespeare), the Gothic (Horace Walpole, Mary Shelley, and Bram Stoker), and the Victorian Age (Charles Dickens, Christina Rossetti, and George MacDonald). Therefore, Tolkien's legendarium includes a vast array of monsters, each possessing multiple symbolisms, literary inspirations, and narrative roles.

The second chapter begins by discussing Melkor, Sauron, and Saruman, who, despite lacking conventional monstrous features, exerted a profound and terrifying influence on Middle-earth through their satanic nature and malevolent actions. Spider-like and repulsive creatures such as Ungoliant and Shelob, which symbolize deep-seated anxieties like being trapped or being preyed upon, are analyzed as epitomes of the "monstrous feminine," subverting traditional female roles in Middle-earth by defying norms of obedience and subservience. Moreover, Werewolves and Vampires, often overlooked figures in scholarly research on Tolkien, are investigated for their

unique portrayal as "fallen beasts inhabited by dreadful spirits,"[459] visually standing as giant vampire bats and dreadful wolves, and thus, deviating from their Gothic origins. Trolls are examined in the context of Norse mythology, with their depiction in Tolkien's legendarium as monsters that violate human boundaries and convey fears of the unknown, mirroring the jötnar, creatures employed in Norse sagas to test and define heroism. Middle-earth's lurking threats and dangers are symbolized by the Watcher in the Water. The monstrous qualities of this creature are further defined by its inability to fit into the classificatory "order of things."[460] This makes it possible to associate it with the Nameless Things, malevolent entities who are supposed to reside in Middle-earth's darkest depths and stand as some of the most enigmatic creatures of the legendarium. In addition, the Nameless Things, together with the unknown origins surrounding Ungoliant stand as exceptions in Tolkien's conception of evil. Furthermore, the Barrow-wights, the Ringwraiths, and the Dead Men of Dunharrow are crucial to present Tolkien's relationship with the notion of undeath, especially concerning how these different monsters are able to corrupt the balance between body and soul, which is essential in Tolkien's conception of Arda. Among the first creatures Melkor corrupts in *The Silmarillion* are the Balrogs, corrupted Maiar who manifest themselves as hideous spirits of fire. A detailed investigation is conducted on Durin's Bane, the Balrog that serves as Gandalf's primary adversary in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In addition to being reminiscent of the battle between the god Freyr and the fire giant Surtr narrated in the *Prose Edda*, their fight on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm culminates in a heroic demise for Gandalf. In narrative terms, Durin's Bane serves as a climatic antagonist who proudly and momentarily removes Gandalf from the story, allowing Aragorn's essential growth as a leader. Moreover, an extensive examination

[459] Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 192.
[460] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6.

of Tolkien's Dragons is presented, illustrating how the author portrayed them as intricate representations of monstrosity that combine extraordinary physical strength with cunning and psychological manipulation. Theoretical frameworks, including Hegel's Lord-Bondsman Dialectic and Adriana Cavarero's theory concerning the distinction between epic and novelistic characters, are applied to Tolkien's monsters, particularly in the exploration of Orcs' monstrosity as embodiments of Tolkien's notion of "The Machine" and in Gollum's unique self-affirmation through introspection rather than action.

Lastly, an examination of the two major cinematic adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*—the animated film directed by Ralph Bakshi and the trilogy of films directed by Peter Jackson—has been particularly relevant in further investigating Tolkien's notion of monstrosity. Although partially deviating from Tolkien's legendarium, these directors brought their own perspective to the adaptation through their artistic genius and striking visual elements, giving Tolkien's monsters more depth and symbolic significance.

Ultimately, Tolkien's monsters in Middle-earth mainly serve to represent how almost every aspect of existence is corruptible. Tolkien's concept of "Fall," which carries Augustinian connotations, together with the other terms of "Mortality" and "The Machine," serve as a foundation for all of Tolkien's monsters. In this process, Melkor plays a pivotal role: his rebellion and fall, which led to the emergence of evil in Arda, subsequently gave life to monstrosity in Middle-earth. Nearly every monster or twisted being in Middle-earth follows a parallel trajectory: they fall from their original state, whether through corruption, enslavement, or deception, and are transformed into embodiments of evil. However, their monstrosity is not merely a result of this fall; it is uniquely defined by their individual natures, circumstances, and the specific ways in which they have been tainted.

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tuo costante sostegno e i tuoi saggi consigli non sarei mai arrivato a questo punto. Sei una persona dal cuore d'oro; ti meriti tutto l'amore del mondo, a volte penso anche un figlio migliore di me. Grazie per avermi accompagnato fin qui.

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luna mi sorrida, e mi conceda di vivere questa complessa “vita mortale” accanto alla donna più straordinaria che il destino abbia deciso di farmi incontrare. Come Aragorn e Arwen, il cui legame ha sfidato il tempo e il fato, desidero percorrere ogni passo di questo cammino al tuo fianco. Il nostro amore è un modo di guardare alla vita sempre in due, un insieme di gesti e parole che raccontano di cura, di comprensione e di compassione. Quindi, ti prometto di proteggerlo e custodirlo fino alla fine dei miei giorni, come se fosse il più splendente e radioso dei Silmaril. Ti amo.

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“Despite everything, it’s still you.”