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# J.R.R. Tolkien and the Morality of Monstrosity

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## Abstract

This thesis asserts that J.R.R. Tolkien recreates *Beowulf* for the twentieth century. His 1936 lecture, ‘*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*’ sets the tone not only for twentieth century criticism of the text, but also Tolkien’s own fictional project: creating an imagined world in which ‘new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited’ (*B: M&C* 26). At the core of his analysis of *Beowulf*, and at the core of his own Middle-earth, are the monsters. He creates creatures that are an ignition of past and present, forming characters that defy allegory and simple moral categorization. To demonstrate the necessity of reading Tolkien’s Middle-earth through the lens of his 1936 lecture, I begin by examining the broad literary source material that Tolkien draws into his creative process. I assert that an understanding of the formation of monstrosity, from classical, Augustinian, late medieval, Renaissance, Restoration and Gothic sources, is fundamental to seeing the complexity, and thus the didactic element, of Tolkien’s monsters.

As a medieval scholar and professor, Tolkien’s focus on the educational potential of a text appears in his critical work and is enacted in his fiction. Tolkien takes on a mode of writing categorized as Wisdom Literature: he writes a series of texts that demonstrate the imperative lesson that ‘*swa sceal man don*’ (so shall man do) found in *Beowulf*. Tolkien’s fiction takes up this challenge, demonstrating for the reader what a hero must do when faced with the moral and physical challenge of the monster.

Monsters are a primarily didactic tool, demonstrating vice and providing challenges for the hero to overcome. Monsters are at the core of Tolkien’s critical reading; it must be at the core of ours.

## Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Abbreviations	v
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Tolkien's Middle-earth: a Modern Beowulf	1
1.2 Definitions	10
1.3 Tolkien and his Critics	16
1.4 Method and Theory	25
<b>Chapter Two: Tolkien and the Critical Landscape</b>	<b>31</b>
2.1 Tolkien's Critical Project	31
2.2 The Politicization of <i>Beowulf</i>	37
2.3 Textual and Historical Conceptions of the Other	48
2.4 Tolkien and the Language of Monstrosity	56
<b>Chapter Three: Tolkien's Later Influences</b>	<b>62</b>
3.1 Tolkien's Reading of Late Medieval Monstrosity and 'Faerie'	62
3.2 The Renaissance Monster	70
3.3 The Restoration Monster	79
3.4 The Gothic Monster	81
3.5 Victorian Neomedievalism	90
<b>Chapter Four: The Monsters of Middle-earth</b>	<b>96</b>
4.1 Tolkien's Framework: Language and Loss	96
4.2 Tolkien's Monsters	112
4.2.1 Orcs and Goblins	112
4.2.2 Trolls	125
4.2.3 Spiders	131
4.2.4 Dragons	137
4.2.5 Wraiths and Wights	144
4.2.6 Ghosts and the Dead	150
4.2.7 Smeagol/Gollum	154
4.2.8 Dwarves	160
4.3 The Monster Continues	165
<b>Chapter Five: Middle-earth Ignites</b>	<b>167</b>
Works Cited	178
Works Studied	185

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## Textual Abbreviations

These conventions are from *Tolkien Studies* 1.1 (2004) vii-viii, augmented with my own abbreviations for commonly used texts in this thesis.

- ‘*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics.’ *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997. 5-48. Print.
- Beowulf* *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. Ed. Fr. Klaeber. Third Edition. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1950. Print.
- ‘Orfeo’ ‘Sir Orfeo.’ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl and Sir Orfeo*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1975. 169-90. Print.
- Gawain* ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.’ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl and Sir Orfeo*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1975. 23-121. Print.
- ‘Gawain’ ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.’ *The Monster and the Critics and Other Essays*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997. 72-108. Print.
- ‘Fairy-stories’ ‘On Fairy-stories’ *Tolkien on Fairy-stories*. Ed. Verlyn Flieger & Douglas Anderson. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008. Print.
- FR* *The Fellowship of the Ring. The Lord of the Rings: Book One*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001. Print.
- H* *The Hobbit*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998. Print.
- Húrin* *The Children of Húrin*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007. Print.
- Index* *Index: The Histories of Middle-earth*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth*. London, HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Jewels* *The War of the Jewels*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Lays* *The Lays of Beleriand*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Letters* *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Humphrey Carpenter, ed. with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen & Unwin; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981. Print.
- Lost Road* *The Lost Road and Other Writings*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.

- Lost Tales I* *The Book of Lost Tales: Part One.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth.* London, HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Lost Tales II* *The Book of Lost Tales: Part Two.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth.* London, HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Morgoth* *Morgoth's Ring.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Peoples* *The Peoples of Middle-earth.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- RK* *The Return of the King. The Lord of the Rings: Book Three.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001. Print.
- S* *The Silmarillion.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999. Print.
- Sauron* *Sauron Defeated.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Shadow* *The Return of the Shadow.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Shaping* *The Shaping of Middle-earth.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth.* London, HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Smith* *Smith of Wootton Major.* Ed. Verlyn Flieger. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005. Print.
- TT* *The Two Towers. The Lord of the Rings: Book Two.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001. Print.
- Treason* *The Treason of Isengard.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.
- UT* *Unfinished Tales.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998. Print.
- War* *The War of the Ring.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. *The Histories of Middle-earth.* London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002. Print.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Tolkien's Middle-earth: a Modern *Beowulf*

J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth is *Beowulf* for the twentieth century. Tolkien fashioned a literary world in which elements of past and present 'touched and ignited' ('*B: M&C*' 26). Feeling a lack of English myth, Tolkien invented his own mythology of Middle-earth by reaching into deep history and creating a world full of narrative dark matter: the ancient material that gives his twentieth century tales of Middle-earth weight cannot be seen directly, but adds 'mass' to the text. One way to analyse the constituents of this hidden 'mass' is through his monsters, which are at the centre both of his critical work on *Beowulf* and of his fictional texts. This thesis, then, begins by asking: what is Tolkien doing with his monsters? Does Tolkien's reading of *Beowulf* – which recuperated the role of the monsters in the poem after many decades of critical neglect – help us to understand his fiction? This thesis will demonstrate that Tolkien's monsters are, in fact, one of the chief means by which Tolkien recreates the historical nexus between deep history and modern belief. His monsters both recall *Beowulf*'s foes and invoke modern traumas, and so comprise the same cross-cultural historical intersection as the Old English monsters.

In 1936, J.R.R. Tolkien changed the face of medieval scholarship. He gave a celebrated lecture in honour of Sir Israel Gollancz to the British Academy on *Beowulf* and its critics, both pointing to the positive achievements of previous commentators on the poem and offering a solution to what he declared to be a glaring omission from their interpretations. His argument was that *Beowulf* scholars should not concern themselves exclusively with linguistic, historical, or political matters, which were the standard modes of reading. Instead, he asserted the need for a literary reading of a poem that had been primarily studied as an historical text, reclaiming the text as a work of art, not simply a convenient source for linguistic or cultural material. His lecture centred on a reassertion of the narrative and moral role of the monstrous figures in the poem. The monster, though Tolkien never specifically defines the term in his lecture, appears to refer to those creatures that stand in physical and moral opposition to *Beowulf* and the poem's heroes: beings of abnormal size or form which serve to demonstrate some idea or point at some sort of moral. These creatures are Tolkien's chief focus in his discussion, as he tells his audience: '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' ('*B: M&C*' 6). In this lecture, entitled '*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*,' Tolkien links the monsters in *Beowulf* to the development of a number of the poem's primary themes. *Beowulf*'s ability to defeat a number of powerful creatures defines him as an epic hero: 'It



is just because the main foes in *Beowulf* are inhuman that the story is larger and more significant' (Tolkien, 'B: M&C' 33).

Tolkien countered the arguments of the many predecessors who had either wholly ignored the monsters or declared them to be an error of judgement by the poet. Tolkien argued that reading the text through the lens of the monsters was at the core of understanding *Beowulf*. This method of critical redirection, focusing on the monster figure instead of the author's use of language, geography, or historical characters, can be applied to Tolkien's own fiction: an approach which – rather surprisingly – has not been attempted hitherto. This thesis will provide that focus, and discuss the creatures that are at the heart not only of Tolkien's literary works, but also of the literary genre he helped popularise. This genre, which has come to be termed high fantasy, is modeled on the writings of William Morris, Lord Dunsany and Tolkien himself. I argue that the monsters have a key function within the moral structure that underpins all Tolkien's fiction: Tolkien's Catholicism remains at the core of his works, despite his use of characters and creatures from diverse eras and belief systems. His work is highly syncretic: he encourages his reader to consider the narrative through the eyes of both a reader of fiction and an historian, placing his story in an imagined history that draws on both historiographical and literary-historical sources. Tolkien is not the first writer to create works that stand at the nexus of history and literature, as I will address the many texts Tolkien drew from which also demonstrate these traits. He was creating a *Beowulf*-like set of texts, using a meld of fact and fiction as a framework for his didactic purposes.

Tolkien's lecture at Oxford University addresses a tendency among *Beowulf* scholars to treat the poem as a source of cultural and historical information rather than a work of poetry. To this end, Tolkien discusses the various contemporary trends in *Beowulf* scholarship, addressing in detail the work of three critics in particular: W.P. Ker, R.W. Chambers and Ritchie Girvan. For the modern reader, as for Tolkien, these scholars may be considered to exemplify the critical landscape Tolkien sought to transform. They advocated a reading of the *Beowulf* poet's Germanic text in the context of the Mediterranean mythologies of the Greco-Roman pantheon, and sought to place the poem in a geographic, historical or cultural setting without paying attention to its literary merits. Tolkien identifies what he sees as a fundamental flaw in these scholars' approach: their tendency to see the poem's frequent departures from historical 'realism' as its major failing. For Tolkien, Humphrey Wanley's 1705 assessment of the text as a poor example of Anglo-Saxon verse brands the text an inept performance for all the generations of critics who followed after:

As it set out upon its adventures among the modern scholars, *Beowulf* was christened by Wanley Poesis [that is, poetry] – *Poeseos Anglo-Saxonica egregium exemplum* [an exceptional example of Anglo-Saxon verse]. But the fairy godmother later invited to superintend its fortunes was Historia. And she brought with her Philologia, Mythologia, Archaeologia, and Laographia. Excellent ladies. But where was the child's name-sake? Poesis was usually forgotten; occasionally admitted by a side-door; sometimes dismissed on the door-step. '*The Beowulf*', they said, 'is hardly an affair of yours, and not in any case a protégé that you could be proud of. It is an historical document. Only as such does it interest the superior culture of today.' And it is as a historical document that it has mainly been examined and dissected. ('*B: M&C*' 6)

For Tolkien, the arguments of many of his contemporaries, like Ker, Chambers and Girvan, echo Wanley's earlier methods of reading as well as his conclusions. Tolkien asserts that these scholars have perpetuated reading methods that were employed as early as the sixteenth century, when the *Beowulf* manuscript was rediscovered. Tolkien's reading of the text as standing at the nexus of Christian faith and pagan belief results in his argument that the monsters – a term he uses sparingly in his essay, to refer to Grendel, Grendel's mother and the Dragon – give physical and emotional substance to the moral and spiritual questions the poem tackles: 'I would suggest, then, that the monsters are not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem, which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness' ('*B: M&C*' 19). Their role as a challenge to the hero, a representation of the explosive encounter between Pagan and Christian mythologies and an embodiment of the poem's complex moral universe makes them central to *Beowulf*. For Tolkien, the inhuman beings provide a greater challenge for the hero than any human enemy could have done:

If the dragon is the right end for Beowulf, and I agree with the author that it is, then Grendel is an eminently suitable beginning. They are creatures, *feond mancynnes*, of a similar order and kindred significance. Triumph over the lesser and more nearly human is cancelled by defeat before the older and more elemental. ('*B: M&C*' 32-3)

Grendel and his mother, as Cain's kin, are 'more nearly human,' in contrast to the elemental power of the Dragon. The connection between the men of Heorot and Grendel is noted by Tolkien, echoing the idea of monstrosity presented by Augustine. By this means Tolkien seeks to rescue the outsider figures from relegation to inconsequentiality; in his work as a scholarly medievalist, Tolkien tried to reconsider early literature as literature,

accepting the narrative roles of all the different figures in the text, rather than assuming the poet to have been mistaken in inventing most of them. In response to Archibald Strong's declaration that the poem was of primarily historical importance, Tolkien stated that 'it seems to me that the air has been clouded not only for Strong, but for other more authoritative critics, by the dust of the quarrying researchers. It may well be asked: why should we approach this, or indeed any other poem, mainly as an historical document?' ('*B: M&C*' 6). For Tolkien, the historical elements in the poem, which made it appealing as a focus of study, are precisely what distracted attention from its imaginative richness:

So far from being a poem so poor that only its accidental historical interest can still recommend it, *Beowulf* is in fact so interesting as poetry, in places poetry so powerful, that this quite overshadows the historical content, and is largely independent even of the most important facts [...] that research has discovered. It is indeed a curious fact that it is one of the peculiar poetic virtues of *Beowulf* that has contributed to its own critical misfortunes. The illusion of historical truth and perspective, that has made *Beowulf* seem such an attractive quarry, is largely a product of art. ('*B: M&C*' 7)

For Tolkien, the literary elements of the poem, namely its narrative, its characters and the complexity of its language, far outweigh the historical elements embedded in them. As Tolkien discusses in 'On Fairy-stories,' the power of a storyteller lies in his ability to engage in sub-creation, constructing a secondary world convincing enough to enlist the belief of the reader ('Fairy-stories' 61). As I shall argue here, this creative act is the supreme achievement of the *Beowulf* poet, which explains why the poem occupies such an important place in Tolkien's own development as a literary sub-creator.

Tolkien translated and edited a number of medieval English texts in a bid to make early poetry accessible to new generations of readers; yet his most memorable contribution to the body of medieval literary criticism was this lecture. His insistence on a literary reading of the poem, a reading that recognized and celebrated the presence of the monsters, proved enormously influential. As Bruce Mitchell noted, the 'Greenfield and Robinson *Bibliography* records seventy items on "Literary Interpretations" of *Beowulf* before J. R. R. Tolkien's lecture and two-hundred-and-fifty between its publication and the end of 1972' (209). The scholarly community accepted and adopted Tolkien's critical approach, so that his essay appears to have shaped how subsequent readers and critics have considered the text. Since he gave his lecture, the monsters in *Beowulf* are accepted as central to the moral and artistic purpose of the poet; they are no longer blunders on the part of the writer, as Ker, Chambers and Girvan claim, or distractions from the political narrative, but key elements in the central theme of the text. For Tolkien, this theme was a religious one. As

Edward James points out, Tolkien sees that the morality of the poem is centred around the monsters: ‘Tolkien argued [...] that through the fantastic events of the poem - the killing of the monster Grendel, and then of Grendel’s mother, and then of a dragon - the poet could express real truths about courage, and loyalty, and duty’ (69). Tolkien argues that the author was a Catholic poet writing about a pagan hero; a poet who constructed his monsters to demonstrate how man cannot overcome obstacles without divine assistance. As Tolkien explains, the transition between the Pagan and Christian conceptions of monsters shows the familiarity of the monster as a marker of faith:

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. (‘B: M&C’ 22)

The poem asserts, according to Tolkien, that while one such as Beowulf may struggle against evil and win, it is only when one puts his faith in God that he can achieve a total victory: man possesses hubris and weakness, while God does not.

Just as Tolkien recuperated the role of the monsters in *Beowulf*, so this thesis argues that the monsters are central to an understanding of Tolkien’s own fiction. The way he constructs his monsters enriches the traditional notion of the monstrous and demonstrates the breadth of literary materials upon which he drew, which includes *Beowulf*. Tolkien’s critical lectures focused on a few specific texts, which will be the primary focus of my analysis. He did not address analogue texts like *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* when he discusses *Beowulf*, nor did he bring texts like *Fled Bricrend* or *Hunbaut* into his analysis of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Thus, I will focus on texts Tolkien used; while other contemporary works certainly influenced his formation of the monsters, my argument centres upon how Tolkien’s critical reading of medieval materials influenced his fiction. These texts incorporate the monstrous and fantastical, providing rich source material for Tolkien’s composition of monsters. Rather than populating Middle-earth solely with wholly evil or corrupted monsters, Tolkien includes complex creatures among them, with whom readers can sympathize and whose motives they can understand. Corruption in Tolkien’s fiction changes characters, creating monsters that are not necessarily beyond redemption. As Shippey points out in *The Author of the Century*, there

are ‘several characters who show one stage or another of the creeping corruption which Gandalf fears’ (117). Figures like Bilbo and Samwise show moments of temptation from the Ring, while Boromir, who declares that ‘True-hearted Men, they will not be corrupted’ (FR 389), falls to the Ring’s power. Though critics like Jared Lobdell,<sup>1</sup> Richard Purtill<sup>2</sup> and Fleming Rutledge<sup>3</sup> have asserted that Tolkien’s fictional world consists of a set of simple dichotomies, even the simplest of these monsters are, I would argue, more interesting figures than some critics assess; and while there are certainly monsters that can be described as morally ‘simple’ in the many texts of Middle-earth, these creatures can serve complex functions in Tolkien’s narratives.<sup>4</sup> As I have said, Tolkien sees the function of the monster as didactic: they are demonstrations of vice, sin or corruption. Even the morally one-sided characters, like Orcs, Trolls or Spiders, have instructive purpose in the many tales of Middle-earth. But their example is by no means a straightforward one, and these morally simple monsters exhibit their complexity most prominently, perhaps, in their use of different dialects, as I shall argue in Chapter Four.

Tolkien’s formation of morally instructive narratives echoes a traditional form of literature common in the medieval period: Wisdom Literature. This form of text is found in biblical and medieval literature, incorporating philosophical and moral adages in order to teach the reader about the divine and about the best way to behave as God’s servant. These texts often took a narrative form in order to describe and model morality. Wisdom Literature is typically defined as particular books of The Bible, namely Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms and, of course, The Book of Wisdom. Scholars have pointed to the importance of including broader sources, like writings of Hesiod, or medieval poems like *Maxims*, *Solomon and Saturn II* or *The Descent into Hell*. *Beowulf*, though often not included in the catalogue of Wisdom Literature, possesses the same traits. Wisdom Literature is not limited to a single style or format, but is characterized by the incorporation of statements of wisdom that are instructive about divinity and virtue. Wisdom Literature is primarily narrative, but can also include texts that list aphorisms, like

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<sup>1</sup> See Lobdell, *A Tolkien Compass*.

<sup>2</sup> See Purtill, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion*.

<sup>3</sup> See Rutledge, *The Battle for Middle-earth: Tolkien’s Divine Design in the Lord of the Rings*.

<sup>4</sup> This is an idea found in Brian Attebery’s discussion of reading fantasy literature through a structuralist lens: ‘We may have angels in disguise at one end of the scale and a wholly evil Dark Lord at the other, but in between there are alternative versions of the same characters that, among them, demonstrate how nuanced structural thought can be. Sneaky Gollum is paired with loyal Samwise; both are matched at different times with Frodo; unheroic Frodo is contrasted with the human warrior Boromir; Boromir serves as a binary contrast sometimes with his brother Faramir and sometimes with the kingly Aragorn. Once alerted to this mode of doubling, the reader can see unlikelier but suggestive pairings such as the elf queen Galadriel with the loathsome spider Shelob, or the persuasive Gandalf with the skulking Wormtongue’ (87).

the book of Proverbs or the *Maxims*. The defining element of Wisdom Literature texts is their complexity; ‘the poems as a group value highly what is “deop, deorc, dygel, dyrne”, deep and dark and secret and hidden; [...] Anglo-Saxon wisdom, it seems, is neither knowledge nor faith nor morality, but an uneasy mixture of all these and more, a way of life rather than a possession, a balance only to be acquired [...] by age and experience’ (Shippey *Wisdom* 4). Wisdom is not readily available to the reader, but is complex, secretive and requires investment and thought. Tolkien emulates the didactic drive of Wisdom Literature in his use of monsters that defy simple moralities through their existence at the nexus of past and present. Tolkien’s monsters will be compared with Milton’s Satan, Mary Shelley’s Creature, and Wagner’s incorporation of Germanic myth into the Ring cycle, especially in his representation of Fafnir: complex creatures operating within a rich, historically-determined moral framework.

Tolkien’s creation of a didactic framework for Middle-earth reflects the tradition of Wisdom Literature. Anglo-Saxon Wisdom Literature, as described by Shippey, refers to ‘poems which aim primarily neither at narrative nor at self-expression, but deal instead with the central concerns of human life – what it is; how it varies; how a man may hope to succeed in it, and after it’ (Shippey *Wisdom* 1). *Beowulf* can be read as a Wisdom text, as it frequently echoes what man must [*sceall*] do when faced with trials and challenges. The key element of Wisdom Literature that is important to reading Tolkien is the didactic element: Wisdom texts both reflect the values of the author and impart the moral to the reader. King Alfred the Great, as recorded in Asser’s *Life of King Alfred*, used poetry as a means of instruction and insisted that his children and his ealdormen, reeves and thanes read poetry to ‘apply [themselves] much more attentively to the pursuit of wisdom’ (Keynes & Lapidge 110). For the king, then, poetry was first and foremost a powerful tool of instruction for its readers.

Tolkien emulates Wisdom Literature in his didactic narratives, capturing the resonance and complexity of *Beowulf* in his fiction. Tolkien’s Middle-earth is a demonstrative text: characters act as man must, as when Frodo finds out he holds the One Ring and makes a decision based on the greater good:

“Well!” said Gandalf at last. [...] “Have you decided what to do?”

“No!” answered Frodo [...] “Or perhaps, yes. As far as I understand what you have said, I suppose I must keep the Ring and guard it, at least for the present, whatever it may do to me. [...] I cannot keep the Ring and stay here.

I ought to leave Bag End, leave the Shire, leave everything and go away.”  
(FR 60-1)<sup>5</sup>

Frodo reflects that sense of *sceall* that Beowulf takes up throughout the poem: he accepts the challenge despite his fears. The focus of Wisdom Literature, in its diverse forms and eras, is the element of instruction and demonstration. Corruption and redemption are at the core of the narrative and, as Shippey points out in *Author of the Century*:

while critics have found fault with almost everything about *The Lord of the Rings*, on one pretext or another, no one to my knowledge has ever quibbled with what Gandalf says about [the corruption of] the Ring. It is far too plausible, and too recognizable. It would not have been so before the many bitter experiences of the twentieth century. (115)

The text demonstrates the corruption of power, as even Frodo, the brave Hobbit who takes up the Ring to destroy it, is consumed by its power. The morality of the narrative shows how even great men can and will be overcome by powers greater than themselves, just as Beowulf understands when he faces the dragon. Tolkien's narrative models the behaviours one must follow to live a virtuous, Christian life.

My discussion of Tolkien's monsters in this thesis, while considering the larger *Silmarillion*<sup>6</sup> texts, will concentrate on the changing representation of such creatures in his best-known works of fantasy, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In such a large and evolving body of fiction, there are inevitable shifts of emphasis and inconsistencies, but it appears that there is also a unifying set of ethical considerations to which Tolkien returns repeatedly.<sup>7</sup> While characters may change their moral role in the narrative of Middle-earth, they do so with didactic purpose in the larger mythology. Tolkien redeems some figures as his work evolves, like the occasionally monstrous Dwarves, while others remain powerful representations of evil or corruption, like the eternally corrupted Orcs. Tolkien described his texts as ‘fundamentally religious and Catholic,’ pointing out how ‘the religious element is absorbed into the story and symbolism’ (*Letters* 172). His world took on his own moral

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<sup>5</sup> While the three texts were published with continuous pagination, each of the three separate volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* will be identified in citations to make the quotations easier to identify and place for the reader.

<sup>6</sup> Tolkien referred to any text pertaining to the History of Arda and Middle-earth as part of the *Silmarillion*, meaning the history of that world. This can cause confusion when considered in relation to the selected histories of Middle-earth compiled by Christopher Tolkien, entitled *The Silmarillion*. When italicized, this thesis is referring to that specific text; when the word is not in italics, this thesis is referring to the wider collection of documents, tales and histories which provide the background of Tolkien's imagined world.

<sup>7</sup> When discussing the texts, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* will be preferred over the later published *The Histories of Middle-earth*. Tolkien's mythology shifts over the course of its development, so my reading of Middle-earth will focus on the texts he published or prepared for publication himself, rather than those prepared posthumously.

beliefs, as Middle-earth was not overtly religious, but was shaped by the values of Tolkien's Catholicism.

This thesis will address primarily Tolkien's use of source materials, as it is through understanding Tolkien's sources that one can see his syncretic and archaistic project. This thesis will focus on a single question: what is Tolkien doing with his monsters? In order to address this broad topic, I will break it into a number of subsidiary questions:

What are the sources for Tolkien's monsters?

What historical baggage do these monsters carry?

How does Tolkien use his source materials in constructing his own monsters?

How does the 'ignition' (to use Tolkien's term) between deep history and modern context shape Tolkien's monsters?

Chapters Two and Three of this thesis will primarily address the first and second questions, while the third and fourth questions will be the focus of Chapter Four. Tolkien uses medieval and gothic sources as part of his world to conflate the eras in Middle-earth, as his monsters incorporate traits and codes from different literary periods. His use of characters and creatures from multiple eras shows how his Middle-earth is a blending of history and art, a wisdom text that draws on universal character types to appeal to and impart a lesson to the reader. This thesis will draw out the different sources and influences as a way of discussing Tolkien's monsters, placing their new narrative role within their original literary contexts.

Tolkien's monsters are, I argue, the source of complexity and depth in his writing. He uses figures of physical otherness to explore the processes and conditions surrounding corruption and redemption. Tolkien allows some of his monsters redemption in their didactic role. Rather than presenting a world of static morality and simple dichotomies, Tolkien draws Middle-earth as a dynamic space of change: creatures can fall and be redeemed through the many texts of Middle-earth. Whether any given monster is morally static or morally variable, it is defined by its language. Tolkien's writing is, I argue, didactic: a form of Wisdom Literature, a genre with which Tolkien, a scholarly medievalist, was familiar. His texts teach the virtues of forgiveness and hope within a highly spiritual (although not excessively religious) framework. The nature and function of Tolkien's creatures changed during his literary career, and I will consider both how he initially envisaged these monstrous figures and how they shifted in their moral and narrative roles.



## 1.2 Definitions

This thesis will engage with texts I categorise as early medieval, high medieval, renaissance, restoration, gothic and neomedieval. Early medieval, as the term is used in this thesis, refers to texts written prior to 1066. High medieval refers to texts that follow the linguistic shift from Anglo-Saxon to Middle English, after the arrival of the Normans and prior to the language's shift to early modern. While many scholars, including Tolkien, refer to the entire Middle Ages as medieval, I am seeking to provide a sense of differentiation, rather than reducing such a broad and culturally diverse period of time into the single entity of the medieval.

The Renaissance and Restoration eras are a bit less contentious: the Renaissance in this thesis refers to the long literary period from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. The Restoration was a brief period at the end of the Stuart reign: the 1660s to the end of the 1700s. This thesis will address one text in this era: *Paradise Lost*.

The term Gothic will be used to refer to the literary mode practiced from the eighteenth century onwards, which was developed as a reaction to the classical forms of literature and art that dominated this period. While originally referring to the Germanic tribe known as the Goths, as noted in the primary definition given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* ('[o]f, pertaining to, or concerned with the Goths or their language'), the word 'Gothic' was later adopted to describe architecture that defied the classical Greek and Roman styles.<sup>8</sup> This sense of the anti-classical appeared in literature of the eighteenth century, when the term began to be used to mean 'belonging to, or characteristic of, the Middle Ages; mediæval, "romantic", as opposed to classical. In early use chiefly with reprobation: Belonging to the "dark ages"' ('Gothic'). This classical opposition led to the association of the literary Gothic with a sense of freedom: the anticlassical movement rejected the structure and formality that was associated with the Classic revival. As Chris Brooks explains in *The Gothic Revival*:

The political liberty connoted by gothic architecture, in gothic literature becomes imaginative liberty, the distinctive characteristic of "genius", a quality of essential creativity born of nature rather than culture. [...] The gothic genius that loves freedom liberates English poetry from Grecian regulation, just as it had liberated English institutions from Roman imperialism. (109-10)

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<sup>8</sup> 'A term for the style of architecture prevalent in Western Europe from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, of which the chief characteristic is the pointed arch. Applied also to buildings, architectural details, and ornamentation.' 'Gothic.' *OED Online*.

In eighteenth-century England, what began as a wave of Graveyard Poetry developed into a literary mode that sought to recapture the perceived freedoms of the Goths (Brooks 111-2). In this thesis, Gothic does not refer to a time-period, but a literary mode. I will speak of the individual eras in which the Gothic appears, as it is prevalent in different forms in the Romantic, Victorian and Modern eras.

Neomedieval literature developed in the nineteenth century from the Gothic; neomedievalism was a revitalization of literature and culture that considered a broader Nordic culture deriving from the rise of academic medievalism. Narrative texts, like Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816), reflect this change to a more academic consideration of the past, as the eponymous character studies the past as an amateur historian and archeologist. Like the Gothic, neomedievalism is anti-classical, but demonstrates a closer reflection on and understanding of medieval style and form, following as it does the discovery and translation of more texts and materials in the second half of the eighteenth century.

A key term in this thesis is *monster*, which has undergone dramatic changes from its early uses by Pliny and St. Augustine, and its deployment by the writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The original concept of the monster in Greco-Roman texts is a hybrid being: the chimera, the sphinx, the hydra and the gorgon just to name a few. Each of these creatures is a blend, typically of great size or ferocity. What is notable is the position of the monster in the cultural morality: Tolkien draws attention to how the Cyclops and Grendel are in moral contrast in their respective texts: 'we will [...] consider especially the difference of [the monsters'] status in the northern and southern mythologies. Of Grendel it is said: *Godes yrre bær*. But the Cyclops is god-begotten and his maiming is an offence against his begetter, the god Poseidon' ('B: M&C' 24). So, the monster is marked by its size and strangeness, but is not necessarily evil or malicious. The core mythology of the Greco-Roman myths draws the monsters out as a challenge to the hero, though these creatures are not automatically in the moral wrong. Because of the mercurial and diverse nature of the gods, there is no single right for a monster to counter. The concept of evil is less clear. In the monotheistic world of the *Beowulf*-poet and his contemporaries, the monster takes on a more absolute role, as the creature is at war with God.

The writings of St. Augustine and St. Bernard of Clairvaux demonstrate the spiritual concepts associated with the term monster, and its role as a demonstration of God's Providence at work. Considering the writings of Augustine and Bernard, for instance, one can see a clear shift in the interpretation of monster from spiritual other to social other. As Caroline Walker Bynum points out in *Metamorphosis and Identity*, Augustine did not consider monsters to be supernatural or 'against nature,' but rather as

being ‘against what we know of nature’ (quoted in Bynum 48). They are not solely aberrations, but a demonstration of God’s power to shape mankind; thus, the use of the idea of monster remains limited to specific, and spiritual, instances, like the monstrous races resulting from Cain’s fratricide or the giants as the offspring of the fallen angels. Interestingly, Augustine refers to all the monstrous races as part of the human race, because if they are ‘rational moral creature[s]’ (43), then they are to be considered part of the race of man; this humanizing of monsters accords with their treatment in *Beowulf*, where Grendel and his mother are ‘Caines cynne’ [Kin of Cain] (107), and have therefore sprung from the same bloodline as the rest of humanity. Augustine responds to texts like Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* [Natural History], or *The Wonders of the East*, which speak of the marvels and monsters found around the world, as he points to the wonders in the divergent races, or as forms of monstrous birth: a disfigurement of the natural shape of man. This attempt at justification of the marvels that texts like Pliny spoke of points to the discomfort of Christianity with the ‘ethno-graphical heritage of pagan antiquity’ (Wittkower 167). Augustine argues that monstrous races are there to demonstrate the diversity of God’s creation and to challenge man’s conception of his dominant place in nature:

*Quaeritur etiam, utrum ex filiis Noe vel potius ex illo uno homine unde etiam ipsi extiterunt propagata esse credendum sit quaedam monstrosa hominum genera, quae gentium narrat historia [...] Sed si homines sunt, de quibus illa mira conscripta sunt, quid si propterea Deus voluit etiam nonnullas gentes ita creare, ne in his monstris, quae apud nos oportet ex hominibus nasci, eius sapientiam qua naturam fingit humanam velut artem cuiuspiam minus perfecti opificis putaremur errasse? Non itaque nobis videri debet absurdum ut quem ad modum in singulis quibusque gentibus quaedam monstra sunt hominum ita in universo genere humano quaedam monstra sint gentium.*

[It is also asked whether we are to believe that certain monstrous races of men, spoken of in secular history, have sprung from Noah’s sons, or rather, I should say, from that one man from whom they themselves were descended. [...] but supposing they are men of whom these marvels are recorded, what if God has seen fit to create some races in this way, that we might not suppose that the monstrous births which appear among ourselves are the failures of that wisdom whereby He fashions the human nature, as we speak of the failure of a less perfect workman? Accordingly, it ought

not to seem absurd to us, that as in individual races there are monstrous births, so in the whole race there are monstrous races.](16:8)

Augustine is certain that the value of the unfamiliar and monstrous is demonstration: God showing his artistry and power over mankind. Augustine sees the monster as didactic: a creature of demonstration and instruction. The power of the marvel is separate from the later concept of the monster; while Augustine sees wisdom in God's choice to demonstrate his power and breadth in his formation of both individual monsters and whole races who do not conform to human shape, later scholars harken back to the Greco-Roman traditions of the monster as a hybrid or frightening figure, disruptive to the natural and controlled world.

Rudolf Wittkower points to the tremendous impact Augustine's philosophy had on the concept of the monster in the medieval world. While Augustine must address the geographies and histories of the Eastern world, he does so by coopting them into his own Christianity.

Augustine [...] suggests that God may have created fabulous races so that we might not think that the monstrous births which appear among ourselves are the failures of His wisdom. Augustine's subtle deductions were accepted by all the writers of the Middle Ages. Isidore, in his encyclopaedic work, the *Etymologiae* (written probably between 622 and 633), simply stated that monstrosities are part of the creation and not "contra naturam." (Wittkower 168)

Augustine's conception of the monster as portent, as marvel and as sign from God echoed through writers throughout most of the medieval period. There is a perceptible shift in the return to considering the monster as hybrid and thus aberration once classical illustrations proliferated. As Wittkower notes:

[Classical illustrations] reached the Middle Ages through different channels: the maps of the world, the monster treatises, the illustrated Solinus and probably the illustrated Isidore. It is this visual material which, together with the literary transmission, impressed itself on the minds of the people and proved so influential in many branches of mediaeval thought. (176)

Illustrations for texts like Isidore's *Etymologies* have been dated as far back as the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries (Woodruff in Wittkower, 176 n1). These representations of the classical monster challenged Augustine's assertions that the marvel was planned and controlled by God, as the creatures appeared visibly hybrid. While many ecclesiastical texts tried to

maintain Augustine's assertions of God's dominance over all races, the idea of the hybrid being took hold.

Seven hundred years after Augustine wrote *De Civitate Dei*, St. Bernard of Clairvaux uses the concept of monster as a term for hybridity, exploring public figures who combine religious, legal or civic roles; this includes himself. As Caroline Walker Bynum explains:

Monsters and mixtures figure [...] in Bernard's descriptions of his own "monstrous life," "I am a sort of modern chimera, neither cleric nor layman," [...] [a]nd in Bernard's letter praising Abbot Suger for his reform of life, the powerful noble Stephen of Garland (seneschal to Louis VI and archdeacon of Notre Dame) is described as a monster (*monstrum*), an abuse (*abusio*), and a confusion of orders (*confundit penitus ordines*), because he wishes to be at once cleric and knight (*clericus et miles simul videri velit...neutrum sit*). (119)

The hybrid figure is a shift from the singular physical distortion of man found in the early medieval period. While Bernard does not think himself a literal monster, he points to the concept that the hybrid is something dangerous, something to be feared. He is associating the monster with the unnatural and aberrant, unlike Augustine's earlier definition. He instead echoes the Greco-Roman tradition of the hybrid or distorted creature as monster, evident in creatures such as the griffin, Cyclops, Hydra, Medusa and Sphinx. The movement toward man as a form of monster, particularly as a result of his blending of clear categories, shows the importance of social roles and the broader designation of the monstrous as disruptive or dangerous to social norms.

In seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writings, the idea of the monster was more closely tied to spiritual damnation, and physical malformation continued to demonstrate one's spiritual state. One was physically misshapen because one was either separated from God through sin, or soulless; this distortion is evident in the descriptions of the physical hideousness of Mr. Hyde: an exemplary form of human monstrosity from the late nineteenth century. While he is one half of Dr. Jekyll, his physical malformation results from him being the malicious half of Jekyll's soul. In Stevenson's narrative, Hyde is described by many sources, including the narrator, through Mr. Utterson's perspective, upon their first meeting:

Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish; he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, [...] "the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? or can it be the old story of Dr. Fell? or is it the mere radiance of a foul soul that thus

transpires through, and transfigures, its clay continent? The last, I think; for, O my poor Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend." (23)

The monstrous being was marked by deformity either because of its soullessness, or its close association with Satan and sin. The element of physical differentiation continues as a defining factor in post-Romantic texts, echoing a part of Augustine's original definition; this continuity of the physical as a marker of monstrosity appears in the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.<sup>9</sup> The etymologies for the word identified by the *Oxford English Dictionary* are various, as the Romance (i.e. Latin-derived) languages all possess a version of it:

Anglo-Norman and Middle French *monstre*, *moustre*, French *monstre* (mid 12th cent. in Old French as *mostre* in sense 'prodigy, marvel', first half of the 13th cent. in senses 'disfigured person' and 'misshapen being', c1223 in extended sense applied to a pagan, first half of the 18th cent. by antiphrasis denoting an extraordinarily attractive thing) < classical Latin *mōnstrum* portent, prodigy, monstrous creature, wicked person, monstrous act, atrocity < the base of *monēre* to warn. (Etymology 'Monster' *OED Online*)

The original meaning of the word, therefore, is as a portent or sign of God's divine power, while its late-medieval meaning focuses more on a sense of the supernatural or physical difference as abnormal size, shape, appearance or hybridity. Throughout this thesis I will use the term Monster to reflect the connotations of the word and its cognates in each era. It is notable that while the term Monster appears to be an absolute, it is consistently present as a subjective: the monster is in the eye of the beholder. The monster is an antagonist, the challenge to the hero and the instigator of narrative action. This role appears consistent across literary history, though the physical and spiritual traits of the monster shift. As belief systems changed, so did the conception and presentation of otherness, particularly in the characterization of the monster.

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<sup>9</sup> Monster: Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening.  
The centaur, sphinx, and minotaur are examples of 'monsters' encountered by various mythical heroes; the griffin, wyvern, etc., are later heraldic forms.  
2. Something extraordinary or unnatural; an amazing event or occurrence; a prodigy, a marvel. Obs.  
3. a. A malformed animal or plant; (Med.) a fetus, neonate, or individual with a gross congenital malformation, usually of a degree incompatible with life.  
4. A person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman; a monstrous example of evil, a vice, etc.  
5. a. A creature of huge size.  
b. Anything of vast or unwieldy proportions; an extraordinarily large example of something.  
6. An ugly or deformed person, animal, or thing.  
(Excerpted from *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed December 18, 2007.)

### 1.3 Tolkien and his Critics: the Contemporary Critical Response

Tolkien's work as both a scholar and a fiction writer has attracted an enormous amount of critical attention. As I cannot provide a comprehensive response to the extensive body of Tolkien scholarship, I propose to divide the different critical approaches by broad categories. Looking at critiques of Tolkien's language and religious or spiritual imagery, as well as critics who consider his sources or biography, I will address the current critical landscape and the breadth of work that has focused on Tolkien's fiction. I will build on the work done by these scholars in my assertion that Tolkien was writing a *Beowulf* for the twentieth century.

Tolkien's linguistic interests have been the focus of much discussion. The work of three critics may be taken as representative: David Jeffrey, Tom Shippey and Dimitra Fimi. Jeffrey argues that the underlying elements of philology in Tolkien's fiction are historical and sub-creative.<sup>10</sup> Tolkien's use of philology, Jeffrey argues, is a means of creating a secondary world that appeals to the audience: the natural laws are maintained, so readers can immerse themselves in a magical yet familiar space.<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey points to how language is a means of recovering magic and wonder. This is the process whereby the author can reinvigorate the imagination of readers by reminding them of the beauty and wonder of the world. As Tolkien explains in 'On Fairy-stories,'

Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say “seeing things as they are” and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say “seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them”—as things apart from ourselves. [...] We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them. (67)

Recovery is the return of one's delight in everyday objects that have lost their shine: a renewed sense of their novelty, the recuperation of child-like wonder. Jeffrey argues that Tolkien, by linking his fictional world to reality through mimicking existing language patterns, makes that recovery possible through language, as the 'function of philological

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<sup>10</sup> 'sub-creation,' as Tolkien defines it in 'On Fairy-stories,' is when the author constructs a 'Secondary World' that '[the reader's] mind can enter. Inside it, what [the author] relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside.' (52)

<sup>11</sup> In this, Jeffrey links to the concept of the sub-creator, which Tolkien describes in 'On Fairy-stories': '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' (52).

recovery [...] is a participatory inculcation in an ancient depth of language (of word and of name) accessible to us all through the subliminal, often unacknowledged, but persistent half-conversance that we still share' (74). It is this subconscious understanding that Tolkien points to in his lecture on 'English and Welsh.'

The basic pleasure in the phonetic elements of a language and in the style of their patterns, and then in a higher dimension, pleasure in the association of these word forms with meanings, is of fundamental importance. This pleasure is quite distinct from the practical knowledge of a language, and not the same as an analytic understanding of its structure. It is simpler, deeper-rooted, and yet more immediate than the enjoyment of literature. (190)

We can reclaim a sense of delight through the languages that Tolkien uses and creates, because Tolkien's imagined languages follow familiar linguistic rules; this familiarity connects the reader to the text and the text is imbued with a sense of genuine culture. Farah Mendlesohn reflects this idea in her *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, as she describes how the key to immersive fantasy is language.

The immersive fantasy is a fantasy set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world. In order to this, the world must act as if it is impervious to external influence; this immunity is most essential in its relationship with the reader. The immersive fantasy must take no quarter: it must assume that the reader is as much a part of the world as those being read about. (59)

Mendlesohn points to the power of mimesis, immersing the reader in the world without a disconnection through language. Tolkien achieves this to a degree, drawing in the reader with the appeal of language on a subconscious, phonetic level.

While Jeffrey's approach is focused on Tolkien's creation of languages, other analyses, such as Shippey's lecture on 'A Fund of Wise Sayings: Proverbiality in Tolkien,' discuss Tolkien's use of language to make a fictional space familiar; Shippey looks at Tolkien's use of proverbs to achieve this, as Tolkien playfully creates his own proverbs, including '[n]ever laugh at live dragons' (*H* 275). Shippey identifies an element of Tolkien's echo of Wisdom Literature, as the proverbs provide pithy summaries of deeper messages. Shippey's focus on the presence and effect of the proverb considers primarily Bilbo and his folksy reliance on proverbial wisdom. While Shippey does not make explicit connections to Wisdom Literature, he does identify how the proverb is a didactic element



in the text. Sometimes citing his father as a source before speaking,<sup>12</sup> Bilbo frequently uses phrases that would appear familiar to the twentieth century reader. Tolkien uses proverb as an instructional element, pairing the positive instruction of the proverb with the demonstrative warning of the monsters to make a fully didactic text. Shippey identifies the folk-wisdom element, but does not connect this mode of speech with the larger Wisdom themes found in Tolkien's fiction. His more famous work, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, is a more thorough consideration of Tolkien's oeuvre. He looks at the construction of Middle-earth and its various narratives, considering the structural elements of the plot and characters and their interaction with language and textual analogues. Shippey's discussion of Tolkien's representation of sin will be addressed in Chapter Four, as will his consideration of language as an element of national character.

Another linguist, Dimitra Fimi, also asserts that languages can be a way into reading an author's culture, as she places Tolkien's languages within a political framework. She examines the national drives for Tolkien's work, as he sought to write a myth for England, and she considers how Tolkien's fiction interacts with his literary contemporaries and immediate predecessors. Her analysis addresses the idealization of language, the supernatural races, and their differentiation. Her work never explores in detail the monstrous creatures of Middle-earth: her focus remains on the Elves, Men and Hobbits and the different designations of race and class within those groups. While she offers an interesting examination of Tolkien's ties to Victorian ideals, particularly the presentation of social hierarchy, she chooses not to engage with his medieval research and neomedieval interests. This location of Tolkien within a Victorian context means she does not spend much time on the monsters of the texts, as they are primarily echoing medieval source materials.

While this thesis will engage with language, I will primarily look at the interaction of language, or more specifically dictions, as a means of reading Tolkien's monsters. The use of language as a starting point for understanding Tolkien's Middle-earth is rather fundamental, as most scholars who examine cultural traits, ideology, source materials and psychological archetypes all begin with a consideration of Tolkien's use of language. My project will also start with language, but will draw upon echoes of sources and the diversity of language in Tolkien's creation of monsters.

Along with those exploring language in relation to the imagined cultures of Middle-earth, there have been scholars who focus their attention primarily on potential

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<sup>12</sup> Bilbo, when speaking with the Dwarves, identifies his father's adage 'third time pays for all' (*H* 258), and later 'while there's life there's hope!' (*H* 283). He also develops his own: 'Never laugh at live dragons' (*H* 275).

influences upon Tolkien's creations, from early folkloric sources to medieval texts. These critics have tended towards mining Tolkien's work for early myths and potential influences, not unlike the scholars Tolkien criticized in 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics.' However, Tolkien argued against those who were looking purely for historical material, while critics of his fiction readily acknowledge the literary merit of his works. Verlyn Flieger, for example, looks at continuities and redevelopments of particular literary, folkloric or allegorical figures in Tolkien's fiction, such as the Wild Man of the Woods and his reappearances in the very different forms of Aragorn, Túrin Turambar and Gollum (100; 101; 103). Jane Chance, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power and Tolkien's Art*, constructs instead a long series of parallels, linking ancient texts and references to *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and Tolkien's fairy-tales. She seeks to link central characters and events in Tolkien's fiction to early English poetry, sometimes stretching her readings to look for literary parity rather than direct sources of influence: 'The dragon [Smaug]'s avarice leads to his death, just as the *revelours*' search for the treasure leads to death in the *Pardoner's Tale*' (Chance *Power* 37). Chance's work after *Tolkien's Art* continues to focus on Tolkien's literary-historical allusions, yet at times the links are still tenuous: 'In *The Hobbit*, Gollum, whose name begins with the same letter as Grendel's, assumes his place, and thus epitomises the "lesser and more nearly human" vices as Smaug in the second part epitomises the "older and more elemental" vices' (36). Chance is seeking the connections between Tolkien's fiction and his source material, just as I do in this thesis; however, she primarily focuses on connecting texts rather than a single character type. She looks at the narrative structure, rather than Tolkien's use of characters and values from the earlier texts.

Patrick Curry's pioneering eco-critical approach sought to argue how Tolkien's eye for the ancient was an expression of his yearning for a simpler time and lifestyle, as Curry argues in "'Less Noise and More Green": Tolkien's Ideology for England.' Curry's argument, which asserts that Tolkien's narratives are a way of asserting his ideal of Englishness, in culture, nature and ethics. In all these instances, the identification of medieval references, while appearing to be solely a quest for influences, tends to take on a political significance: either in connecting Tolkien's fiction to southern myths, looking at his replication of Victorian ideals, or arguing for his anti-industrial beliefs. Each of these scholars asserts a political motivation for Tolkien's creation of Middle-earth.

Another school of critical analysis considers Tolkien's fairy-tale form. Scholars have pointed to Tolkien's defense of fairy-tale traditions, especially in his essay 'On Fairy-stories', not just as Tolkien's assessment of fairy-tale scholarship as a whole, but rather as a manifesto for Tolkien's fairy-stories. A discussion of Tolkien's fairy-tale form appears in

Clyde B. Northrup's 'The Qualities of a Tolkienian Fairy-Story,' where he explains the difference between Tzvetan Todorov's 'fantastic' and Tolkien's fantasy:

The fantastic, for Todorov, becomes "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25) or, more simply, a character or reader when confronted by something that appears to come from outside of the character's/reader's normal reality. [...] Because the Todorovian fantastic is subject to the real, or perhaps a violation of the real, fantasy that creates its own, independent world, has no place within Todorov's framework. This type of fantasy, called by Colin Manlove "secondary world" fantasy, or as I will call it, Tolkienian fairy-story, [...] has for its roots the medieval romance. (814-5)

In order to examine the structure and form of Tolkienian fantasy, Northrup uses Tolkien's breakdown of the traditional fairy-tale into three components – Escape, Recovery, Consolation – and applies these to *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien's construction of the Secondary World differs from the Todorovian fantastic. Todorov's definition of fantasy is more limited, as he argues that:

The fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by the character; [...] Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations. (33)

Todorov requires a sense of uncertainty, an ambiguity throughout the text to remain fantastical; Tolkien embraces the immersion of the reader in a supernatural world without the sense of hesitation that is key in Todorov's definition. Tolkien echoes Todorov in his insistence that the text must be read without allegory or conceit, but feels that the reader cannot be uneasy in the fantastical space: one must embrace the fantasy space. Northrup does not discuss Tolkien's work as a critic, but asserts that the writing of 'On Fairy-stories' is a personal assessment; he argues that Tolkien was describing his own aims when creating his fiction. This is akin to what I will be arguing in my thesis, but my focus will remain on an earlier and, I believe, more influential lecture that sets the tone for Tolkien's later writings, both critical and fictional. Northrup demonstrates Tolkien's consistency, as both a writer of fairy-stories and a critic of the same, but his work does not extend beyond a simple application of form. This thesis, while also considering Tolkien's fiction in the context of his critical writings, will go further to explore the impact of Tolkien's body of

scholarship on his fictional texts, in the development of common characters and concepts within both forms of writing. His scholarly engagement with *Beowulf*, its role as Wisdom Literature and its use of monsters as key narrative actors, has influenced his formation of Middle-earth. Tolkien argued for a literary and moral reading of *Beowulf* and echoed those traits in his own storytelling through his creation of monsters.

The study of monsters intersects with the mythological and medieval studies of the source languages and literatures that Tolkien drew upon. The tendency in many of these critical considerations of the monster is to consider the psychological significance of the 'other'. The problem with these analyses is the simplification of the monster figures as allegorical: something Tolkien abhorred. Critical readings of characters like Gollum tend to read him through the lens of psychoanalytical criticism, considering his role simply as shadow or foil to the heroes; these critics often read monsters in a comparative format, drawing connections between earlier and later texts. Examples of this form of reading can be found in Lisa Hopkins' essay 'Gollum and Caliban' or from Ursula K. Le Guin in 'The Child and the Shadow.' Hopkins' essay ties the two characters together to demonstrate '*translatio imperii*, which postulated that the cultural authority of Troy and Rome had been ultimately transferred to England' and as a means to allow 'Tolkien to pit ideas of evolution and chance against those of design and order as a complex part of the book's overall sense of historical pattern' (281). The linking of these characters, while drawing literary parallels, is a means of asserting historical framework. The elves, as representative of the passing order, stand in contrast to the changing order of Middle-earth. Le Guin's reference is much more brief, pointing to Tolkien's use of the shadow as contrast to the hero. She includes Gollum in a list of famous foils, like Cain, Caliban, Mr. Hyde and Frankenstein's monster. Caliban is a very fundamental monster character and does appear to influence Gollum in Tolkien's formation of a sympathetic figure. I will discuss Caliban's function as an exemplary monster in the Renaissance in later chapters and, while I see the impact of the character in Tolkien's idea of the monster, I disagree with any simple one-to-one comparative, as did Tolkien.

David Day, author of *A Tolkien Bestiary*, focuses on the monsters as creatures and as active characters. He places the creatures in the imaginary Bestiary of Middle-earth, yet does not engage with the didactic purpose of that medieval text. His preface demonstrates his misunderstanding of the function of the bestiary:

The traditional bestiary was an illustrated reference work compiled by scholarly monks about beasts and beings both exotic and mundane. It was rooted in the Greek and Roman classics and was based on the Greek-Egyptian "Physiologus" of the second century A.D. It codified the ancients'

knowledge of magical and monstrous animals and races and what the medieval mind observed and understood of the natural world. (6)

He does at one point make mention of the Bestiary as a text which was ‘highly regarded as source books on the natural world, as allegorical documents of religious instruction and as books of popular entertainment’ (Day 7). This brief reference to the didactic element of these texts shows how small a role it plays in Day’s creation of a Tolkienian Bestiary. He ascribes no moral significance to the creatures, instead listing and describing them without passing judgement. His use of the term ‘Bestiary’ indicates his replication of the format of the medieval catalogues, like *The Wonders of the East*, but his collection does not capture its implicit morality. Day’s text, as a non-scholarly work, has little in common with the criticism that has addressed the monsters in detail.

Critics have also read Tolkien’s work as advocating modern religious values, such as those of (conservative) Catholicism. Tolkien’s professed beliefs and the experiences that shaped them have been read into his literary texts. Texts that focus on spirituality and faith in Middle-earth, from *Tolkien’s Ordinary Virtues: Exploring the Spiritual Themes of The Lord of the Rings* to *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth*, consider Tolkien’s personal values, but then reduce the narrative to a series of moral lessons. *Tolkien’s Ordinary Virtues* lists different virtues, like ‘Trust,’ ‘Humility,’ ‘Generosity’ and ‘Faith.’ The chapters each centre on their eponymous virtue, cataloging examples from the texts. *The Gospel According to Tolkien* takes a broader analytical scope, drawing out the elements of Christian faith that are present in Tolkien’s construction of Middle-earth and its long history. While there are certainly values and morals present, Tolkien’s text goes beyond a series of simple parables. This presumption of moral significance appears in the mythological and linguistic readings as well, like Jane Chance’s *J. R. R. Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader*, Jonathan Evans’ ‘The anthropology of Arda: Creation, theology, and the race of Men’ or Verlyn Flieger’s *Splintered Light*, but is more readily apparent in texts that seek to describe the virtues and morals encoded in Middle-earth.

Scholars addressing Tolkien’s faith tend to read him as a Judeo-Christian apologist, as Fleming Rutledge does in *The Battle for Middle-earth: Tolkien’s Divine Design in The Lord of the Rings*, or discuss the interplay of different concepts of philosophy and Catholicism, as Kathleen E. Dubs does in ‘Providence, Fate and Chance: Boethian Philosophy in *The Lord of the Rings*.’ As Tolkien has been such an influential force in twentieth century literature and culture, critics have sometimes sought to prove how his work supports their values, as in *Tolkien’s Ordinary Virtues: Exploring the Spiritual Themes of The Lord of the Rings* and *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the*

*Kingdom in Middle-earth*. These readings provide an interesting lesson on how Tolkien's writings can be used as a source for lessons on Christian morality, but the criticism tends to disregard the broader genre of Wisdom Literature. Traditional Wisdom texts, like the aforementioned books of The Bible or the writings of Hesiod, look to present ideas of virtue and spirituality to the reader through storytelling. Tolkien, while clearly influenced by biblical narratives and their importance to medieval theology, constructs fictions that are not solely emulating Judeo-Christian traditions. The texts' moral drive is the consideration of corruption, redemption and faith; critics frequently read the presence of instructive language in his narratives as religious commentary, while I will argue that it is instead part of his project to reproduce *Beowulf*. The elements of faith are not enacted in the text; instead, the morality of the world is implicit and accessible to the reader.

The matter of Tolkien's faith complicates any critical approach to Middle-earth, with its almost complete lack of organized religion. Tolkien defined much of his personal life and relationships through his strong Catholic beliefs, and it is easy to read these values within the fiction he composed; yet the absence of anything resembling the institutional structures of Catholicism has often been noted. He acknowledged the presence of these values in his fantasy when he wrote to a friend, Father Robert Murray:

*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. [...] That is why I have not put in, or have cut out practically all references to anything like 'religion,' to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and symbolism. However that is very clumsily put, and sounds more self-important than I feel. For as a matter of fact, I have consciously planned very little. (*Letters* 172)

The introduction of elements of faith into the revised version of *The Lord of the Rings* points to its role as a Wisdom text, with an underlying message drawn through the narrative. *The Lord of the Rings* does not emulate biblical writing,<sup>13</sup> but reflects the narrative Wisdom texts of the medieval period, like *Solomon and Saturn II*, *The Descent into Hell*, or *Beowulf*. What is also notable is that Tolkien states he consciously omitted any reference to religious practice. Tolkien has no ecclesiastical structure: there is ritual behaviour in social contexts, but the exercise of ceremony does not take on a religious role. Because of this characteristic of his fiction, I will address in this thesis how Judeo-Christian concepts of sin and redemption are harnessed and transformed in Tolkien's

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<sup>13</sup> Notably, *The Silmarillion* initially takes on elements of The Bible in the creation story; it does, however, veer away from this in its consistent narrative line and focus on the warfare and historical elements of Middle-earth, instead of the interposition of books like Proverbs or the Song of Solomon.

fiction. These core concepts are at the heart of Tolkien's literature, including the way he employs his monsters. The monsters are part of the universally understood origin of Middle-earth. Their role as trial and foil strengthens the characters and the larger narrative. The 'religious element is absorbed into the story and symbolism' (*Letters* 172), so the creatures carry an innate meaning in the text.

While there have been readings of the subconscious or Jungian elements of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, the most extensive body of psychoanalytical criticism on Tolkien's work appears in the writings of war-critics: those who reconstruct the experiences of Tolkien in World War I and read them in the text, interpreting the appearance of particular elements as echoes of trauma. John Garth's analysis is the strongest example: *Tolkien and the Great War*. In this monograph, Garth contextualizes the creation of various works by Tolkien within his childhood, his experiences of World War I and its after-effects on the events of his life, seeking 'to place Tolkien's creative activities in the context of the international conflict, and the cultural upheavals which accompanied it' (xiii). What results is an interesting and informative approach to Tolkien's creation and creative processes, yet Garth's attempt to provide comprehensive assessments of Tolkien's work leads him to speculation. He draws upon the journals of other soldiers, pointing to these writings as analogous to Tolkien's own experience in the war, leading to his paper "'As under a green sea": visions of war in the Dead Marshes,' a further linking of Tolkien's works to his presumed response to the war he faced, without actually basing much of the analysis in Tolkien's own writings, both fictional and critical. Such readings, while interesting in their construction of context and timeline for Tolkien's writings, often tell the reader more about the author's context than about the details of the text. Reading a work of literature within a historical setting or in the context of an author's life can be revelatory, as long the focus remains more upon the text than the biography; at the point where the focus switches, the critic is reading the author, not the text.

The critical landscape addressing Tolkien's writing has established a diverse means of reading his fiction and the interaction between his fiction and scholarship. While some critics have used Tolkien's fiction as a means of forwarding a political agenda, the great majority read Tolkien's writings through his syncretic and archaistic tendencies, as this thesis will do. As a scholar of medieval fiction, Tolkien drew readily on his interests in the formulation of Middle-earth. This reading of sources will take place through different lenses, as examining Tolkien's work purely in an historical, linguistic or cultural context limits the reading of Middle-earth as a nexus of deep history and modern belief.

## 1.4 Method and Theory

To discuss the monster in Tolkien's fiction, this thesis will use a few key lenses. I will read Tolkien's work in history: both when his texts were written and how his texts (both fictional and scholarly) respond to the preceding eras. I will look at the cultural influences in these eras and how monsters developed both through literature and scholarly writings. I will look at Tolkien's texts using an altered form of Monster Theory, more in line with his own critical project outlined in '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics' and less connected with Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's 'Seven Theses.' I will explain how language cues to a character's role in the text and its complexity. And I will use these different lenses to draw together how Tolkien's Middle-earth is a recreation of *Beowulf*: a text at a literary crossroads.

In discussing the sources Tolkien drew upon, this thesis will consider historical texts through a Literary Historicist lens. Tolkien was familiar with the cultures active in the texts he studied, and to disregard the historical context risks missing some of Tolkien's inspiration. Literary History is a study of context, examining the language and social context that produced a piece of literature, but also an acknowledgement of the placement of the historian or critic in a given time period and space. While William Ruckert in 1975 argued that this method of reading was a 'hydra-headed topic' (491) that would never result in an effective reading of literature,<sup>14</sup> critics still pursue contextual readings to understand literature in its original context. As Mario Valdes and Linda Hutcheon discuss in 'Rethinking Literary History – Comparatively,' the 'texts of that past were created by people in a specific language, at a specific moment, in a specific place; but the literary historian is also an historical being, "situated" with similar particularity' (ii). It is with this self-conscious reading that this thesis will discuss monstrosity and medievalism. These terms have shifted meaning over time, and I will consider that shift in discussing Tolkien's influences. The interplay of language is a central part of reading Tolkien's sources, as well as understanding the development of criticism and the historical placement of each scholar who engaged with the works. Each author and critic is writing in a timeframe: as a twenty-first century scholar, I am reading these works outside of their original context; I must be

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<sup>14</sup> 'One soon realizes that any attempt to think one's way into historiography is to die into this topic before it is even born; any fool of a literary critic knows that much and so grabs onto a working concept of history (or, more wisely, uses the term history *as if* it were defined and had a universally accepted meaning) and begins immediately to speak reasonably of literary criticism as a verbal action upon a historical scene; as the action of the mind upon the grounds of being; as human action *in* and counter to history; as a critical action of the mind which begins in history, goes out of history, and then returns to and into it, thus engaging in a kind of perpetual dialectical relationship with history.' (Ruckert 491)



aware of the historical frameworks and their role in the construction of the texts and arguments.

This thesis will also address the broad historical understanding of language in Tolkien's writings, as his work as a philologist influenced his formation and use of languages in his fiction, and thus will harness notions of 'New Philology', as famously outlined in the Winter 1990 issue of the journal *Speculum*. Siegfried Wenzel explains what he perceives as the new concept of philology:

It is precisely what the etymology of the word declares, "love of the word": an appreciative attraction to verbal documents that seeks to understand their meaning, starting with the surface and penetrating to whatever depths are possible, but also alert to the fact that a given text comes from and is shaped by a specific time and place that usually is significantly different from that of the observer. (12)

This statement echoes Tolkien's approach to literature. Tolkien's translation work is certainly not the most artistic or graceful, but tries to keep the diction of the original text, being very aware of its historicity (Tovey). Tolkien's project is preservation, even while translating early texts; he worked to keep the sense of the past present within the translated poems. His attempt to recuperate monsters from critical neglect in *Beowulf* reinvigorated reading the poem as literature; his archaisticism encourages the modern reader to consider the text in its original context.

Archaisticism, the embrace and emulation of an older style of reading, is key to Tolkien. In his creation of a myth for England, he sets Middle-earth in an imagined past, asking his reader to consider the world through different eyes. The poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* demonstrates this practice, as he wrote a text in an outmoded poetic structure, seeking to capture a sense of the archaic. Tolkien does the same, but not with a real sense of history: he asks his reader to embrace an imagined history of Middle-earth. This thesis will argue that Tolkien's archaisticism is an important part of the ignition of past and present in his fiction. Looking at Tolkien's language, his sense of history and his play of dictions is key to a reading of the monsters of Middle-earth.

Central to Tolkien's construction of complex creatures and a morally instructive space is the idea of codeswitching. Codeswitching is a linguistic term for the transition between languages or discourses by an individual in a single sentence or conversation. Codeswitching requires familiarity with multiple languages, traditions and vocabularies on the part of the interlocutor, and assumes the same on the part of the auditor. While most codeswitching studies address the change between languages, this thesis will look at a more subtle form of codeswitching. Throughout Tolkien's Middle-earth, characters

demonstrate an ability to move between elevated, heroic diction and informal speech. This movement will be read as a key element in Tolkien's construction of his monsters. The ability to move between speech patterns and its demonstration of social and political awareness give some of Tolkien's creatures complexity. There are monsters like Gollum or the Orc captains who are able to move between linguistic codes, giving these creatures character and motivation within the narrative. Other creatures, like Trolls and Wraiths, are left with limited language and thus remain simple figures in the text. Language is a means of defining the characteristics and role of the monsters of Middle-earth.

A branch of theory that focuses entirely around the monster's intersection with culture is Monster Theory: developed from Tolkien's *Beowulf* lecture, it was first defined by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in 1996. Cohen argues that the monster is a cultural touchstone that embodies society's fears, boundaries and transgressions. His article 'Monster Culture: Seven Theses' provides a summary of the terms and concepts used in Monster Theory. The fault in Monster Theory, and the reason it is not the primary theoretical lens for this analysis, is that it considers monsters in a single context: there is no reading of the monster between historical periods or as a product of larger tradition. As Cohen states in *On Giants*, 'every monster has its historical specificity: the vampires of Anne Rice are clearly different from those of Bram Stoker, even if they are separated from each other by less than a century and filiate from the same genealogical tree' (Cohen, *Giants* xv). This approach disregards the universal traits of the monster as part of a superstitious past. Tolkien points to the monster as the nexus of past and present, which Monster Theory does not. Tolkien's notes at the end of 'Beowulf: The Monster and the Critics' on 'Grendel's Titles' discuss the complication of Grendel as a figure at a crossroads:

The changes which produced (before A.D.1066) the mediaeval devil are not complete in *Beowulf*, but in Grendel change and blending are, of course, already apparent. Such things do not admit of clear classifications and distinctions. Doubtless ancient pre-Christian imagination vaguely recognized differences of 'materiality' between the solidly physical monsters, conceived as made of the earth and rock (to which the light of the sun might return them), and elves, and ghosts or bogies. Monsters of more or less human shape were naturally liable to development on contact with Christian ideas of sin and spirits of evil. Their parody of human form (*earmsceapen on weres wæstmum*) becomes symbolical, explicitly, of sin, or rather this mythical element, already present implicit and unresolved, is emphasized: this we see already in *Beowulf*, strengthened by the theory of

descent from Cain (and so from Adam), and of the curse of God. ('B: M&C'  
Note 1)

Grendel's importance lies in his placement as both mythic creature and embodiment of sin. Monster Theory does not take into account the interrelation of different eras, instead looking at a creature as a reflection of a single culture. Yet Cohen's assertions that the monster is central to a text and can be revelatory of the text's historical moment will play a key part in my discussion. So while I will not use Monster Theory as defined by Cohen, I will begin from the same assumption, which I share with Tolkien himself: the monster is a central figure in literature which deserves study, both for its narrative role and its ties to earlier traditions.

Cohen argues in his essay, 'Monster Culture: Seven Theses,' that the monster is a cultural construct. The monster is a result of its context; as Lisa Verner asserts: '[t]he monster is always a sign of something else' (Verner 156). Cohen's essay discusses the physical and social territory of the monster within its narrative, exploring its use in reflecting its culture of origin. The monster, as an aberrant being, presents a challenge to clear social categories; this is what Cohen argues under the heading 'the monster is the harbinger of category crisis.' The 'category crisis' is the introduction of a 'third term' into a system of binaries – such as alive and dead, human and animal. Monsters represent this third term, serving as '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' (Cohen 6). Despite addressing the idea of the monster existing at a crossroads, Cohen does not consider the monster's presence as a temporal signifier. He does not open his analysis to the intersection of time, as Tolkien proposed. Cohen's work and the work of his fellow Monster Theorists provide an interesting groundwork for the consideration of otherness in a social and cultural context, but the theory falls short in exploring points of change and cultural ignition.

Cohen's work *On Giants* is closer to the approach this thesis takes, though his consideration of the psychoanalytical elements varies from my own reading of *Beowulf* through Tolkien's lens. Cohen studies the figure of the giant in medieval literature as a social outcast and hybrid being: a fully subjective, embodied being which exists on the fringes of society in a state of *extimite*: external intimacy (Cohen *Giants* xii). He points to the powerful elements of the monster as partial beings, segmented creatures who are described incompletely. '[A]ny capture of the monster into a complete epistemology is impossible. When placed inside a human frame of reference, the giant can be known only through synecdoche: a hand that grasps, a lake that has filled his footprint, a shoe or glove

that dwarfs the human body by its size' (Cohen *Giants* xiii). This partial presentation of the monstrous body appears in Tolkien's own work: the Orcs, Trolls, Spider-creatures and Wraiths are described with synecdoches. The slant-eyed Orc, or roaring Troll echo the firey eye and terrible screaming of Grendel. Cohen considers the complexity of the monster as a prevalent character in medieval literature, as 'the giant conjoined absolute otherness with reassuring familiarity' (Cohen *Giants* xii). So, while this thesis will not draw upon the methods of Monster Theory, Cohen's engagement with the monster as a key literary figure is central to my analysis.

As is evident from this brief survey of approaches to Tolkien's fiction, in recent decades Tolkien criticism has developed a diversity to match the complexity of his works. The prevailing scholarly approach considers source materials that influence Tolkien's own writing in order to identify the genius behind the works. I will take this approach a step further, as I also look to consider Tolkien's syncretic and archaistic approach, the scholarly and creative process that Tolkien followed to develop his characters and creatures. I will approach the works from an historical perspective, putting Tolkien not only in the context of his medieval predecessors or twentieth century colleagues, but also in the long line of scholarship and criticism that formed the background for his challenge to contemporary scholarship and his literary creations. I will discuss the narrative role of his monstrous characters, building on the studies of source material that have taken place up to this point. I will consider the figures Tolkien draws upon from medieval and neomedieval literature both in the original texts and in their transmuted form in Tolkien's fiction. In the process, I will share Tolkien's own focus when he spoke on *Beowulf* in 1936. For him, the monsters are 'essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem' ('B: M&C' 19). As a mythic text with a strong moral drive, Tolkien argues that *Beowulf* centres on the figures that provide an ignition between past superstition and modern belief. This concept of ignition, the syncretic act of taking historically diverse source material into a new context to create a complex nexus of meanings, will run throughout my argument. I argue that Tolkien, in his fiction, emulates what he saw as the key technique of the *Beowulf* poet, placing old myths within a contemporary moral framework: 'this [presentation of Norse and Christian traditions together] is not due to mere confusion – it is rather an indication of the precise point at which an imagination, pondering old and new, was kindled. At this point new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited' ('B: M&C' 26).

Tolkien's own fiction is another such ignition point, drawing together different understandings of the monstrous from across centuries of literary history, as I will discuss in Chapters Two and Three. Tolkien's blending of these understandings changes their moral context and brings them into a modern framework, as I will demonstrate in Chapter

Four. His own Middle-earth centered upon the forces of corruption and virtue, and his narrative method makes his text akin to ecclesiastical and secular Wisdom texts from antiquity and the Middle Ages. Tolkien's rhetorical method, his incorporation of proverbial wisdom and his interest in redemption make his literary works a redefinition of a classical and medieval form. These elements are concentrated through his monsters, as the figures of past superstition that come into contact with contemporary beliefs and disillusionment in his twentieth century fiction. His use of mythic materials within a modern moral frame is thus comparable with the work of the *Beowulf* poet, as Beowulf's paganism does not interrupt the Christian (and Catholic) underpinning of the narrative. Like Tolkien, I will 'confine' this thesis 'mainly to the *monsters*' ('B: M&C' 6) but I will argue that Tolkien presents his monsters in the same way as the *Beowulf*-poet deployed Grendel, Grendel's mother and the Dragon: as mythic figures from the past within a Christian moral universe of his time. By drawing the creatures from a mythic past into a Christian present, both Tolkien and the *Beowulf*-poet point to the subjective morality surrounding these creatures, problematizing their role in the text and resulting in their defiance of simple categorization.

## Chapter Two: Tolkien and the Critical Landscape

### 2.1 Tolkien's Critical Project

To consider Tolkien's literary works in isolation from his criticism would be to disregard his rich intermingling of scholarship and fiction: his narratives reflect his academic work and both forms of writing respond to his scholarly context and the influence of his medieval and medievalist predecessors. In his criticism, he argued for a re-evaluation of the monster's literary function in medieval texts and an acknowledgment of the imaginative power of fairy-tales, while at the same time he was writing neo-medieval fairy tales that centred on monstrous and magical figures. Interestingly, in his own work, he appears to forward the idea that the monster is in the eye of the beholder; while Grendel and the Dragon's actions can be read in a sympathetic or justified light and Grendel's mother is given abdication by Beowulf's tales of her actions, Tolkien reads them unequivocally as monsters. They are antagonists to the hero, and thus are monstrous. It is this idea of the monster as antagonist-figure that is a blend of the medieval and fantastical. The implications of the interplay of these two genres upon his most celebrated works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, deserve further consideration.

One implication of Tolkien's fusion of scholarship and fiction is that his conception of monsters is balanced between two different worlds, the medieval and the modern, more radically than in many texts by other fantasy writers. His awareness of that dynamic tension between two periods is articulated in his scholarly interest in the clash of alien cultures – in particular the cultures of the past and the present – in medieval poetry. His fiction, too, reflects this conflict between worlds, as his monsters bear markers from the past while engaging with a modern spiritual world. While the monster is the focus of this thesis, this chapter will discuss Tolkien's critical response to contemporary and past medieval scholarship; his consideration of the medieval text and how it is understood in the modern world has a fundamental impact on his representation of monstrosity. As John D. Niles points out in 'Beowulf, Truth, and Meaning,' 'the understanding of a literary work is deeply implicated in its past understandings by prior generations of readers. Just as one cannot know what a word means until one knows what it has meant in the past, one cannot wholly separate a literary work from the meanings it has previously evoked' (1). In particular, Tolkien was responding to a body of scholarship that argued over the relationships between the competing concerns of national identity and Christianity, as manifested in early epic and romance. Tolkien argued that the focus on nationalism had resulted in the disregard of monsters in *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; this nationalism led to concentration on questions of philology and history in the poems, rather than addressing the texts' literary merit. His criticism was largely dedicated to correcting

this imbalance: not by excluding nation and religion altogether, but by arguing for a major change of emphasis. His address of the texts could be called a form of total philology, as he saw the inherent literary traits as ingrained in the text through language. The beauty of the poetry was not isolated from the language and the history, but synthesized from it. The process of synthesis is key to Tolkien's work: he drew together sources, names and languages to create a new world of Middle-earth.

Tolkien's love of languages is well known, as he drew heavily upon ancient materials that he read and loved. He did not just draw in languages, but their history and complexity as part of his syncretism. 'Tolkien, then, was a philologist before he was a mythologist, at least in intention, before he ever became a writer of fantasy fiction' (Shippey, *Author* xvi). Tolkien's interest in Welsh and Finnish was clear, as he drew upon these languages for his development of Elfish. 'By contrast Tolkien thought that Welsh, and Finnish, were intrinsically beautiful; he modeled his invented Elf-languages on their phonetic and grammatical patterns, Sindarin and Quenya respectively' (Shippey *Author* xiv). These languages are thus an important part of Tolkien's mythology, but they are wholly associated with the heroes: the archivists and storytellers of the first two ages of Middle-earth. Because of this strong connection between Finnish and Welsh and the heroic, I will not be exploring Tolkien's use of these languages. He pointed to the deep connection between language and culture and the idea of a native tongue: one's natural language.

I will [...] say that language – and more so as expression than communication – is a natural product of our humanity. But it is therefore also a product of our individuality. We each have our own personal linguistic potential: we each have a *native language*. But that is not the language that we speak, our cradle tongue, the first-learned. [...] But though it may be buried, it is never wholly extinguished, and contact with other languages may stir it deeply. ('English and Welsh' 190)

The idea that Welsh connected to something inherent and beautiful is apparent in the languages of the Elves. The use of phonemes and grammars from languages he found resonant was a means of connecting with his reader. So, while these languages and traditions are important to Tolkien's text, they will not be a focus of this thesis. They were drawn into Quenya with limited change, with little of the ignition that Tolkien focuses on in his reading of *Beowulf*.

For Tolkien, literature flourished from the points in history when past and present came into conflict, when 'new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited' ('B: M&C')

26). He saw these points as imaginative furnaces in which new narratives were forged from unexpected alloys of Christianity and folklore:

in England this [pagan] imagination was brought into touch with Christendom, and with the Scriptures. The process of “conversion” was a long one, but some of its effects were doubtless immediate: an alchemy of change (producing ultimately the medieval) was at once at work. [...] It is through such a blending that there was available to a poet who set out to *write* a poem [...] on a scale and plan unlike a minstrel’s lay, both new faith and new learning (or education), and also a body of native tradition (itself requiring to be learned) for the changed mind to contemplate together. (‘B: M&C’ 21)

Tolkien sought to reproduce such a ‘blending’ of competing cultures in his fiction, as he drew upon the body of native tradition – Anglo-Saxon, Norse and late medieval – adding more recent history and invented elements of his own. The best account of the effects of cultural and historical blending is given in Tolkien’s celebrated Israel Gollancz lecture of 1936 from which the above passage is taken: ‘*Beowulf*: the Monsters and the Critics.’ This chapter will look closely at this lecture and its context in the history of Anglo-Saxon scholarship as the initial lens through which we will read his critical works and consider his own fiction in later chapters.

‘*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics’ served as the cornerstone for all Tolkien’s later critical writing both in defense of those ‘unfashionable creatures’ (‘B: M&C’ 16), the monsters in medieval literature, and in opposition to the ‘[c]orrect and sober taste’ that denies that ‘[f]antasy is a natural human activity.’ (‘B: M&C’ 16; ‘Fairy-stories’ 65). Monsters and magical beings, he argues, tap into universal values because they can explore moral questions without being constrained either by the limitations imposed by reality or by the need to be explicit about their narrative role. In a letter to Milton Waldman, he argued that ‘[m]yth and fairy-story must, as an art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary “real” world’ (*Letters* 144). Above all, monsters transform the texts in which they occur into a ‘struggle in different proportions’ (‘B: M&C’ 18). The monster not only represents danger within the text, but it carries the weight of the past, so that its different proportions are both physical and chronological. The sense of history inherent in the creature is fundamental in Tolkien’s reading of *Beowulf* and will be present in my reading of Tolkien.

For Tolkien, the monster is a representation of the bygone order: the folk-belief systems that would not fade. As he draws upon multiple folk structures in his fiction, we



can see that the monster is not limited to one culture or history, but takes on the traits of its individual culture of origin. The monster fights against the civilizing order of the warriors and their hall. And yet, its impact on the present and future should not be ignored. The monster, the figure of the pagan past, can still have tremendous significance for the moral import of the narrative, complicating the Christian morality which the poet advocates by recalling pre-Christian value systems decidedly at odds with the new religion. Tolkien, in his 1936 lecture, points to the continued power of the Northern myths, after the insurmountable Southern gods have faded into ‘literary ornament;’ he suggests that ‘the northern [myth] has power, as it were, to revive its spirit even in our own times’ (*B: M&C*’ 26). While other critics saw the monsters as distraction, Tolkien sees them as fundamental historical, spiritual and literary material.

The monsters are not explained away by the Christianity of the poem, but are rather incorporated to fit into Biblical history. Tolkien asserts in *‘Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics’*:

So far from being a confused semi-pagan – historically unlikely for a man of this sort in the period – he brought probably *first* to his task a knowledge of Christian poetry, especially that of the Cædmon school, and especially *Genesis*. He makes his minstrel sing in Heorot of the Creation of the earth and the lights of Heaven. So excellent is this choice as the theme of the harp that maddened Grendel lurking joyless in the dark without that it matters little whether this is anachronistic or not. *Secondly*, to his task the poet brought a considerable learning in native lays and traditions. [...] It would seem that, in his attempt to depict ancient pre-Christian days, intending to emphasize their nobility, and the desire of the good for truth, he turned naturally when delineating the great King of Heorot to the Old Testament. (*B: M&C*’ 26-7)

Tolkien identifies the perceived flaws as an intentional blending of faiths on the poet’s part. Grendel’s arrival is a response to the inherent goodness of the creation story. He is not a distraction from the real history in which the poem participates: the history of Denmark and the coming of Christianity. He helps to create, for the reader, ‘the illusion of surveying a past, pagan but noble and fraught with deep significance’ (*B: M&C*’ 27). The value of the monster, then, is its representation of a past that survives into the present. Tolkien points to the *Beowulf*-poet’s use of the past as an effect, creating narrative depth. Tolkien himself, in his letters, speaks of his craving to create a narrative with the depth of history and a sense of English-ness, reconnecting his present England with her ancient roots.

Despite his opposition to narrowly nationalist readings of early poems, Tolkien was profoundly interested in the ‘heroic legend’ found in national epics (*Letters* 144), which he felt was lacking in English literature. His fiction sought to compensate for the dearth of a distinctively English mythology, not by writing about England. Instead, he devised a world which would, as he described to Milton Waldman, ‘possess the tone and quality that [he] desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of [English] “air” [...] and, while possessing the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic, it should be “high”, purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry’ (*Letters* 144-5). As Tolkien explains to Waldman in his letter, the sense of English-ness that he sought to capture was not the tangible, or visceral, but rather the surrounding sense of place. Tolkien’s term ‘air’ denotes the indescribable nature of that sensation of familiarity: the ability to take a deep breath and feel somehow at home. He wanted his fiction to have a sense of presence and comfort that could not be quantified. He felt this was missing in existing English literature: Arthurian legends, being rooted in Celtic tradition and primarily written in French, lacked a sufficiently English identity, and most Anglo-Saxon texts were either Latin or Germanic in their inspiration. He wrote to Waldman that:

an equally basic passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world [...] There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, and Germanic, Scandinavian, Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. Of course there was all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing. For one thing its ‘faerie’ is too lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. For another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion. (*Letters* 144)

Tolkien craved myths that spoke to universal themes, beyond the spatial and chronological limitations of real world religion; he felt that, while ‘Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories’ (‘Fairy-stories’ 78), the real power of the fairy-tale is that ‘they open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself’ (‘Fairy-stories’ 48). He wanted to create ‘a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story [...] which [he] could dedicate simply: to England; to [his] country’ (*Letters* 144). He sought to capture the sense

of England: its *air*. It was with this aim in mind that he constructed his own narratives, and monsters were an integral part of evoking this air in his fiction.

Given his explicit interest in national identity, Tolkien's critique of nationalist readings of medieval literature in '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics' should not be read as resistance to the idea of nationally-oriented fiction in itself, but as a protest against the limitations such a reading could impose on a complex text. His focus on the monster identifies one of the core elements of fairy-tale that transcends cultural and national contexts and becomes part of what he repeatedly calls 'the soup' ('Fairy-stories' 39). Tolkien's use of this term draws from George Webbe Dasent's description of Norse tales, and Dasent's assertion that the reader should appreciate each tale as a complete entity, not a composite formed of disparate ingredients: 'We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled' ('Fairy-stories' 39). The soup is the coherent whole, greater than the individual parts. For Tolkien, the appeal of the monster is the creature's resistance to limitation to any single belief-system or set of cultural associations, bringing with it instead the complex anxieties and desires of the folkloric past into confrontation with the Scriptural present. This fundamentally emotional confrontation is something that most critics at the time chose to ignore, as they obsessively sought philological evidence to support their nationalist agendas: that is, what Tolkien calls 'the bones' of cultural or historical fact in the soup of the story (Dasent quoted in Tolkien 'Fairy-stories' 39). Tolkien's concern, by contrast, is with the rich and complex dish of the poetry itself rather than with its constituent elements. And in taking the poetic whole as his subject, he was challenging many generations of medieval scholars whose chief concerns were very different.

This chapter will address the first two component questions identified in Chapter One: What are the sources for Tolkien's monsters? What historical baggage do these monsters carry? Answering these questions will be the focus of this chapter and the next, though considering different eras. The address of these questions will provide the basis of my historical argument for Tolkien's use of *Beowulf* and wider Wisdom Literature as inspiration for his construction of Middle-earth. It is in recognizing his synthesizing of past materials that we can read the richness of his work and the didactic drive of his fiction. To make sense of Tolkien's argument in his celebrated essay, and appreciate the role his monsters play in his fiction, we will consider both the history of Old English scholarship, particularly in Europe, and the attitude to monsters that scholarship evinced. In order to read the monsters in medieval scholarship, we must understand the framework and context for the development of the critical reading of *Beowulf*: so much of the early analysis of the text was fuelled by religious or cultural politics. As such, the history forms the subject of

the next section of this chapter; it will be followed by an analysis of the perception of monsters among Tolkien's predecessors and contemporaries in Old English scholarship. The chapter will finish with an account of Tolkien's argument in 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics' above all, as it establishes his central focus on the role of the monster in his fiction.

## 2.2 The Politicization of *Beowulf*

To address the role Tolkien played in the shifting perception to Anglo-Saxon, and more specifically *Beowulf*, scholarship, we must look to the roots of that scholarship in the religious reformation of sixteenth-century England, and the anti-Catholic element that reformation inevitably contained. The notion that the study of Old English might form part of the reformation movement was initiated, strangely enough, by a Croatian: Matitius Flacius (or Matija Vlačić Ilirik), a follower of Martin Luther. In 1561, Flacius wrote to Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker with the recommendation that Parker collect and archive Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical and historical texts in order that they might show 'the obscured Truth of the Church and reprove the Popish Tyranny' (Flacius quoted in Adams 14). The collection of texts showing Britain prior to the dominance of the Catholic Church would, he hoped, undermine the papist version of history and demonstrate the antiquity of the doctrine of the reformed English Church. As Graham Caie explains, '[h]is views are clearly expressed in *A Testimonie of Antiquitie* (1567) in which he uses Anglo-Saxon sources, in particular Ælfric, to justify the independence of the national church from the papacy' (28). As Chris Brooks explains, '[b]y showing that the English Christian Church, in its origins and traditions, had always had a separate identity, the break from Rome could be justified as a means of recovering independence. At the same time, the very existence of those origins and traditions allowed Anglicans to claim continuing membership of the Holy Catholic Church' (25). Allen Frantzen, in *Desire for Origins*, explains how Parker was the 'first Anglican official whose mandate was to supply a textual basis for the settlement and liturgical reform already in effect' (43). Parker supervised scholars in their production of texts including *A Testimonie of Antiquitie* and *A Defence of Priestes Marriages*, creating materials that supported Anglican beliefs as separate from the Catholic Church. 'Parker was [...] in a remarkably good position both to intercept and to produce texts. Numerous Anglo-Saxon texts passed under Parker's eye and through his authority' (Frantzen 44). Parker took up Flacius' suggestion with enthusiasm, and thus initiated what would become the widespread practice of studying Old English for political purposes.

While John Leland, Henry VIII's librarian and antiquarian, and John Bale, a former Carmelite monk turned Protestant, had amassed substantial collections of ancient texts prior to 1560, Parker's programme was more ambitious; he sought not only the collection of texts, but also their translation and re-printing (Adams 23). Using his authority as Archbishop of Canterbury, Parker began collecting books from libraries and private citizens in 1568, seeking first the Anglo-Saxon texts owned by churches and parishes, then moving on to explore personal book repositories. While Parker amassed materials for the church, collections of Anglo Saxon legal texts – such as *Archainomia*, published by John Lambarde in 1568 – were being edited and published with the aim of demonstrating England's unique legal past: a complement to the writing of its independent religious history. This nationalist project was furthered by John Foxe, the martyrologist, who published the Gospels in Anglo-Saxon, which were edited and translated by Parker and his secretary, John Joscelyn. So the initial impetus behind Anglo-Saxon scholarship was the development of an independent religious and legal history for England; but the collection and publication of Anglo-Saxon texts soon aroused wider social interest in the culture of the early English peoples, and a corresponding spread of Anglo-Saxon scholarship, creating a wider base of enthusiasts and critics who sought to advance the nationalist project. The drive for a national past, based in legal, religious, and later literary documents, exhibited the same craving for a sense of English-ness echoed centuries later by J.R.R. Tolkien in his search for, and creation of, what he considered a specifically English heroic legend.

The founding of the College of Antiquaries in 1586, under the patronage of Robert Cotton, resulted from the availability of Parker's accumulated historical and cultural documents. The focus of the Society was primarily on the origins and development of English and thus Anglo-Saxon culture and its relation to the development of British culture; while the society did not follow directives from Archbishop Parker, they still stood in opposition to the universalising, supra-national history promulgated by the Church of Rome. English nationalist sentiment also appears in William Camden's *Britannia*, published in 1586, which was a survey of British antiquities, but not widely known until the late 1600s, when the term 'British' had gained wider currency as a result of the union of England and Scotland under James I. Camden wrote to record faithfully the history of his nation as he saw it: 'to accomplish this worke the whole maine of my Industrie hath beene employed for many yeares with a firme settled study of the truth, and sincere antique faithfulnessse to the glory of God and my countrie' (Camden). Camden steered a middle way between the Puritan and Roman Catholic extremes, and his interest in the past appears

to have been driven more by scholarly curiosity than a desire to promote a particular doctrinal position.

The Society of Antiquaries began drawing on Anglo-Saxon texts and other historical documents to propagate ideas which provided not only a challenge to the Catholic Church, but also to current systems of government through their research into two Anglo-Saxon political concepts: *witenagemot* and *gavelkynde*. These terms reference a form of social organization incorporating the election of ruling officials and the equalization of heritable property, and were presented by Elizabethan historians both as an integral part of England's legal history and potential answer to contemporary social imbalances. As Toni Wein explains:

The first Society of Antiquaries zealously promoted the notion that ancient political liberties furnished a legacy for the present. The story they disseminated, that these political liberties included an elected parliamentary assembly whose members then chose one of themselves as a provisional king, proved the democratic character of those liberties and formed perhaps the Society's most seditious idea. (38)

Accordingly, the would-be absolutist James I of England (James VI of Scotland) declared the Society's research subversive and against the interests of the ruling monarch, so the institution was abolished in 1604. Nevertheless, despite official attempts to suppress the concept that there were alternative means of organizing and governing the English people besides Monarchy, these ideas were widespread.<sup>15</sup> The power of the past, as a counterpoint to present beliefs, was a threat to James' power. James did not embrace Anglo-Saxon history as part of English culture, but rather tried to distance himself from the bygone order. Frantzen points out that the Glorious Revolution, which resulted in the abdication of James II in 1688, 'brought to surface the question of limits to the monarchy and the authority of Parliament. The unpopular political stance of some of these Anglo-Saxon scholars no doubt slowed the spread of work in the field' (50). England's history still had influence, though its politically inflammatory nature limited its study.

Over a century after the publication of Camden's *Britannia*, John Aubrey published his *Miscellanies* (1696), which worked to preserve local culture, as he feared that social change would result in a loss of the traditional tales and local folklore:

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew Hadfield argues in *Shakespeare and Republicanism* that Shakespeare was influenced by contemporary thought on the power of a republican state instead of a monarchical one. He describes the political landscape in the 1590s in Part I of his text, then discusses Shakespeare in detail in Part II. Hadfield points to specific examples of republicanism in *Titus Andronicus*, as well as poetic works *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

Before Printing, Old-wives Tales were ingeniose, and since Printing came in fashion, till a little before the Civill-warres, the ordinary sort of People were not taught to reade. Now-a-dayes Bookes are common, and most of the poor people understand letters; and the many good Bookes, and variety of Turnes of Affaires, have putt all the old Fables out of doors: and the divine art of Printing and Gunpowder have frightened away Robin-goodfellow and the Fayries. (Aubrey quoted in Dorson 5-6)

Finding and preserving folklore was important to Aubrey. His studies aimed to maintain oral popular culture within England, not to define the country as separate from Rome, but rather to ensure continuity: to keep England connected to its own past.

Despite Aubrey's efforts and the gradual re-emergence of antiquarian studies in England after the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, a part of English history and culture was disregarded by English scholars; it had, however, caught the attention of the Danes. Just after Aubrey's publication of the *Miscellanies*, there is record of the correspondence between George Hickes, Humphrey Wanley and Eric Benzelius. Wanley contacted Hickes regarding the discovery of a manuscript that was later inaccurately described by Thomas Warton as a Danish Saxon poem, 'celebrating the wars which Beowulf, a noble Dane, descended from the royal stem of Scyldinge, waged against the kings of Swedeland' (Warton quoted in Shippey *Beowulf* 3). While Hickes and Warton, both English scholars, were aware of the *Beowulf* manuscript, neither ever made a close study of the work. Indeed, after its discovery in the Cottonian Library, *Beowulf* received little scholarly attention for many decades, despite the climate of medieval study.

The 1750s and 60s saw the resurgence of antiquarianism and medievalism among English scholars. In 1751, George II gave royal assent to the reformation of the Society of Antiquaries, which resumed its investigation of English history. This project included Bishop Richard Hurd's publication of *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* in 1762. The intention of Hurd's research was, as it had been in 1561 when Parker began collecting Anglo-Saxon texts, the definition of the nation through history. Hurd did not look to ecclesiastical, legal or historical texts to fulfill this purpose; he looked instead to literature. Hurd's assessment was that England's greatness lay not in her mimicry of the Classical works of Greek and Roman writers, but in the tales of her own feudal past. As he points out, '[Consideration of Spenser] will afford, at least, a fresh confirmation of the point, I principally insist upon, I mean, *The preeminence of the Gothic manners and fictions, as adapted to the ends of poetry, above the classic*' (Hurd 72, italics in original). With patriotic fervor, Hurd questioned the intrinsic value of Italian, French, Latin and Greek poetry, putting Northern European traditions and values, as espoused and developed by the

ancient English, above all else. This adoration of the Germanic past is echoed clearly in both Tolkien's critical and narrative work: while he nods to what he called the Southern mythologies, his writing stays grounded in the Germanic influences which Hurd advocated almost two hundred years before him.

Hurd was not the only scholar of his time to discuss the importance of national culture in the formation of national identity. Johann Gottfried Herder first used the term 'Volkslied' (folksong) in 1773, in anticipation of his publication of *Volkslieder, Stimme der Völker in Liedern* (Folksongs: The Voice of the Nation in Songs) in 1778. The preservation and continuity of the national culture were also important to Francis Grose, whose work bore a close resemblance to that of John Aubrey. In 1775, Grose published the first volume of *The Antiquarian Repertory: A Miscellany, intended to preserve and illustrate several valuable Remains of Old Times*. He followed this with *A Provincial Glossary, with a collection of Local Proverbs, and Popular Superstitions* in 1787. Grose made the history and custom of the nation widely available through these publications, but despite his attempts in *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, the literature which became mainstream was not the actual works of the ancient past, but rather texts which claimed to revive the Gothic style, mimicking and re-writing history in the light of the political and revolutionary concerns of the present. *Beowulf* remained relatively unknown, while the most widely consumed form of literature – the Gothic – sought to rewrite the past as a treasure-house of rebellious poetics. Brooks describes the aesthetic appeal of the Gothic, as seen by one of the Graveyard Poets:

As the valuation of medieval literature shifted, so also did the theoretical positions that underlay critical opinion. In "Conjectures on Original Composition" (1759), the poet Edward Young bemoaned the dull decorousness of contemporary verse and urged the merits of untutored originality – the robust, imaginative qualities he found in works written before the Neoclassical muses claimed a literary monopoly. (109)

The sense of history was idealized, as poets tried to capture the unconstrained pre-classical form they saw as central to the Gothic style.

Gothic revival literature saw its first flood of popularity with British readers from 1760 to 1820, coinciding with the emergence of Graveyard Poetry, like Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743) or Thomas Warton's *On the Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747),<sup>16</sup> and

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<sup>16</sup> 'Graveyard poetry constitutes an implicit attack on those who [...] claim that nature's purpose is merely to serve human needs. For the graveyard poet, the nature of destiny and the evolution of the future are far less comprehensible than this. Although written largely about death, these works also serve a subtly different purpose of challenging the certainties of human progress [...], and suggest a far more dubious awareness of the limitations of human knowledge and the necessity of owning to the



accompanying the rise of the novel. As a term, Gothic was initially tied to the geography, culture and history of the Goths, and the word was applied to a specific cultural phenomenon: namely, resistance to Rome and the challenge to Classical order. The term was first used as an architectural descriptor, but quickly developed a wider range of meanings:

When Italian art historians of the early Renaissance first used the term “Gothic” in an aesthetic sense, they erroneously attributed a style of architecture to those Germanic tribes that sacked Rome, and identified this style as barbaric, disordered and irrational in opposition to the classical style. By the eighteenth century a Goth had come to be defined, in the terms of Dr. Johnson’s *Dictionary* of 1775, as “one not civilized, one deficient in general knowledge, a barbarian”, and the medieval or Gothic age as a cultural wasteland, primitive and superstitious. (Punter & Byron 4)

Despite the accusations of barbarism, there was an appeal in the sense of anti-classical rebellion that came to be associated with the Gothic style. Whether architecturally or stylistically, the Gothic stood in contrast to the rules espoused by the Restoration, and was presented as an idealized and coherent English artistic movement capable of rivaling or even surpassing the achievements of Classical antiquity:

What remains constant throughout the developing of the political use of the term is that the Gothic always remains the symbolic site of a culture’s discursive struggle to define and claim possession of the civilized, and to abject, or throw off, what is seen as other to that civilized self. (Punter & Byron 5)

Writers who wanted to explore the resistance to classical strictures and freedom from the social restraint drew upon these defining traits of the Gothic. Their narratives embodied the Gothic by focusing on characters that exemplified barbarism and challenged the order and civility of modern society. Gothic had ‘become descriptive of anything medieval – in fact, of all things preceding about the middle of the seventeenth century’ (Punter & Byron 7). The literature of the Gothic revival incorporated romance, chivalry and forgeries of

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inevitability of human frailty. [...] the value of reason is replaced by a valuation of feeling, and what this leads to is a sense of the sublime, in which the mind is overwhelmed by, or swoons before, something greater than itself. What is crucial, however, is that this ‘something greater’ is also inevitably accompanied by terror.’ (Punter & Byron 10-1)

Exemplary works of Graveyard Poetry are Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* (published between 1742 and 1745), Robert Blair’s *The Grave* (1743), James Hervey *Meditations among the Tombs* (published between 1745 and 1747) and Thomas Gray’s *Elegy in a Country Church-Yard* (1751).

supposedly ancient texts; yet while the English wrote about, read and reinvented the life and literature of their past, they showed little interest in *Beowulf*.

*Beowulf* scholarship began in earnest in 1815 with the publication of Grimur Thorkelin's Latin translation of the poem from Anglo-Saxon, which followed closely on Jacob Langebek's listing of the *Beowulf* text in *Scriptores Rerum Danicarum Medii Aevi* as being 'on Danish affairs which were either lost or which have not come into [his] hands' (Langebek quoted in Shippey *Beowulf* 5). Langebek, while acknowledging its Anglo-Saxon source, still valued the poem as a contribution to Danish national history: 'I am surprised that none of the scholars of England has taken the trouble to edit a work of such antiquity, which would infinitely gratify both his own people on account of its poetry, and ours on account of its history' (Langebek quoted in Shippey *Beowulf* 77). After Langebek's reprimand, the English scholar Sharon Turner translated the first 517 lines in 1803, but he did so without a grammar or dictionary, mostly guessing at the meaning and context of words through comparison to modern English. His interpretation of the plot, insofar as he read and translated, was very flawed (Shippey *Beowulf* 7-9); however, this was the first published attempt at a translation of the poem. Thorkelin's edition of the text followed in 1815, with the assertion that "[It] will be clear to anyone" [...] that "our poem of the Scyldings is indeed Danish" despite its coming down to us in an Old English translation' (Thorkelin quoted in Bjork & Obermeier 17). Thorkelin's translation and assertions of Danish origin provoked a good deal of scholarly criticism, with Nicholas Outzen, Peter Muller and Nickolai Grundtvig writing reviews that questioned Thorkelin's knowledge of Anglo-Saxon and his assertions concerning the poem's plot.<sup>17</sup> All three critics were particularly critical of Thorkelin's claims for the elements of Danish history in the poem, and of his argument that Beowulf had died in 340 A.D. in Jutland, based on his readings of a Synchronistic Table of Danish and Swedish Kings (Shippey *Beowulf* 11). Thorkelin embraced the poem as history, a means of enriching the Danish cultural heritage; but scholarship on the poem was handicapped by the obscurity of its language.

Thorkelin translated the poem into Latin, but the critics who responded to and reviewed his work wrote in modern European vernaculars. Outzen, a Danish scholar, for instance, raised questions about the value of the poem as a key to Danish history, and did so writing in German. Contemporary linguistic nationalism and the implications of a Dane writing in German for a German journal were complicated by current political

<sup>17</sup> While Outzen's concerns are with Thorkelin's statements on the virtues of Monarchy and his interest in the characters of Hróðgár and Hygelac, Muller and Grundtvig argue with Thorkelin's dating and means of translating based on the principle that Anglo-Saxon was akin to Icelandic. Muller and Grundtvig are unable to agree upon proper names and Thorkelin's flawed interpretation of the poem: Muller, a friend of Thorkelin, supported him despite Grundtvig's acute reading and clarification of confusion in the plot, such as Scyld being deceased in the passage from lines 26-52. (Shippey 20-23)

developments: notably the Schleswig-Holstein question. Schleswig-Holstein was a territory ruled by the King of Denmark and populated by both Danish- and German-speaking peoples; centuries of boundary-shifts, ethnic cleansing by both Germans and Danes, and linguistic and political conflict ensured that the territory remained a point of contention until after World War II. It was therefore a matter of political importance to the Danish and German peoples when Thorkelin's translation came out.

Thorkelin displayed a clear bias concerning the importance of Hróðgár and Hygelac within the poem and the larger social system these characters represented (Shippey *Beowulf* 17); these views, in conjunction with his assertion that the ancestral homeland of the Angles was in southern Schleswig (Shippey *Beowulf* 17), a German territory under Danish rule, led to Outzen, among others, challenging Thorkelin's support for the Danish influence on the poem over that of culturally German peoples. As Shippey explains, Outzen asserted:

if Anglo-Saxon were really a German language; and if the early inhabitants of Schleswig had really spoken Anglo-Saxon; then Schleswig would be historically a German state; an issue disrupted only by later Danish linguistic and political imperialism. In these circumstances, Thorkelin's subtitle for *Beowulf*, "a Danish poem in the Anglo-Saxon dialect", was completely provocative. And even if it was "a Danish poem in the Anglo-Saxon language" (not dialect, for German-speakers would certainly not accept the "Old English = Old Norse" thesis), did that not only prove that the unfortunate original Anglo-Saxon poet and audience were *just like Schleswig-Holsteiners* – good Germans themselves in language and culture, but *compelled to call themselves Danes?* (Shippey *Beowulf* 18, italics in original)

While Outzen was Danish by nationality, he was culturally German and used *Beowulf* as a historical touchstone, turning the critical debate into an argument about nationality and culture. In 1816, then, the political and social implications of declaring the poem to be either Danish or German were potentially inflammatory. Nevertheless, Outzen's statements on the matter in 1816 were not answered for several decades. The political context for the analysis resulted in the majority of critics addressing the historical and linguistic elements of the poem, disregarding the creatures that were central to Tolkien's reading over a century later.

Meanwhile, in England, after the re-founding of the Society of Antiquaries and the subsequent publications of historical works on literature and culture, folklore studies and antiquarianism once again found an audience. Sharon Turner asserted that '[w]hen the first

volume of [the first edition of *The History of the Anglo-Saxons*] appeared [in 1799], the subject of Anglo-Saxon antiquities had been nearly forgotten by the British public' (Turner quoted in Shippey *Beowulf* 7). But by 1825, William Hone was able to find an audience, though admittedly small, for *The Every-Day Book*, which was a discussion of history, cultural remnants and folk rituals.<sup>18</sup> This weekly miscellany incorporated 'descriptions of landscape, curious narratives, and, increasingly, the contributions of correspondents' (Dorson 35). The decade from 1834-44 saw the founding of a variety of antiquarian societies, which were supported by an earl or lord and maintained by private scholars. The Camden, Parker, Percy, Shakespeare, Ælfric, Caxton and Sydenham societies all devoted their energies to 'the scholarly editing and publishing of valuable literary, historical and religious manuscripts, documents, tracts and studies' (Dorson 44). It is in this context that J.M. Kemble published the first English-language translation of the complete *Beowulf* in 1833. Kemble trod a careful middle ground between the schools of Danish and German criticism, dating the poem through comparisons to Scandinavian texts<sup>19</sup> and using Germanic grammatical conventions to confirm Wilhelm Grimm's assertion that *Beowulf* was a Germanic poem. He also adopted Thorkelin and Outzen's argument that *Beowulf* came from Schleswig (Shippey *Beowulf* 30), while not entering into the argument over whether it was then under Danish rule or steeped in Danish cultural history. Kemble's translation, more importantly, was an improvement on Thorkelin's work, as the grammar was more logical and he provided an extended glossary. The British were taking an interest in their literary past, though the poem was still a site of political and cultural controversy. British scholars, however, avoided entanglement in the debates over national origin, despite the fact that the poem itself was Anglo-Saxon, and thus from Britain.

Nikolai Grundtvig, a Danish scholar and 'arguably the most influential person ever in Danish education' (Caie 32), saw the poem as a thread between Denmark and England in their shared cultural history. *Beowulf* 'created a link with England and the mythic past that he always felt united the two countries' (Caie 33). Grundtvig's edition of the poem, translating the Anglo-Saxon to Danish, shows the cultural significance that the poem held as a text to 'revive a national appreciation of the great myths and moral truths of the past by awakening "the heroic spirit of the north through the release of the power of the spoken word, hidden in ancient myths"' (Grundtvig quoted in Caie 34). The battle over the Danish or Germanic authority over the poem continued to overwhelm the English scholarship.

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<sup>18</sup> While the popularity was limited at first, William Tegg purchased the rights and continually reissued the works until 1874, garnering praise from Sir Walter Scott, Robert Southley and Charles Lamb. (Dorson 35)

<sup>19</sup> namely the *Ynglinga saga* and the *Hrolfs saga kraka*

While the English translated the *Beowulf* manuscript – Kemble’s rendition followed soon after by Benjamin Thorpe’s in 1855 – the text was encouraging further scholarly debate in continental Europe. *Beowulf* continued to provoke dispute on historical, cultural and national issues. While attempting to seek out historical contexts and analogues for *Beowulf*, scholars often argued in favour of particular cultural sources, either analogues to identify locations or characters in the poem or cultural identifiers, like particular phrases or names to identify the nationality of the poet, as Outzen had done in 1816. Surprisingly, monsters were wholly disregarded as potential markers of cultural identity. However, few of the critics now addressed questions of national origin directly. Two German scholars, Franz Mone and Heinrich Leo, addressed Outzen’s arguments, but did so through the identification of folk-song elements and other historical analogues within the poem. Each critic situated the poem within a specific historical narrative. Rather than discussing the poem’s geographical setting and political contexts, Mone and Leo considered the *Liedertheorie* (the study of the language of lays) and social history arguments of the Grimm brothers. Jacob Grimm, in his reviews of Thorkelin’s translation work, had called into question the ‘Scandinavian take-over’ of the history of the text, while Wilhelm ‘incorporated the evidence of the allusions of *Beowulf* into his *Deutsche Heldensage* of 1829’ (Shippey *Beowulf* 28). They both sought to place *Beowulf* within the German cultural history they were developing through their study of folklore and language. Mone asserted in 1836 that the tale was Nordic and must have been carried by the Danes to England. Leo, on the other hand, placed the poem’s analogues and origins firmly with the German Angeln (Germans living in the territory of Anglia) in his 1839 article (Shippey ‘Structure’ 154).

In the 1840s to 1860s, a number of critics, while shying away from the discussions which might involve the Schleswig-Holstein debate, talked more about the elements of Christianity in the poem: whether they were part of the primary composition or imposed at a later date.<sup>20</sup> This discussion led to questions regarding the number of poets involved in the composition of *Beowulf*.<sup>21</sup> None of these scholars worked to situate the Christianity of the poem in its history as an Anglo-Saxon narrative, as Tolkien would do a century later. The political question was left out of discussions of religion; it was not until the English scholar George Stephens, who was working in Copenhagen, responded directly to Outzen’s claims for German preeminence in the composition of *Beowulf* that the political debate was re-opened. Stephens stated in an 1852 piece in *Gentleman’s Magazine* that: ‘in

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<sup>20</sup> Ludwig Ettmüller (1840), Karl Mullenhoff (1869)

<sup>21</sup> Ludwig Ettmüller (1840), Christian Grein (1862), Karl Mullenhoff (1869), Artur Kohler (1870)

spite of Grimm's classification of the "Germanic" languages, English as a language (and so implicitly as a culture) was South-Scandinavian rather than West-German (and should never be called "Saxon")' (Stephens paraphrased in Shippey *Beowulf* 46). Further arguments in support of the isolation of Anglo-Saxon from Germanic language and culture were advanced in 1883 and 1888 by Hermann Moller and Bernhard Ten Brink, respectively. Moller was Danish, but lived in territory that had been occupied by the Germans since 1864, wrote in German and taught Germanic Philology in Copenhagen. He supported Outzen's argument for the primacy of the German history and culture in the poem, focusing his work primarily on the North Frisian legends. Ten Brink followed the lines of Kemble's 1833 arguments in his prefatory material to his translation. Ten Brink saw the composition of the poem as a patchwork affair which drew on many traditions and histories. While other scholars continued to make contributions on one side or the other of this dispute, its impact was diminished through the development of medieval studies in the United States and new the critical voices from England: the discussion was moved out of the arena of Germanic nationalism and into an Anglo-American framework.

From the 1890s, then, *Beowulf* was considered an English poem, rather than a text that by mere coincidence was written in Anglo-Saxon and should have been in another language. This eventual reclamation demonstrates how disconnected the scholarship had been from reading *Beowulf* in an English context. It is this same sense of absence of English mythology that Tolkien seeks to rectify centuries later, as his Middle-earth is echoing the powerful influence *Beowulf* held. While English-speaking authors and critics like Henry Sweet<sup>22</sup> and Stopford Brooke<sup>23</sup> became involved in the discussion, they tended to repeat arguments, like the translation of the name Beowulf or the assertion of Grendel as a Neanderthal-figure, which had been made by scholarly predecessors working in other languages. Shippey, in his introduction to *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage*, describes the shift in power towards English-speaking scholarship:

One may say that by the late 1890s the time was ripe for a new consensus on the poem, which in fact came into being with unusual speed; [...] It centers on the international triumvirate of Friedrich Klaeber (1863-1954), R.W. Chambers (1874-1942) and W.W. Lawrence (1876-1958), whose major works of 1922, 1921 and 1928 respectively are still well known or indeed (in the case of Klaeber's revised edition and Chambers' revised

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<sup>22</sup> Argued in 1879 that 'Beowulf' could be translated into 'Bear' through the etymology of 'bee-wolf'. This was a repetition of the argument presented by Karl Simrock in 1859.

<sup>23</sup> Asserted in 1892 that Grendel was a form of Neanderthal-figure, repeating Grundtvig's 1841 discussion and conclusions.

*Introduction*) in constant use. A major factor in it was the shift of power to America, along with the founding of a string of significant English-language philological journals, such as *PMLA* (1884), *Modern Language Notes* (1886), *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (1897), *Modern Philology* (1903). (62)

The launch of a large number of English-language academic journals meant that discussions of *Beowulf* were removed from their earlier context. Critics still approached the text from their own political perspectives, but the diversity of views brought the argument out of the arena of German *Kultur*. There was a shift to a consideration of the Catholic Christianity of the poem, as well as to Anglo-Saxon history. As English scholars responded to the new concerns in medieval and folkloric scholarship, their discussions continued to focus on matters of social and national history; while the critical discussion considered the cultural history of the Anglo-Saxons, rather than the Germans or Danes, *Beowulf* remained a text mined for historical, and thus political, reference.

In all these debates, the monsters remained marginal distractions: they could tell scholars little about the proto-national origins of the text and, as seemingly ahistorical beings, they irked, rather than excited, historiographers and antiquaries, if not philologists. Thus, in *Beowulf* and in broader Old English scholarship, the monsters were left at the margins. In the next section I shall consider this liminal placement of the monsters in the scholarly debate up to the moment when Tolkien wrote '*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*,' and suggest that this refusal to be categorized in terms widely used by the scholars, was what made them so fascinating to Tolkien.

### 2.3 Textual and Historical Conceptions of the Other

While early *Beowulf* critics disregarded the creatures as an historical or philological sign, the monster has been of philosophical and theological interest throughout history. Tolkien's focus on the moral representation of the monster means that we must consider the monster's place and definition in the history of the text. Tolkien's reading of *Beowulf* centres not only on the character of the monster within the narrative, but also on its place within the larger spiritual framework of the poem.

A monster, as defined by medieval theologians or poets,<sup>24</sup> is a being sent by God as a mechanism of education: a means of demonstrating His will or purpose to mankind. Augustine explains in *De Civitate Dei* that some of these creatures were human, and thus

<sup>24</sup> The binding of *Beowulf* with *The Wonders of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* places the *Beowulf* text concurrent with these works, or at least shows scribal familiarity, apart from the potential knowledge of the popular Latin works like Pliny's catalogue of races, or the religious texts like Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*.

children of Adam, while others were altogether inhuman, although created by God.<sup>25</sup> His point was that even a physically disfigured human being or a potentially dangerous inhuman creature formed part of the divine plan; his belief that all monsters have a function in this plan remains consistent even when considering the races described by pagan authors such as Pliny (*City of God* 16:8). Nothing was beyond the control of God. As such, the thought of a monster being at war with God, as the *Beowulf*-poet describes Grendel and his kin (*Beowulf* 113-4), was impossible in Augustine's philosophy. Even the Devil, God's perpetual antagonist, would eventually be brought under divine control through his defeat by the Archangel Michael, according to Augustine's interpretation of the Book of Revelation. There is no force that is wholly outside God's power, and this Augustinian position tamed the monster, domesticated it by weaving it into a coherent moral narrative.

The Augustinian view of monsters as demonstrations of God's purpose is also present in the Old English text *The Wonders of the East*, a manuscript bound with *Beowulf* in the Nowell Codex. These travels constitute, in effect, a catalogue of exotic creatures and marvels situated in the distant Orient. The creatures are not condemned for specific vices, but placed instead within a Christian context that sets them beyond condemnation, as instruments of instruction, integral parts of the Christian story. The organizing principle of the narrative is geographical, and it opens with a statement of location: '[t]he colony is at the beginning of the land Antimolima, which land is 500 in the tally of the lesser measurements, which are called *stadia*, and 368 of the greater, which are called *leuuae* ["leagues"]' (Orchard 'Appendix' 185). It goes on to treat each individual race and animal in that land as a separate, exotic wonder. The author presents the creatures as companion pieces to the geographical marvels of the Orient; the beings are all understood as manifestations of spiritual phenomena. Rather than attributing meaning, the creatures are described neutrally: 'Also there are born there half-dogs who are called Conopenae. They have horses' manes and boars' tusks and dogs' heads and their breath is like a fiery flame.

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<sup>25</sup> 'Qualis autem ratio redditur de monstrosis apud nos hominum partibus, talis de monstrosis quibusdam gentibus redid potest. Deus enim creator est omnium, qui ubi et quando creari quid oporteat vel oportuerit, ipse novit, sciens universitatis pulchritudinem quarum partium vel similitudine vel diversitate contexat. Sed qui totum inspicere non potest tamquam deformitate partes offenditur, quoniam cui congruat et quo referatur ignorat. [...] Ita etsi maior diversitas oriatur, scit ille quid egerit, cuius opera iuste nemo reprehendit.'

[Furthermore, the same explanation that is used to account for monstrous human births among our race can be applied to certain monstrous races also. For God is the creator of all things, and he himself knows at what place and time a given creature should be created, or have been created, selecting in his wisdom the various elements from whom whose likeness and diversities he contrives the beautiful fabric of the universe. But one who cannot see the whole clearly is offended by the apparent deformity of a single part, since he does not know with what it conforms or how to classify it. [...] So, even if a greater variation were to arise, he whose works no one has the right to censure knows what he has done.] (Augustine *City of God* 44-45)



These lands are near the cities which are filled with all the worldly wealth: that is in the south of Egypt' (Orchard 'Appendix' 189). *The Wonders of the East* also describes many extraordinary creatures in human terms: pygmies, beings with malformed faces and anthropoids of any colour and shape are referred to inclusively as men. There is no ascription of the demonic to these figures: even to the idolaters and cannibals. The text reserves any judgement, but provides enough information for the reader to identify the demonstrative traits of the creatures.

The *Beowulf* manuscript, the Nowell Codex, is a collection of five texts from two different scribes' hands. These texts have been drawn together, as Kenneth Sisam asserted in 1953, as a 'book of various monsters' (quoted in Orchard 1). The five texts, while varied in their narrative content, each present monsters and the heroes which must battle them. Each of these texts also takes on a didactic element, as John Pickles points out that *Passion of Saint Christopher* and *Judith* 'are intended for different purposes: one for the pulpit, the other for private meditation' (quoted in Orchard 13). Each of the five texts is a monster-narrative and is also a form of Wisdom text. Orchard points out that the texts are placed in apposition to draw together the contiguous meanings.

The way in which individual marvels in the *Wonders of the East* are occasionally connected in sequence, or contain thematic parallels with other elements of the text. [...] Just as *Judith* and the *Passion of Saint Christopher* are connected by the theme of saintly forbearance overcoming regal arrogance, and the *Passion of Saint Christopher* and the *Wonders of the East* are connected by the figure of the half-human, half-monstrous *cynocephali*, so too the *Wonders of the East* and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* are linked by the figure of the Alexander the Great, a mighty pagan monster-slayer whose match is famously celebrated in *Beowulf*, which follows the *Letter* in the manuscript. (27)

The texts are bound by their common material and their didactic purpose. Each of the elements of the Nowell Codex provides a moral lesson to the reader in the form of the monster.

The term 'monster' as it was used in early twentieth century medieval scholarship, by contrast, shared its judgmental overtones with the vocabulary employed by the *Beowulf* scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Grendel, for example, is presented as a devil in Grimur Thorkelin's 1815 translation. Shippey points out that Thorkelin was impelled to draw this parallel by his desire to make comparisons between the culture of *Beowulf* and his own Icelandic heritage. For the early nineteenth-century scholar, Shippey tells us that:

[i]n [the name “Grendel]” is concealed Logi “Fire”, [...] “the Anglo-Saxon” confused Logi or Loki with Old Norse words for “bolt, bar”, and created “Grendel” from the Anglo-Saxon word *grind*, “bolt”. [Thorkelin] sees the word *grindel* in Genesis 1.384 as referring similarly to the devil. (Thorkelin quoted in Shippey *Beowulf* 15)

As the discussion shifted away from a search for the signs of Christianity in the poem to a quest for the signs of cultural definition, later critics proceeded to adopt Thorkelin’s vocabulary associating Grendel with the Devil. This theological evaluation of Grendel, separating him from Beowulf at a religious level, was an early stage in the process whereby the creatures in the poem came to be called monsters, in the crude modern sense of adversaries, and thus became wholly negative entities. Tolkien may be alluding to this process when he writes in his 1936 lecture: ‘[m]ost important it is to consider how and why the monsters become “adversaries of God”, and so begin to symbolize (and ultimately become identified with) the powers of evil, even while they remain, as they do still remain in *Beowulf*, mortal denizens of the material world, in it and of it’ (*B: M&C* 20). Tolkien argues that the creatures should be read as more than mere devils or allegories of evil, as their representation in the latter light is the outcome of an historical process. As a site of tension between the pagan and the Christian, Grendel has infinitely greater complexity than any simple Christian devil; he must be read in his historical context.

Scholars like Nikolai Grundtvig and the Grimm brothers, all writing in the early nineteenth century, used comparisons to traditional Germanic texts as a means of approaching *Beowulf*; it is through this comparison that phrases such as ‘monster-tales’ were adopted to refer back to the earlier texts containing similar structures and concepts.<sup>26</sup> As a result of this comparative study, the term ‘monster’ came to be used by scholars to describe the creatures in *Beowulf*, encouraging the poem’s readers to view them in simple terms of black and white morality. For Grundtvig, for example, the presence of the creatures in this essentially Christian poem makes them fundamentally wicked:

When therefore the skald daringly undertook to make an epic out of heathen events, but without making a heathen of himself, he saw no other possibility than to have recourse to folk-tale matter and thereby to provide the events with a kind of relation to Christian truth; that is why the tales about Grændel and the dragon make up the main content of the poem, as a continuation of the war of the Devil and the ancient giants against God,

<sup>26</sup> Grundtvig compares *Beowulf* to Nordic tales of troll-wrestling, calling it the stuff of Fairy-tale in his 1841 essay.

Wilhelm Grimm makes similar comparisons to historical analogues, pointing to the ‘legendary cycles’ common in Germany in his 1842 analysis.

which as trolls' work affect the course of history, and are in this way meant to give it a higher meaning. (Grundtvig quoted in Shippey *Beowulf* 127)

Grundtvig's argument points to how the poet has tried and failed to walk a tenuous path between the pagan and the Christian, balancing the folktales of the past with the values of the present audience. Tolkien echoes this perception in his lecture, but sees this balance not as a failure but as a creative decision on the part of the poet:

this [combining of old myth and new religion] is not due to mere confusion – it is rather an indication of the precise point at which an imagination, pondering old and new, was kindled. At this point new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited. It is for this reason that these elements of Scripture alone appear in a poem dealing of design with the noble pagan of old days. ('B: M&C' 26)

Tolkien agrees with Grundtvig's initial argument, then, but does not agree with the conclusion that the poet's choices are missteps. Grundtvig questions the perspective of the poet who would haphazardly connect the episodes of Grendel and the Dragon, and would place the Dragon in the right when he seeks retribution after the robbery (Grundtvig in Shippey *Beowulf* 127). He identifies these decisions as weaknesses because he insists on seeing the monsters as evil figures designed to provide a challenge to the heroes, but rendered incapable of doing so satisfactorily because of the poet's choice to put the hero in the wrong.

The deployment of theological categories as a means of separating the good men from the evil monsters appears again in Stopford Brooke's *The History of Early English Literature* (1892). Brooke's analysis focuses on the imagery of water and the sea; it is in this framework of the men's close relationship to the sea that he calls Grendel and his mother 'more sea-demons than demons of the moor' (29). Brooke goes on to summarize all that is said of Grendel in a damning assessment of the character, omitting the more ambiguous statements:

He is a grim and giant demon, of the old Eoten race, of so great strength that Beowulf, who has the power of thirty men, scarcely overcomes him. His fearful head is so huge that four men carry it with difficulty. [...] The nails of his hands are like iron, monstrous claws, and it seems he wore a kind of glove, large and strange, made fast with wonderful bands, wrought by curious skill with devil's craft and out of dragon-hides. Finally, he is spelled against all weapons. Like many an Iceland troll, no sword can bite his skin; he must be fought with naked hands. (35-6)

It is this long list of out-of-context references to *Beowulf* that leads to Brooke's most judgemental statement: '[Grendel] is the fiend of the moor, the quaking bog and the morass' (Brooke 36). Such declarations result in the use of terms 'demon' and 'monster' throughout Brooke's reading, and in critics who followed. They do not justify or explain these terms with reference to Grendel's moral role in the narrative.

While Tolkien's 1936 lecture was a response to general trends in *Beowulf* criticism, his focus remained upon the scholarship of three recent figures: W.P. Ker, R.W. Chambers and Ritchie Girvan. As Tolkien points out, Ker's consideration of *Beowulf* in his general history of the early medieval period, *The Dark Ages* (1904), is very perfunctory. His discussion of Grendel and Grendel's mother takes up a few short sentences, asserting that the text's major flaw is its focus on monster-battles of little consequence:

A reasonable view of the merit of *Beowulf* is not impossible, though rash enthusiasm may have made too much of it, while a correct and sober taste may have too contemptuously refused to attend to Grendel or the Fire-drake. The fault of *Beowulf* is that there is nothing much in the story. The hero is occupied in killing monsters, like Hercules or Theseus. (Ker 164)

While Ker is willing to say that the episodes are diversified and the style of the poem dignified and heroic, he contends that the poem has little socio-political or psychological complexity, because of its focus on the hero's interaction with monsters and the sheer simplicity of the story. Ker instead argues that the historical events placed at the periphery by the poet are the true centre of the narrative. He conflates *Beowulf* with other monster-killing tales, seeing nothing epic or grand about the poem, despite his assessment that 'three chief episodes are well wrought and diversified' and the poem possesses a great 'dignity of style' (Ker 164). He critiques the plot while acclaiming the style, resulting in a contradictory reading that carried over into later criticism due to the esteem in which Ker is held. Tolkien notes how Ker's inconsistent reading influenced later generations of critics:

the contrast made between the radical defect of theme and structure, and at the same time the dignity, loftiness in converse, and well-wrought finish, has become a commonplace even of the best criticism, a paradox the strangeness of which has almost been forgotten in the process of swallowing it upon authority. ('B: M&C' 11)

Tolkien also shows great respect for the critical voice of Ker, but points to the flaw in his reading: his craving for a rearrangement of focus, his resulting paradoxical reading, and its critical impact.

R.W. Chambers, the next to receive Tolkien's critique, shares Ker's tendency to dismiss the creatures of the poem in the interests of addressing what he sees as more

significant historical matters. Chambers, in his 1925 introductory essay ‘Beowulf and the Heroic Age in England,’ while once again discussing the monsters, thinks little of their presence within the poem. He admits their appeal to a wide audience, but argues that the creatures are crudely symbolic of immorality in a Christian sense and nothing more:

But the gigantic foes whom Beowulf has to meet are identified with the foes of God. Grendel and the dragon are constantly referred to in language which is meant to recall the powers of darkness with which Christian men felt themselves to be encompassed. [...] Consequently, the matter of the main story of *Beowulf*, monstrous as it is, is not so far removed from common medieval experience as it seems to us to be from our own.  
(Chamber xxviii)

Chambers argues that the language categorizes the creatures as allegorical figures.<sup>27</sup> Once he is able to identify what he sees as their religious significance and point to what, like Grundtvig, he considers their allegorical meaning, he pays the creatures little attention; his focus is instead upon the social and historical structure of the poem: ‘Grendel hardly differs from the fiends of the pit who were always in ambush to waylay a righteous man. And so Beowulf, for all that he moves in the world of the primitive Heroic Age of the Germans, nevertheless is almost a Christian knight’ (Chambers xxix). Tolkien responds to this quotation by pointing to Chambers’ tendency to elide the folkloric and the Christian in this passage; for Chambers, Beowulf is a noble figure who, despite his context, reflects impeccably Christian virtues. Tolkien points to the strength of this duality, as ‘we may not observe confusion, a half-hearted or a muddled business, but a fusion that has occurred *at a given point* of contact between old and new, a product of thought and deep emotion’ (*B: M&C*’ 20). Chambers instead considers this friction between the two worlds as a dissonance: Beowulf is a Christian knight despite his circumstances, not because of them. Later critics, like Ritchie Girvan, echo this concept.

Girvan, in *Beowulf and the Seventh Century* (1935), discusses the language of the text and places the poem within a folkloric tradition through his discussion of similar phrases and narrative elements found in *Beowulf* and contemporary works: Chapter III, ‘Folktale and History’ deals broadly with analogues, like the *Grettissaga* or *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, comparing narrative elements and heroic characteristics. Like Chambers, Girvan uses terms akin to Grundtvig’s language of the demonic and Brooke’s language of the

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<sup>27</sup> ‘But the gigantic foes whom Beowulf has to meet are identified with the foes of God. Grendel and the dragon are constantly referred to in language which is meant to recall the powers of darkness with which Christian men felt themselves to be encompassed. [...] Consequently, the matter of the main story of *Beowulf*, monstrous as it is, is not so far removed from common medieval experience as it seems to us to be from our own.’ (Chambers xxviii)

aquatic and provides moral purpose for the creatures (Girvan 58; 57). Also, Girvan, like Chambers, places the monsters at the intersection of the past and present beliefs of the poet's community:

Grendel and his dam may inherit cannibalistic features from the *eotons* of old, but their position is explained and motivated in a manner to appeal to reason. Their outcast state has its root in descent from Cain, and the curse of Cain hangs heavy upon them. They are no longer embodied evil and destruction, motiveless malignity which men cannot explain, avoid, or appease. Everything about them has been reduced to the plane of reason and of experience, or at least all but one thing, that some of the limitations incident to humanity are removed, and the hero shares in part in the freedom from such limitations. (Girvan 59)

This description of the creatures is echoed in Tolkien's own assessment of the monsters as powerful figures that are 'mortal denizens of the material world' ('*B: M&C*' 20). Girvan points to the intersection of past and present that is central to Tolkien's own reading. Yet, despite recognizing the same space of possibility as Tolkien does, Girvan dismisses the poem in his 1935 lecture quoted by Tolkien, saying that the poem chooses to deal with creatures rather than one of 'so many greater' topics, which were 'charged with the splendor and tragedy of humanity' (Girvan quoted in '*B: M&C*' 13). For Girvan, the value of the poem is diminished because of the focus on creatures, rather than on human conflicts; like Ker and Chambers before him, he refuses to see the monsters as a cultural touchstone of the poem.

Tolkien responds to these predecessors specifically, while addressing the larger culture of criticism they follow; his concern is to identify the monster as participating in rather than distracting from history. Each of the critics he addresses at the beginning of his lecture identifies the poem as occurring at a moment of historical transition, but fail to acknowledge the complex relationship of the monsters to that moment. The creatures are either regarded as a distraction or an allegory, while historical matters effectively occur elsewhere. In this way, Ker, Chambers and Girvan built on centuries of *Beowulf* commentary, in which the monsters were seen as having little bearing on the task of locating the poem in its cultural or national context. Tolkien argues against this exclusion of the monsters from the outset, claiming that it arises from a refusal to read the poem poetically:

[*Beowulfiana*] is poor in criticism, criticism that is directed to the understanding of the poem. It has been said of *Beowulf* itself that its weakness lies in placing the unimportant things at the centre and the

important on the outer edges. This is one of the opinions that I wish specially to consider. I think it profoundly untrue of the poem, but strikingly true of the literature about it. *Beowulf* has been used as a quarry of fact and fancy more assiduously than it has been studied as a work of art. ('B: M&C' 5)

Tolkien's project is thus a rebalancing of the critical space: returning to foreground the core matters of the text and a relegation to the periphery the unimportant details. He effaces himself at the beginning of the lecture, quoting Chaucer as he claims to be a '*lewed man*' who seeks to '*pace the wisdom of an heep of lerned men*' ('B: M&C' 5, italics in original). He gives this as the reason to limit his discussion to one small aspect of the poem: the monsters. Yet as with Chaucer, the self-effacement is satirical, since it is through his discussion of monsters that Tolkien opens up the significance of the poem and its reflection of history, culture and religious change. The use of the monster as a point of access to folk belief and cultural history is apparent in Tolkien's own fiction, as his monsters demonstrate his syncretic method of interlocking multiple mythologies to formulate a more powerful mythos, a myth for England.

#### 2.4 Tolkien and the Language of Monstrosity

Tolkien's discussion of *Beowulf* focuses on the monsters, and questions the critical dismissal of such important figures. In his critique of the contemporary privileging of historical and linguistic analysis,<sup>28</sup> the great majority of his statements are sweeping dismissals of the assumptions that pervade the study of *Beowulf*:

Nearly all of the censure, and most of the praise, that has been bestowed on *The Beowulf* has been due either to the belief that it was something that it was *not* – for example, primitive, pagan, Teutonic, an allegory (political or mythical), or most often, an epic; or to disappointment at the discovery that it was itself and not something that the scholar would have liked better – for example, a heathen heroic lay, a history of Sweden, a manual of Germanic antiques, or a Nordic *Summa Theologica*. ('B: M&C' 7)

Many critics, he points out, describe the monsters as either simple representations of evil or as narrative filler: an event in the plot or challenge for the hero to overcome. But Tolkien argues that the monsters in *Beowulf* are not accidents of taste or narrative short cuts, but 'fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem' ('B: M&C' 19); their

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<sup>28</sup> 'And it is as an historical document that it has mainly been examined and dissected. Though ideas as to the nature and quality of the history and information embedded in it have changed much since Thorkelin called it *De Danorum Rebus Gestis*, this has remained steadily true.' ('B: M&C' 6)

duality, standing between the old world of folklore and the new world of Christianity, is what makes the monster an important figure in the text.

The monsters demonstrate both Beowulf's prowess and his eventual failure: 'By [the end] we are supposed to have grasped the plan. Disaster is foreboded. Defeat is the theme. Triumph over the foes of man's precarious fortress is over, and we approach slowly and reluctantly the inevitable victory of death' ('*B: M&C*' 30). The monsters help to define Beowulf's behaviour, changing his acts from brave to heroic: while he is a warrior of renown who fights in mortal battles, the monsters described by the poet are 'inhuman' and thus 'the story is larger and more significant [than a mere tale of a king's fall to human enemies]' ('*B: M&C*' 33). Beowulf may overcome 'mortal denizens of the material world' with the characteristic 'Northern courage' ('*B: M&C*' 20), but the creatures he fights are also at war with God: the Christian God, according to the poet. Beowulf's struggles may be in 'the dark past' ('*B: M&C*' 23), but they are remembered by a poet who knows, understands and draws upon Scripture. The significance of the monsters does not come from their singular historical or spiritual placement, but from their location at the nexus of past and present.

Tolkien condemns the sweeping dismissal of the monsters by Ker and Chambers as a failure of critical intelligence: 'one even dares to wonder if something has not gone wrong with our "modern judgement"' as 'there is also, I suppose, a real question of taste involved: a judgement that the heroic or tragic story on a strictly human plane is by nature superior' ('*B: M&C*' 13; 15). Rather than agreeing that 'correct and sober taste may refuse to admit there can be an interest for *us* [...] in ogres and dragons' ('*B: M&C*' 16), Tolkien points to the value of interweaving mythology and religion:

[Passages in *Beowulf* concerning Cain and the giants' war with God] are directly connected with Scripture, yet they cannot be dissociated from the creatures of northern myth, the ever watchful foes of the gods (and men). The undoubtedly scriptural Cain is connected with *eotenas* and *ylfe*, which are the *jotnar* and *alfar* of Norse. But this is not due to mere confusion – it is rather an indication of the precise point at which an imagination, pondering old and new, was kindled. At this point new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited. ('*B: M&C*' 26)

Monsters, then, in Tolkien's critical assessment, are a literary necessity; the poet has used the malleable figure of the monster to reconcile the myths and beliefs of the past with the new Christian faith.

The poet establishes the pagan context of the poem as prior to the enlightenment of Christianity, as he describes the behaviour of Hrōðgár's people: 'wylc wæs þeaw hyra:



haéþenra hyht' [such was their habit: the way of the heathens] (*Beowulf* 178-9). Tolkien reflects on this retrospective look at pagan values:

The relation of the Christian and heathen thought and diction in *Beowulf* has often been misconceived. So far from being a man so simple or confused that he muddled Christianity with Germanic paganism, the author probably drew or attempted to draw distinctions, and to represent moods and attitudes of characters conceived dramatically as living in a noble but heathen past. ('B: M&C' 39)

The poet counterpoises heathen myth and Christian belief, describing creatures that fit within the ideas of the past and the contemporary Christian value-system: while the monsters may echo the figures of ogres and giants and the men may not know Christian salvation, the poet describes the monsters through a Christian lens. Grendel is Cain's kin, regardless of whether the Scyldings have heard the story of Adam, Eve and their two sons. The monster's Christian significance is not predicated on the Geat or Scylding belief systems. Beowulf is an honourable warrior who is given a pagan burial (*Beowulf* 3137-48), though critics have mistakenly called him a Christian Knight (Chambers xxix). The poet draws distinctions between the past and present to keep the sense of history and context while still writing a wholly Christian work.

Tolkien, in '*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*,' does not actually detail the morals or ethics which the monsters demonstrate; instead, he focuses on defending the use of the monster-figure by the poet. He assures his audience that they are 'richer in significance than [a dragon's] barrow' ('B: M&C' 16), but gives little enumeration of those significances, possibly from an anxiety not to restrict them as his scholarly forebears had. After all, we as readers can recognize much of what they stand for, with Grendel and his mother presented as almost-human fiends that plague Heorot. Grendel attacks once the song of creation is sung (*Beowulf* 86-9, 115-20), showing his rage in response to the worship of a higher power. He is an outsider, carrying on the punishment first handed down in the Book of Enoch:

And to Gabriel said the Lord: 'Proceed against the bastards and the reprobates, and against the children of fornication: and destroy [the children of fornication and] the children of the Watchers from amongst men [and cause them to go forth]: send them one against the other that they may destroy each other in battle: for length of days shall they not have. [...]  
And the Lord said unto Michael: 'Go, bind Semjâzâ and his associates who have united themselves with women so as to have defiled themselves with them in all their uncleanness.

And when their sons have slain one another, and they have seen the destruction of their beloved ones, bind them fast for seventy generations in the valleys of the earth, till the day of their judgement and of their consummation, till the judgement that is for ever and ever is consummated. In those days they shall be led off to the abyss of fire: <and> to the torment and the prison in which they shall be confined for ever. And whosoever shall be condemned and destroyed will from thenceforth be bound together with them to the end of all generations. (10.9-13)

Grendel, then, is a figure isolated, suffering for the sins of his forebears; he retains a good deal of the pathos of the exile, as the novelist John Gardner later recognized.<sup>29</sup> The poet's references to Cain and the other malevolent spirits which plague the fens identify Grendel as part of a tradition of punishment; yet his cry of pain after Beowulf's attack and his tormented return to the supposed safety of his mother's lair also make him poignantly human.

Grendel's mother, meanwhile, attacks the hall out of grief, not hate. This mitigating circumstance is what keeps her from becoming allegorical: she is never a symbolic figure enacting a representational role. The same is true of the fire-drake or dragon. When speaking of the dragon's moral right to lash out after he is robbed, Tolkien describes that '[i]n this poem the balance [between the personification of vice and the reality of the creature as a mortal being] is nice, but it is preserved. The large symbolism is near the surface, but it does not break through, nor become allegory' ('B: M&C' 17). The monsters are powerful because they are overwhelming in size and strength, yet share many traits with mortals. The poet allows them justification for their actions and authenticity in their motives and emotions, but this only helps to elevate Beowulf: 'Something more significant than a standard hero, a man faced with a foe more evil than any human enemy of house or realm, is before us, and yet incarnate in time, walking in heroic history, and treading the named lands of the North' ('B: M&C' 17). The monster is a powerful lens by which we can read Beowulf, both as pagan and Christian hero, more clearly.

The role of the monsters within the poem is central to the argument of '*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*;' as later chapters will show, this critical focus on monsters carried over into Tolkien's fiction, making them central to his imagined worlds. The monsters' centrality to *Beowulf* identifies the poem as a deliberate fusion of northern myths and Christian beliefs.

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<sup>29</sup> see John Gardner's *Grendel*

[In the old Norse myths, the] monsters had been the foes of the gods, [...] and within time the monsters would win [...] 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. ('B: M&C' 22)

These beliefs are, for Tolkien, the core message of the poem: one must struggle with the monsters to earn honour and glory in this life and the next. While the deity has changed, the poem argues that the goal has not. The act of battle, the struggle with the insurmountable forces, is not bound to a particular historical space or set of spiritual beliefs. Beowulf's nobility is a central act of honour to God and his own liege lord: 'Man [...] is assured that his foes are the foes also of Dryhten [The Lord], that his courage is noble in itself is also the highest loyalty: so said thyle [judge or arbiter] and clerk' ('B: M&C' 26). By defeating the monster, one is serving kin, king and God. One must fight against vice, sin and the danger of dishonor to serve the greater good.

The universal struggle and the monster as a challenge occupy a central place in Tolkien's fantastical novels. Tolkien grounds his concepts of Middle-earth firmly in the Augustinian image of the monster as epic signifier, a demonstration of spiritual meaning, but also incorporates broader ideas of the fairy-tale and the humanized complex monster. Tolkien is caught between worlds, just as the *Beowulf*-poet was. His works draw upon the epic heroics of the past, capturing the spirit of rebellion and a world that was 'less noise and more green' (*H* 14). Middle-earth holds didactic power, as a demonstration of the moral values that Tolkien held as a Catholic. This emulation of Wisdom Literature, texts that demonstrate morality and virtue, shows Tolkien's personal beliefs and his awareness of his fiction as a nexus between past and present. His fiction cannot, however, be extricated wholly from his own time or its belief-systems. While Tolkien may describe creatures like the Orcs as wholly unredeemable, they are not without pathos: he gives them an original fall from grace, as elves corrupted by Melkor. They are damaged beings, whose story is not without poignancy. He draws other monsters with complexity, like Dragons and even Spiders, making them at times engaging despite their unrepentant state. Finally, he shows how even complete corruption can be redeemed in the figure of Gollum or the Men of the Mountains. The focus on the morality of the creatures in the text draws back to the tradition of Wisdom Literature. This possibility of redemption draws on the more ambiguous characters of High Medieval Romance and the later Gothic narratives that imagined mankind itself as potentially demonstrative in the Augustinian sense; it also owes a great deal to the resolutely non-allegorical function he gives to the creations of the

*Beowulf*-poet in 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics'. As my later chapters will argue, Tolkien takes the monster of the past and brings it into a modern framework; and it is peculiarly at this point, the point at which the monstrous explodes into the heroic narrative, that for him the old and the new touch and ignite.

## Chapter Three: Tolkien's Later Influences

### 3.1 Tolkien's Reading of Late Medieval Monstrosity and 'Faerie'

Tolkien's fiction drew upon the concepts of the supernatural that had developed over the preceding centuries. From the Arthurian romances he translated to the later neo-medieval and Gothic works he claimed to disregard, Tolkien's writing was influenced by his reading. This chapter will continue to address the first two component questions identified in Chapter One: What are the sources for Tolkien's monsters? What historical baggage do these monsters carry? To do so, this chapter will analyse Tolkien's discussion of late medieval monstrosity and the interrelated concept of what he called 'Faerie.' Tolkien wrestled with 'Faerie' in his work, asserting in 'On Fairy-stories' that 'Faerie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole' ('Fairy-stories' 32). Tolkien wrote extensively on the concept of 'Faerie,' focusing on the appeal and peril of the supernatural in literature. While monsters are not normally associated with fairies, they are associated with 'Faerie': the supernatural space in fantasy literature in which creatures of all sorts can exist. Tolkien's monsters echo the complexity and ambiguity of 'Faerie', which is why it is an important concept in any discussion of Tolkien's fantastic art. This chapter will identify the literary influences on Tolkien's work from the late medieval sources in which he immersed himself as a scholar to the Renaissance and Gothic revivalist texts of later centuries.

Tolkien's critical discussions of late medieval works, particularly *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, speak extensively of the land and attributes of what he calls 'Faerie.' While he discusses the development of literary fancy that has shaped the idea of the elf and fairy in his celebrated essay 'On Fairy-stories,' his argument begins with the conceit that 'Faerie' is in some sense a real space, an actual geographical location: 'Faerie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold' ('Fairy-stories' 28). He characterizes this concept of an enchanted otherworld as central to the definition of the fairy-story. He does not refer to the denizens of Faerie as fairies, but primarily calls them elves:

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.

('Fairy-stories' 30; 32)

As this chapter discusses Tolkien's argument, I will use Tolkien's language, referring to Faerie as a territory, drawing on Tolkien's conceit and putting the concept of imagination

in spatial terms. The land of Faerie is a territory used by many authors; Tolkien uses the term to refer broadly to imagined supernatural lands within Western literature.

Tolkien's critical interest in the late medieval period focused on certain key texts, above all the fourteenth-century verse romances *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Sir Orfeo*. His translations of *Sir Gawain* and *Sir Orfeo* were published with his translation of the dream-vision *Pearl*, while his critical lectures on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the definition of fairy-stories have been collected with his work on *Beowulf*. If 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics' was a call to reconsider the point when past and present came into conflict, when 'new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited' ('B: M&C' 26), so too are his translations and analyses of the two later medieval poems. These texts are central to my argument about Tolkien's development of the monster; it is this blending of Scripture and pagan tradition that is Tolkien's contribution to the notion of the neo-medieval.

The monster and the fairy are also a point of blending in early mythologies, as apparent in *Beowulf* and late medieval romances. The supernatural, as a broad category, is dangerous throughout medieval literature and it is not until Spenser's separation of the fay and the monstrous that the two sides of the supernatural are distinguished. This fear of the supernatural is clear right up until James I's *Daemonologie*, which will be discussed later in the chapter. The monster, both as ferocious, malformed being and as beautiful fay-creature, is a figure of moral significance from early Anglo-Saxon literature to modern fantasy.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of 'monster,'<sup>30</sup> beginning with literary examples from the 1300s, draws upon late medieval fears of hybridity, overlooking the Augustinian concept of demonstration that is the source for the word: *demonstrare*, composed of *de*, of or concerning, and *monstrare*, to show or explain. As addressed in Chapter Two, Augustine discusses the presence of the monstrous races as a demonstration of God's power and plan:

The same account which is given of monstrous births in individual cases can be given of monstrous races. For God, the Creator of all, knows where and

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<sup>30</sup> Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening. The centaur, sphinx, and minotaur are examples of 'monsters' encountered by various mythical heroes; the griffin, wyvern, etc., are later heraldic forms.

3. a. A malformed animal or plant; (Med.) a fetus, neonate, or individual with a gross congenital malformation, usually of a degree incompatible with life.

4. A person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman; a monstrous example of evil, a vice, etc.

5. a. A creature of huge size. In early use freq.: a sea-monster (see sea-monster n.).

(Excerpted from 'Monster')

when each thing ought to be, or to have been created, because He sees the similarities and diversities which can contribute to the beauty of the whole. But He who cannot see the whole is offended by the deformity of the part, because he is blind to that which balances it, and to which it belongs.

(Augustine *City of God* 16:8)

Augustine does not believe the monstrous creatures are inherently a danger or threat. Deformity is a demonstration of diversity: humanity is made more beautiful by variance and abnormality, even if man cannot see it. One must trust in the wisdom of God, as His plan is beyond the understanding of man.

But supposing they are men of whom these marvels are recorded, what if God has seen fit to create some races in this way, that we might not suppose that the monstrous births which appear among ourselves are the failures of that wisdom whereby He fashions the human nature, as we speak of the failure of a less perfect workman? Accordingly, it ought not to seem absurd to us, that as in individual races there are monstrous births, so in the whole race there are monstrous races. (Augustine *City of God* 16:8)

Augustine sees all variants as part of the larger design. God demonstrates his power and plan in the creation of many races and peoples, some from the line of Adam, others from bestial origins. There is no sense of hybridity in his account, no sense that monstrosity entails the blending of usually separate components: all deformity is singular and complete because it forms part of God's design.

The etymology of 'monster' from the *Oxford English Dictionary* pays homage to that lineage from Augustine, though the definition lays greater stress on classical and later medieval uses of the word. The two different traditions of the monster appear in the definition and etymology. The etymology reads:

Anglo-Norman and Middle French *monstre*, *moustre*, French *monstre* (mid 12th cent. in Old French as *mostre* in sense 'prodigy, marvel', first half of the 13th cent. in senses 'disfigured person' and 'misshapen being', c1223 in extended sense applied to a pagan, [...] classical Latin *mōnstrum* portent, prodigy, monstrous creature, wicked person, monstrous act, atrocity; the base of *monēre* to warn. ('Monster' Etymology)

The element of demonstration is seen in the concept of portent or warning, as Augustine asserted were the functions of the monster. The early history of the word given here relates to the marvel or portent Augustine describes, but the entry also shows the shift into the idea of disfigurement in the early 1300s. The *Oxford English Dictionary* uses textual examples of this shift in meaning from 1375 onwards, starting with Chaucer's 'The

Monk's Tale.' The definition, however, also makes reference to classical, pre-Augustinian ideas of the monster, listing the 'centaur, sphinx, and minotaur' as examples of monsters 'encountered by various mythical heroes.' Augustine does not consider monsters to be hybrid beings: a monster is designed by God in the form it takes; thus, monsters in Augustine's definition possess none of the elements of blending of classical monsters. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition overlooks the suggestion that monsters *demonstrate* God's plan for mankind and the world and focuses on the classical definition, as quoted in Chapter One. In classical use, monster is a term that describes hybrid characters of great size or ferocity; it gradually became a descriptor of a 'person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman' ('Monster' 4). This increasing emphasis on intent shows a development of the monster as a character with motivations.

In the later medieval period, the definition of the monster drew upon classical usage, in which hybridity and ferocity were key. While Augustinian concepts of demonstrative warning faded from use, the classical image of the monster returned. The term acquired connotations of cruelty, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in the early 1500s, around the time when the Scottish poet Robert Henryson wrote his poem *Orpheus and Eurydice*. The idea that a character could be monstrous purely for cruelty is reinforced by later writers like Shakespeare. Meanwhile the meaning of the word was also expanding to incorporate 'something extraordinary or unnatural; an amazing event or occurrence; a prodigy, a marvel' ('Monster' 2), as in John Wycliffe's 1384 translation of The Bible.<sup>31</sup> The word, beginning as a portent or sign, maintained its connotations of wonder only into the early eighteenth century before losing them altogether; the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides no further examples of this usage after Anthony Shaftesbury's *Soliloquy* in 1710. The sense of the marvelous so central to Augustine's definition of the word had faded from use by the time Tolkien wrote his lecture on *Beowulf*, overtaken by the traits of monstrosity more familiar to the modern reader.

These modern meanings were present in the Middle Ages alongside the less familiar meanings we have been looking at. The *Oxford English Dictionary* shows the word being used in the 1400s to mean, '[a] malformed animal or plant; (Med.) a fetus, neonate, or individual with a gross congenital malformation, usually of a degree incompatible with life' ('Monster' 3). In 1425, John Mandeville's *Mandeville's Travels* provides a clear instance of this definition: '[a] monstre [Fr. *monstre*] is a þing difformed aȝen kynde both of man or of best' ('Monster' 3). It is in 1522, in Douglas' translation of

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<sup>31</sup> "Alle men preyeden, the monstres [L. *monstra*] or wondres,..for to be togidre turned in to good." 2 Macc. v. 4' ('Monster')



Virgil's *Aeneid*, that the sense of unusual size is added to the idea of monstrosity: 'This fatale monstre [*sc.* the Trojan horse] clam our the wallis then' ('Monster' 5). Here the monstrosity of the horse presumably springs from its gigantism rather than its deformity. The ideas of malformation and grotesquely hypertrophied size are central to our modern understanding of 'monster', but were not always part of the medieval definition. It is interesting to note that Tolkien has few hybrid creatures in Middle-earth, but figures of abnormal size or physical deformity appear often. The Orcs 'by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved' (*S* 47), as a result of torture at the hands of Melkor. Tolkien, despite his familiarity with Augustine's or even Bernard's definitions of the monster, tends to draw his definition from the more modern usages, relating to the malformity and grotesque shape that modern readers would recognize as monstrous. He does not present attractive monsters, as appear in *Gawain* and *Orfeo*, though he does create heroic races that are beautiful and perilous.

The late medieval texts on which Tolkien focused, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Sir Orfeo*, appear to reflect a conflation of certain aspects of the monstrous with other forms of the supernatural, namely the fairy. The magic of Faerie presents the same threat of danger and of strangeness – of a morality entirely distinct from that of conventional human cultures, and therefore perilous because not understood – that was manifest in Grendel and the Dragon. While Grendel may have wandered the moors with other deformed and aggressive creatures, the kin of Cain from whom ogres and elves too sprung (*Beowulf* 111-3), in *Sir Gawain* the Elf-figure has replaced the cannibalistic fiend as a threat to the civilized hall. The physical beauty and implied threat of the Green Knight as a figure from Faerie bursts into the banquet of King Arthur much as Grendel bursts into Heorot, and he perfectly encapsulates the innate ambiguity of Faerie, as his appearance is at once terrifying and appealing (*Gawain* 141-5).

Katherine Briggs is the foremost modern scholar<sup>32</sup> of the fairy in its various forms. Briggs's *Encyclopedia of Fairies* (1976), which can be considered a comprehensive summary of her life's work, provides a catalogue of mythic figures, giving definitions and folkloric context, drawing extensively on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholarship that sought to catalogue the folklore of the British Isles. While not always citing specific literary sources, she places the beings in their historical frame, and her entry for monster is

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<sup>32</sup> Her published works, beginning with *The Personnel of Fairyland* in 1955, discuss and catalogue the history of British folklore and its supernatural figures, achieving such authoritative status that the Folklore Society (of which she was president) named an award in her honour: The Katharine Briggs Folklore Award 'to encourage the study of folklore, to help improve the standard of folklore publications in Britain and Ireland, to establish the Folklore Society as an arbiter of excellence' (*Folklore Society*).

particularly interesting in that it points to the blending of different forms of the supernatural in the British fairy tradition:

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. (Briggs 301-3, capitalization in original)

It is clear that Briggs, writing soon after Tolkien's death in 1973, is interested in the historical development of the fairy. Moreover, she links the presentation of tales of monsters with the concepts of what Tolkien would call Faerie, looking at the idea of monstrosity as a subset of the larger group of magical beings. The monster becomes part of the supernatural: no longer a creature of God's design, but rather an antithesis to God and the Church. The monster represents another understanding of the appropriate way to behave in any given situation, tapping into desires and impulses on which the Church had turned its back.

Tolkien describes his own understanding of 'Faerie' in his 1939 lecture 'On Fairy-stories.' While speaking of an imagined narrative territory, Tolkien engages in the conceit of describing Faerie as a real space: 'a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold' ('Fairy-stories' 27). Tolkien does not define the nature of the peril; instead, it is the ambiguity of the space, the lack of rules and guidelines that make Faerie dangerous. There is an innate threat, but the form of threat is never stated. Yet the paths can be trod carefully: Tolkien writes in his critical work of the imagined visitor who may explore Faerie and still return home. The concept of a dangerous land as a literary conceit runs throughout Tolkien's critical and fictional works: it is through the dangers of travel that the protagonist is challenged and changed. The power of Faerie, its unspoken rules, its beauty and peril, are mechanisms of education. Yet, Tolkien asserts that Faerie is a land 'full of wonder but not of information' ('Fairy-stories' 27). This statement would appear to contradict his assertion in his 1953 lecture entitled 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' that '[t]here is indeed no better medium for moral teaching than the good fairy-story (by which I mean a real deep-rooted tale, told as a tale, and not a thinly disguised moral allegory)' ('Gawain' 73). Fairy-stories and the realm of Faerie are educational, but not informational. The power is in the experience of Secondary Belief which Tolkien

spends the rest of his 1939 'On Fairy-stories' lecture discussing. One learns through the embrace of Fantasy and the experience of Enchantment in a narrative space.

This conception of Faerie as a territory appears in *Smith of Wootton Major*, in which the titular character enacts what Tolkien sets up at the beginning of 'On Fairy-stories:' the careful traveller experiencing the wonders of Faerie. Tolkien's description of the imagined territory of Faerie shows his investment in the impossible realm.

At last [Smith] found a road [...] into the Vale of Evermorn where the green surpasses the green of the meads of Outer Faery as they surpass ours in springtime. There the air is so lucid that eyes can see the red tongues of birds as they sing on the trees [...] As he set foot upon the grass of the Vale he heard elven voices singing, and on a lawn beside a river bright with lilies he came upon many maidens dancing. The speed and grace and the ever-changing modes of their movements enchanted him. (*Smith* 30-1)

He echoes *Sir Orfeo* in his description of a perfect green-space. His diverse texts, including those not set in the realm of Middle-earth, exist in the imagined space of Faerie. He conflates the idea of the fairy-tale and the space of Faerie in his lecture and his fiction. As such, his readings of ancient texts which play with the ideas of the fay and Faerie also look for the didactic element. As he argued, the fairy-tale was the ideal medium for moral teachings, he sees the didactic in many Faerie texts. His way of identifying the moral message and the key challenge is through his reading of the supernatural: the monster.

While *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* lacks a straightforward monster, since the Green Knight is attractive as well as perilous, it does have a supernatural figure that raises questions of morality and honour. Tolkien engages with this complexity in his critical introduction to the poem:

all this care in formal construction serves also to make the tale a better vehicle of the 'moral' which the author has imposed on his antique material. He has re-drawn according to his own faith his ideal of knighthood, making it Christian knighthood, showing that the grace and beauty of its courtesy (which he admires) derive from the Divine generosity and grace, Heavenly Courtesy. ('Introduction' 5)

Tolkien's description of the work centres on the importance of the Christian context for the interpretation of the poem. Tolkien argued for the supernatural as a reflection of contemporary morality or as a mechanism of trial for the protagonist: 'The "Faerie" may with its strangeness and peril enlarge the adventure, making the test more tense and potent, but Gawain is presented as a credible, living person' ('Introduction' 6). He once again focuses his critical reading on the counterpoint of ancient and contemporary, as his reading

of the text echoes his approach to *Beowulf*: ‘it is in *Beowulf* that a poet has devoted a whole poem to the theme [of inevitable defeat], and has drawn the struggle in different proportions’ (*B: M&C* 18). His consideration of the supernatural text remained focused on the incorporation of old and new.

Tolkien’s lecture on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* addresses the work of a poet who is blending Celtic myth, French fable and English poetry in a narrative that focuses on temptation and redemption. The poet speaks about chivalry and courtesy, turning to the chivalric code of the Round Table to demonstrate these virtues, particularly virtues under threat. Gawain must struggle with his conscience: his morality versus his mortality. The crisis Gawain experiences is precipitated by the monster-figure: the Green Knight. As such, the context for this struggle is coloured with the complexities of Faerie:

Behind our poem stalk the figures of elder myth, and through the lines are heard the echoes of ancient cults, beliefs and symbols remote from the consciousness of an educated moralist (but also a poet) of the late fourteenth century. His story is not *about* those old things, but it receives part of its life, its vividness, its tension from them. [...] As the author of *Sir Gawain*, it would seem, perceived; or felt instinctively, rather than consciously: for being a man of the fourteenth century, a serious, didactic, encyclopaedic, not to say pedantic century, he inherited “faerie”, rather than turned deliberately to it. (Tolkien ‘Gawain’ 73, italics in original)

Tolkien points to knowledge of Faerie as being inherent to the medieval romance tradition, not a creative intervention by the poet. The beheading challenge, apparent in texts like *Fled Bricrend*, *Le Livre de Caradoc*, *Hunbaut* and *Dui Crone* among others, must be set in a supernatural context to make sense of the survival of the challenger; yet, the contest is not about the Green Knight’s survival: it is about Gawain’s promise. The miraculous ability to survive decapitation takes up little time in the poem and less in Tolkien’s analysis. The Knight’s supernatural abilities are merely a mechanism by which the challenge of Gawain can be played out: the antagonist’s magic enables the poet to set the stakes higher than a normal duel. ‘It is one of the properties of Fairy Story thus to enlarge the scene and the actors; or rather it is one of the properties that are distilled by literary alchemy when old deep-rooted stories are rehandled by a real poet with an imagination of his own’ (Tolkien ‘Gawain’ 83). The supernatural amplifies the struggle of conscience and the trial Gawain faces. Once again, Tolkien focuses his critical eye on a text that incorporates old and new beliefs, the pagan and the Christian, to demonstrate the hero’s greatness against insurmountable foes. The challenge of the impossible opponent also appears in *Sir Orfeo*. Tolkien’s translation, published first in 1944 in an unattributed

booklet, was based on his own metrical version of the original text. The text of *Sir Orfeo* demonstrates similar traits to other works he studied, as it updates a pagan story in a Christian context; however, he never wrote introductory material or critical work on the text of *Sir Orfeo*.

The context for *Sir Orfeo* changes, bringing the original story of Orphic disaster into a fairy-tale space. By changing the context, the story has a new possible ending: death is no longer the only result. There is instead a third way: Faerie. Like Gawain, Orfeo's life is interrupted by the sudden incursion of supernatural forces. Instead of interrupting a Christmas Feast, the fairies appear in Heurodis' dream and demand that she come with them to Faerie. Orfeo attempts to stand against the power of the fairies, but is overwhelmed in an instant: while ten hundred men stand guard around Heurodis, 'amiddes hem ful right / The quen was oway y-twight, / With fairi forth y-nome. / Men wist never wher sche was bicombe.' [from midst of that array / the queen was sudden snatched away; / by magic was she from them caught, / and none knew whither she was brought] (*Orfeo* 191-4). The fairies display the same moral ambiguity we have already noted in *Sir Gawain*; they represent a very real threat, yet Heurodis exclaims that she 'no seighe never yete bifore / So fair creatours y-core' [I saw not ever anywhere / a folk so peerless and so fair] (*Orfeo* 147-8), while the fairies tell her: 'Whar thou be, thou worst y-fet, / And totore thine limes al / That nothing help the no schal' [where'er thou be, we shall thee take, / and all thy limbs shall rend and tear / no aid of man shall help thee there] (*Orfeo* 170-3). The world of 'Faerie' interrupts the world of man as a beautiful, powerful threat; the fay-figure is the monster that disrupts the Christian understanding of honour in the world of the poem.

### 3.2. The Renaissance Monster

The early Renaissance concept of the monster maintains the blending of the fairy and the monster that we have observed in the late medieval romances. The early modern focus on the moral role of Faerie or the Monstrous is countered in James I's treatise *Daemonologie* (1597). James suggests that the fairy is a product of a superstitious Catholic culture; it has no moral role other than to demonstrate the kinds of absurdities Catholicism encourages people to believe. This idea appears widespread in the Reformation, most clearly expressed in the famous early seventeenth century poem by William Cobbett, 'Farewell Rewards and Fairies'. James I offers an imagined dialogue between two characters with Greek names, Philomathes (the lover of knowledge) and Epistemon (intelligent, experienced, one with expert knowledge), who are speaking about the spiritual dangers of the supernatural. Epistemon is instructing Philomathes about how to avoid

falling into ‘sortes of illusiones that was rifest in the time of *Papistris*’ (James I 74).

*Daemonologie* shows the development of the fear and disbelief in ritual and superstition that had begun with the Catholic community of the Lollards in their Twelve Conclusions in 1395, and had developed through early Protestantism (Thomas). Texts like Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* in 1584 associated the Catholic Mass with sorcery, as the fear of the supernatural and the rejection of Catholic belief became more widespread.

*Daemonologie* deals with many elements of the supernatural, like witches, fairies and demons, but the message remains consistent: belief in such things is evil. It is a text against the kinds of superstition encouraged by the Church of Rome, decrying the creatures and tales Briggs catalogues centuries later in her *Encyclopedia*. Though Fairies are not described as actually performing acts of evil, the mere fact that they are magical makes them devils and deceivers of mankind. James I’s attack on Witches and Fairies is a means of questioning the superstition and false folk-beliefs of the past, pointing constantly to the illusions which co-existed and are cultivated by the Roman Catholic Church in England. The text demonstrates a fear, not only of the supernatural creatures, but also of the belief system that enabled such superstition. His introduction establishes the fear he feels:

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 (moued of conscience) to preasse / thereby, so farre as I can, to resolute the doubting harts of many; (James I xi)

James I’s text shows his fear of the supernatural as a social influence; his denials of the fay reinforce its power. So, while the discourse tries to present a tone of logic and reason in the face of fancies, it is also a politically and religiously motivated argument against the Catholic presence in England.

It would appear from *Daemonologie* that the monster and fairy were in the Renaissance conflated as wicked, shifting the role of the monster-character from being a demonstration sent by God to becoming a demonic or dangerous figure undermining God’s power over the faithful. The complication in reading these characters is the distinction between folk belief versus literary creation: scholars like Katherine Briggs (1976), or those who long predated Tolkien, like Thomas Keightley (1828), discuss the formulation of Faerie through popular beliefs: folklore. While Keightley discusses the development of the

term Faerie,<sup>33</sup> his analytical focus remains on the creatures and their cultural origins, not on the narratives in which they appear. The beliefs of the time appear in both the folklore and the literature; as Tolkien was a literary scholar, this thesis will remain grounded in the literary materials, and the two exemplary figures that demonstrate different ways in which the monster is conceptualized in the Renaissance: Spenser's allegorical Monster Error, and Shakespeare's Caliban.

It is in Spenser's poem that we see a clearly articulated division of fay and monster. While late medieval texts describe fay characters as ambiguous, both beautiful and threatening, Renaissance texts like Spenser's associate the positive traits with the fay and negative traits with the monstrous. The supernatural continues to have moral significance, though rather than the supernatural being a universal threat, as James I argues, the supernatural world possesses both good and evil. This trend continues through subsequent literature, including Tolkien's Middle-earth.

Spenser's Monster Error in the first book of *The Faerie Queene* (1590) is an allegorical being: from her name to her enwrapping of men in her serpentine lengths. She is constructed as a hybrid, 'Halfe like a serpent horribly displade, / But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine / Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdain' (Spenser Stanza 14). The battle between the Red Cross Knight and Error is violent and desperate, as she attacks him for bringing light into her den, 'for light she hated as the deadly bale, / Ay wont in desert darknesse to remaine, / Where plaine none might her see, nor she see any plaine' (Spenser Stanza 16). She spits poison at him, and vomits books, papers and blind frogs. Error is a representation of the Catholic Church, an allegorical figure of the dangers of being misled by an institution. She tries to remain concealed, fearing exposure in the light. She spews papers and pestilence, expelling the corruption of the Church. She is horrific and is defeated in the same way as Grendel's mother: by beheading. The Red Cross Knight must overcome the fear of shame as he strikes out:

Halfe furious vnto his foe he came,  
 Resolv'd in minde all suddenly to win,  
 Or soone to lose, before he once would lin;  
 And stroke at her with more than manly force,  
 That from her body full of filthie sin  
 He raft her hatefull head without remorse;  
 A streame of cole black bloud forth gushed from her corse. (Stanza 24)

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<sup>33</sup> 'Faerie next came, to signify the country of the Fays. Analogy also was here aiding; for as a Nonnerie was a place inhabited by Nonnes, a Jewerie a place inhabited by Jews, so a Faerie was naturally a place inhabited by Fays' (Keightley 14).

Una describes Error as '[a] monster vile, whom God and man does hate' and Error is defeated by a Patron of Holiness (Stanza 13), whom she attacks out of her fear of light. The religious allegory of the Protestant Knight striking and killing Error, a representation of the Catholic Church, is important to Spenser's distinctions between the elf and monster figures. The Red Cross Knight is called the 'valiant Elfe' (Stanza 17), who is seeking to earn the grace of the greatest Gloriana: 'Glorious Queene of Faerie lond' (Stanza 13). Those who have rejected the blind belief in superstition and false teachings can seek the grace of Gloriana. Spenser's inclusion of the magical land of Faerie invokes the image of power and royalty found commonly in late medieval romances like *Sir Gawain* and *Sir Orfeo*, yet he no longer conflates the monstrous and fay as the late medieval poems did. He counters James I's assertion that all supernatural figures are evil, but he does so in a rather obvious allegory. There is no element of folk belief in Spenser's text; he uses the elf as a figure of supernatural strength and beauty to explore man's struggle to embody virtues such as holiness, temperance or chastity.

In the 1589 letter to Raleigh in which he lays out his intentions, Spenser describes his use of Faerie as allegorical, claiming that Faerie here represents virtue, rather than the dangerous superstitions with which James I associates it:

Sir knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled the Faery Queene, being a continued Allegory, or darke conceit, I haue thought good aswell for auoyding of gealous opinions and misco[n]structions, as also for your better light in reading thereof, (being so by you commanded) to discouer vnto you the general intention and meaning, which in the whole course thereof I haue fashioned, without expressing of any particular purposes or by accidents therein occasioned. [...] In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land.  
(‘Letter’)

Spenser associates glory and grace with his monarch and dedicates his narrative to '[t]he most high, mightie and magnificent Empresse renowned for pietie, vertue, and all gracious government Elizabeth by the grace of God Queene of England Fraunce and Ireland and of Virginia, defendour of the faith' ('Introduction'). His letter establishes his separation from James I's fears of the supernatural: Faerie is positive. Published seven years before *Daemonologie*, Spenser asserts that fairyland is a reflection of England, and its mortal nobility and goodness, as he states in his letter to Raleigh. Elizabeth is allegorically associated with the wonders of fairyland, which Spenser uses as an imaginative realm to



tell of the many virtues to which knights and ladies may aspire. Spenser here is embracing allegory, which Tolkien abhors, as he is drawing in the supernatural characters in a simple one-to-one relationship. He declares his allegory from the outset, setting his monsters, the dangers of the Catholic Church and its corruption, against the virtuous knights and elves of England. Spenser is not using the supernatural characters to invoke a sense of the past; he does not reference Arthurian texts or medieval conceptions of the fairy in his narrative. He instead uses the supernatural characters as means to change the context of the story. *The Faerie Queene* is not a fairy-story in Tolkien's definition; it is a story about fairies. Spenser forever changes the way the fairy is read, but not through a blending of the past and present; he instead defines the fairy as a heroic and powerful figure, isolated from its historical context.

Despite the contrast James I drew between Papist superstition and modern Protestant reason, there was still an active folk-belief in the sixteenth century. As Minor White Latham, a contemporary of Tolkien, pointed out in *The Elizabethan Fairies: The Fairies of Folklore and the Fairies of Shakespeare* (1930),<sup>34</sup> the early modern fairy was widely perceived as a genuine, visible creature:

If it was understood in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the fairies were the contemporary fairies of tradition and of the English folk, it was a matter of common belief that they were real and actual beings. Not only were they believed to exist but they were known to appear in visible and material form, or, as Robert Kirk stated in 1691, they were "...no Nonentities or Phantasms, Creatures proceeding from ane affrighted Aprehensione, confused or crazed Sense, but Realities, appearing to a stable Man in his awaking Sense and enduring a rational Tryall of their Being." (Latham 28-9)

The origin and purpose of fairies is much debated during the Renaissance, yet Latham attempts to make absolute statements about the moral and spiritual state of the mythic creatures. While Latham initially describes the belief in fairies as belonging 'to the category of wicked spirits' (33), he then goes on to explain how there were those who questioned the attribution of wickedness to all fairies:

The degree of the fairies' wickedness and the extent of their infernal connections were never definitely settled, but varied with the circumstances,

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<sup>34</sup> Despite their work as contemporary scholars, there is no mention of Latham in Tolkien's letters or in any of the appendixes in *The Lord of the Rings* or the *History of Middle-earth*. It does not appear that Tolkien was familiar with Latham's work; at the very least, he did not address Latham's work in his own writings. As Latham worked with Fairy mythology in Renaissance writing, his work does not appear to cross Tolkien's, nor do their sources.

as witchcraft, with which they were connected or with the belief and superstition of the scholar who wrote concerning them. In spite of the fact that they were known to belong to the rank of evil spirits and devils, both in folk tales and in treatises of scholars, a curious uncertainty is evidenced in regard to the exact nature of the fairies' wickedness, and, in some cases, a perceptible reluctance to condemn them utterly or to brand them irretrievably with the stigma of infernal spirits, possibly because of their notorious generosity and their habits of bestowing good fortune and rich gifts on their favorites. (36-7)

Latham thus argues for the ambiguity of these figures in Renaissance writings, which were publicly termed wicked or evil, but yet were often excused for less-than-theological reasons. The use of fairies in the masques and dramas exemplifies a positive interpretation of these beings, as the fairy often represents sovereignty, grace, glory and beauty, rather than wickedness and evil: the view of them, which according to Latham was the 'one point only' on which there was 'complete agreement' (33). His contradiction is obvious, as he himself has argued for their positive traits before declaring that there is complete agreement that fairies are evil. Even for critics, the ambiguity of the fairy's role is inherent.

Fairies are not depicted consistently as good or evil, clearly demonic or clearly courteous. This difficulty is identified in Matthew Woodcock's *Renaissance Elf Fashioning*:

Perhaps the most frequently made (and most problematic) ramification is between the fairy found in literary texts and the 'real' fairy of popular tradition or belief. In numerous studies born out of an obsession with the fairies of Shakespeare, the nineteenth-century writers and folklorists were keen to stress the extent to which the "genius" of Shakespeare has ameliorated the more sinister, often horrific image of fairy found in popular belief, and to take care to illustrate the kind of sources from which his fairies were constructed. At the same time, there is the repeated sentiment that Shakespeare has provided us with the most accurate realization of fairy belief. In the folklorist treatises and dissertations there is certainly a consensus that Shakespeare constructed the most enduring representation of fairy to come out of the sixteenth century. (13)

While texts like James I's *Daemonologie* warned against belief in the supernatural, Shakespeare wrote plays with endearing supernatural characters and humorous elements, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. He incorporated folk-belief, but made

it attractive, either by viewing it through the lens of distant times or placing it at a geographical distance, in ancient Greece or an unnamed Mediterranean island.

Shakespeare's incorporation of otherworldly elements appears in both his earlier and later works. Following Spenser's separation of the fairy and monster, Shakespeare creates a space where the fairy is a supernatural threat, but not a monstrous one. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the fairies manipulate the human protagonists, creating the conflict and driving the plot. They remain safely within the woods through most of the play, only entering the civilized world at night to place a blessing upon the happy couples:

Now, until the break of day,  
Through this house each fairy stray.  
To the best bride-bed will we,  
Which by us shall blessed be; [...]  
Through this palace, with sweet peace;  
And the owner of it blest  
Ever shall in safety rest.  
Trip away; make no stay;

Meet me all by break of day. (Shakespeare *Dream* V.i.396-9; 413-7)

The fairies are arranged in a mirror-court, like in *Sir Orfeo*, with King Oberon and Queen Titania fighting not only over a changeling child, but over their previous indiscretions with Hypolyta and Theseus. As Oberon insists, 'How canst thou thus for shame, Titania, / Glance at my credit with Hippolyta, / Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?' (Shakespeare *Dream* II.i.74-6). The fairy and human courts are not just reflected but intermingled. Shakespeare blends native folkloric figures, like Robin Goodfellow and the Fairy King and Queen, with classical characters: Hippolyta, Theseus, the moon-goddess Titania (Diana) and others. His vision of the fairy-figures shows they are not dangerous, as even Bottom is returned to his original state after being transformed into a courteous monster by Robin and then wooed by Titania. As the only hybrid-monster in the play, Bottom provides stark contrast to the audience's expectations; he may appear an egotistical and intolerable figure at the beginning of the play, but his innate courtesy and gentility throughout the play contradicts the definitions of the monster that incorporate cruelty or savagery. He is instead comically obsequious in his kindness 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. (Shakespeare *Dream*  
IV.i.10-7)

The fairies, and even the monster, are appealing to the audience, as engineers of the night's entertainment mentioned in the title. The fairies of the play provide the action, the excitement and also create much of the comedy in Shakespeare's play.

Shakespeare again invokes folk-belief in *The Tempest*, which focuses on magic, spirits and the abused and abusive monster Caliban. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare places the action of the play on an isolated island, far from civilization. Magic is a central component in the play, and seems to be amoral in its operations, the instrument of whoever takes control of it. Magic here is also temporary and localized. Prospero does not bring his magic back to Milan: not just because it is morally reprehensible, but because he has made a promise to himself. He gives up his magic as a form of payment for the return of 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. (Shakespeare *Tempest* V.i.50-7)

In this way, the magical and fairy elements are placed in a safe, isolated space, just as they were in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The central fairy-figure of the play, Ariel, is a frightening creature, yet he exists under human control. While Ariel is able to control weather, transform his physical shape and become invisible, create spectral visions and summon musicians, he is still under Prospero's authority. Ariel should be a frightening figure, yet he is cowed and controlled. The presentation of the limited fairy shows the diminished nature of the fairy in the play; both Ariel and Caliban are presentations of the supernatural, yet in lessened forms. The unknown world of magic and superstition can be controlled by the rational actions and careful study of man. The supernatural is not threatening or dangerous, as James I asserted; it is, instead, within man's influence. Yet, at the end of the play, both forms of the supernatural are set free: both the monster and the fay are released from Prospero's authority. And while Ariel's story is given a clear ending, as he is set free, Shakespeare leaves Caliban's story as a loose thread at the end of *The Tempest*.

Caliban is a monstrous figure from late in Shakespeare's career that has attracted considerable critical interest. Caliban has been read both as monster and island native, either a supernatural or colonized character. Caliban is clearly humanoid in his shape, but carries with him deformity and difference: he is called monster by the jester and butler, and is, according to Prospero, a 'lying slave' and 'hagseed' (Shakespeare *Tempest* I.ii.347; I.ii.368). Caliban is described by Trinculo as a questionable being, not clearly human, animal or a fusion of both: 'a man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish, he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fishlike smell; a kind of not-the-newest Poor John. A strange fish. [...] this is no fish, but an islander, that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt' (*Tempest* II.ii.25-7; 35-7). Caliban is exotic; Stephano and Trinculo call him a monster and describe him as a hybrid, while Ariel says that Caliban is 'not honoured with / A human shape' (*Tempest* I.ii.285-6). His form is attributed to his moral status and origin: he is deemed to be the child of an evil mother, and therefore misshapen, as Prospero claims: 'got by the devil himself / upon thy wicked dam' (*Tempest* I.ii.322-3). 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 dreams and the music of the island (*Tempest* III.i.137-45). Shakespeare creates a figure that can be read as monstrous, malicious and evil, or else abused and misunderstood. The complexity of the monster has made him appealing for scholars and fellow writers, just as Tolkien's monsters have greater appeal due to their complexity and placement at the nexus of history and literature.

Shakespeare's monsters show a clear delineation from the earlier forms we have seen in the early and late medieval periods. While *Beowulf* conflates the supernatural, having Grendel coexist with elves and giants, the Green Knight is both fairy and monster. Once Spenser shows the separation between the monstrous and the fay, the characteristics of the negative and positive forms of the supernatural become more articulated. Shakespeare builds on this separation, but also redeems the monster. It is this complexity that Tolkien draws on for his sympathetic characters: Gollum can be read as a cross between the traits of Grendel and Caliban. While the great majority of Tolkien's literary influences in *The Lord of the Rings* are easily traced to Anglo-Saxon and Norse sources, Middle-earth also reflects the influence of the Gothic revival which captured the imagination of eighteenth-century and later British audiences. The idea of the monster was constantly in flux, appearing in the form of supernatural antagonists, grotesque beings or demonstrations of vice or hybridity. Tolkien does not actively reference later works, drawing his creatures and settings from the early tales he studied; yet his fiction, as an

ignition of medieval and modern values, also reflects the literary predecessors of the Renaissance and Neo-Gothic period.

### 3.3 The Restoration Monster

The Restoration maintains elements of the medieval, still drawing on the monster demonstrating vice and sin; yet, the sense of pathos found in Shakespeare's Caliban continues on into another iconic figure: Satan. In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton makes a tragic figure out of the personification of evil. Whether deliberately or inadvertently, Milton carries on the development of sympathetic ambiguity we have witnessed in Shakespeare's Caliban. Satan, the most irredeemable figure in the Christian tradition, is turned into an epic hero: journeying on an insurmountable task, facing his weakness and falling victim to his own hubris. He is an unrepentant traitor, leading a rebellion, but the narrator introduces us to Satan as he sees himself: a fallen soldier striking out against a tyrannous ruler. As John Carey points out in 'Milton's Satan:'

Milton's effort to encapsulate evil in Satan was not successful. That is, those readers who have left their reactions on record have seldom been able to regard Satan as a depiction of pure evil, and some of the most distinguished have claimed that he is superior in character to Milton's God. It is sometimes supposed that critical support for Satan began with the Romantics, but this is not so. Sharrock [...] has shown that the notion of Satan as the true hero of Milton's epic goes back to Dryden and was commonplace of eighteenth-century literary opinion in both France and England. (161)

So, Satan has been an appealing character for centuries, despite being the embodiment of corruption. Milton was not writing a revision of Christian beliefs that would put Satan in the right; he was writing a text that would give evil depth and pathos, demonstrating the power of temptation and a seemingly just cause. While the reader cannot side with Satan by the close of the poem, his representation as a heroic figure in the early books of the poem is tremendously effective.

The incorporation of sadness and suffering in the most monstrous characters in the poem is at its most poignant in Book Two, where the reader is introduced to Sin, child of Satan, and their progeny Death:

Before the Gates there sat  
On either side a formidable shape;  
The one seem'd Woman to the waste, and fair,  
But ended foul in many a scaly fould

Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd  
 With mortal sting: about her middle round  
 A cry of Hell Hounds never ceasing bark'd  
 With wide *Cerberian* mouths full loud, and rung  
 A hideous Peal: yet, when they list, would creep,  
 If aught disturb'd thir noyse, into her womb,  
 And kennel there, yet there still bark'd and howl'd,  
 Within unseen. (Milton II.648-59)

A distorted hybrid, Sin is the picture of monstrosity by any era's definition; she is a clear echo of the morally allegorical Monster Error. She is in perpetual suffering: raped by her son, used as a kennel by her offspring. Despite the darkness and brutality of this passage, there is an element of sympathy: she remains dedicated to her beloved, her creator, despite their fall. She trusts him to save her, even though her torturous state is the outcome of his pride:

thou wilt bring me soon  
 To that new world of light and bliss, among  
 The Gods who live at ease, where I shall Reign  
 At thy right hand voluptuous, as beseems  
 thy daughter and thy darling, without end. (Milton II.866-70)

She is the personification of wrongdoing, of isolating oneself from God,<sup>35</sup> and yet she is perpetually suffering for that. So, Milton presents figures that are monstrous, yet at least in part sympathetic. While she identifies her own sin, pointing to her incestuous relationship with Satan, she is tortured for her failings. Milton is, like Shakespeare, a defining writer of his age, developing characters that are resonant: Satan may not be a representative figure of the age, but he is the monster-character whose ambiguity – as Carey points out – has resounded long past Milton's time. The echoing of this character-type demonstrates its importance moving from the Restoration into the Romantic period. It is the sense of pathos that carries most strongly into the Romantic period and the vision of the Gothic monster.

The strong connection of monstrosity to a religious literary text sets the stage for Tolkien's creation centuries later, though Tolkien had no scholarly or religious interest in Milton. Milton's project to reframe the narrative of the Garden of Eden in the heroic epic form foregrounds Tolkien's goal: creating Middle-earth as a blending of ancient myth and modern belief. While not engaging with fairy-figures in his epic work, Milton drawing in the allusion to *The Faerie Queene* shows that Milton's formation of these monsters drew

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<sup>35</sup> 'An act which is regarded as a transgression of the divine law and an offence against God; a violation (esp. wilful or deliberate) of some religious or moral principle' ('Sin')

from past traditions. Yet, as each iconic writer before him, Milton takes the earlier materials and creates something new. His formation of Satan as a Romantic heroic figure builds on Shakespeare's sympathetic figure Caliban, while still demanding that the reader recognize the character's inherent evil. This simultaneous appeal and revulsion appears in Tolkien's construction of the Orcs, and also sets the tone for a key character of the Gothic age: Frankenstein's monster.

### 3.4 The Gothic Monster

The Gothic revival saw widespread popularization of what were presented as the literary modes and social values of the early Germanic tribes who stood against the Roman Empire. As David Punter explains in his introduction to *The Literature of Terror*, Gothic as a term can be read in many different ways, which can lead to confusion:

A particular attitude towards the recapture of history; a particular kind of literary style; a version of self-conscious un-realism; a mode of revealing the unconscious; connections with the primitive, the barbaric, the tabooed – all of these meanings have attached themselves in one way or another to the idea of Gothic fiction [...] The original meaning, not unnaturally, was literally “to do with the Goths”, or with the barbarian northern tribes who played so somewhat unfairly reviled a part in the collapse of the Roman empire, although even this apparently literal meaning was less simple than it appears, because the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writers who used the term in this sense had very little idea of who the Goths were or what they were like. (4)

The original idea of the Gothic was a rejection of the ‘neoclassical realistic and didactic aesthetic rules’ (Botting 1), a challenge to the Augustan values and principles that had preceded the Romantic period. The Gothic Revival was named for the Goths and the sense of rebellion they were thought to represent: barbaric figures standing opposed to the rigid conventions of the Roman Empire. While the historically inaccurate representation of rebellion was associated with the Gothic tribes, much of the focus on experience and emotion was tied to Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime. The sublime is a pleasure derived from terror and the extreme emotions invoked by the overwhelming or incomprehensible. Burke's treatise on the sublime and the beautiful, published in 1757, is an aesthetic exploration of artistic pleasure, in which he seeks to distinguish between the two:

They are indeed ideas of a different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure; and however they may vary afterwards from the direct



nature of their causes, yet these causes keep up an eternal distinction between them, a distinction never to be forgotten by any whose business it is to affect the passions. [...] If the qualities of the sublime and beautiful are sometimes found united, does this prove, that they are the same, does it prove, that they are any way allied, does it prove even that they are not opposite and contradictory? Black and white may soften, may blend, but they are not therefore the same. (Burke 124-5)

Burke's discussion of the pleasure that can result from horror is evidently supported by the appeal of horror and the macabre in Gothic Revival texts. This fascination with the sublime is manifest in literature.

The Gothic period sees a considerable increase in the number of representations of the human monster. Writers like Horace Walpole, William Godwin and Mary Shelley construct characters whose actions are monstrous while their bodies are human. The use of Gothic settings or time frames places the texts in imagined territory while exploring the limits of human behaviour. The *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of monster incorporates size, hybridity and deformity; yet the type of monster seen most often in the Gothic text is '[a] person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman; a monstrous example of evil, a vice' ('Monster' 4). The antagonists may be human, but they are still monsters.

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* was originally published as a literary artifact that Walpole discovered and translated for publication. In declaring *Otranto* to be a discovery, Walpole claimed historical authenticity for his creative work and distanced himself from its production. In the preface to the first edition, he asserts from the outset that the text was not his own: 'The following work was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. How much sooner it was written does not appear' ('First Edition' 17). But the 'favourable manner in which this little piece ha[d] been received by the public' led Walpole to feel obliged to reveal himself ('Second Edition' 21), not as translator, but author. In his preface to the second edition, he states:

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been damned up, by a strict adherence to common life. [...] The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the

boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions. ('Second Edition' 21)

Walpole's text is both a Gothic creation and a critique of the ancient texts, as he sought to maintain and emulate true nature in his formation of the characters. He identifies his craving to 'blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern' (21). His blending is quite narrow, but still seeks to bring the ideas of the past into a modern framework. He attempts to create an authentic text, as his introduction claims it to be a found document.

Gothic texts like *The Castle of Otranto*, Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* or Shelley's *Frankenstein* demonstrate that man can possess monstrous traits. The horrific and the demonic are not limited to visible outsiders in the Gothic Revival texts: it is the character's actions that define his or her monstrosity. This evil appears in many forms, from the lascivious acts of the titular character in *The Monk*, to Manfred's brutal attempts to preserve his household and lineage in *The Castle of Otranto*, to Victor's rejection of his creature in *Frankenstein* or Falkland's murderous attempts to keep a secret in *Caleb Williams*. In these books, seeming heroes too can be monsters, like Satan; writers of neo-Gothic romances explore the potential darkness of human nature.

Walpole's text is an interesting step in the construction of the monster, as the monster is entirely human. Manfred, after the death of his son, suddenly divorces his wife and pursues Isabella. The tale is set, according to the First Preface, between 1095 and 1243, and was 'found in the library of an ancient Catholic family' ('First Edition' 17). At the time of the narrative, while divorce is immoral and against the church, Manfred's aggressive pursuit of Isabella is far more horrifying. Manfred's behaviour is termed 'inhuman' (Walpole *Otranto* 44), and as he begins to feel shame for his actions, he steels himself and the 'next transition of his soul was to exquisite villainy' (*Otranto* 44). Manfred is not described as animalistic or a hybrid being, but his behaviour is fully monstrous. He goes against his faith and his family, as he declares his 'fate depends on having sons' (Walpole *Otranto* 34). Walpole's construction of *The Castle of Otranto* as an historical text heightens the horror of Manfred's actions. Placing these events in the past asserts that they are historical fact, as Walpole writes '[t]he names of the actors are evidently fictitious, and probably disguised on purpose' ('First Edition' 17). He later elaborates, speculating that:

[t]hough the machinery is invention, and the names of the actors imaginary, I cannot but believe, that the ground work of the story is founded on truth.

[...] If a catastrophe, at all resembling that which he describes, is believed to have given rise to this work, it will contribute to interest to the reader, and will make the *Castle of Otranto* a still more moving story. ('First Edition' 19)

While other texts like *The Monk* or *Caleb Williams* present the horrors men could enact upon one another, Walpole's attempted construction of truth makes his story a more stirring exemplification of the potential monstrosity of man. He also builds on the existing prejudice against Catholics, just as *The Monk* does. The positioning of his horrific acts as history, in a Catholic family, plays into the existing beliefs of Walpole's Protestant audience. The guise of truth tells the reader that Manfred existed and acted as the narrative describes, though the name has been changed. He is not just an example of maliciousness, but a historical figure whose acts have been recorded.

Tolkien's emulation of Walpole appears twofold in *The Lord of the Rings*, as Mordor mimics Otranto's horrific architecture and Boromir's temporary corruption and attempted theft of the ring emulates Manfred's madness in pursuing Isabella. When first arriving in Mordor after his battle through Shelob's caverns, 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. (RK 882)

*The Castle of Otranto* does not have a pair of watchers, but does have its own haunted figure: a gigantic suit of armour. Bianca describes her vision to Manfred and Fredric:

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. (Walpole *Otranto* 97)

The threat of the animated, conscious object is present in both texts, though the armour is a mobile threat, haunting the castle, while the Watchers are situated; each presents a threat to the characters and must be overcome. Cirith Ungol and the Castle of Otranto are both haunted spaces, corrupted by the malevolence of their inhabitants. Boromir, in his attempt

to take the Ring from Frodo, reflects the corruption that Manfred displays throughout *The Castle of Otranto*. While Manfred breaks faith with his wife and his family in his pursuit of Isabella, Boromir fails to fulfill his role as part of the Fellowship. Manfred's sentiments speaking of Isabella identify her as an object he desires and one he deserves. He speaks, however, in terms of what Isabella will get: 'In short, Lady, you have missed a husband undeserving of your charms: they shall now be better disposed of. Instead of a sickly boy, you shall have a husband in the prime of his age, who will know how to value your beauties, and who may expect a numerous offspring' (Walpole *Otranto* 33). Boromir speaks about expectation and deserving when he loses his self-control. He declares that the Ring is the only hope of Gondor, 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 Numenor, and not Halflings. It is not yours save by unhappy chance. It might have been mine. It should have been mine' (*FR* 390). Boromir's temporary madness mirrors the loss of self and corruption that Manfred demonstrates throughout the Gothic classic. The fear of man's corruption, the monstrosity in human form, is extended further into two key figures of the Gothic era.

Two quintessential monster-figures, Dracula and Frankenstein's creation, began as human beings and are separated and isolated through their reanimation; they thus represent a decisive change from Manfred, who remains a human even while behaving monstrously. Because Dracula and Frankenstein's monster defy science and nature, they are outsiders; yet, they still have ample space to speak and be presented sympathetically within the text. As Chris Baldick explains in *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity and Nineteenth-century Writing*:

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.

(Baldick 45)

Man can be monstrous, and monsters can be thought of as man: murderous, evil behaviour is not limited to those who appear deformed. While Baldick argues against the idea of an articulate figure being monstrous, the *Oxford English Dictionary* incorporates cruelty and a repulsive character as key elements of a monster. Frankenstein's monster may speak like a

poet, but his actions still assert his monstrosity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* reflects the change; yet the physical other, the deformed or grotesque, still carries the name monster as well.

Mary Shelley, in her 1818 novel, incorporates both the physical and spiritual forms of the monstrous, embodying them in two strong characters, Victor and his creation, which display divergent forms of monstrosity. Victor comes from a respected family, has the benefit of wealth and education, and sins through his experiments. He seeks to find the mechanism of life and performs unspeakable deeds to do so. When he reflects upon his actions, he draws upon the Christian vocabulary of damnation:

Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. (Shelley 83)

The processes Victor engages in are often at odds with the principles on which he has been brought up, since ‘often did [his] human nature turn with loathing from [his] occupation’ (Shelley 83). Shelley’s language points to the division of self that Victor experiences: his humanity is repulsed by his intellectual pursuits, pointing to the monstrousness of the act.

Frankenstein’s creation, a being without family or moral instruction, sins in his violent actions. He is driven to a state of rage through his rejection by the De Lacey family: ‘despair had not yet taken possession of me; my feelings were those of rage and revenge. I could with pleasure have destroyed the cottage and its inhabitants, and have glutted myself with their shrieks and misery’ (Shelley 163). While his acts are deplorable, he is given a sympathetic voice, much as Caliban was. The creature speaks of his wretchedness, and demands an opportunity to defend himself as permitted in a court of law:

The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise they eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands. (Shelley 129)

The creature’s pathos is present throughout the text, as he struggles for acceptance; he does not request forgiveness, thinking himself beyond saving. Both Victor and the creature describe themselves as wretched, as they are both exiled and miserable.

While the creature's horrid physical form is at the root of his isolation, it is not his shape that he abhors or regrets. As he speaks to Walton on the ship, he states:

I have murdered the lovely and the helpless; I have strangled the innocent as they slept, and grasped to death his throat who never injured me or any other living thing. I have devoted my creator, the select specimen of all that is worthy of love and admiration among men, to misery; I have pursued him even to that irremediable ruin. (Shelley 246)

Both characters are miserable and driven to rage and revenge. They are isolated, outside of society and, by their actions, monstrous. Each, however, is given a space of potential redemption in the telling of their stories: both Victor and the creature demonstrate repentance for their sins, opening the possibility of forgiveness.<sup>36</sup> Their monstrosity in the eyes of the reader is mitigated by their voices. Tolkien is heavily influenced by this tool, as the majority of his monsters speak over the many narratives of Middle-earth. While they are not always softened in their presentation, as Orkish speech actually reaffirms the monstrous nature of the already grotesque beings, they are given greater character and complexity through their speech.

Like the Orcs, Dracula has a voice that is part of his monstrosity, as his seductive voice is a tool of his cruelty. In Bram Stoker's novel and earlier vampire myths, the vampire is a human being who has died and returned to drink the blood of others. While some myths, like 'The Vampire of Croglin Hall,'<sup>37</sup> have a silent monster, widely read narratives like John Polidori's 'The Vampyre,' James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire* or Stoker's *Dracula* incorporate a voiced monster, whose words are a means to draw in prey and maintain concealment. Rather than having the voice make an emotional appeal to the reader and offer possible redemption, as with the creature's voice in *Frankenstein*, the vampire's words are a means of exacting promises<sup>38</sup> or gaining trust.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> While there is no spiritual forgiveness offered in the text, the reader has the chance to sympathize and forgive the actions of each character. This is made possible through the presence of their articulate and penitent voices.

<sup>37</sup> This excerpt from Augustus Hare's *In My Solitary Life* describes a silent, dried corpse attacking a young woman before returning to its nearby crypt.

<sup>38</sup> Lord Ruthven demands a promise from Aubrey upon his deathbed: 'Swear by all your soul reveres, by all your nature fears, swear that for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crime or death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see' (Polidori 18).

<sup>39</sup> Dracula, upon meeting Harker, gives Harker a sense of ease with the Count's interest in England. As he says to Harker: 'Through [my books] I have come to know your great England; and to know her is to love her. I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is' (Stoker 20).

Even later texts, like Hamilton Deane's theatrical version of Stoker's narrative, make the vampire more attractive, but not more sympathetic. The voice of the monster is not a tool of redemption, but of temptation. The monster does not have a simple role in the Gothic revival: it is both a figure of damnation and potential redemption. It is this complexity that Tolkien echoes in his own construction of monsters.

Vampires do not appear directly in Tolkien's work, but echoes of their traits are evident in the behaviours of Gollum and the hypnotic powers of the *palantir*. When pursuing Frodo and Sam into Eryn Muil, Gollum's physical feats are disturbing and reminiscent of Harker's descriptions 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. In any case I could not mistake the hands which I had had some many opportunities of studying. I was at first interested and somewhat amused, for it is wonderful how small a matter will interest and amuse a man when he is a prisoner. But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when 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. (Stoker 34)

Gollum's descent emulates this movement almost exactly; its eeriness remains, despite the change of context.

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 if it 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. (*TT* 598)

Gollum does not display any other traits of Dracula, lacking his physical power or seductive capacity. He is a broken individual, corrupted by contact with the ring. There are however other reflections of *Dracula* in Tolkien's tales of Middle-earth.

Denethor's effected state once he has gazed into the *palantir* reflects Renfield's corruption, though there is no literal hypnosis. Renfield, the thrall of Dracula, demonstrates strange behaviours, gaining him the focus of Dr. Seward in the novel. Seward describes the vacillations between his periods of mania and calm:

For half an hour or more Renfield kept getting excited in greater and greater degree. I did not pretend to be watching him, but I kept strict observation all the same. All at once that shifty look came into his eyes which we always see when a madman has seized an idea, and with it the shifty movement of the head and back which asylum attendants come to know so well. He became quite quiet, and went and sat on the edge of his bed resignedly, and looked into space with lack-luster eyes. (Stoker 100)

Denethor, corrupted by the visions fed him by Sauron and the *palantir*, shows the same mania that Seward observes in Renfield. Denethor has his will broken through the hypnotic power of the *palantir*. His manic behaviour and suicide demonstrate his loss of hope and the control Sauron has over him. When Gandalf tries to stop his self-immolation, Denethor reveals the *palantir*: the source of his information and madness:

Then suddenly Denethor laughed. He stood up tall and proud again, and stepping swiftly back to the table he lifted from it the pillow on which his head had lain. Then coming to the doorway he drew aside the covering, and lo! he had between his hands a *palantir*. And as he held it up, it seemed that those that looked on the globe began to glow with an inner flame, so that the lean face of the Lord was lit as with a red fire, and it seemed cut out of hard stone, sharp with black shadows, noble, proud and terrible. His eyes glittered. (RK 835)

Both Tolkien and Stoker point to the madness that is captured in the eyes, as each of these men has been controlled by what they have been shown; they are corrupted by a more powerful force and are driven to insanity through hopelessness and regret. The power of the voice as a seductive and dangerous element is also present in Tolkien's characterisation of the dragons, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Looking at the Renaissance, Restoration and Gothic representations of the monster, it is clear that Tolkien's use of a folkloric figure in a new narrative form is not wholly new: this method of writing the monster appears throughout history. His focus on the *Beowulf* narrative as a critical start-point and his depth of historical context make his work a stronger representation of the syncretic than his predecessors. Also, Tolkien's didactic element, harkening back to the form of Wisdom Literature, sets him apart as a twentieth century writer. His reference to George Webb Dasent, a collector and translator of folklore,



shows his interest in enriching the folklore of the past in a new narrative form. The meaning of the fairy-tale changes over time and becomes something richer and more complex:

So with regard to fairy-stories, I feel that it is more interesting, and also in its way more difficult, to consider what they are, what they have become for us, and what values the long alchemic processes of time have produced in them. In Dasent's words I would say "We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled" ('Fairy-stories' 39)

Stories change over time, through alchemical processes, and in this growth the story becomes richer. Middle-earth is the means by which Tolkien draws upon past mythology in the framework of a modern, English myth.

### 3.5. Victorian Neomedievalism

Tolkien gives a brief allusion to an influential female writer of the Victorian period: Christina Rossetti. While his physical descriptions of goblins do not match the exact traits described in 'Goblin Market,' her description of their movements is echoed in the attack on the Great Goblin under the Misty Mountains in *The Hobbit*. When Rossetti's goblins approach Laura, the poet-narrator describes them as:

Flying, running, leaping,  
Puffing and blowing,  
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,  
Clucking and gobbling,  
Mopping and mowing. (332-6)

Tolkien's goblins, upon Gandalf's arrival, react to the scattering sparks of the fire: 'The yells and yammering, croaking, jibbering, and jabbering; howls, growls and curses; shrieking and skriking, that followed were beyond description' (*H* 86). Tolkien may use different words than Rossetti, but his catalogue of descriptors echoes Rossetti's tone and characterisation. While the Goblins may have presented a show of unity earlier, singing to their prisoners as they travel below the Misty Mountains, they are thrown into disarray by Gandalf's attack. Rossetti's goblins also fracture in the face of opposition, as the frantic response to Lizzie's refusals do not have the focus of the creatures that had 'answer'd all together' (Rossetti 124). Tolkien's monsters are not static, as he changes the creatures between his stories. *The Hobbit* maintains a sense of levity, even in its representation of monsters, while *The Lord of the Rings* is much darker. Also, Tolkien's opinion of his

monsters change, so influences like Rossetti cannot be seen in later texts, while her poetry has a clear impact on his earlier playful works.

George MacDonald, in his 1872 text *The Princess and the Goblin*, captures Rossetti's style of playful antagonist in his subterranean hideous creatures. Just as Tolkien would echo in *The Hobbit* over sixty years later, the goblins are diligent creatures living in underground caverns, shying away from light and discovery by terrestrial dwellers. Their physical traits are described in parts, much like Tolkien's later Orcs. Yet, unlike Rossetti's and Tolkien's Goblins, MacDonald's creatures shy away from singing. Curdie's song, and the fellow-miner's frequent reminders to remember his rhymes. When first meeting Irene and Lootie out after sunset, Curdie sings:

Ring! dod! bang!  
 Go the hammers' clang!  
 Hit and turn and bore!  
 Whizz and puff and roar!  
 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. (Chapter 5)

This song sounds very similar to both Rossetti's and Tolkien's verses, but it is the tool of the hero, rather than the song of the antagonist. The sound of the music is unpleasant, to the point that the goblin prince threatens violence when Curdie sings: "Stop that disgusting noise!" cried the crown prince valiantly, getting up and standing in front of the heap of stones, with his face towards Curdie's prison. "Do now, or I'll break your head" (Chapter 19). Tolkien's goblins echo Rossetti and MacDonald, drawing in Victorian fairy-tale elements to Middle-earth.

The *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic that was published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a compilation of Finnish oral myths. The poetry of the *Kalevala* was influential in Tolkien's

development of the mythology of Middle-earth, yet primarily as a linguistic and poetic model. His love of Finnish is clear in his modeling of Quenya on Finnish language patterns; however, the *Kalevala* had little perceptible influence on Tolkien's monsters. The long narrative poem describes the interrelated tales of Väinämöinen, Lemminkäinen, Ilmarinen, Kullervo and the characters with whom they interact. The stories are Finnish myths, as they sing the song of creation, not unlike the song that brings Grendel's wrath to the hall of Heorot. Like the *Aeneid*, the *Iliad* and the *Poetic Edda*, the *Kalevala* tells of love and loss, family obligation and betrayal, birth and death. The story does not, however, incorporate monsters. There are a few instances of a small figure that transforms into a giant to perform a feat of physical strength, but these are brief and isolated. The great threats in the narrative are the wild animals, the other heroes and the gods. There is a focus on the Sampo, an artifact of good fortune which is much desired by all the characters in the poem; this prefigures Tolkien's Ring narrative, though the artifact does not carry the element of corruption so key to Tolkien's story. So, the *Kalevala*, which appeared contemporary to these Victorian authors, had a strong influence on Tolkien. He was inspired by the language, the mythology and the poetry, but not in the conceptions of the monstrous.

Tolkien's idealization of the culture and history of the Anglo-Saxons in his fiction follows after the patriotic historical fiction of William Morris, particularly his narratives of the Dalesmen in *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*, written in 1889 and 1890 respectively. In Morris' narrative, the Wolfings are a recreation of a Germanic tribe set upon by the Romans. They are an idealization of the culture that stands against the strength of the Romans, and later the barbarism of the Huns. Morris was following the neo-gothic tradition of idealizing the past, preserving his vision of the ancient peoples and their innate nobility. Tolkien, in a letter to Professor L.W. Forster, noted that while his own life-experience may have shaped his writing, a greater influence could be found in texts like those created by Morris:

Personally I do not think that either war (and of course the atomic bomb) had any influence upon either the plot or the manner of its unfolding. Perhaps in landscape. The Dead Marshes and the approaches to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme. They owe more to William Morris and his Huns and Romans, as in *The House of the Wolfings* or *The Roots of the Mountains*. (*Letters* 303)

While Tolkien certainly draws from diverse sources, he openly credits authors like Morris, who idealized the past through his translations and fiction texts.

William Morris was a scholar and artist who gathered inspiration from medieval sources. His tapestries, paintings, architectural preservation, and writing show his political activism and socialist drive. Aside from his translations, the texts referenced in Tolkien's letters are *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*. While Tolkien owes a great debt to Morris' fantastical texts, like *The Well at World's End* and *The Wood Beyond the World*. Tolkien specifically notes the influence of the historical fantasies. *The Roots of the Mountains*, published in 1889, describes the Germanic community standing against the Roman invasions. This narrative is a perfect representation of the Gothic ideal: the wild goths standing against the stricture of classical order. As the warrior Bork explains at the Folk-Mote:

they told us that they were a house of the folk of the herdsmen, and that there was war in the land, and that the people thereof were fleeing before the cruelty of a host of warriors, men of a mighty folk, such as the earth hath not heard of, who dwell in great cities far to the south; and how that this host had crossed the mountains, and the Great Water that runneth from them, and had fallen upon their kindred, and over-come their fighting-men, and burned their dwellings, slain their elders, and driven their neat and their sheep, yea, and their women and children in no better wise than their neat and sheep. (Morris *Wolfings* 35)

*The House of the Wolfings*, set generations later in the same region, now sees the attack of the Huns, who are described as 'utterly strange to [Gold-mane]: they were short of stature, crooked legged, long-armed, very strong for their size: with small blue eyes, snubbed-nosed, wide-mouthed, thin-lipped, very swarthy of skin, exceeding foul of favour' (Morris *Mountains* 131). The Huns are made monstrous, as horrific in their appearance and actions as Tolkien's Orcs. This description is echoed in Middle-earth, as Grishnákh of Mordor is described as 'a short crook-legged creature, very broad and with long arms that hung almost to the ground' (*TT* 437). The association of physical characteristics with moral traits is present everywhere in Tolkien's Middle-earth, echoing Morris' works. Morris' narratives took on a moral motivation in his advocacy of the simplicity of communal life, advocating his socialist beliefs in his art:

Surely any one who professes to think that the question of art and cultivation must go before that of the knife and fork (and there are some who do propose that) does not understand what art means, or how that its roots must have a soil of a thriving and unanxious life. Yet it must be remembered that civilization has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life

much better than that which he now endures perforce. It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him, a life to which the perception and creation of beauty, the enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be felt to be as necessary to man as his daily bread, and that no man, and no set of men, can be deprived of this except by mere opposition, which should be resisted to the utmost. ('Socialist')

Morris' writing typified the idealization of the past, central to the Gothic revival. He sees the simplicity of the past as something to be sought out, to be reclaimed. While much of the neo-gothic is associated with wild spaces, haunted manors and the experience of the sublime, at its core is an artistic and political craving to return to the past. Morris' works, as author, translator, architect, painter and craftsman, all focus upon that goal of simplicity.

William Morris and his translations had a notable influence not only on Tolkien's scholarly path, but also on Tolkien's use of language in his fiction. One of Tolkien's earliest inspirations for story-telling form was Morris' romances. In 1914, in a letter to his wife Edith, Tolkien described his attempts to translate a tale from the *Kalevala* into a story which would echo Morris' work: 'Amongst other work I am trying to turn one of the stories [of the *Kalevala*] – which is really a very great story and most tragic – into a short story somewhat on the lines of Morris' romances with chunks of poetry in between' (*Letters* 7). His interweaving of poetry and prose, sometimes called prosimetrum,<sup>40</sup> and his use of translations as source material echo Morris's practices, while his playful use of names and imagined cultural history reflect the levity of another writer: Lord Dunsany.

The writings of Lord Dunsany, one of the forefathers of the genre of high fantasy who wrote in the early twentieth century, are another notable influence upon Tolkien's fiction. In a letter to Stanley Unwin, Tolkien mentions the linguistic formulae which add a sense of reality, not found in writers like Swift or Dunsany (*Letters* 26), but then later points to Dunsany as a potential source for the link of language and meaning: Dunsany's sense of character and play overwhelms philological history. In his letter to Charlotte and Denis Plimmer, he observes that:

If I attributed meaning to *boo-hoo* I should not in this case be influenced by the words containing *bu* in many other European languages, but by a story by Lord Dunsany (read many years ago) about two idols enshrined in the same temple: Chu-Bu and Sheemish. If I used *boo-hoo* at all it would be as

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<sup>40</sup> 'Prosimetrum, the mixed verse and prose form, is a world-wide phenomenon attested in Indo-European literatures from ancient Sanskrit onwards, and Tolkien was familiar with prosimetric writings in other languages besides Old Norse-Icelandic: Latin and early Irish are the two most obviously relevant literatures' (Phelpstead 23).

the name of some ridiculous, fat, self-important character, mythological or human. (*Letters* 375)

Dunsany's tale, which is a brief moral story with a sense of long history and unspoken tradition, apparently stayed with Tolkien, who refers to it as a tale 'read many years ago.' Dunsany's short stories and longer novels refer to the past and tradition as something of memory. As the men of the Vale of Erl approach their lord in *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924), they say: 'For seven hundred years the chiefs of your race have ruled us well; and their deeds are remembered by the minor minstrels, living on yet in their little tinkling songs' (Dunsany 1). Tolkien's Middle-earth, with its long mythic past, carries that same sense of tradition, as *The Lord of the Rings* begins with a description of Hobbit-lore, taken from the Red Book of Westmarch: an imagined history within the frame of Tolkien's imagined world. The sense of invention paired with the pursuit of an epic tone follow the genre established by Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. Tolkien carries on the tropes found in Dunsany's text, like the empowerment of the fay-figures called Elves, or the use of the folkloric past in the weaving of their stories.<sup>41</sup> Dunsany's Elves are an emulation of traits found in the Late Medieval period and a preface to Tolkien's idea of the Elf. The King of Elfland is an incredibly powerful figure, manipulating the borders of Elfland and stopping time. Tolkien clearly emulates Dunsany's idea of the powerful Elf-figure, though there is little echo of Dunsany's monsters. While Tolkien does not engage as actively with *The King of Elfland's Daughter* in his letters, or in specific characters in his tales of Middle-earth, Tolkien reflects Dunsany's tone and form.

Tolkien's fiction responds to all these different stages in the development of the monster. The narratives of Middle-earth do not simply place the monstrous as damned or redeemable, but both. His writings are not wholly prosimetric, as Morris' are, but rather have a levity and playfulness reminiscent of Dunsany's somersaulting troll. Tolkien's literary creations have a keen awareness of the past, as he draws in the characters and tropes of the early and late medieval texts that he studied, and does so with the narrative and stylistic complexity of the neomedieval revivals. Tolkien's synthesis of the past gives the folklore creatures a new didactic role in his modern Wisdom text. The monster has changed through each era, as the moral and folk-belief frameworks shift through time. Tolkien's use of the monster figures from these eras carry with them the meaning of their original context.

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<sup>41</sup> Dunsany's Will o' the Wisps are similar to the tricky lights of the Dead Marshes, for example.

## Chapter Four: The Monsters of Middle-earth

### 4.1 Tolkien's Context: Language and Loss

This chapter turns from the study of J.R.R. Tolkien's intellectual engagement with past texts, covered in Chapters Two and Three, to show how Tolkien deployed the notions he derived from these texts in constructing his own fantastical world. This chapter will answer the final two components of the argument: How does Tolkien use these source materials in formulating his own monsters? How does that ignition of deep history and modern context shape Tolkien's monsters? These last questions are key in the culmination of my argument that Tolkien's reading of *Beowulf* and his critical recuperation of the monsters therein informs our understanding of Tolkien's fiction, as Tolkien created a form of *Beowulf* for the twentieth century.

Tolkien's creations are varied and often inconsistent: his creatures change their moral context and significance over the course of his *Silmarillion*. Between *The Histories of Middle-earth*, *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, characters change, either due to the form of text or the time in Tolkien's life. His monsters are drawn from broad source material and reflect that complexity and shifting meaning. It is for this reason Tolkien abhorred allegory. As Shippey reflects upon in *Author of the Century*,

Anyone listening to Tolkien's allegory of the tower [in his 1936 lecture] would sympathize with the tower-builder, and not with the short-sighted fools who destroyed it. [...] One can accept, then, that Tolkien disliked vague allegories, allegories which didn't work, though he accepted them readily in their proper place, which was either advancing an argument (as in the *Beowulf* example) or else constructing brief and personal fables. (164)

The one to one relationship of allegory is frequently far too simple, as Tolkien's monsters are not fixed, consistent creatures. The moral purpose of each form of monster changes between texts, between imagined authors, between times and editions. Tolkien's conceptions of the monster changed and as such, so did each creature's definition. This inconsistency is the greatest reflection of the diversity of sources and the strongest argument against the simplicity of allegory. This chapter will consider not only the source material, but how Tolkien defined each of his different monsters through his history of Middle-earth. His primary mechanism of definition is language: its use, its blending and its absence.

Tolkien wrote in the Modernist period, when Ezra Pound's slogan of 'make it new,' popularized the notion that writing could change a civilization. Yet, instead of embracing the appeal of change and dislocation, Tolkien embraced the long history of English literature. He also stood in contrast to the skepticism that was central to texts like Ford

Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* in 1915. From its opening words, '[t]his is the saddest story I have ever heard,' Ford's novel discusses the dissolution of relationships and the death of the central characters. The text questions our trust in our relationships and our institutions. Many interwar and postwar writers, like T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald and W.H. Auden, manifest this same tone of disillusionment and dislocation in their writings – a phenomenon either explicitly or implicitly derived from the individual and collective experience of the Great War. Writers drew on the heroic language of romance or epic to describe the inexpressible horrors their generation had lived through:

Finding the war "indescribable" in any but the available language of traditional literature, those who recalled it had to do so in known literary terms. [...] Inhibited by scruples of decency and believing in the historical continuity of styles, writers about the war had to appeal to the sympathy of readers by invoking the familiar and suggesting its resemblance to what many of them suspected was an unprecedented and (in their terms) an all-but-incommunicable reality. Very often, the new reality had no resemblance whatever to the familiar, and the absence of a plausible style placed some writers in what they thought was an impossible position. (Fussell 174)

Later, the pull of the modern and the loss of stability in the Empire led to the proliferation of the theatre of the absurd in the 1950s. British literature was moving toward fractured, complicated or skeptical texts in response to social, political and scientific change:

Whether seen in comic or tragic light, the sense of a loss of moorings was pervasive. Following the rapid social and intellectual changes of the previous century, the early twentieth century suffered its share of further concussions tending to heighten modern uncertainty. It was even becoming harder to understand the grounds of uncertainty itself. (Dettmar 1926)

The sense of dislocation is something Tolkien challenges in his construction of an epic: he does not deny the institutions of the past, though he does engage in a form of escape into his fantasy world of Middle-earth. Tolkien's placement of a war narrative in the distant land of Middle-earth responds to his context as an interwar and post-war writer. While incorporating creatures from an imagined past, Tolkien casts them in a modern – implicitly Christian – moral context. Much as the *Beowulf* poet drew together ancient tale and contemporary faith, Tolkien too takes the frightening imagined figures of the past and accounts for their corruption.

Tolkien's world of Middle-earth recuperates myths and stories from past cultures in order to fill the absence he felt in contemporary English literature, as well as in his experiences of twentieth century culture more generally. Tolkien's fiction, a response to



the paucity of what he called ‘books we want to read’ (*Letters* 209), drew together his interests and sources, his personal passions and the stories that long pre-dated him. As he explains in a letter to Sir Stanley Unwin:

an equally basic passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me) for my appetite. I was an undergraduate before thought and experience revealed to me that these were not divergent interests – opposite poles of science and romance – but integrally related. I am *not* “learned” in matters of myth and fairy-story, however, for in such things (as far as known to me) I have always been seeking material, things of a certain tone and air, and not simple knowledge. (*Letters* 144, emphasis in original)

He sought the romances, fairy-tales and histories of bygone ages, because he was ‘from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country’ which had the history but not the myth found in Greek, Celtic, Finnish, or Scandinavian literature (*Letters* 144). Even Arthurian myth, which is British in origin, lacked the connection to England that Tolkien craved (*Letters* 144). Tolkien, in creating what he considered to be a truly English mythology, turned to early tales and histories, drawing upon the Germanic and early Anglo-Saxon stories, as well as Latin Romance, Scandinavian and Finnish tales.

Tolkien’s study of ‘ignition,’ the discussion of early medieval texts as a site of conflict between belief systems, gets reworked in his fiction as well as in his literary criticism. For this reason, it is worth revisiting here. It is in Tolkien’s ignition that he most readily emulates the work of the *Beowulf*-poet. As we have seen, the idea of ‘ignition’ occurs in Tolkien’s discussion of *Beowulf*. The contact of the past and present is important as a didactic moment, a blending of beliefs from the past and new faith:

in England this [pagan] imagination was brought into touch with Christendom, and with the Scriptures. The process of “conversion” was a long one, but some of its effects were doubtless immediate: an alchemy of change (producing ultimately the medieval) was at once at work. [...] It is through such a blending that there was available to a poet who set out to *write* a poem [...] on a scale and plan unlike a minstrel’s lay, both new faith and new learning (or education), and also a body of native tradition (itself requiring to be learned) for the changed mind to contemplate together. (*B: M&C*’ 21)

Tolkien envisages *Beowulf* as an explosive blending of past and present and of different religious beliefs; more than that, it is when ‘new Scripture and old tradition touched and

ignited' ('B: M&C' 26). Tolkien's ignition invokes ideas of the past and the present meeting like elements in a chemical experiment, generating energy greater and brighter than its constituent parts. The value of *Beowulf* is its position at the intellectual crossroads, which Tolkien argued for in his '*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*' lecture. I argue in this chapter that he also transferred this explosive process to his fiction. Tolkien synthesizes historical materials into a new form of story, one that connects with deep history and modern anxiety.

Tolkien wrote in an era of disenchantment. The world had been brought to the brink of destruction by ideological investment and entrenched state-alliances, and writers reflected that in their work. The sense of dislocation is described hauntingly in D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.

(Chapter 1)

In this new world, it has been argued, writing focused more on the personal. The institution and authority were mechanisms of destruction, to be mistrusted, so writers became more engaged with the individual. As James Gordin explains:

Early in the twentieth century writers realized that values and alternatives in society were becoming far less fixed and secure. In part because of rapidly changing values of conduct and class, novels frequently tended to center on personal and metaphysical issues, to use social issues only as temporary decoration for the structure of permanent metaphysical and personal concerns. (4)

The old values and absolute truths were met with cynicism: skepticism became the natural answer to the great abstracted ideals the Great War had been fought for. This attitude never really changed, despite the more obviously 'just' second conflict. For Gordin, narratives written after the Second World War invariably questioned the political, intellectual and religious establishments: 'Clearly the old guides and formulas have vanished. Two world wars, the threat of the hydrogen bomb, and disillusion with the Marxist version of world brotherhood have left these writers skeptical about the value of banners and causes' (9). It is, in part, to this skepticism that Tolkien responds – but not quite as many others did. His world of Middle-earth possesses absolutes and belief in the grand causes many other writers had rejected. Yet he also introduces elements of anxiety.

The most pervasive threat throughout Middle-earth is the Orcs. Orcs are Elves who were corrupted by a great power (*S* 47). While Tolkien repeatedly denies any interest in allegory, he does assert that ‘[m]yth and fairy-story must, as an art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary “real” world’ (*Letters* 144). Rather than embracing the direct relation of allegory, as Spenser did, Tolkien rejects allegory in favour of the multiple layers of meaning, emulating the medieval form of Wisdom Literature in his creation of didactic texts. The power of Wisdom Literature is in its complexity; the reader must work through the moral message. Orcs and Wraiths, once Elves and men respectively, were not originally malevolent: they were corrupted and turned through the manipulations of a powerful force beyond themselves, the Enemy. Interestingly, Sauron and Melkor are sometimes described with this simplified term, which tends to be capitalized. The counterpoint of good and evil echoes The Bible, in which Satan also has the title Enemy. This opposition, good versus evil, is a core concept in the descriptions of Grendel; it defines the monsters as deadly antagonists to the champions of the community, the heroes. So, by creating corrupted figures, Tolkien invokes the figure of Grendel, the opposition of good and evil and the idea that monsters are not natural, but made: a concept from the Gothic text *Frankenstein*. Thus, his monsters exhibit multiple references rather than a simple allegory. And at the heart of the Orc is the Catholic element brought into contact with the literary influences: an anxiety of corruption.

Tolkien, raised by a priest, Father Francis, after his mother’s death, was a devout Catholic throughout his life. He believed in sharing his faith and converted C.S. Lewis to Christianity (though not Roman Catholicism). Tolkien’s religion was a central element of his life, and the spirituality found in Tolkien’s fiction has been discussed by various critics. But Tolkien insisted that his imagined world was not Christian, though it was spiritual:

The only criticism that annoyed me was that it “contained no religion” [...] It is a monotheistic world of “natural theology”. The odd fact that there are no churches, temples, or religious rites and ceremonies, is simply part of the historical climate depicted. [...] I am in any case myself a Christian; but the “Third Age” was not a Christian world. (*Letters* 220)

Middle-earth does not have the trappings or traditions of Western religion, but it maintains a core of spirituality. Tolkien imagined a world with its own origin-myth and a spiritual structure that is distinct from reality, yet reflecting ideas from Catholicism.

Key elements in Tolkien’s writing are the notions of corruption and redemption. These concepts are incorporated in Tolkien’s assignation of the moral absolutes of right

and wrong. Tolkien draws fully upon the Augustinian notion of corruption. As Augustine explains in *Enchiridion*:

When, however, a thing is corrupted, its corruption is an evil because it is, by just so much, a privation of the good. Where there is no privation of the good, there is no evil. Where there is evil, there is a corresponding diminution of the good. As long, then, as a thing is being corrupted, there is good in it of which it is being deprived; [...] But even if the corruption is not arrested, it still does not cease having some good of which it cannot be further deprived. If, however, the corruption comes to be total and entire, there is no good left either, because it is no longer an entity at all.

*(Enchiridion)*

The idea that all beings start good and can be corrupted is at the core of Tolkien's history of Middle-earth. Morgoth began as Melkor, one of the Valar. Melkor's downfall is like Satan's, as he goes from being the greatest of the Valar to their enemy through his ambition and dissent:

But now Ilúvatar sat and hearkened, and for a great while it seemed good to him, for in the music there were no flaws. But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself. To Melkor among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren. (S 4)

The greatest of the angelic figures in Arda, Tolkien's imagined universe, is corrupted by his own gifts. The idea of power as a corrupting force is familiar to twentieth and twenty-first century audiences, as Lord Acton's iconic statement 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely' was written in 1887. The danger of power, as an abstract concept, appears in Tolkien's transformation of his earlier influences. As Stefan Arvidsson points out in his analysis of Wagner's influence on Tolkien's writing:

In *The Lord of the Rings* power becomes an utterly abstract phenomenon, almost Foucaultian: ubiquitous but with no clear focus. In *The Lord of the Rings* then, the struggle is not a battle for wealth through which it is possible to enlist people to serve one, as in Wagner's Ring, but a more general power struggle. Power becomes immaterial. (Arvidsson)

In Tolkien's Middle-earth, power is not a means to an end; it is an end in itself. Rather than using power to accumulate wealth, or land, or any personal gain, power is the goal. Power as a concept is a force that Tolkien associates with the rings, but not in as concretely as

earlier texts like Wagner's operatic trilogy or the poems of the Edda which inspired it. It is not solely the Ring, but claiming the Ring as one's own, that corrupts. As Shippey points out, 'it is Gandalf's point: [...] all seizures of power, no matter how "strong or well-meaning" the seizers, will go the same way. That's what power does' (*Author* 116). The rings are the focus of power in the Third Age, but before that, Melkor demonstrates the corrupting influence of power in his disgrace and his destruction of other races. These horrid acts earn him the name Morgoth, 'the Black Foe of the World' (*S* 83). It is for this reason that Morgoth is not a monster, as such: he is a parallel of Satan in Tolkien's cosmology. He is a corrupting force and a creator of monsters. The Balrogs, as *Umair*, are effectively the fallen angels of Arda. Thus, Morgoth, Sauron and the Balrogs will not be addressed in this thesis. They are not the 'mortal denizens of the material world, in it as of it' ('*B*: M&C' 20). The monsters hold importance because they inhabit the mortal world, providing the immanent threat for the man who is 'a mortal hemmed in a hostile world' ('*B*: M&C' 22). Thus, the *Valar* and *Umair* will not be the focus of my argument. I will remain focused on the earthly beings who provide the threat to Tolkien's heroes and demonstrate the process of corruption.

The process of downfall is traced in Tolkien's account of the Orcs, the most pervasive threat throughout Middle-earth. These creatures were originally Elves, perverted and made evil: 'those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor [...] were put there in prison, and by the slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved' (*S* 47). The status of the Elves as the first race makes their perversion by Morgoth, as described in *The Silmarillion*, all the more devastating. They are robbed of their immortality and their place as the first-born of Ilúvatar through corruption.

The counter to this idea of corruption is that of redemption: the reclaiming of goodness that has been lost. Redemption is when one is justified by grace, primarily through the forgiveness granted by Christ but also by the performance of good works. Redemption through faith in Christ is clearly impossible in Middle-earth: there is no Christian narrative or religion. Tolkien has instead emulated the possibility of redemption found in *Beowulf*: one can battle against corruption through word or deed.

In offering the possibility of redemption in this particular way, Middle-earth echoes the pre-Christian world, as the pursuit of grand boasts and great deeds appears in all the heroic tales. The narrator of *Beowulf* refers to Beowulf and the Geats as noble heathens, who did not know the glory of God. Nevertheless, he shows how they strive to achieve greatness, the Anglo-Saxon *lof*, 'fame,' despite their lack of grace; in other words, they work to redeem themselves in a pagan world. While the heroes are not saved in the Christian sense, they gain immortality through their stories' continuing into later

generations as tales and poems. This immortality is not the everlasting life promised by the Christian faith, but it still entails the achievement of timelessness. The closing lines of *Beowulf* reflect this ideal of eternal greatness in a heathen world. The poet, describing the retainers standing at Beowulf's bier, says: 'they said that he was, of all earthly kings, / the most generous of men, and the most gracious, / the most kind to his people, and the most eager for fame (*lofgeornost*).'<sup>42</sup> Beowulf dies a heathen, but his worldly acts mark him as a great hero and therefore memorable and worthy of being imitated. In this way, the poet demonstrates that greatness can still be sought and achieved in a pre-Christian world; Tolkien's Middle-earth too entertains the possibility of achieving this idea of heroism. Aragorn's quest throughout *The Lord of the Rings* is for redemption, to make up for the failings of Isildur. The ghosts he calls upon from the Paths of the Dead show that same pursuit of redemption. When Aragorn demands 'Oathbreakers, why have ye come' the answer is heard 'as if from far away: "to fulfil our oath and have peace"' (RK 772). The ghosts have remained upon Middle-earth, waiting until they can redeem themselves through battle.

Tolkien divides his characters along clear moral lines. The alignment of Orcs, Trolls, Balrogs and Spiders with darkness and the underground stands in contrast to the light and airiness associated with the Elves, the Valar, the Eagles and the Ents. Tolkien also delineates his good and evil characters through speech, either in its construction, or restriction. For example, while the Elves, self-named as 'the Quendi, signifying those that speak with voices' (S 45), have developed their own language, the Orcs were stripped of their Elvish tongue and taught the Black Speech instead: 'They had no language of their own liking; yet they made only brutal jargons, scarcely sufficient even for their own needs, unless it were for curses and abuse' (RK 1105). Language is an indicator of monstrosity, as the abusive and damaging Black Speech imposed on the Orcs is a mechanism of control. By separating the Orcs from their former community, Morgoth makes them monstrous outsiders.

Contemporary to Tolkien's creation of Middle-earth were the writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf, who built on the concepts developed by his teacher Edward Sapir in the early twentieth century. The theory argues that language is a key element in the development of human thought-processes: a notion with which all professional linguists and philologists of the time would certainly have been familiar. Sapir was advocating a concept that had appeared earlier in the writing of philosophers like Wilhelm von Humboldt, who asserted that language was tied to the spirit and value of a nation. Sapir and Whorf extended the

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<sup>42</sup> Translation mine.

concept of language forming national identity to suggest that language formed the core structure of cognition. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis was ‘first advanced by Edward Sapir in 1929 and subsequently developed by Benjamin Whorf, that the structure of a language partly determines a native speaker's categorization of experience’ (‘Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis’).

Tolkien's use of language as a shaping tool for his characters and communities echoes some of the concepts posited in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, but focuses on the difference between the self-formation of language and the imposition of language. Tolkien's characters in Middle-earth illustrate the concept that language can shape, limit or determine the formation of thought, as languages and terminology shape individual characters' understandings. An illustration of this can be found in Fangorn's confusion upon meeting the Hobbits, who are outside his taxonomy: ‘What are *you*, I wonder? I cannot place you. You do not seem to come in the old lists that I learned when I was young’ (*TT* 453, italics in original). Fangorn here resembles the early encyclopaedists, like Bartholomaeus Anglicus, who sought to catalogue the world and man's understanding of it. Fangorn points to the overlooked nature of the Hobbits as a people: they are not part of the grand cosmology of Middle-earth, garnering no mention at all in the first two ages of the history. Their names do not appear as part of Fangorn's great list and thus he does not know how to understand them.

Onomastics, or onomatology, is the study of the history of proper names and naming habits. The term comes from the Greek *ὀνοματολόγος* or ‘collector of words’ (‘Onomatology’). The development of language is reflected in the transition of meaningful words to personal titles. This study depends on contextual and specialized knowledge, as described by Professor Carole Hough in her introduction to *Onomastics*.<sup>43</sup> The study of names and naming has been applied to Tolkien's writing by Janet Croft, in ‘Naming the Evil One: onomastic strategies in Tolkien and Rowling.’ Croft considers the power of the name and its versatility, applying specifically the power of the act of naming to the evil characters in both Rowling and Tolkien. The name of a character, as an element of their creation, is as central as any physical descriptor. The relationship between the name and character is argued by David Kyle Jeffrey to be a key element of Tolkien's world:

The register of deep meaning in Tolkien's names also helps, I think, to see as sub-creation and individual (in the old sense) some events that might otherwise too conveniently be construed as “mere allegory.” [...] For example, the sensitive handling of Eowyn's love (OE *eo*, “thou”; *wyn*,

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<http://onomastics.co.uk/>

“joy”) for Aragorn, which he must restrain in favor of Arwen, can be more deeply understood through a comparison of their names in relation to his own. (72-3)

Croft builds on these ideas of philological construction in her reading of the villains and their names in Tolkien’s history. Names and the act of naming are inherent to the character, as she makes clear in her reading of the renaming of Melkor:

The most important act of naming in association with Melkor was his renaming by Feanor, the most powerful of the Noldorian Elves. [...] Tolkien describes Melkor as having “forfeited” the right to his original name (*Silm.* 31), and here we see an example of a name change used as a punishment and rejection. Melkor no longer has a right to the name “He who arises in Might”; he is now to be known among the Elves by the title “Black Foe of the World.” (Croft 152-3)

The power of a name and its history is important philologically and narratively, as the change of a name denotes a change of character and moral role. Tolkien’s construction of these names harkens back to both real and imagined etymologies, as Greer Gilman describes: ‘Silent etymologies construct [Tolkien’s] world. So Gríma (as in Wormtongue) has the same meanings in Anglo-Saxon as “larva” in Latin – ghost, spectre, hobgoblin; also, a mask or guise or helmet. [...] His new invented languages – Sindarin, Quenya – are reported as of ancient lineage: as old as galaxies, old as creation’ (134). The names of the characters and the language they use are linked inexorably to their moral condition. The change from Elf to Orc shows the corruption of the creatures and the loss of their original state.

Tolkien forms his cultures around individual languages: the passage of information and history is encoded in the peoples’ vocabulary. As Dennis Baron states: ‘Language use carries not only the idiosyncratic stamp of the individual but the mark of the nation as well. Consequently, language becomes both a primary vehicle for the transmission of group culture and a badge of national identification’ (29). The peoples of Middle-earth are shaped by their language. From the fascistic oppression of the Black Speech to the insularity of Rohirrim, Tolkien constructs the social character of each community in Middle-earth through the language it uses. As Shippey points out in *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, ‘Tolkien believed that languages could be intrinsically attractive, or intrinsically repulsive. The Black Speech of Sauron and the orcs is repulsive’ (Shippey *Author* xiv). The power of a language to shape a reader’s response to a character and race is a key mechanism of Tolkien’s definition of his monsters.



The Black Speech is a mechanism of control, imposed upon the Orcs, Trolls and denizens of Mordor. Orkish speech begins as Black Speech, formed for the minions of Melkor. Tolkien's description of the origins of language in Middle-earth, an early version of an appendix to *The Lord of the Rings*, was published by Christopher Tolkien in *The Peoples of Middle-earth*:

The Orcs had a language of their own, devised for them by the Dark Lord of old, but it was so full of harsh and hideous sounds and vile words that other mouths found it difficult to compass, and few indeed were willing to make the attempt. And these creatures, being filled with all malice and hatred, so that they did not love even their own kind, had soon diversified their barbarous and unwritten speech into as many jargons as there were groups or settlements of Orcs. (*Peoples* 35)

In Appendix F of *The Return of the King*, Tolkien goes into detail about the origin of the Orc-tongue and its development across the three ages of Middle-earth. From their beginning, Orcs are constructed around their language, or lack thereof:

The Orcs were first bred by the Dark Power of the North in the Elder Days. It is said that they had no language of their own, but took what they could of other tongues and perverted it to their own liking; yet they made only brutal jargons, scarcely sufficient even for their own needs, unless it was for curses and abuse. (*RK* 1105)

Henry Gee, in *The Science of Middle-earth*, discusses the corruption of language as a result of the divisions in the Orcs:

Tolkien attributes this debasement to the unloveliness of the Orcs themselves, although – were one to be charitable – it can be assumed that the Common Speech used by orcs was a kind of language that linguists refer to as a 'pidgin.' That is, a jargon constructed to facilitate the communication between people of different origins, largely for reasons of trade or business. [...] [O]ne should not assume that Orcs of various kinds, meeting up occasionally for particular missions, such as the Orcs from Isengard, Mordor, and Moria in *The Two Towers*, would have spoken any more than the most rudimentary kind of pidgin, based largely on words from the Common Speech mixed with elements of Black Speech, indigenous orkish dialects and even Elvish. (Gee 64-5)

The separation of the language into individual jargons shows the inherent fissuring and tribalism that develop among the Orcs. The corruption, violence and disharmony that prevailed among them as a species is demonstrated in their broken language and their need

to use Common, or Westron, as their means of communication between the different communities:

So it was that in the Third Age Orcs used for communication between breed and breed the Westron tongue; and many indeed of the older tribes, such as those that still lingered in the North and the Misty Mountains, had long used the Westron as their native language, though in such a fashion as to make it hardly less unlovely than Orkish. In this jargon *tark*, ‘man of Gondor’, was a debased form of *tarkil*, a Quenya word used in Westron for one of Numenorean descent; [...]

It is said that the Black Speech was devised by Sauron in the Dark Years, and that he had desired to make it the language of all those that served him, but he failed in that purpose. From the Black Speech, however, was derived many of the words that were in the Third Age wide-spread among the Orcs, such as *ghâsh* ‘fire’, but after the first overthrow of Sauron this language in its ancient form was forgotten by all but the Nazgûl. When Sauron arose again, it became once more the language of Barad-dûr and of the captains of Mordor. The inscription on the Ring was in the ancient Black Speech. (*RK* 1105)

Tolkien characterises the speech of the Orcs as a combination of sources, from that which was thrust upon them by Morgoth to that which they gathered from other tongues. In light of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, the Orcs’ immersion in the Black Speech limits their ability to absorb other concepts from Westron. Their speech patterns are ‘brutal jargons’, ‘barbarous dialects’ and ‘perverted.’ Their moral role is designated through their language.

Languages also appear as a mechanism of cultural protection. The Rohirrim use speech as a means of distinguishing themselves from outsiders and protecting themselves: ‘none should enter [Theoden’s] gates, save those who know our tongue and are our friends’ (*TT* 497). The Dwarves keep their language secret from outsiders, protecting their history and culture through a kind of linguistic protectionism:

...it was according to the nature of the Dwarves that, travelling and labouring and trading about the lands, as they did after the destruction of their ancient mansions, they should use the languages of men among whom they dwelt. Yet in secret (a secret unlike the Elves, they did not willingly unlock, even to their friends) they used their own strange tongue, changed little by the years; for it had become a tongue of lore rather than a cradle-speech, and they tended it and guarded it as a treasure of the past. Few of other race have succeeded in learning it. (*RK* 1106)

Language transmission and teaching, as when the Quendi (Elves) teach the Edain (first men) how to express themselves in words (*S* 163), is a form of cultural guidance, a sharing of values, traditions and histories along with the vocabulary that embodies them. Language therefore takes on a moral aspect: how language is shared is an indicator of a race's moral placement.

Morgoth, and later Sauron, forces Black Speech upon his creatures, a process that leads to splintering and dialects in the manner of the Tower of Babel (*RK* 1105). The Orcs' fissuring language shows the inherent divisive nature of the monsters: while they have a language imposed on them, they strain against their oppression. Westron is gradually adopted across the communities of the Free Peoples as a means of interacting and communicating (Fawcett 74-5). Overarching languages, like Westron (called the 'Common Speech' and translated as English throughout Tolkien's texts), or the Black Speech, are inclusive or oppressive, depending on the motivating force behind their adoption. The monsters of Middle-earth are primarily taught Black Speech, but adopt a form of Westron in order to communicate; however, even in their use of Common speech, their nature causes them to corrupt it, forming dialects through their hybridization of Black Speech and Westron: 'And these creatures, being filled with malice, hating even their own kind, quickly developed as many barbarous dialects as there were groups or settlements of their race, so that their Orkish speech was of little use to them in intercourse between different tribes' (*RK* 1105). While they can be understood within the text, they are still corrupted and carry their isolation from the 'Common People' of Middle-earth within their distorted use of the 'Common Speech.'

Tolkien, in his multilingual Middle-earth, has characters demonstrate codeswitching. Codeswitching is the mixing of language codes in a single conversation. The switching of codes can be between languages or language varieties: between social discourses or between class or cultural dictions. The use of different vocabularies or terms can result in a complication of meaning; codeswitching takes place at a point of language contact, where multilingual speakers can move between language codes (Bullock 1). As Barbara Bullock points out, this can happen for a variety of reasons, such as 'filling linguistic gaps, expressing ethnic identity, and achieving particular discursive aims' (2). Tolkien demonstrates codeswitching throughout *The Lord of the Rings*: characters alternate between languages frequently. Not only do the Orcs move between Westron and Black Speech, the Elves, Rohirrim and Dwarves use their native tongue and Westron. Hobbits and the men of Gondor are the only two communities that do not speak multiple languages, though they do vary their dialects. Each of the other language communities speaks its own language along with Westron. Tolkien frequently has characters translating ideas into

Westron; rather than footnoting translations, Tolkien's characters primarily speak in Common Speech, which Tolkien represents as Modern English so the reader can follow the conversation. The alternation of language codes in a single conversation, with no change in topic or interlocutor, does not appear frequently in Tolkien's Middle-earth. Instead, he demonstrates how most characters are conversant in multiple language codes, manifesting the ability to move between different dictions and languages between one conversation and the next. This movement between languages makes the creatures more intricate, as even the Orcs understand how to use multiple dialects. Complex language use is tied directly to complex monsters.

Codeswitching does not always take place between languages; it can also be a shift between forms of discourse or dialects. 'All speakers selectively draw on the language varieties in their linguistic repertoire, as dictated by their intentions and by the needs of the speech participants and the conversational setting. Even monolinguals are capable of shifting between the linguistic registers and the dialects they command' (Bullock 2). Tolkien incorporates this variance in diction between classes. For example, Frodo's diction changes in response to his auditor. As an upper-class hobbit, he possesses both high and low diction, which he can vary depending on his audience. When speaking with Sam, Frodo draws upon familiar terms and colloquial language. When leaving Eryn Muil, Sam regrets leaving the Elvish rope behind and Frodo replies: 'If you can think of any way we could have both used the rope and yet brought it down with us, then you can pass on to me ninyhammer, or any other name your Gaffer gave you' (*TT* 596). His language here differs from the tone he uses when addressing Faramir. When asked about the ring, Frodo answers: 'It does not belong to me. It does not belong to any mortal, great or small; though if any could claim it, it would be Aragorn son of Arathorn, whom I named, the leader of our Company from Moria to Rauros' (*TT* 648). Frodo talks to Sam with long, compound colloquial phrases, even referring back to an insulting pet name that echoes a term of affection from Sam's father. When speaking with Faramir, Frodo's language is grand with simple verb phrases. He speaks in clipped phrases, clear verbs and strong declaratives. The characters of Tolkien's Middle-earth must be conversant with multiple codes if they wish to communicate across cultures and classes. A few characters are limited in their ability to switch diction, like Sam, but the majority can move between languages; this linguistic versatility is even seen in the monsters of Middle-earth.

The language used by Gollum, or Smeagol, demonstrates the internalization of linguistic codes and the potential for blending. As the most complicated monster in Tolkien's Middle-earth, Gollum is a corrupted being through his contact with an artifact of power. Gollum, in his dualism of character, moves between language elements, sometimes

in a single sentence. His codeswitching is more pronounced than any other character. Gollum's use of codes, however, is not self-aware, though it is responsive. His language when speaking to Bilbo, in his initial appearance in *The Hobbit*, demonstrates Tolkien's conception of the monster as threatening, yet playful. The changes between Tolkien's initial edition of *The Hobbit* and the rerelease in 1951 to fit with *The Lord of the Rings* alters little in Gollum's speech-patterns, only changing the offer of the ring as a prize and the direct versus implied threat. In *The Hobbit*, Gollum's voice is sibilant and predatory: 'Is it nice, my precious; is it juicy; is it scrumptiously crunchable?' (Rateliff *Baggins* 158). While he does refer to his precious, his divided voice does not appear in *The Hobbit*. While in the possession of the Ring, Gollum is a singular being: he is corrupted, but whole.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, however, Gollum demonstrates a division of identity through language. His voice as Smeagol is less aggressive and more servile than his voice as Gollum. When waking Sam and Frodo on their trip to Minas Morgul and the secret passage, Smeagol whispers an alert: 'wake up, wake up! Wake up, sleepies! [...] Wake up! No time to lose. We must go, yet, we must go at once. No time to lose! [...] They mustn't be silly [...] we must go. No time to lose!' (*TT* 685). Gollum, speaking as Smeagol, is more coherent and focused than the reader sees when he is speaking as Gollum. He is also more deferential: it is this servitude that creates tension with Sam. Sam's fears of being replaced are merited by the similar style of language he and Gollum possess. While Sam is far more coherent, he and Smeagol show the same tone of reverence to Frodo. He is threatened by Smeagol's subservience and Frodo's acceptance of the help.

Gollum, when contemplating the lure of Sam and Frodo into Shelob's lair, demonstrates the punctuated repetition of the Smeagol voice, but the reliance on the precious as a reassurance.

We'll see, we'll see, [...] we'll see. It may well be, O yes, it may well be that when She throws away the bones and the empty garments, we shall find it, we shall find it, the Precious, a reward for poor Smeagol who brings nice food. And we'll save the Precious, as we promised. O yes. And when we've got it safe, then She'll know it, O yes, then we'll pay her back, my precious. Then we'll pay everyone back! (*TT* 708)

The fracturing is more visible in Gollum's thoughts: while he may speak more gently to Frodo and Sam, his thoughts turn to the precious and his reliance on the Ring as a focus. The movement between language codes, more specifically the structure of his phrasing, demonstrates a shifting of self and a shifting of audience.

By composing a monster who can move between linguistic codes, Tolkien has created a complicated figure. The Orcs, for example, can blend Black Speech and

Common, but do so incompletely. The Orcs are limited in the language they can access from other tongues because they are controlled by Morgoth and his vocabulary. While there are Orcs who possess high diction, which will be discussed later in the chapter, the vast majority use colloquial and vulgar phrases in London Cockney.<sup>44</sup> Tolkien lets his monsters speak, which means they must speak in Common to be understood by the reader; yet he blends words from Black Speech and uses characteristic dialects to define the monsters. Dragons have complex, riddling speech; Trolls have heavily accented speech; Orcs vary between high and low diction; Gollum has a speech pattern all his own. Each of these characters will be read in this chapter by their use of language.

While language plays a key role in the definition and moral placement of characters in Middle-earth, not all creatures have a space to speak. While Orcs have vocal figures among their ranks and both Dragons are manipulators of speech, other creatures like Goblins and Trolls have limited speech and are primarily presented through their actions. The Goblins, Trolls and Spiders, among others, are denied effective narrative space, only having brief moments of dialogue in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Primarily, they are performative characters, measured by their actions.<sup>45</sup> When a character does not have speech, or does not have a space in which to justify its actions, all that is left for the reader is the actions themselves. This tradition of the monster being seen and not heard is described by Baldick, in his assertion that prior to *Frankenstein*, ‘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’ (45). There is no ambiguity, however, about these characters’ place within the moral spectrum of Middle-earth, as Tolkien makes clear moral judgements in his descriptions of them. Smeagol/Gollum is a complex case, to be discussed further in this chapter. Smeagol undergoes the process of corruption that can transform a ‘free person’ to a ‘monster,’ as Orcs derive from Elves, but as the narrative progresses, his corruption lessens; this halfway position is reflected in his language as well as in his understanding of hobbit-customs such as riddling.

The limited voices of the monsters stand in contrast to the races that Tolkien presents in a positive light, which would be otherwise monstrous due to their size or appearance. Giant Eagles, Beorn and Fangorn, for example, would be terrifying figures if

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<sup>44</sup> There is certainly interesting work to be done on Tolkien’s monsters and their representation as lower-class: he consistently places his monsters at a disadvantage in power and language. Shippey describes them in Tolkien’s terms as ‘low down on the scale of evil, the mere “infantry of the old war”’ (Tolkien quoted in Shippey 133). Yet, this is an argument outside the scope of this current work.

<sup>45</sup> Smaug and Shelob are the anomaly, in that they are given narrative moments from their perspective; this will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.

they were left silent in the narrative. This granting of language is a demonstration of how monstrosity is in the eye of the beholder. The monsters in Middle-earth are not more physically overwhelming or violent than the heroes: they are just cast in a negative light by the story-tellers. As the narratives are all imagined translations,<sup>46</sup> the stories are skewed by the original author. It is for this reason that Ents are not discussed as a monstrous race, but Dwarves are. The Ents, while initially frightening to Pippin and Merry, are not cast as antagonists in the tales of Middle-earth. The Dwarves, in their disruption of and battles with Ilúvatar's first-born, are.

## 4.2 Tolkien's Monsters

I have asserted in earlier chapters that Tolkien's development of the monster races in his fiction is syncretistic, blending figures from multiple cultures and schools of thought. Indeed, each individual monster is composed of traits, behaviours, names or language elements from different sources. In addition, his creatures developed over time, from the early writings that fed into *The Silmarillion*, his children's narrative *The Hobbit* in its successive iterations, to his story of the end of the Third Age: *The Lord of the Rings*. These sources contribute to Tolkien's gradual development of these characters between the various texts of Middle-earth and his recasting of earlier texts and myths to suit a modern context. His writing of the monstrous other reflects a number of anxieties present in other writers like Lawrence and Maddox, but instead of disillusionment, Tolkien's writing maintains its hope. While he engages in the same escapism as other writers, his story ends with the defeat of the monster. In a world of fantasy, good can triumph.

### 4.2.1. Orcs and Goblins

The word *orc*, familiar to Tolkien from his reading and scholarship of *Beowulf*, was prevalent in Anglo-Saxon as a term for a monstrous threat. The Anglo-Saxon use of 'orc' denoted difference, both spatial and cultural, demonstrated in its association with Grendel. Grendel, Kin of Cain, is of the same bloodline as 'eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnéäs' [Trolls and elves and evil spirits] (*Beowulf* 112). Tolkien, in his 1954 letter to the novelist Naomi Mitchison, acknowledged that the etymological root of his word 'orc' lay in Anglo-Saxon: 'the word is as far as I am concerned actually derived from Old English *orc* "demon", but only because of its phonetic suitability' (*Letters* 177-8). His word, then, has an

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<sup>46</sup> '[*The Hobbit*] was derived from the earlier chapters of the Red Book [of Westmarch], composed by Bilbo himself, the first Hobbit to become famous in the world at large, and called by him *There and Back Again*, since they told of his journey into the East and his return: an adventure which later involved all the Hobbits in the great events of that Age that are here related. [...] [A] few notes on the more important points are here collected from Hobbit-lore' ('Prologue' 1).

etymological link with Anglo-Saxon but is his own coinage and means something a little different from what it may have meant to his Germanic ancestors. Yet as a philologist, his sense of the ‘phonetic suitability’ of the word, namely its harsh sound, would incorporate the history and meaning that developed with the phonetic structure. In the Bosworth-Toller *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, the only example of ‘orcneas’ provided is from *Beowulf*, and it connects to Grendel: the creature outside the hall. Called *æglæca* and *deorc dēapscua* [wretch, dark deathshadow] (*Beowulf* 159, 160),<sup>47</sup> Grendel is characterised by his separation from the community in the halls of men. The poet separates Grendel from humanity, associating him with the uninhabited moors and grouping him with other outlandish creatures: *eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas* (*Beowulf* 112). Klaeber glosses this last phrase as ‘giants and elves and evil spirits,’ and Benjamin Thorpe’s 1865 translation writes the line as ‘eotens and elves and orkens’ (224-5); thus it seemed fitting for Tolkien to adopt the term ‘orc’ for his own creatures that have been removed from their communities and robbed of their language and culture. His Orcs are outsiders, forever barred from their former lives. As Gee notes, Tolkien’s use with the word orc was likely influenced by Charles Kingsley’s *Hereward The Wake*, which the OED includes in their list of usage; Kingsley’s novel is about ‘things unspeakable – dragons, giants, rocs, orcs, witch-whales, griffins, chimeras, satyrs, enchanters, Paynims, Saracen Emirs and Sultans, Kaisers of Constantinople, Kaisers of Ind and of Cathay, and beyond them again of lands unknown’ (Kingsley quoted in Gee 63). Gee points out that the list of ‘largely interchangeable beasts unites solely on the basis of their unfamiliarity and, no doubt, their hostility towards our parochial selves’ (64). Gee addresses the idea of the outsider cast as monstrous, which Tolkien develops but never fully reverses in his own work. ‘The OED entry for ‘orc’ culminates with citations from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and defines Tolkien’s use of the word as one of a warlike people in whom are combined human and ogre-like characteristics’ (Gee 64). The sense of the hybridity identifies the monstrous elements of the Orc, while their sense of corruption and dislocation appears more readily in their use of language.

Tolkien’s use of the word Orc also carries the meaning of spectre and demon from its original sources. Tolkien shows throughout his work a strong link between one’s name and its history or true nature. As Allan Turner writes in ‘Tolkien’s “Linguistic Heresy”’:

There are occasional hints in Tolkien’s fiction of a state in which meaning really is inherent in words. This is shown particularly by the importance of names, which by their nature are congruent with individual people or places:

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“I am Gandalf, and Gandalf means me,” declares that character when he is first introduced in *The Hobbit*. Treebeard the Ent explains, “Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language.” (330)

As discussed in the prior discussion of Onomastics, names hold a core meaning in Tolkien’s creations, hence his careful selection of culturally consistent names for his Dwarves<sup>48</sup>, Wizards, Men<sup>49</sup> and others. Thus, it is important to consider the history of the word Orc when discussing their character and role. The *Oxford English Dictionary* names two sources, either Classical Latin ‘Orcus’ or Anglo-Saxon ‘Orcneas,’ as the root of this word; both words are associated with death and monstrosity, as Orcus was the god of the underworld and orcneas walk the moors with Grendel. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines orc as ‘[a] devouring monster; an ogre; spec. a member of an imaginary race of subhuman creatures, small and human-like in form but having ogreish features and warlike, malevolent characters’ (‘Orc’). Examples include Samuel Holland’s 1656 description of ‘three heads [on] the shoulders of an Orke, begotten by an Incubus’ and Charles Kingsley’s aforementioned *Hereward the Wake*. These texts show the entrenching of the orc as monster, carrying in the tradition of Grendel. The Thesaurus of Old English categorizes ‘orc’ under the heading ‘spectre, ghost, demon, goblin.’ Tolkien does not draw on the spectre or ghost in his development of the Orc, instead focusing on the goblin or ogre traits. As a philologist, Tolkien would be familiar with the history and connotations of the word when naming his most prevalent form of monster, invoking the dark history of the word in his own narrative.

In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien describes the origin of Orcs, and Melkor’s role in their corruption, yet it is not the only version of their formation found in Tolkien’s mythology:

Yet this is held true by the wise of Eressëa, that all those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison, and *by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes.* For the Orcs had life and multiplied after the manner of the Children of Ilúvatar; and naught that had life of its own, nor the semblance of life, could ever Melkor make since his rebellion in the Ainulindalë before the Beginning: so say the wise. And deep in their dark hearts the Orcs loathed the Master whom they served in

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<sup>48</sup> Dwarvish names are taken primarily from the Poetic Edda of the Norse.

<sup>49</sup> While not necessarily extant names, Tolkien’s Rohirrim have names based on Anglo-Saxon language structure.

fear, the maker only of their misery. This it may be was the vilest deed of Melkor, and the most hateful to Ilúvatar. (*S* 47, italics mine)

There are two narratives of the creation of the Orcs; in *The Silmarillion*, the Orcs are corrupted Elves who have been tortured. The Elves who become Orcs then reproduce as Elves would have done. The other narrative of the origin of the Orcs comes from *The History of Middle-earth*, which Christopher Tolkien published after his father's death. *The Lost Road* describes how 'the Orcs were not made until [Morgoth] had looked upon the Elves, and he made them in mockery of the Children of Ilúvatar' (*Lost Road* 212). *The Shaping of Middle-earth* states that the 'hordes of Orcs he made of stone, but their hearts of hatred' (*Shaping* 82). *The Silmarillion*, the original history of Middle-earth that Tolkien tried to publish prior to *The Lord of the Rings*, focuses on the element of corruption in the history of the Orcs. Tolkien's other notes link them instead to Trolls: as stone creatures shaped by Morgoth. This shift in the origin reflects Tolkien's changing concept of the monsters. Because his works were created over a number of years, Tolkien's idea of the Orc transformed.

The Orcs are ruined Elves in one version of their history; they are simultaneously a mockery and a direct descendent. These two origin myths contradict one another, demonstrating the discontinuity in Tolkien's development of the monsters.

The endless indecision [on the origin of Orcs] is amply illustrated by notes from the *Annals of Aman* (in *HOME X*) in which Tolkien writes that Orcs are enslaved Elves, broken by Morgoth and bred. However, notes added to this suggest that Orcs should not, in the end, have such an Elvish derivation. Deepening the confusion is a constant alternation between the idea of creation and corruption. The word 'made' is emended to 'bred,' 'spawn' is changed to 'children' and so on. (Gee 76)

His early focus on corruption and later focus on narrative consistency shows the change in his mythology. He does not write a single version of the history of Middle-earth, as the events of the world are recorded by different imagined archivists. Elves recorded *The Silmarillion*, while Hobbits recorded the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Acting as the imagined translator, not unlike Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto*, Tolkien brings all these texts together into an apparently unified history. It is, however, inconsistent. The connection of the monsters to the heroes begins with the relationship between Elves and Orcs. Just as the Elves are the first life on Middle-earth, the Orcs are the first fallen described in *The Silmarillion*. By making this the story recorded by the Elven historians, we can read *The Silmarillion* as a biblical story, as the race of monsters is sprung from the first inhabitants of the world. Tolkien's conception of the monster shifts

based on the voice telling the story, just as the meaning of the monster has shifted throughout literary history.

Tolkien's Orcs are also referred to as Goblins in *The Hobbit* and elsewhere in *The History of Middle-earth*. While these terms are occasionally distinguished from one another, as when an army is described as the 'great host of the Orcs, and wandering goblins' (*Lost Tales* 230), they are more often conflated.<sup>50</sup> When they are distinguished, Goblins appear an offshoot of Orcs, but seem to be a diminution. Often, the two are spoken of as a singular group, particularly in matters of language:

The orcs and goblins had languages of their own, as hideous as all things that they made or used; and since some remnant of good will, and true thought and perception, is required to keep even a base language alive and useful even for base purposes, their tongues were endlessly diversified in form, as they were deadly monotonous in purport, fluent only in the expression of abuse, of hatred and fear. For which reason they and their kind used (and still use) the languages of nobler creatures in such intercourse as they must have between tribe and tribe. (*Peoples* 21)

In *The Hobbit*, there is no reference to Orcs. Instead, the dwarven company faces the Goblins and their king. While *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* are texts for an adult audience, Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* for his children. His idea of the monster changes: the Goblins, Trolls and Dragon in *The Hobbit* are challenges on Bilbo's quest; the monsters of *The Lord of the Rings* present a powerful threat to the heroes. The structure of the two texts also varies: *The Lord of the Rings*, as an epic narrative, has the singular enemy Sauron with many subsidiaries providing more immediate threats through the narrative. *The Hobbit's* episodic format appeals to the youthful audience, but also breaks the threats into distinct entities. Each threat is met, faced and defeated (or escaped) before the dwarven company moves on.

In *The Hobbit*, the Goblins are introduced when the Dwarves accidentally sleep at the entrance to the Goblins' home under the mountains. The Goblins' response to the Dwarves on the doorstep points to their insularity and paranoia: 'Up to no good, I'll warrant!' their king observes; 'Spying on the private business of my people, I guess! Thieves, I shouldn't be surprised to learn! Murderers and friends of Elves, not unlikely!' (*H* 84). They are an unambiguously evil counterpart to the Dwarves, as productive mining communities under a monarchic government. They are physically smaller beings than the

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<sup>50</sup> 'Orcs "Gnomish *orch*, pl. *eirch*, *erch*; Qenya *ork*, *orqui* borrowed from Gnomish. A folk devised and brought into being by Morgoth to war on Elves and Men; sometimes translated "Goblins", but they were of nearly human stature"' (*Lost Road* 406).

'It is Melko's goblins, the Orcs of the hills' (*Lost Tales I* 157).

Orcs, though there are large Goblins, like the King or the one killed by Bullroarer Took.<sup>51</sup> They are also capable of being baffled and overwhelmed by fireworks and distraction tactics. Their vulnerability stands in stark contrast to the overwhelming power of the Orc armies in *The Lord of the Rings*. The Goblins of *The Hobbit* are primarily comic figures, just as the Elves and Trolls appear in a humorous or diminished form. The monstrous is lessened in *The Hobbit*, as it is a children's story and is early in Tolkien's development of Middle-earth.

Something akin to a Goblin exists in many myths from around the world, as a small, supernatural imp-figure often dwelling underground. Katherine Briggs and Diane Purkiss, in their catalogues of the fay-figures of the British Isles, discuss the goblin in their literary contexts. Purkiss and Briggs discuss the tradition of the larger goblin, associating it with other creatures like the Shellycoat, Kelpies and Will o' the Wisps (Briggs 69-73). Purkiss describes the mercurial nature of familiars and brownies:

Occasionally, instead of leaving, hobs [an abbreviated term for hobgoblin] turn malevolent, ruining the housework with which they once helped; [...] [i]n folklore, some of those [malevolent fairies] are hobs who have not been treated properly by their own perverse standards; others, like the Norse trowies and the Greek *kallikantzaroi*, are mischievous by nature. (Purkiss 154)

The level of malice varies depending on the narrative; while some of the imps are playful and distracting, others threaten lives and intend genuine harm. Rossetti draws on the idea of the danger they pose in her 1862 poem 'Goblin Market.' The goblins here are predatory beings, much like Tolkien's rendition in *The Hobbit*. Rossetti's goblins prey on the innocent and naïve, approaching young girls when they are alone and vulnerable. They are not physically formidable: they use song and the temptation of the fruit to lure in the adolescents. When rejected, they demonstrate a limited aptitude for violence:

They trod and hustled her,  
Elbow'd and jostled her,  
Claw'd with their nails,  
Barking, mewling, hissing, mocking,  
Tore her gown and soil'd her stocking,  
Twitch'd her hair out by the roots,  
Stamp'd upon her tender feet,

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<sup>51</sup> 'Old Took's great-grand-uncle Bullroarer, who was so (huge for a hobbit) that he could ride a horse. He charged the ranks of the goblins of Mount Gram in the Battle of the Green Fields, and knocked their king Golfimbul's head clean off with a wooden club' (*H* 31).

Held her hands and squeez'd their fruits

Against her mouth to make her eat. (Rossetti 399-407)

The Goblins in *The Hobbit* emulate this sense of threat: a single Goblin is not a danger, but the company of them is. Gollum demonstrates this through the narrator's explanation of his hunting behaviour. As the narrative voice explains, 'He liked meat too. Goblin he thought good, when he could get it; but he took care they never found him out. He just throttled them from behind, if they ever came down alone anywhere near the edge of the water' (*H* 94). He does not face Goblins in combat, or in groups, but has the strength and speed to choke a single Goblin. Their power lies in numbers, as it did for Rossetti.

To distinguish between the creatures under the Misty Mountains in *The Hobbit* and the dangerous horde in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien calls the creatures by different names. The Goblins in *The Hobbit* sing songs and are defeated in a single battle. The Orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* speak in barbarous dialects and are a brutal army. In his later work, Tolkien only uses the term 'Goblin-men' to describe the Northern Orcs Saruman uses as his breeding stock in *The Lord of the Rings*, while *The Silmarillion* includes no references to Goblins. While Tolkien conflates the idea of the Goblin and Orc in much of his language, he specifically uses the term Goblin when they demonstrate the traits found in Rossetti, like their singing as they drag the captives underground. Their size, movement and group behaviour make them Goblins, rather than just a variety of Orc. Their language, particularly their percussive, descriptive song as they bring the Dwarves into the caves below the Misty Mountains, echoes that of Rossetti's fruit-peddlers.

Clap! Snap! the black crack!

Grip, grab! Pinch, nab!

And down down to Goblin-town

You go, my lad!

Clash, crash! Crush, smash!

Hammer and tongs! Knocker and gongs!

Pound, pound, far underground!

Ho, ho! my lad!

Swish, smack! Whip crack!

Batter and beat! Yammer and bleat!

Work, work! Nor dare to shirk,

While Goblins quaff, and Goblins laugh,

Round and round far underground

Below, my lad! (*H* 81-2)

The Goblins speak Common, and are thus able to communicate with the Dwarves. Instead of being isolated through their language, like the Orcs, the Goblins are made familiar: the song, while connecting them with Rossetti's earlier predatory goblins, actually makes them more engaging. Their song is playful, and light, which stands in opposition to their later actions in the story and their origin in *The Silmarillion*. The casting of the Goblins as a momentary threat is a result of the audience of *The Hobbit*. The childish song of the Goblins makes them an entertaining monster. Tolkien's monsters in *The Hobbit* are engaging and often humorous, rather than malevolent. While the Goblins are threatening to enslave the Dwarves, they are doing so in song.

Tolkien represents his Orcs as physically and linguistically distinct from other creatures in Middle-earth. Tolkien's descriptors for the Orcs throughout *The History of Middle-earth*, *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* are damning, focusing on the harshness of their speech and the cruelty of their actions. Early in *The Silmarillion*, they are described in a list of 'beasts and [Melkor's] demons, and the race of the Orcs' that were 'bred long before' and 'grew and multiplied in the bowels of the earth' (S 86). Their proliferation in the 'bowels of the earth' suggests an earthbound origin, encased in rock, locked away from light. Their association with darkness continues in *The Lord of the Rings* when, in Moria, Gandalf explains they are being hunted by 'Orcs, very many of them, [...] And some are large and evil: black Uruks of Mordor' (FR 316). Tolkien uses the cultural shorthand of light and dark to demarcate good and evil; Orcs are associated with blackness, and thus evil. These are the creatures who 'wrought ruin in Beleriand' and serve Morgoth (S 102), and his protégé Sauron throughout the Three Ages of Tolkien's Arda. Yet, despite their constant presence, Tolkien provides sparse physical description of the creatures.

As a substitute for detailed physical description, Tolkien makes effective use of certain brief phrases and hints. Rather than presenting a detailed description of the Orcs, Tolkien uses their origin, as corrupted Elves, to provide a sense of their physical form. Just as the *Beowulf* poet ties Grendel to the men of the hall and the Biblical tradition of monsters by saying Grendel is Cain's kin, so Tolkien ties the Orcs to Elves. From their first appearance in *The Silmarillion* to their presence throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, the adjectives used do not give a sense of the whole creature, but point to specific elements. Tolkien echoes Shelley in her descriptors of the creature; Frankenstein never provides a full description of his creature's physical form, but traits such as the creature's 'dull yellow eye' (Shelley 38), 'yellow skin' (Shelley 39) and its 'shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips' (Shelley 39) give the reader a sense of the monster's horrid physical form. Tolkien's Orcs are described with terms like 'clawlike hand' (TT 437) 'evil voice' (TT

436), ‘yellow-fanged’ and ‘swart, slant-eyed’ or ‘long-armed crook-legged’ (*TT* 437; 441; 441). Even in their origin, as described in *The Silmarillion*, it is not their own traits that define them, but their opposition to the Elves: ‘thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes’ (*S* 47). This establishment of opposition is not unlike the description of Grendel as ‘hearmscaþa’ (pernicious spoiler) or ‘laðgetēona’ (enemy) (*Beowulf* 766; 974), as his physical form is less important than his role as enemy. As Grendel’s role was as kin of Cain, a reflection of how the spiritual fall resulted in a physical fall, so the Orcs are an expression of corruption; both are given little physical description and explanation, but are rather left to the reader’s imagination. This powerful omission connects the reader to the text, requiring investment and involvement.

As discussed earlier, Tolkien demarcates Orcs as evil through language, separating them from the other races of Middle-earth. They speak a debased and degraded form of Westron throughout most of *The Lord of the Rings*, which needed to be softened to fit it into the story: ‘The speech of Orcs was actually more filthy and degraded than I have shown it. If I had tried to use an “English” more near to the reality it would have been intolerably disgusting and to many readers hardly intelligible’ (*Peoples* 42). Tolkien describes Orc-speech in terms of its harsh sound and underlying anger, as a hybrid of the language the Orcs are taught by Melkor and the language of the Free Peoples. As Merry and Pippin are kept captive by the Uruk-hai and the Mordor Uruks, the discussion between the Isengarders and the Mordor-Orcs takes place in Westron because ‘the members of two or three quite different tribes were present, and they could not understand one another’s orc-speech’ (*TT* 435). They speak to each other with disdain and anger, as arguments are short lived and end with violence: ‘Many loud yells in orc-speech answered [Uglûk], and the ringing clash of weapons being drawn [...] some of the Northerners were still unwilling, and the Isengarders slew two more before the rest were cowed’ (*TT* 436-7). While this anger and violence is apparent between Orcs of different tribes and masters, there is also visible infighting in the Tower of Cirith Ungol in Mordor as Sam attempts to rescue Frodo. Sam arrives immediately following a civil slaughter that wipes out the two factions of Orcs:

“And anyway it looks like as if Shagrat, Gorbag, and company have done nearly all my job for me” [...] At once [Sam] saw that up here the fighting had been fiercest. All the court was choked with dead orcs, or their severed and scattered heads and limbs. The place stank of death. [...] As Sam overhears:] “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.” (RK 884-5)

While the two camps have common language, there are clear distinctions in the tribal attitudes. Tolkien demonstrates division within the race along lines of fealty and leadership; this discord is most clearly evident in the fighting between Isengarders and Mordor-Orcs, who each have their own dialects of Westron. Despite these later divisions, Tolkien describes in the Appendixes of *The Return of the King* the origin of Orkish as a single language under the control of Morgoth.

Tolkien introduces different races of Orcs, but shows their primary means of organization or separation is through their oppressors. The Isengard-Orcs, those mustered by Saruman, are in the service of Orthanc. Going by the name of Uruk-Hai, they wear the symbol of the White Hand of Saruman, and serve his interests before those of Mordor: they are physically and ideologically divided from their Mordor brethren. Saruman breeds the Orcs in his service, which Aragorn recognises through the discarded gear and corpses: ‘Here lie many that are not folk of Mordor. Some are from the North, from the Misty Mountains, if I know anything of Orcs and their kinds. And here are others strange to me’ (TT 405). There is visible difference in the Orcs based on breeding; their distinction is determined by whomever controls them. Orcs are bred for the purposes of war and conflict, but there are different tasks and roles:

Presently two orcs came into view. One was clad in ragged brown and was armed with a bow of horn; it was of a small breed, black-skinned, with wide and snuffling nostrils: evidently a tracker of some kind. The other was a big fighting-orc, like those of Shagrat's company, bearing the token of the Eye. (RK 903)

While Aragorn points to the Northern Orcs, and Uglúk refers to the Misty Mountain Orcs as ‘mountain-maggots’ when they resist running through the daylight (TT 439), the greatest point of difference is one’s master:

We are the fighting Uruk-Hai! We slew the great warrior. We took the prisoners. We are the servants of Saruman the Wise, the White Hand: the Hand that gives us man’s-flesh to eat. We came out of Isengard, and led you here, and we shall lead you back by the way we choose. (TT 436)

There is a sense of distinction between the Orcs based on their master and origin, though they are still all referred to as Orcs; there is a noted increased sensitivity to light on the part



of mountain-Orcs,<sup>52</sup> but the primary mode of distinction between the Orc communities is their master and the resulting division of language.

Tribalism and the Orkish divisive nature perpetuates itself through the interactions of the Mordor Uruks and the Isengard Uruk-Hai, and the descriptions of the two differing groups remain consistent and damning. There is little clear definition of distinct physical traits provided in the texts, despite Aragorn's perception of difference, nor is there any sense that one group is less violent or more honourable than any other. Each of the captains demonstrates a form of perverted loyalty; while loyalty is a virtue central to medieval texts like *Beowulf*, the form of loyalty demonstrated by the Orcs is violent and territorial. The history of Middle-earth describes the loyalty of the Orcs: 'And deep in their dark hearts the Orcs loathed the Master whom they served in fear, the maker only of their misery' (*S* 47). The fealty of the Orcs is not out of affection or reciprocation; it is a relationship of domination and submission. The language of the Orc Captains, Uglúk, Shagrat and Grishnákh, is varied but maintains the sense of dominance. While they have varied speech patterns, they each use language as a tool of oppression.

Tolkien's Orkish captains, each answering to either the Red Eye of Sauron or the White Hand of Saruman, show similar speech patterns, which make them distinct from the other Orcs within the text. While each Orc Captain has a distinct diction, it is clear that those named figures, Uglúk, Shagrat and Grishnákh, are separate from the masses they command. Each of them uses a more elevated form of speech, blended with the debased Common that Tolkien describes in his appendixes (*RK* 1105). This vocabulary is interwoven with the references to abuse and violence that are natural to Orcs. These captains demonstrate the aforementioned code-switching in their movement between heroic language and cruel words. As Grishnákh speaks to the Orcs kidnapping Merry and Pippin, his voice sets him apart from the others: "“That is a very interesting remark,” sneered a voice, softer than the others but more evil. “I may have to report that. The prisoners are NOT to be searched or plundered: those are *my* orders”” (*TT* 436). The use of words like 'remark' and 'plundered' bespeak a level of language sophistication not seen in the other Orc speeches. Grishnákh may have a softer voice, but it is 'more evil.' The narrative voice identifies the malice of the character present in the voice. This passing mention suggests that language is inherently tied to a character's morality: one can hear in a voice that someone is 'more evil.' The more formal parlance is continued, when Grishnákh challenges Uglúk's authority over the prisoners:

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<sup>52</sup> Yet, Legolas points out that it is rare for Orcs to be out in daylight, regardless of their region of origin: 'Seldom will Orcs journey in the open under the sun, yet these have done so.' (*TT* 415)

“You have spoken more than enough, Uglúk,” sneered the evil voice. “I wonder how they would like it in Luginbúrz. They might think that Uglúk’s shoulders needed relieving of a swollen head. They might ask where his strange ideas come from. Did they come from Saruman, perhaps? Who does *he* think he is, setting up on his own with his filthy white badges? They might agree with me, with Grishnákh their trusted messenger; and I Grishnákh say this: Saruman is a fool, and a dirty treacherous fool. But the Great Eye is on him.” (*TT* 436)

This passage stands in contrast to the clipped, definitive statements made by Uglúk, which are Uglúk’s assertion of power and authority. He is absolute in his phrasing, leaving no space for negotiation or challenge: ‘I am Uglúk. I command. I return to Isengard by the shortest road’ (*TT* 436). While it lacks the sophistication of Grishnákh’s speech, the strong words like ‘I command’ sound akin to the noble courts of the Rohirrim or Gondorians, not the other Orcs.

Language can delineate not only moral position, but also social rank. As most of the speaking human characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are of a noble bloodline, they demonstrate an elevated style of speech to indicate their social standing and position of authority. Uglúk, as a leader, holds authority over the other Orcs. So, while Uglúk can be quite colloquial in his conversations with his fellow Isengard Orcs,<sup>53</sup> he demonstrates a fluidity of speech that shows his awareness of noble speech patterns as well as his soldiers’ brutal jargon. While his voice is not immediately identified, Uglúk’s discussion with the men about the reason for not searching the prisoners fits with his later statements; yet, his language is quite informal and drawn out: ‘I heard that one of them has got something, something that’s wanted for the War, some elvish plot or other. Anyway, they’ll both be questioned’ (*TT* 435). This mobility between dictions demonstrates Uglúk’s ability to codeswitch.

The use of simple or complex verb phrases is a means of distinguishing character types: the strong singular verb echoes the heroic speech of the epic poetry Tolkien studied. When Beowulf declares to Wealhþéow that he will guard Heorot, his phrasing is simple and assertive.

I resolved that, when I mounted the water,  
sat down in the sea-boat amid my company of warriors,  
that I forthwith your people’s

<sup>53</sup> While his voice is not immediately identified, Uglúk’s discussion with the men about the reason for not searching the prisoners fits with his later statements; yet, his language is quite informal and drawn out: ‘I heard that one of them has got something, something that’s wanted for the War, some elvish plot or other. Anyway, they’ll both be questioned’ (*TT* 435).

will would work, or fall in slaughter,  
 fast in the fiend's grasp; I must perform  
 this daring act of courage or the last day  
 in this mead-hall of mine await. (*Beowulf* 632-8)<sup>54</sup>

In the same way, Uglúk's declarative tone elevates his character: we can read in his words a sense of purpose and direction. So, despite Orkish speech being a debasement of Common, Tolkien has created characters with individual diction and distinctive phrasing, each separated from the other Orcs by the formality of their speech. Archaic and high-speech defines the nobility and traditional races throughout Middle-earth, and the adoption of such speech identifies these Orcs in positions of power from the other Orkish warriors. The power of Uglúk's and Grishnákh's speech is in their claim of a speech pattern and vocabulary that is not Orkish. They show their adoption of Westron and the speech of their enemy as a marker of their authority. Tolkien's construction of ambiguity is clear in this parity of language; his villains, who are unrepentant and unredeemable, speak with the same vocabulary and diction as his heroes. The downfall of the Orc is stressed throughout *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, making the language similarity a question of heroics and the language of the past. In a text that raises questions of morality and heroics, often dismissing valour in battle,<sup>55</sup> the power of language shows an anxiety over the similarity between hero and villain.

Shagrat also demonstrates codeswitching: the intertwining of elevated speech with debased terms. He draws readily upon two dictions simultaneously, showing his understanding of both vocabularies. When Sam enters the Tower of Cirith Ungol, he overhears the end of an argument between Shagrat and Snaga,<sup>56</sup> as Shagrat attempts to assert authority, Snaga refuses and enrages him. What is interesting is the phrasing Tolkien gives Shagrat is aggressive, using angry, violent words; however, this is matched by more complex and formal speech patterns:

“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

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<sup>54</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>55</sup> After the battle of Helm's Deep, the piles of the dead are described: 'The Orcs were piled in great heaps, away from the mounds of Men, not far from the eaves of the forest. And the people were troubled in their minds; for the heaps of carrion were too great for burial or for burning' (*TT* 532).

<sup>56</sup> This term is actually a derogatory term, not a name, as *snaga* means slave in Black Speech (*RK* 1105).

with you: I'll send you to Shelob." [...] "I must stay here anyway. But I'm hurt. The Black Pits take that filthy rebel Gorbag." (RK 885)

Shagrat has both the longer phrases and sentences seen in Grishnákh's speech, a fellow Mordor-Uruk, and the short, clipped phrases of Uglúk. He moves between the verb clauses, demonstrating his aptitude in different dictions: he codeswitches. 'Come here and I'll squeeze your eyes out, like I did to Radbug just now' is a compound phrase with a trailing clause; this contrasts with the simple phrase '[b]ut I'm hurt.' Shagrat's speech is more aggressive than the two captains warring over the Hobbit prisoners; however, each conversation that Tolkien shows the reader ends in violent confrontation and slaughter, as Orkish speech is not so much a mechanism of discussion and compromise; it is a tool for obtaining power.

Tolkien shows the completeness of the corruption that has occurred, as nothing of the Elvish culture or character remains once Melkor has warped the Orcs. They are constructed as wholly ruined and wholly monstrous. As figures of corruption, the Orcs are opponents in an ideological battle. While other authors incorporate the idea of groups of goblins as warriors, as found in Rossetti's violent fruit-peddlers or George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, Tolkien is the first to show the monster in the role of a soldier. MacDonald's guards are mustering for war, but Tolkien is the first to fully explore the monster as marshaled combatant. In the great wars of the twentieth century, soldiers on both sides were fighting for the beliefs and values held by their leaders. The Orcs have no choice in their role: they are captured, tortured and changed. The Orcs' actions are not excused by their history; they are still violent, vicious threats to the peace of Middle-earth. Yet, knowing their origin does raise disquiet about the fight between the Orcs and the other races of Middle-earth.

#### 4.2.2. Trolls

Troll, originally a figure from Scandinavian mythology, was adopted as a word into English in the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup> The Troll in Scandinavian mythology began as a supernatural giant figure of enchantment that possesses magic: in old Swedish, 'trylla, trylde' was to charm, and 'trolldómr' meant witchcraft ('Troll'). While some of their physical traits changed over time, as trolls in Danish and Swedish lore became small, impish figures, some traits remained consistent – for instance, they continued to be seen as cave dwellers. Tolkien follows the early tradition of the Scandinavian Troll, though he

<sup>57</sup> 'Adopted in English from Scandinavian in the middle of the 19th c.; but in Shetland and Orkney, where the form is now TROW (in 1616 troll), it has survived from the Norse dialect formerly spoken there' ('Troll')

does not grant his monsters the magical powers implied by the word ‘trylla’. While Tolkien’s Trolls are the products of enchantment, stone sculptures formed into moving, living beings, they do not themselves have the power to enchant. Instead they are large, generally stupid creatures; in *The Hobbit*, they are comic figures, while in *The Lord of the Rings*, they are silent figures controlled by malevolent powers. Their control by others is consistent with the early myths, as Keightley describes their association with the lower classes in Scandinavian mythology:

The Trolls are represented as dwelling inside of hills, mounds, and hillocks—whence they are also called Hill-people (Bjergfolk)—sometimes in single families, sometimes in societies. [...] Their character seems gradually to have sunk down to the level of the peasantry, in proportion as the belief in them was consigned to the same class. (Keightley 160)

The Trolls in Scandinavian myth reflected the community that believed in them, though it interesting to note that Trolls had both positive and negative characteristics in the ancient folklore. Many of the positive traits, like wealth, generosity, affluent hill-dwellings and neighbourly behaviour appear in Tolkien’s Middle-earth, but have been allocated to the Hobbits. The Trolls in his narratives are consistently negative characters: monsters under the control of Morgoth.

Trolls, described in Tolkien’s histories of Middle-earth as ‘creatures of lumpish and brutal nature’ (*Peoples* 35), appear in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* as one of two forms of Troll: Hill Trolls or Olag-Hai. In *The Hobbit*, the three Hill Trolls, while still threatening, are primarily comic and slow-witted. They may be fast and strong enough to capture the whole of the dwarvish company, but they can be outsmarted. Their initial description from Bilbo’s perspective notes that they are certainly Trolls, based on their form and their language:

Three very large persons sitting round a very large fire of beech-logs [...] But they were trolls. Obviously trolls. Even Bilbo, in spite of his sheltered life, could see that: from the great heavy faces of them, and their size, and the shape of their legs, not to mention their language, which was not drawing-room fashion at all, at all. (*H* 51)

As with the Goblins in *The Hobbit*, the monster is both comic and frightening. William, Bert and Tom discuss the poor state of hunting and how to cook the Dwarves once they have been captured. In that short bit of dialogue between them, much is revealed about their habits and habitation. They are originally mountain Trolls, and Bert and Tom followed William down into the hills in search of people. Unfortunately, that has not been wholly successful, as ‘never a blinking bit of manflesh have we had for long enough’ (*H*

51). William responds to this with ‘you’ve et a village and a half between yer, since we came down from the mountains’ (*H* 51). While the Trolls are comic in their bickering, they are still threatening: gluttonous for human flesh and quick to argue. They are defeated by Gandalf’s power of distraction, keeping a false argument going until he finally says ‘Dawn take you all, and be stone to you!’ as the light transforms them (*H* 58). Despite their large size and the physical descriptions provided elsewhere in the text, it is in this passage that Tolkien really presents Trolls as monstrous, a warning against vice, captured forever in stone for their greed and anger. Tolkien’s Trolls are a demonstration of sin and fault, a central component of a medieval monster.<sup>58</sup> However, while Trolls exist in a long tradition, Tolkien’s incorporation of these characters does not necessarily reflect the conventions that were established before him, like their association with wealth or their ambiguous presentation.

As the larger, fiercer counterpart to the Orcs, Trolls are part of the battles at the end of the Third Age; yet, they have no speaking role in *The Lord of the Rings*. They remain wordless warriors, like Grendel, as they ‘came striding up, roaring like beasts’ and ‘sprang into the pools and waded across, bellowing as they came’ (*RK* 874). They are likened to beasts, but are not; they are sentient, but silent in the text, only having the expression of rage and bloodlust in their bellowing and roars. The Olog-Hai are said to be of quicker wit and able to withstand exposure to sunlight. As they are described in the Appendix of *The Lord of the Rings*, they are a later addition to Middle-earth, not seen until the wars at the end of the Third Age, specially bred for battle:

But at the end of the Third Age a troll-race not before seen appeared in southern Mirkwood and in the mountain borders of Mordor. Olog-hai they were called in the Black Speech. That Sauron bred them none doubted, though from what stock was not known. Some held that they were not Trolls but giant Orcs; but the Olog-hai were in fashion of body and mind quite unlike even the largest of Orc-kind, whom they far surpassed in size and power. Trolls they were, but filled with the evil will of their master: a fell race, strong, agile, fierce and cunning, but harder than stone. Unlike the older race of the Twilight they could endure the Sun, so long as the will of Sauron held sway over them. They spoke little, and the only tongue that they knew was the Black Speech of Barad-dûr. (*RK* 1106)

These quicker, more dangerous Trolls are closely tied with Sauron, as their link with their master is what gives them strength against sunlight. They also demonstrate greater

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<sup>58</sup> This concept, discussed in Chapter Two, is central to the analysis of Augustine and the medieval bestiaries. The monster as demonstration goes back to the origin of the name: monstrare.

intelligence and possess a unified language, unlike the divisive vocabularies of the Orcs. However, this language is an imposed vocabulary, one taught and enforced by Sauron. It is also a language not visible in *The Lord of the Rings*. It is only in the appendixes that their intelligence is noted; in the story, they are roaring beasts. The narrator chooses to present these creatures as wholly monstrous, while the ‘translator’s’ notes provide a slightly more balanced view.

Treebeard tells Merry and Pippin that the Trolls were created in an act of sorcery by Melkor as a counter to the power of the Ents: ‘Maybe you’ve heard of Trolls? They are mighty strong. But Trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as Orcs were of Elves’ (*TT* 474). As the Orcs are the corrupted and fallen form, the Trolls are a reflection of the power and elemental force of the Ents.<sup>59</sup> The Troll is a reflection of the Ent, but in a diminished form. The Troll is made of a fixed material, locked in its form through exposure to sunlight, in contrast to the Ent who is a living, growing thing. Trolls are the counterfeits Tolkien described in his letter to Peter Hastings: ‘I am not sure about Trolls. I think they are mere “counterfeits”, and hence (though here I am of course only using elements of old barbarous mythmaking that had no “aware” metaphysic) they return to mere stone images when not in the dark’ (*Morgoth* 412, n.3). The Troll, as a counterfeit created by Morgoth, is like to Frankenstein’s creature: taken from natural components and made into a monstrous being.

As with his Orcs, Tolkien has contradictory origin narratives for his Trolls. The Trolls’ origins are only given a passing mention in *The Silmarillion* and *The Histories of Middle-earth*, and have no real mention in *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*. The lack of a core narrative points to Tolkien’s syncretism. The idea of the troll is globally pervasive, appearing in many forms in many different cultures. Tolkien does not present the same consistent creation myth as he does with other creatures, but instead assigns them to the realms of ‘barbarous mythmaking’ and ascribes a set of characteristics appropriate

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<sup>59</sup> The Ents as a people are slow to anger, but once roused they are a powerful force. Tolkien does not describe the siege of Isengard, but instead describes the aftermath through the eyes of Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli:

The doors lay hurled and twisted on the ground. And all about, stone, cracked and splintered into countless jagged shards, was scattered far and wide, or piled in ruinous heaps. The great arch still stood, but it opened now upon a roofless chasm: the tunnel was laid bare, and through the cliff-like walls on either side great rents and breaches had been torn; their towers were beaten into dust. If the Great Sea had risen in wrath and fallen on the hills with storm, it could have worked no greater ruin. (*TT* 542)

The Ents are likened to a great storm, wreaking havoc on the once strong construction of Isengard. The power of the Ents appears in the aftermath, rather than in descriptions of the battle. While Merry and Pippin do provide description of the battle, they describe the attack as a natural process: ‘An angry Ent is terrifying. Their fingers, and their toes, just freeze on to rock; and they tear it up like bread crust. It was like watching the work of great tree-roots in a hundred years, all packed into a few moments’ (*TT* 553). This accelerated motion is out of character for the Ents, who move, think and speak slowly.

for their place in his plot and narrative structures. They are presented as creatures of stone, forged in darkness and destroyed by light. As the narrator of *The Hobbit* explains: ‘trolls, as you probably know, must be underground before dawn, or they go back to the stuff of the mountains they are made of, and never move again’ (*H* 59). They are creatures of darkness, formed from stone, animated by magic – not a true form of life, as Morgoth had no power to create new life. As Frodo explains to Sam in *The Return of the King*, ‘The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own’ (*RK* 893). Tolkien’s complex world space does not maintain a single myth: Frodo’s statement shows the discontinuity in Tolkien’s mythology. The idea of the stone-bred mockery seems to be the creation of life; yet, Frodo draws a distinction, as does *The Silmarillion*.

Trolls are without a language of their own, and the descriptions of how they are taught language further entrench their character:

Trolls, in their beginning creatures of lumpish and brutal nature, had nothing that could be called true language of their own; but the evil Power had at various times made use of them, teaching them what little they could learn, and even crossing their breed with that of the larger Orcs. Trolls thus took such language as they could from the Orcs and in the west-lands the Trolls of the hills and mountains spoke a debased form of the Common Westron speech. (*Peoples* 35-6)

They are initially taught Morgoth’s language, adopting it from the Orcs, but also must turn to Common Speech, Westron, in order to function in the world beyond Moria. Yet, as with the Orcs’ understanding of Westron, Trolls are limited in what terms and ideas they can adopt. In *The Hobbit*, Trolls appear quite simple and stupid. The use of affected writing, suggesting a Cockney accent, gives the reader a sense of the character and contrasts the Trolls from the company: ‘Mutton yesterday, mutton today, and blimey, if it don’t look like mutton again tomorrer’ (*H* 51). The Troll’s colloquial language distinguishes them, but also works to make them more comic figures. This troll-speech in *The Hobbit* prefigures Tolkien’s use of low-speech for characterization that is central to the Orcs in *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien creates the character through the speech patterns, enabling the reader to see the difference in language while the characters stay in Westron. In contrast to the Trolls in *The Hobbit*, the new breed, the Olog-Hai, are wholly immersed in Black Speech, denied a vocabulary beyond the language of hatred Morgoth developed; yet this information is only available through Tolkien’s Appendixes, as he does not construct narrative space for any creature using the Black Speech, with the exception of Gandalf’s brief recitation (*FR* 247).



One of the ways Tolkien separates his Trolls from other creatures is through their use of language; Tolkien asserts that one's possession of language suggests the possession of a soul: 'Of course [...] when you make Trolls *speak* you are giving them a power, which in our world (probably) connotes the possession of a "soul"' (MR 412). Tolkien asserts the connection of language and the soul, which is a connection explored by Rosalyn Saunders in *The Monster Within: Emerging Monstrosity in Old English Literature*. The power of speech as a marker of monstrosity relates to the creature's intelligence, but also their ability to manipulate:

The ability to speak is the defining characteristic of both the Donestre and Harpy, but this recognisably human characteristic arguably contributes to their monstrosity because they utilise human language and turn it against their human victims. The Donestre and Harpy are hybrids, but in contrast to the Cynocephali and Hippocentaurs, they are able to communicate intelligibly and meaningfully with the human traveller. (Saunders 207)

While a creature can possess speech, they often were not conceived as having a soul in an human sense: creatures of mindless consumption, much like Tolkien's Trolls, were associated with a lack of human regulation. Rosalyn Saunders discusses the connection of consciousness and ensouled beings in her discussion of headless monsters in Old English texts: the lack of conscious thought compounds the monstrous traits.

Both the Epifugi and Blemmye are mentally stunted, and the implication is that although the breast was considered the site of mental and emotional thought in Old English literature, the lack of a head and brain has far-reaching consequences for the acephalous races. The eyes of the Epifugi and Blemmye see and their bodies experience want, but without a brain to process and regulate the body's senses and appetites, the Epifugi and Blemmye consume to excess. (207)

Tolkien points to this concept of speech as a marker of monstrosity by indicating that 'I do not agree (if you admit that fairy-story element [that speech equates with the possession of a soul]) that my trolls show any sign of "good", strictly and unsentimentally viewed' (*Letters* 191). Tolkien wrote this about his Trolls in *The Hobbit* and then left his Trolls silent in *The Lord of the Rings*. So the speech remains a marker of agency, but in Tolkien's mythology, it remains unclear as to whether his monsters have souls. While Orcs, as corrupted Elves, could possess an eternal soul, other races like intelligent Spiders and Dragons do not have the same corrupted origin – that is, they exist in their own right as independent species. They came into Middle-earth in their current form, but they also

possess speech. This idea of souls being indicated through speech relates to the medieval idea of monstrosity, but complicates these monstrous races.

#### 4.2.3. Spiders

While spiders received comparatively positive descriptions in medieval bestiaries, as representations of industry, they are also lauded in the Greco-Roman myth of Arachne. While to become a spider is a curse, it is Arachne's talent as a weaver that makes her a threat to Athena. The *Middle English Physiologus* describes the spider as:

De spinnere on hire web swiðe ghe wevedð,  
Festeð atte hus-rof hire ðredes,  
O rof er on ouese, so hire is on elde,  
Werpeð ðus hire web & weueð on hire wise.  
[The spinner on her web quickly she weaves.  
Attaches at the house-roof her threads,  
On a roof or on eaves, she is as on a hill,  
Casts thus her web and weaves in her way.] (316-9)

A spider is described as 'an air worm' in T.H. White's translation of *The Book of Beasts*, which praises it for its industry: 'It never stops working, cutting out all loss of time without interruption in its skill' (191). These medieval descriptors echo the story of Arachne, the ancestress of all spiders according to Greco-Roman mythology. Arachne defeats Athena in a weaving contest and then is transformed by Athena into a spider out of anger and jealousy. This talent and tenacity is opposite to what Tolkien presents in his spiders; Tolkien echoes more of the Renaissance representations of the spider, which focuses on the spider's ability to poison, rather than a presentation of virtue and diligence, Tolkien presents monsters of avarice and darkness. He diverges from the traditional cultural characterisation of the spider as a positive figure, and instead casts it as a counter to light and archetypal goodness in his texts.

While Tolkien constructs most of his monsters as diametrically opposed to another set of creatures or characters within the text, his Spiders do not have any obvious counterpart among the free peoples of Middle-earth. Instead they are consistently associated with darkness and entrapment, opposing themselves to liberty and light.<sup>60</sup> He establishes this concept early in *The Silmarillion*. Ungoliant, the first Spider-creature in Tolkien's series of texts in Middle-earth, literally creates unlight by consuming light and vomiting out darkness: 'A cloak of darkness she wove about them when Melkor and

<sup>60</sup> This pairing is identified as a Structuralist dichotomy in Brian Attebery's analysis of Tolkien's Middle-earth (87).

Ungoliant set forth: an Unlight, in which things seemed to be no more, and which eyes could not pierce, for it was void' (*S* 77). She not only devours the light of the Trees of Valinor, but then emits darkness in its place, a trait she passes on to her children, including Shelob.

Shelob, when described in *The Two Towers*, has been in the caves near Mordor for longer than the narrator can describe. She has been 'weaving webs of shadow; for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness' (*TT* 707). While the Spiders of Mirkwood lack this power, so far removed from their forbearers, Ungoliant and Shelob are both able to consume light and excrete darkness. The consumption of light is Ungoliant's role, the reason she is persuaded by Morgoth to aid him in his attack on Valinor. And in return, he promises to sate her hunger: 'I will give thee whatsoever thy lust may demand. Yea, with both hands' (*S* 77). The formality of the scene, particularly Morgoth's archaic pronouns, helps to place this event at or before the dawn of history. Tolkien does not have all spiders speak with the same diction; the Spiders of Mirkwood, who are Ungoliant's furthest descendants in his fiction, speak with low-style speech. Shelob is described with elevated diction, though she does not speak in the text; Sauron even considers her a pet, though she does not necessarily agree:

[Sauron] knew where she lurked. It pleased him that she should dwell there hungry but unabated in malice, a more sure watch upon that ancient path into his land than any other that his skill could have devised. And Orcs, they were useful slaves, but he had them in plenty. If now and then Shelob caught them to stay her appetite, she was welcome: he could spare them. And sometimes as a man may cast a dainty to his cat (*his cat* he calls her, but she owns him not) Sauron would send her prisoners that he had no better uses for: he would have them driven to her hole, and report brought back to the play she made.

So they both lived, delighting in their own devices, and feared no assault, nor wrath, nor any end of their wickedness. (*TT* 708)

Shelob is an insatiable hunter, who is tolerated, but not controlled, by Sauron. This relationship echoes the interactions between Morgoth and Ungoliant. Morgoth uses Ungoliant as a tool of destruction, attacking the Valar to claim the Silmarils. Like Shelob, her hunger is the key trait that makes her a useful tool for Morgoth; her hunger to consume light sets her against the Valar, and eventually against Morgoth when he refuses to give her the Silmarils: the jewels stolen from the Valar: 'Huger and darker yet grew Ungoliant, but her lust was unsated [...] "Open thy right hand." In his right hand Morgoth held close the Silmarils' (*S* 85). Ungoliant, and Shelob after her, represent insatiable greed and pride, as

each seeks only to feed and serve herself. As a contrast to the goodness and light in Tolkien's texts, the Spiders are unquestionably monstrous figures.

The Giant Spiders of Middle-earth have a long lineage, traced to before the beginning of Arda, Tolkien's universe. One of the first monstrous beings in existence is a creature in spider-form, Ungoliant. While *The Silmarillion* does not state where this creature comes from, she appears to have existed since before the creation of Middle-earth, somehow born of darkness itself:

Thus unseen [Melkor] came at last to the dark region of Avathar. [...]

There, beneath the sheer walls of the mountains and the cold dark sea, the shadows were deepest and thickest in the world; and there in Avathar, secret and unknown, Ungoliant had made her abode. 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. (S 76)

It is interesting to note that Tolkien's describes her joining with Melkor as not simply a choice; instead, he 'corrupted' her to his service. Even though she is a creature 'decended from the darkness,' she is still distorted through her alliance with Melkor. It is Ungoliant's offspring that later plague Middle-earth in the Third Age, as Ungoliant dies in the Second Age, and 'her foul offspring lurked and wove their evil nets' (S 138) in the Mountains of Ered Gorgoroth. Prior to her death, she flees to Nan Dungortheb, after being chased away by the Balrogs, and finds other spider-creatures to mate with. '[O]ther foul creatures of spider form had dwelt there since the days of the delving of Angband, and she mated with them, and devoured them' (S 86). Thus, there were other spider-creatures, outside the creation and control of the Valar, but Ungoliant consumes them. Ungoliant's 'last child [...] to trouble the unhappy world' is Shelob, who is mother to the Spiders of Mirkwood. In fact, she remains a loose thread at the end of the War of the Ring, the end of her story left untold by the narrator, much like Caliban's story is left unfinished at the end of *The Tempest*:

Shelob was gone; and whether she lay long in her lair, nursing her malice and misery, and in slow years of darkness healed herself from within, rebuilding her clustered eyes, until with hunger like death she spun once more her dreadful snares in the glens of the Mountains of Shadow, this tale does not tell. (TT 713)

The Spiders are mysterious creatures, whose exact beginning and end are outside the text and beyond the knowledge of the narrator.

From Ungoliant to Shelob to the Giant Spiders of Mirkwood, the form of the monster becomes more defined. Ungoliant, a creature of darkness, is described by the narrator of *The Silmarillion*: '[i]n a ravine she lived, and took shape as a spider of monstrous form, weaving her black webs in a cleft of the mountains. There she sucked up all light that she could find, and spun it forth again in dark nets of strangling gloom' (*S* 77). She takes the shape of a Spider, but is not defined as a Spider herself. Shelob echoes that amorphousness, though she is more closely defined by her shape: 'There agelong she had dwelt, an evil thing in spider-form, even such as once of old had lived in the land of the Elves in the West that is now under the Sea' (*TT* 707). In her attack on Sam, she is given a more exact physical description, as:

...the most loathly shape that [Sam] had ever beheld, horrible beyond the horror of an evil dream. Most like a spider she was, but huger than the greatest hunting beasts, and more terrible than they because of the evil purpose in her remorseless eyes. [...] 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. (*TT* 709)

The horror of her physical form is articulated, as is her association with evil. Her eyes are remorseless, her body is a bloated bag and her legs end in claws. There is nothing appealing or redeeming in this description. She is a powerful and overwhelming opponent, shown when she attempts to crush Sam: 'Now the miserable creature was right under her, for the moment out of the reach of her sting and of her claws. Her vast belly was above him with its putrid light, and the stench of it almost smote him down' (*TT* 711). This description echoes an equally ill-defined and dangerous female monster: Grendel's mother. When fighting Beowulf under the water, Grendel's mother leaps onto him and threatens him with her knife:

grimman grápum ond him tógéanes féng  
oferwearp þá wérigmód wigena strengest  
féþecempa þæt hé on fylle wearð  
ofsæt þá þone selegyst ond hyre seax getéah  
brád ond brúnecg· wolde hire bearn wrecan  
árgan eaferan  
[she again him quickly gave hand-reward

with wrathful grips and clutched him against herself;  
 then, weary in spirit, he stumbled, the strongest man,  
 warrior on foot, so that he was in a fall;  
 then she bestrode the guest in her hall, and drew her dagger,  
 broad and bright-edged; she wished to avenge her son,  
 only offspring;] (*Beowulf* 1541-7)

Grendel's mother sits atop Beowulf and tries to stab at him; it is her physicality and strength that is overwhelming to the unsuspecting warrior, just as it is Shelob's physical force that makes her so threatening to Sam. In trying to crush him, Shelob uses her body as her weapon. She contrasts Grendel's mother, who pins Beowulf to the ground and tries to use a knife in her attempted vengeance. While Shelob is a being in Spider-form, it is clear that she is a greater beast than any of the Giant Spiders Bilbo meets in Mirkwood. Those creatures that bind up the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* are unquestionably Spiders; they are offspring of the same bloodline, but are far removed from the power and strength of Ungoliant: 'Far and wide [Shelob's] lesser broods, bastards of the miserable mates, her own offspring, that she slew, spread from glen to glen, from Ephel Duath to the eastern hills, to Dol Guldur and the fastness of Mirkwood' (*TT* 707). As Bilbo is awakened in Mirkwood at the feeling of being tied up, 'he could only see the thing's eyes, but he could feel its hairy legs as it struggled to wind its abominable threads round and round him' (*H* 192). As the 'evil thing in spider-form' bred (*TT* 707), the miserable mates provided only bastard offspring: actual spiders. While they still possess the monstrous size and appetite of their progenitors, they have lost the strength and power of darkness that Ungoliant embodies and Shelob echoes.

The language of the Spiders, from Ungoliant to her distant offspring, is not explored in Tolkien's texts. There are brief instances where Ungoliant and the Mirkwood Spiders speak, but their words and Shelob's thoughts are represented in Westron. Tolkien does not provide the Spiders with a distinctive language, but he does describe the voices of the loathsome creatures: 'Their voices were a sort of thin creaking and hissing, but [Bilbo] could make out many of the words that they said' (*H* 194). The Spiders show less talent with languages than their progenitor, Ungoliant; she is capable of negotiating with Morgoth and Shelob is able to persuade Gollum. There is no mention of specific language, but each creature is able to communicate. These creatures are adaptable to their context, not having a language or culture of their own, but rather living parasitically upon other peoples. Shelob is isolated, separate from any other community, but still demonstrates a level of linguistic understanding, bargaining with Smeagol after his escape from Mordor:

Already, years before, Gollum had beheld her, Smeagol who pried into all dark holes, and in past days he had bowed and worshiped her, and the darkness of her evil will walked through all the ways of his weariness beside him, cutting him off from light and from regret. And he had promised to bring her food. (*TT* 707)

It does not say in the text what language is spoken, or that Shelob herself speaks, but just that an agreement is reached. Thus, each incarnation of Spiders in Tolkien's texts demonstrate the ability to speak or understand language; however, it is not a language of their own, but leeches from those around them. The early history of Middle-earth allows the voice of the Spider, which is either greatly formalized, as Ungoliant is, or made into colloquial, informal speech, as the Mirkwood Spiders speak; however, in giving the reader access to these voices, Tolkien demonstrates the extent of their single-minded avarice.

From early in the *Silmarillion*, Spiders play an important role in the events that shape Middle-earth, as Ungoliant darkens Valinor and Shelob waylays Frodo in his attempt to destroy the Ring. Ungoliant's motivations and drives are clear to the reader, removing any ambiguity or question, as she asks Melkor to provide everything he took from the Valar, as nothing less will satisfy her: 'Then perforce Morgoth<sup>61</sup> surrendered to her the gems that he bore with him, one by one and grudgingly; and she devoured them, and their beauty perished from the world. Huger and darker grew Ungoliant, but her lust was unsated' (*S* 85). She and her children are characterised by greed and self-preservation, as is clear from Shelob's thoughts and the Mirkwood Spiders' conversations after capturing the dwarves in *The Hobbit*:

"It was a sharp struggle, but worth it," said one. "What nasty thick skin they have to be sure, but I'll wager there is good juice inside."

"Aye, they'll make fine eating, when they've hung a bit," said another.

"Don't hang 'em too long," said a third. "They're not as fat as they might be. Been feeding none too well of late, I should guess."

"Kill 'em, I say," hissed a fourth, "kill 'em now and hang 'em dead for a while." (*H* 194)

The Spiders' language emulates the Trolls from earlier in *The Hobbit*. The use of low-style abbreviations, like 'em', separates the Spiders from the language of the Dwarves and Bilbo. The monsters' speech is distinctive, but maintains the sense of class separation that begins with the Trolls' use of language. *The Hobbit* has multiple monsters, each with colloquial speech. *The Lord of the Rings* uses language to distinguish characters from one

<sup>61</sup> 'Then Fëanor rose, and lifting up his hand before Manwë he cursed Melkor, naming him *Morgoth*, the Black Foe of the World; and by that name only was he known to the Eldar ever after' (*S* 83).

another, while in *The Hobbit*, the monsters all use lower diction than the heroes. So, the Orcs, Trolls and Spiders in *The Lord of the Rings* all use a higher form of speech than their predecessor in *The Hobbit*.

The most interesting narrative space given to the various Spider-creatures is not their interactions or conversations; instead, it is the moments of perspective and narrative voice that Tolkien provides in the caves above Cirith Ungol. Not unlike the Dragon in *Beowulf* discovering that the cup is missing from its horde, Shelob is given a perspective within the text, and the reader is given a new perspective for the story. Yet, even in these moments, the monster is not made appealing. Instead, this instance works to elevate the heroism and strength of Sam; Shelob thinks of Sam in very negative terms, but her hatred of the ‘miserable creature’ makes him more appealing to the reader. She is greedy, cowardly and selfish, with little concern for anything beyond her safety and her caves:

Now the miserable creature was right under her, for the moment out of the reach of her sting and of her claws. Her vast belly was above him with its putrid light, and the stench of it almost smote him down. Still his fury held for one more blow, and before she could sink upon him, smothering him and all his little impudence of courage, he slashed the bright elven-blade across her with desperate strength. (*TT* 711)

The passage shows a change between perspectives, as both Shelob and Sam are demonized in the desperation of their struggle. While the reader is exposed to the thoughts and words of these monsters, it is to further enforce the avarice they possess, their single-minded, self-serving nature. Tolkien’s negative characterization of Spiders is a contrast to the traditional mythologies, which celebrate the spiders’ skills in spinning and their perseverance.

#### **4.2.4. Dragons**

The dragon as a literary figure has a long history, with the modern Western idea of the dragon drawn from the creature as it appears in medieval bestiaries and religious texts. While the dragon draws upon traits from further back, as sea monsters and great serpents appear throughout Mediterranean mythology and in Greek and Roman art, the Western concept of the dragon takes its origin from religious didactic texts. The dragon as both a threat and demonstration appears in medieval bestiaries, as a counter to the panther and elephant, who are representations of Christ and Adam and Eve respectively; it is likened to the Devil, and the power of his deception is highlighted:

the Devil in raising himself from the lower regions translates himself into an angel of light and misleads the foolish with false hopes of glory and worldly



bliss. [The dragon] is said to have a crest or crown because he is the King of Pride, and his strength is not in his teeth but in his tail because he beguiles those whom he draws to him by deceit, their strength being destroyed. He lies hidden round the paths on which by they saunter, because their way to heaven is encumbered by the knots of their sins, and he strangles them to death. (White 167)

The dragon as a bestiary figure is an embodiment of vice, with special emphasis on its deceitfulness and greed. Tolkien hones in on this element of deceitfulness in Glaurung, the dragon in *The Children of Húrin*: his words may be true, but he manipulates the minds of his victims and strangles them with their own sins. The dragon was a powerful tool of demonstration, encapsulating the lure and danger of excessive wealth. In response to the dismissive criticism on the Dragon in *Beowulf*, Tolkien asserts that ‘[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*’ (‘B: M&C’ 16). For Tolkien, the Dragon in *Beowulf* is more complex than the ‘plain pure fairy-story dragon’ (‘B: M&C’ 17). It is instead:

a real worm, with a bestial life and thought of his own, but the conception, none the less, approaches *draconitas* [the abstraction of the dragon] rather than *draco* [the literal dragon]: a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the indiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life). (‘B: M&C’ 17)

Tolkien points to how the dragon has a sense of reality, yet still plays the role as symbolic creature: an embodiment of vice and a warning for the audience. The dragon is a creature of malice and greed for the *Beowulf*-poet, and continues to carry that role in later works, like Wagner’s opera and Tolkien’s Middle-earth. Fafnir, in his final words, reflects on the gold he killed his brother for: the gold that is now left for Siegfried.<sup>62</sup> Dragons appear throughout British literary history, as Celtic dragons are strongly associated with water like

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<sup>62</sup> Of the towering race of giants,  
the brothers Fasolt and Fafner  
both now are dead.  
For the accursed gold  
gained from the gods  
I dealt death to Fasolt.  
He who defended the hoard  
as a dragon,  
Fafner, last of the giants,  
has fallen to a fresh-faced hero. (Wagner 2.2)

the *afanc*, *boobri* and *Llamhigyn y Dwr*, which Briggs discusses (82). Tolkien's Dragons, however, predominantly draw upon the Norse and Anglo-Saxon traditions.

One detail relating to the dragon in *The Hobbit* comes directly from *Beowulf*: the theft of the cup as the first treasure to be extracted from the dragon's den is the most obvious connection between the two texts, though other parallels are clearly drawn. This part of Tolkien's narrative is given from the perspective of Smaug, as his dream is disturbed by the intrusion: 'He stirred and stretched forth his neck to sniff. Then he missed the cup! Thieves! Fire! Murder! Such a thing had not happened since he came to the Mountain!' (*H* 263). The dragon in *Beowulf* is given a moment of perspective in the poem, as it reflects upon the theft. While there is no first-person narration by the poet, the dragon's opinion is present: 'stonc ðá æfter stáne stearcheort onfand / féondes fótlást hé tó forð gestóp / dyrnan cræfte dračan héafde néah.' [he sniffed along the stone, the strong-hearted one found / the foot-print of his foe; he too far forward had stepped / in his stealthy craft near the dragon's head] (*Beowulf* 2288-90). The strong-hearted one reflects on the theft by a foe: the opposition is set against the dragon, instead of the hero. While the dragon in *Beowulf* has no speech, he does clearly plan his revenge for the theft: he burns villages of the Geats, just as Smaug attacks Laketown. Each has lain dormant for many years, only rousing when they have been robbed. Yet, Smaug is a more powerful figure of villainy, as he speaks. His conversations with Bilbo demonstrate his other vices, such as pride, whereas the *Beowulf* dragon stays silent in his vengeance over a lost cup. The addition of malicious intent changes the idea of the Dragon in Tolkien's Middle-earth. No longer is the Dragon an unthinking animal that accumulates wealth instinctively: it is instead an agent of cruelty and destruction. Just as Walpole's Manfred or Lewis' Monk are more monstrous for their intentional cruelty, so the evil of the Dragons of Middle-earth is heightened through their intelligence and intent.

Smaug is the driving force behind the plot of *The Hobbit*, motivating the Dwarves in their pursuit of justice. Smaug has only brief narrative presence, appearing in just three of the eighteen chapters, but he poses the overarching challenge of the story. The reason for his centrality is the grandeur of the dragon as a creature and mythic figure. As Tolkien stated in '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics:'

If the dragon is the right end for *Beowulf*, and I agree with the author that it is, then Grendel is an eminently suitable beginning. They are creatures, *feond mancunnes*, of a similar order and kindred significance. Triumph over the lesser and more nearly human is cancelled by defeat before the older and more elemental. [...] The placing of the dragon is inevitable: a man can but die upon his death-day. (*B*: M&C' 32-3)

The dragon is a powerful force in literature from early history through to Tolkien's writing. Tolkien refers to the dragon as 'elemental,' harkening back to the Northern mythologies of the Gods as being irresistible forces. Tolkien quotes Ker in his lecture, as it is not the Gods and mankind that win in the Northern myths; instead, "[t]he winning side is Chaos and Unreason" – mythologically, the monsters' ('B: M&C' 21, italics in original). The monsters are larger than the gods, a concept apparent in the origins of Ungoliant described earlier. While many creatures are given origin myths, some of which are contradictory, others are left ambiguous. Tolkien's reverence for the dragon as 'potent creation of men's imagination' appears in his denial of an origin myth for these creatures ('B: M&C' 16).

Dragons exist early in the ages of Middle-earth, though they are not given a clear beginning. The first reference in *The Silmarillion* speaks of the fire-drakes, particularly the first of the race: Glaurung: 'after a hundred years, Glaurung, the first of the Uruloki, the fire-drakes of the North, issued from Angband's gates by night. He was yet young and scarce half-grown, for long and slow is the life of the dragons' (S 132). The Dragon, from its appearance early in Middle-earth, is a powerful and dangerous enemy. It is not just an animal: it is an intelligent, manipulative and strong figure that can overpower its antagonists through either physical or mental force. Like Dracula, Glaurung has the power of hypnosis, drawing in 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, 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. (*Húrin* 178-9)

Glaurung's power is his knowledge and his manipulation of his enemies. Rather than blasting Túrin, he uses words to devastate him. Glaurung's power undermines Túrin's confidence and sense of self, distorting his understanding of the world. The Dragon acts maliciously, threatening Túrin physically and mentally. The Dragon's intelligence is a central characteristic, in Norse myth, in *Beowulf* and in Tolkien's world. It is this intelligence and strategic awareness that makes Bilbo's challenge to Smaug so impressive.

When first meeting Smaug, Bilbo cleverly avoids Smaug's questions in a series of riddling answers, providing true statements about his adventures without ever giving away

his name. Unfortunately, he provides more than he intends when facing his intelligent opponent:

“You seem familiar with my name, but I don’t seem to remember smelling you before. Who are you and where do you come from, may I ask?”

“You may indeed! I come from under the hill, and under hills and over the hills my paths led. And through the air, I am he that walks unseen.”

“So I can well believe,” said Smaug, “but that is hardly your usual name.”

“I am the clue-finder, the web-cutter, the stinging fly. I was chosen for the lucky number.”

“Lovely titles!” sneered the dragon. “But lucky numbers don’t always come off.”

“I am he that buries his friends alive and drowns them and draws them alive again from the water. I came from the end of a bag, but no bag went over me.”

“These don’t sound so creditable,” scoffed Smaug.

“I am the friend of bears and the guest of eagles. I am Ringwinner and Luckwearer; and I am Barrel-rider,” went on Bilbo beginning to be pleased with his riddling.

“That’s better!” said Smaug. “But don’t let your imagination run away with you!” (*H* 270)

After riddling his way around answering Smaug’s questions, Bilbo is commended by the narrative voice for his word-play: ‘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’ (*H* 270). Both Smaug and Glaurung demonstrate a love for wordplay and a use of grandiose speech, echoing the voice of Fafnir in Wagner’s *Siegfried*.<sup>63</sup> Fafnir, when stabbed by Siegfried, reveals his knowledge of Siegfried’s birth and fate:

You bright-eyed boy,  
 who do not know yourself,  
 I will tell you  
 whom you have murdered.

<sup>63</sup> While many critics have pointed to structural similarities and character allusions, there is no mention of Wagner in any of Tolkien’s letters; he does not discuss Wagner in relation to any of his own work, yet Carpenter pointed to Tolkien’s dismissive attitude to Wagner in his biography. So, while the connection appears undeniable, there are no references in Tolkien’s own writing to confirm intention or interest on his part.

Of the towering race of giants,  
 the brothers Fasolt and Fafner  
 both now are dead.  
 For the accursed gold  
 gained from the gods  
 I dealt death to Fasolt.  
 He who defended the hoard  
 as a dragon,  
 Fafner, last of the giants,  
 has fallen to a fresh-faced hero.  
 Keep a sharp watch,  
 jubilant boy;  
 he who prompted you in your blindness to this deed  
 is now, after your triumph, plotting your death. (Wagner II.ii)

Fafner, as a shape-changing sorcerer in Norse mythology, is a powerful giant who has chosen the form of a dragon to protect his horde. His choice demonstrates how overwhelming this shape is to any who might threaten him prior to Siegfried's arrival. The power of the dragon is emphasized, as is its inherent magic and intelligence, through the Volsunga Saga and Wagner's reinterpretation of it centuries later. Fafnir knows more than he can personally see, as he warns Siegfried against the machinations of the dwarf Mime, just as Glaurung knows more of Túrin and Níniel than he could by natural means. Tolkien echoes the idea of the Dragon as superior being who must be slain by the rare hero, but his dragons do not transform. Instead, Dragons are overwhelmingly large, strong and intelligent beings. While they speak Westron like most of the characters in the Middle-earth narratives, Dragons use a diction and vocabulary beyond many of the other characters. They demonstrate their confidence, control and intelligence through their use of language.

The narrator of *The Hobbit* identifies the power that a Dragon holds in its voice: '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' (*H* 273). Smaug's self-aggrandizing, for example, shows his powerful speech. He does not speak in the short, clipped phrases of the Men of Gondor or the Orc Captains; instead, his diction is reminiscent of the Green Knight.<sup>64</sup> Smaug says:

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<sup>64</sup> When explaining the deception and moral challenge to Gawain after the third blow of the axe only snicks his skin, the Green Knight says:  
 Fearless knight on this field, so fierce do not be!

“The King under the Mountain is dead and where are his kin that dare seek revenge? Girion Lord of Dale is dead, and I have eaten his people like a wolf among sheep, and where are his sons’ sons that dare approach me? I kill where I wish and none dare resist. I laid low the warriors of old and their like is not in the world today. Then I was but young and tender. Now I am old and strong, strong, strong, Thief in the Shadows!” he gloated. “My armour is like tenfold shields, my teeth are swords, my claws spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my wings a hurricane, and my breath death!”  
(*H* 273-4)

Both Smaug and Glaurung show incredible mastery of Westron, and there is no mention of a native tongue for the Dragon, as so few dragons appear in the mythology of Middle-earth. They instead are powerful tricksters, speaking the language of their target.

While the Dragon is not given a separate language or clear origin narrative, it is given a powerful role in two narratives of Middle-earth. Both Glaurung and Smaug are unrepentant villains. Each delights in the manipulation of those around him. Each of these Dragons strives to bring about destruction, either through the careful revelation of information or physical attack. Smaug delights in the diamond waistcoat he has formed by lying atop his treasure pile for so many years. He has no humility or sense of mortality: he believes himself invincible. ‘I am armoured above and below with iron scales and hard gems. No blade can pierce me’ (*H* 274). Glaurung knows of the incest between Níniel and Túrin,<sup>65</sup> and telling Níniel of her sins causes her to commit suicide by leaping over a waterfall (*Húrin* 244-5); Brandir then reveals the information to Túrin, who responds by killing Brandir and then falling onto his own blade (*Húrin* 253, 256). The use of

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No man here unmannerly hath thee maltreated,  
nor aught given thee not granted by agreement at court.  
A hack I thee vowed, and thou’st had it, so hold thee content;  
I remit thee the remnant of all rights I might claim.  
If I brisker had been, a buffet, it may be,  
I could have handed thee more harshly, and harm could  
have done thee.  
First I menaced thee in play with no more than a trial,  
and clove thee with no cleft: I had a claim to the feint,  
for the fast pact we affirmed on the first evening,  
and thou fairly and unfailing didst faith with me keep,  
all thy gains thou me gavest, as good man ought.  
The other trial for the morning, man, I thee tendered  
when thou kissedst my comely wife, and the kisses didst render.  
For the two here I offered only two harmless feints to make.  
The true shall truly repay,  
for no peril then need he quake.  
Thou didst fail on the third day,  
and so that tap now take! (*Gawain* 114)

<sup>65</sup> Tolkien in this narrative echoes quite clearly *Die Walkure*, the second part of Wagner’s Ring Cycle.

information as a weapon shows the manipulation in which Glaurung engages. Smaug, on the other hand, is a more physical threat. While he does draw information from Bilbo through clever conversation, his primary power is his physical force. He not only burned the Dwarves out of their mountain home and laid waste to the Dale long ago, he smashes the secret entrance and attempts to destroy Laketown in *The Hobbit*.

#### 4.2.5. Wraiths and Wights

Tolkien presents multiple forms of the undead in Middle-earth; while he has ghosts that are echoes of their former selves, he also has Wights and Wraiths. Tolkien's Middle-earth incorporates two concepts: *fea* and *hroa*. These are two states of the soul: the *fea*, 'the indwelling spirit of an incarnate being' (*Index* 158) is separate from the *hroa*, which is 'the body of an incarnate being' (*Index* 233). The dual existence of the spirit and body as separate but linked reflects Christian belief and separates the once incarnate beings from wholly spirit beings, like the Valar and Maiar, in Tolkien's mythology. Yet Tolkien's terms do not provide a word for the soul, just for the body and the ensouled body. Tolkien's use of Christian concepts of incarnation and embodiment makes the wraith and wight characters possible in Middle-earth. The Barrow-wights appear early in *The Fellowship of the Ring* without reason aside from Merry and Frodo reflecting on the memories they gained from the wights while lying in the barrow. 'Then [Merry] stopped, and a shadow came over his face, and he closed his eyes. "Of course, I remember!" he said. "The men of Carn Dum came on us at night, and we were worsted. Ah! the spear in my heart!" He clutched at his breast. "No! No!" he said, opening his eyes. "What am I saying? I have been dreaming"' (*FR* 140). While there is a brief mention of the Men of Carn Dum, the stronghold for the Witch-king of Angmar (the lord of the Ringwraiths), there is no sense of history or in the Wights or Wraiths: they do not provide any kind of moral guidance; they are not reliving a fault and seeking redemption; they are not a reminder of the past. Both the Wraiths and Wights are nothing more than malevolent creatures that threaten the protagonists on their journeys across Middle-earth.

The Wights inhabit the barrow and lure Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin to a living death like their own, as they reveal in their song, called an incantation in the text:

Cold be hand and heart and bone,  
and cold be sleep under stone:  
never more to wake on stony bed,  
never, till the Sun fails and the Moon is dead.  
In the black wind the stars shall die,  
and still on gold here let them lie,

till the dark lord lifts his hand  
 over dead sea and withered land. (*FR* 138)

The Wights give no impression of their past life; there is no sense of character or motivation. They are purely threatening beings, luring the Hobbits to lie upon the funereal platform. While Tolkien speculated in notes on the manuscript that the Barrow-wights have a relation to the Black Riders,<sup>66</sup> none of this connection is found in the final published text. Instead, the Wights are left ambiguous. Frodo has heard of the Wights, as when he is taken he reflects that ‘he was probably already under the dreadful spells of the Barrow-wights about which whispered tales spoke’ (*FR* 137). This knowledge does not lead Frodo and his friends to avoid the barrow, even though their ponies have spooked and run. Instead, there is wisdom in afterthought, as Tom Bombadil points out to the Hobbits he has just rescued that ‘[the ponies] have more sense (in some ways) than you wandering hobbits have – more sense in their noses. For they sniff danger ahead which you walk right into; and if they run to save themselves, they run the right way’ (*FR* 141). The Wights’ threat is in their insatiable hunger and their relentless pull. They draw in the Hobbits with little warning and can only be undone with a matching song-incantation by Tom Bombadil.<sup>67</sup>

The Barrow-wights reflect the tradition of the undead, both spectral and corporeal. The guard of the barrow appears in Norse sagas, like *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, in which Kar guards his treasure-laden tomb. His punishment for a life of greed is to remain with his treasure after his death, struggling with anyone who enters his barrow. Grettir decides to challenge the tomb-dweller, entering the haunted howe.

It was very dark and the odour was not pleasant. He began to explore how it was arranged, and found the bones of a horse. Then he knocked against a sort of throne in which he was aware of a man seated. There was much treasure of gold and silver collected together, and a casket under his feet, full of silver. Grettir took all the treasure and went back towards the rope, but on his way he felt himself seized by a strong hand. He left the treasure to close with his aggressor and the two engaged in a merciless struggle. Everything about them was smashed. The howedweller made a ferocious onslaught. Grettir for some time gave way, but found that no holding back

<sup>66</sup> The notes Christopher deciphered are: ‘Barrow-wights related to Black-riders. Are Black-riders actually horsed Barrow-wights?’ (*Shadow* 119)

<sup>67</sup> Get out, you old Wight! Vanish in the sunlight!  
 Shrivel like the cold mist, like the winds go wailing,  
 Out into the barren lands far beyond the mountains!  
 Come here never again! Leave your barrow empty!  
 Lost and forgotten be, darker than darkness,  
 Where gates stand for ever shut, till the world is mended. (*FR* 139)



was possible. They did not spare each other. Soon they came to the place where the horse's bones were lying, and here they struggled for long, each in turn being brought to his knees. At last it ended in the howedweller falling backwards with a horrible crash, whereupon Audun above bolted from the rope, thinking that Grettir was killed. Grettir then drew his sword Jokulsnaut, cut off the head of the howedweller and laid it between his thighs. Then he went with the treasure to the rope, but finding Audun gone he had to swarm up the rope with his hands. (*Grettir* XVIII).

The Barrow-wights of Middle-earth lack Kar's physical form, but they echo his malevolence and wealth. The Wights in Middle-earth are tied to the treasure they guard in the barrow, like Dragons; yet, they lack the overwhelming strength and power of the Dragon, instead haunting the space. Their tie to the treasure as an earthly tether is clear as Tom Bombadil dispels the barrow:

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 spell of the mound should be broken and scattered and no Wight ever come back to it. (*FR* 142)

The lost spirit in Middle-earth can be bound to the earthly possessions, just as it is in the sagas. However, in Tolkien's text, the Wights are not defeated in physical combat, but by song. Without being connected to the larger threat of the Ringwraiths, as Tolkien had proposed in his notes, they appear a momentary diversion; they demonstrate Tom Bombadil's immunity to various incarnations of power of Middle-earth, but fail to have a lingering effect on the Hobbits in their journey.

Wraiths are fallen beings, stripped of their bodies and identities through corruption by a ring of power. The etymology of the word 'wraith' is, as addressed by Shippey in *Author of the Century*, 'derived from the Old English verb *wriðan*, "writhe". [...] 'Writhe' has given rise to [...] 'wroth' (the old adjective meaning 'angry'), and wrath. [...] The word is an old dead metaphor which suggests that wrath is a state of being twisted up inside' (122). The wraiths are a twisted form of their former selves. In early drafts of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien describes Morgoth's manipulation of the different races through the creation and proliferation of rings. As Gandalf explains to Frodo in the version of the text Christopher published in *The Histories of Middle-earth*:

In the ancient days the dark master made many Rings, and he dealt them out lavishly, so that they might be spread abroad to ensnare folk. The elves had many, and there are now many elf-wraiths in the world; the goblins had

some and their wraiths are very evil and wholly under the command of the Lord. The dwarves it is said had seven, but nothing could make them invisible. In them it only kindled to flames the fire of greed, and the foundation of each of the seven hoards of the Dwarves of old was a golden ring. In this way the master controlled them. But these hoards are destroyed, and the dragons have devoured them, and the rings are melted, or so some say. Men had three rings and others they found in secret places cast away by the elf-wraiths: the men-wraiths are servants of the Lord and brought all their rings back to him. (*Shadow* 78)

This version of the distribution of the rings varies from what appears in the *Lord of the Rings* in the number of rings and their recipients. In *The Lord of the Rings*, there is no inclusion of the Elf or Goblin Wraiths at all: that becomes a fate reserved for men. There is also a greater focus on the process of becoming a Wraith in Tolkien's earlier draft; the rings are closely related with being 'ensnared.' This alteration of a fundamental element of the mythology of Middle-earth demonstrates Tolkien's ever-changing conception of the imagined world. His myths are not fixed between the text, and nor are his monsters. Elves, other than their debasement as Orcs, remain untouched by the corruption of the Ring in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Again, Gandalf is explaining the history of the rings to Frodo in the same segment of text, but after revision and reconsideration:

The Three, fairest of all, the Elf-lords hid from him, and his hand never touched them or sullied them. Seven the Dwarf-kings possessed, but three he has recovered and the others the dragons have consumed. 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. (*FR* 50)

There is no mention of Elf-wraiths, or the rings given to Goblins; instead, the number of rings is carefully restricted and accounted for. So, the idea of the Wraith is restricted in Tolkien's development of Middle-earth, from Goblin- and Elf-wraiths to the nine Nazgûl that appear in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Ringwraiths, or Nazgûl, play a central role in *The Lord of the Rings*. They are the thralls of Sauron and pursue Frodo and the company, as they are drawn to the Ring. The corrupting force that drew them in is the lust for power:

Those who used the Nine Rings became mighty in their day, kings, sorcerers, and warriors of old. They obtained their glory and great wealth, yet it turned to their undoing. They had, as it seemed, unending life, yet life became unendurable to them. They could walk, if they would, unseen by all

eyes in this world beneath the sun, and they could see things in worlds invisible to mortal men; but too often they beheld only the phantoms and delusions of Sauron. And one by one, sooner or later, according to their native strength and to the good or evil of their wills in the beginning, they fell under the thralldom of the ring that they bore and under the domination of the One, which was Saruon's. And they became for ever invisible save to him that wore the Ruling Ring, and they entered into the realm of shadows. (S 346)

Tolkien constructs them as fallen heroes, as the rings were given to great men who fell when corrupted by the pursuit and love of power. This is the ultimate descent: from king to thrall. The Ringwraiths are shadows of their former selves: 'darkness went with them, and they cried with the voices of death' (S 346). The lords of Numenor who were corrupted lose their identities and their self-control. They are men who cannot come back from their corruption; they have lost their identities to the rings.

The introduction of Ringwraiths in the third chapter of *The Fellowship of the Ring* is as Black Riders: they are hooded horsemen pursuing the hobbits through the Shire. They do not appear as horrific beings, but are concealed by large cloaks: '[r]ound the corner came a black horse [...] on it sat a large man, who seemed to crouch in his saddle, wrapped in a great black cloak and hood, so that only his boots in the high stirrups showed below; his face was shadowed and invisible' (FR 73). The Nazgûl seem to be men, though there is no mention of their appearance until Frodo sees them at Weathertop. They initially appear as 'tall black figures [...] [s]o black were they that they seemed like black holes in the deep shade behind them' (FR 190). Once Frodo puts on the Ring, the Wraiths are revealed:

He was able to see beneath their black wrappings. There were five tall figures: two standing on the lip of the dell, three advancing. In their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helms of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel. (FR 191)

The Nazgûl possess the shape of their former selves, even down to the helms they wear on their head. It is notable that they are not preserved, kept young or vital in their wraith-state. They are haggard, their robes are grey and so is their hair. They are fading beings, their bodies lost to their corruption by the Ring. Even when Frodo sees them, the Wraiths are not physically monstrous: they are just men who have fallen.

As the narrative continues, the threat becomes more advanced: the Nazgûl trade their terrestrial mounts for winged beasts, called the winged terror or flurry of wings. It is in their appearance on the winged beasts that there is a greater sense of monstrosity. The

creatures the Nazgûl ride are far more horrific than the Ringwraiths themselves. At the battle of Pelennor Fields, the Witch King arrives on one of these unnamed mounts:

The great shadow descended like a falling cloud. And behold! it was a winged creature: if bird, then greater than all other birds, and it was naked, and neither quill nor feather did it bear, and its vast pinions were as webs of hide between horned fingers; and it stank. A creature of an older word maybe it was, whose kind, lingering in forgotten mountains cold beneath the Moon, outstayed their day, and in hideous eyrie bred this untimely brood, apt to evil. And the Dark Lord took it, and nursed it with fell meats, until it grew beyond the measure of all other things that fly; and he gave it to his servant to be his steed. (RK 822)

There is no name given to this creature, nor any mention outside of *The Lord of the Rings*. The connection of this incredibly powerful creature which is ‘apt to evil’ with the Nazgûl reinforces their position as both powerful and trusted thralls. The Ringwraiths are ‘his most terrible servants. [...] As the Shadow grows once more, they too may walk again’ (FR 50). The Wraith as a thrall links them most closely to Sauron: they are subject to the rings and to the will of the Dark Lord. The pull of the Ring as an object is clear when Frodo contemplates putting it on and ‘as his hand touched the chain on which [the Ring] hung. At that moment the rider sat up, and shook the reins’ (FR 74). Unlike the Orcs, who operate independently after their corruption, the Nazgûl are bound to Sauron and the Ring. The Ringwraiths demonstrate the absolute downfall of the kings of men, their loss of identity and their loss of will.

The greatest of the men to fall was the Witch King of Angmar, the lord of the Nazgûl. Gandalf tells the Council of Elrond about his discovery that the Nazgûl are on the move; as he recounts his conversation with Radagast about the Nazgûl, Gandalf describes how his ‘heart sank. For even the Wise might fear to withstand the Nine, when they are gathered together under their fell chieftain. A great king and sorcerer he was of old, and now he wields a deadly fear’ (FR 250). The power of the Witch King is highlighted in his arrogance when facing Gandalf at the battle for Gondor:

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.

“Old fool!” he said. “Old fool! This is my hour. Do you not know Death when you see it? Die now and curse in vain!” (RK 811)

His confidence comes from his personal myth, though it is unclear whether his predictions are his own creation or from an external source. When he faces Eowyn, he declares ‘No living man may hinder me!’ (RK 823). As a powerful sorcerer, as well as a Nazgûl, he may have cast a form of protection upon himself, much like Grendel, who ‘had foresworn / every weapon’ (*Beowulf* 804-5). The confidence of the Witch King is his undoing, as he trusts too much to his fate; in this, he reflects his master. Just as the Witch King is brought down by the unlikely hero Eowyn, so too is Sauron undone by the unlikely heroes Samwise and Frodo.

The fallen heroes, the Wraiths and Wights of Middle-earth, are men who have been corrupted through their experiences, not unlike the Orcs. The horror of the Nazgûl is clearly paralleled to the horrors of war in Tolkien’s letter to his son, Christopher when Christopher was stationed in England after his return from South Africa. In a letter often cited for Tolkien’s anti-technology sentiments, he equates the airplane and the winged horrors the Nazgûl ride. He sees the engagement in warfare as horrific, even for his own son.

It is the aeroplane of war that is the real villain. And nothing can really amend my grief that you, my best beloved, have any connexion with it. My sentiments are more or less those that Frodo would have if he discovered some Hobbits learning to ride Nazgûl-birds, “for the liberation of the Shire”.  
(*Letters* 115)

The Ringwraiths are thralls, tools of a more powerful lord. They do not act for themselves or their own interests; they are soldiers following orders. They are echoes of man’s strength without his free will. Characters like Denethor and Boromir demonstrate how great men can be corrupted, showing the process of downfall that the wraiths underwent before them. The wraiths are hollow shells of great heroes, like the lords of Gondor. Only the rare warrior, like Aragorn, can come through war unscathed.

#### **4.2.6. Ghosts and the Dead**

The ghost appears as a once living person, often suffering through a punishment or carrying a message. Greco-Roman ghosts could be summoned, and were called upon as vengeful spirits or guides, as in *The Aeneid*. In texts by members of the Catholic Church, ghosts can appear as an omen of impending death, a warning, or an encouragement of a particular behaviour. In an exemplary text from the early medieval period, ‘The Priest Walchelin and Hellequin’s Hunt’ from Orderic Vitalis’ *Historia Ecclesiastica* (1115), Walchelin witnesses a procession of the recently deceased, enacting their purgatory as they walk. He meets his brother, who fell in battle, and hears of how his own continued prayer

and piety has lightened the burden of his brother's afterlife. Robert, Walchelin's brother, describes the liberation that prayer has brought him so far:

Until this time, I have undergone terrible torment, but after you had been ordained in England and had celebrated your first Mass for those who had died in faith, your father Ralph was released from his torment and the burden of my shield, which had been a cause of great torment to me, fell away. You can see that I still bear this sword, but I faithfully await release from its burden in the coming year. (Vitalis 72)

The ghost is a powerful figure of spiritual commentary, which Tolkien's spirits reflect. Unlike the Wraiths and Wights, who have lost their identity through their corruption, the ghosts of Middle-earth remain echoes of their former selves. As power-hungry warriors or cowards, the ghosts demonstrate unwanted behaviours. They must perform brave acts under the guidance of their rightful leader in order to redeem themselves.

Middle-earth, with its long history, is host to many ghosts. The men of the Dunharrow and the Dead Marshes act as historical echoes, drawing the earlier ages of Middle-earth into the Third Age narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*. The ghosts are not limited to humans, as the Dead Marshes are a mix of humans, Orcs and Elves, laying in their graves after the great battle at the gates of Mordor. The ghosts carry the stories of the past and provide warning to the characters of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Dead Marshes, the ground surrounding the Black Gate, is the location of the ancient battle that tore the Ring from Sauron. The dead Men, Elves and Orcs are described when Frodo and Sam are led through the Marshes by Gollum. The Marshes are swamp ground that crept over the graves of the fallen warriors, some with 'grim faces and evil,' others 'noble faces and sad' (TT 614). Frodo and Sam must pass through these marshes to reach the Black Gate, the entry of the Land of Mordor. Sam trips, and

his face was brought close to the surface of the dark mere. There was a faint hiss, a noisome smell went up, the lights flickered and danced and swirled. For a moment the water below him looked like some window, glazed with grimy glass, through which he was peering. Wrenching his hands out of the bog, he sprang back with a cry. "There are dead things, dead faces in the water," he said with horror. "Dead faces!" (TT 614)

The horror of the battlefield has been preserved: the faces stare up from the water not as active threats or manifested spirits, but as a memory of the past. Gollum knows the history of the plains, and describes the devastation that remains: 'All dead, all rotten. Elves and Men and Orcs. The Dead Marshes. There was a great battle. Tall Men with long swords, and terrible Elves and Orcses shrieking. They fought on the plain for days and months at

the Black Gates. But the Marshes have grown since then, swallowed up the graves; always creeping, creeping' (*TT* 614). Sam is convinced the Marshes are an intentional barrier set around Mordor by Sauron, as there is no way the remnants of the past battle could remain. "“But that is an age and more ago,” said Sam. “The Dead can’t be really there! Is it some devilry hatched in the Dark Land?”” (*TT* 614). The Marshes are not just a repository or warning; there are still present threats to lure the unwary traveller. Tolkien’s incorporates the old folk theme of the Will o’ the Wisp<sup>68</sup> in the lights that move through the Marshes. Gollum specifically warns the Hobbits about the lights surrounding them. ‘The tricky lights. Candles of corpses, yes, yes. Don’t you heed them! Don’t look! Don’t follow them!’ (*TT* 613). The past is not distant or safe: history returns to avenge itself on successive generations. Tolkien’s hatred of warfare is present in this text, as well as his historical philology: we are never separated from our history, as it continues to echo through the modern world.

John Garth’s analysis of Tolkien’s involvement in World War I draws upon the descriptions of other soldiers in the trenches. The Somme is described by Gerald Brennan, who when remembering the battlefield, thinks of:

“a treacherous, chaotic region recently abandoned by the tide”, recalled that the ground between the two villages was “torn up by shells and littered with dead bodies, some of which had been lying around for three weeks...In the first attack on 1 July it had been impossible to rescue the wounded and one could see how they had crowded into shell-holes, drawn their waterproof sheets over them and died like that.” (Brennan quoted in Garth 166)

The description here echoes the devastated landscape of the Dead Marshes. It was this resonance of the battlefield that caused C.S. Lewis to comment in a review of *The Lord of the Rings* that:

This war has the very quality of the war my generation knew. [...] The author has told us elsewhere that his taste for fairy-tale was awakened into maturity by active service; that, no doubt, is why we can say of his war

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<sup>68</sup> Briggs describes:

Will o’ the Wisps, under their various names – Spunkies, Pinkets, Jacky Lantern, Joan o’ the Wad and many more, are generally reckoned as ghosts. [...] Will o’ the Wisp is often a userer who has hidden gold, or an unjust man who has moved his neighbours’ boundary stones, or in some stories, a man who has been too clever for the Devil, and can get entry into neither Heaven nor Hell. (63)

Tolkien’s use of this figure has no element of social payback, and instead emulates more the dangerous threat that Lord Dunsany asserts in his use of Will o’ the Wisps in *The King of Elfland’s Daughter*: ‘it is well known that the people of the marshes lure travellers to their doom, and have delighted to follow that avocation for centuries’ (204). The Will o’ the Wisp is a threat, a lure, and a danger to uninformed travellers. It is Gollum’s warning that keep Sam and Frodo safe from the ‘tricky lights’ (*TT* 613).

scenes (quoting Gimli the Dwarf), “There is good rock here. This country has tough bones.” (Lewis quoted in Garth 311)

Tolkien’s sense of horror throughout his war narrative (as C.S. Lewis classifies it) draws upon his experiences in the trenches. This connection is most clear in the Dead Marshes where Frodo, Sam and Smeagol are literally surrounded by the echoes of the dead. Smeagol points to the inaccessibility of the dead, who are just beyond the reach of the living, much as the bodies Brennan describes in the shell-holes. ‘You cannot reach them, you cannot touch them. We tried once, yes precious. I tried once; but you cannot reach them. Only shapes to see, perhaps, not to touch. No precious! All dead’ (*TT* 614). The dead are present to the travellers, but are just beyond their reach. The other revenants of Middle-earth are less the passive memory that the Dead Marshes present. Instead, they are corrupted, fallen beings who must redeem themselves or remain damned. This mortality, and the possibility of damnation, is at the core of Christian belief and at the centre of Tolkien’s mythology of Middle-earth.

The Edain, or mankind, second-born of Ilúvatar, are given a tremendous gift at the beginning of *The Silmarillion*: choice. This is also the curse of mankind, as ‘Ilúvatar knew that Men, being set amid the turmoils of the powers of the world, would stray often and would not use their gifts in harmony’ (*S* 36). Mankind is set into the world without the guiding hand of fate, so they are free to make their own choices, but also free to fail. This fallibility is the reason for mortality: ‘Death is their fate, the gift of Ilúvatar, which as Time wears even the Powers shall envy. But Melkor has cast his shadow upon it, and clouded it with darkness, and brought forth evil out of good, and fear out of hope’ (*S* 36). The race of men is the most diverse set of characters and each of the human protagonists goes through moments of trial and weakness. Boromir, the son of the Steward of Gondor, is consumed by lust for the Ring, just as the Nazgûl before him. While men can be corrupted and act maliciously or evilly, they are not a uniform race. They are also heroes throughout Middle-earth’s history: Húrin, Túrin, Beren, Bard and Aragorn are all heroes in their respective tales, while secondary characters like Faramir show that strength in men is not limited to kings. The culmination of the monstrous downfall seen in the races of men is evident in their afterlife: the ghostly oathbreakers or the Nazgûl of Sauron.

Aragorn, in order to overcome the army of Mordor at the siege of Gondor, must compact with some concerning allies. He walks the Paths of the Dead, the home of the former men of Dunharrow. Aragorn must walk these paths, barred to any but the true king of Gondor, to muster the cursed oathbreakers who are bound to remain as ghosts. After seeing the horrors of the Barrow-wights and Nazgûl, Aragorn’s choice to call upon spectral allies should give the reader pause. Unlike the Wights and Wraiths, the ghosts on the Paths



of the Dead were not wholly corrupted, but weak. The Men of the Mountains fled from battle against Sauron and thus are cursed for their cowardice: ‘the oath that they broke was to fight against Sauron, and they must fight therefore, if they are to fulfil it’ (RK 764). They worshiped Sauron, and thus could not fight for Isildur against Sauron in the final battle at the end of the Second Age when they were called to fulfill their oath. In return, Isildur laid a curse upon them:

Then Isildur said to their king: “Thou shalt be the last king. And if the West prove mightier than thy Black Master, this curse I lay upon thee and thy folk: to rest never until your oath is fulfilled. For this war will last through years uncounted, and you shall be summoned once again ere the end.” (RK 765)

They are only freed from their purgatory when they perform the role they promised to fulfill: fighting for their king. This instance is very much an exemplar of Christian redemption: the Men of the Mountains turned to idolatry in a time of weakness. When their true lord returns to them, they must prove their conversion and return to his guidance. When they do so, they find release from their torment. They leave their purgatorial state, freed from their earthly failings, through their acts of bravery and redemption.

#### 4.2.7. Smeagol / Gollum

Smeagol, the key monster in Tolkien’s narratives, demonstrates the process of corruption that the Wraiths have undergone, yet he has not become a wraith. Smeagol bore the ring for years and is warped by its power, but shows the resilience of the halflings. The physical changes and mental division that Smeagol demonstrates shows the slow, agonizing process of transformation caused by the corruption of the Ring. The language division, particularly his constant shifting of name,<sup>69</sup> shows this loss of original identity. Smeagol, or Gollum, provides Bilbo with the Ring that makes Bilbo’s survival in *The Hobbit* possible, and acts as both guide and betrayer to Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*. He is not only central to the plot of Tolkien’s most popular texts, but is also central to the moral questions therein. Whether or not Smeagol can be saved is not only a question of great import for Frodo, but also for the reader. As a corrupted Hobbit-like creature, he is at the centre of Tolkien’s moral conception of the monster. As a former Hobbit, Gollum is a demonstration of corruption, as the Orc is for Elves and the Wraith is for Men. He is the counterpart, but he is not wholly lost.

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<sup>69</sup> For example, when describing how Smeagol knew about Shelob, the sentence reads: ‘Already, years before, Gollum had beheld her, Smeagol who pried into all dark holes, and in past days he had bowed and worshipped her’ (TT 707).

The narrator in *The Hobbit* introduces Gollum of unknown origins: ‘I don’t know where he came from, nor who or what he was. He was Gollum – as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face’ (*H* 94). He is defined by his association with darkness, not unlike Grendel: ‘sé þe in þýstrum bád’ [he who dwelt in darkness] (*Beowulf* 87). The reader can piece together further information about Gollum’s earlier life from his reflections as he plays the riddle-game: ‘Gollum brought up memories of ages and ages and ages before, when he lived with his grandmother in a hole in a bank by a river’ (*H* 98). Gollum is described in *The Hobbit* as a creature bound in darkness, warped to survive in his underground refuge. Gollum is ‘as dark as darkness’ with ‘two round pale eyes’ which are ‘like telescopes’ and when he is enraged, burn with a ‘pale flame’ of ‘green fire’ like ‘small green lamps’ (*H* 94; 95; 108). He has six teeth, ‘long webby [feet]’ (*H* 101), and quick, flat hands with long fingers, with which he captures fish and throttles Goblins in order to survive. He is carnivorous, and threatens Bilbo with cannibalism: ‘Is it nice, my precious? Is it juicy? Is it scrumptiously crunchable?’ (*H* 100). We can gradually come to understand his physical form through the hints in *The Hobbit*, and the confirmation of racial connection, placing Gollum as an ancestor of the Stoors in *The Fellowship of the Ring* who ‘were broader, heavier in build; their feet and hands were larger, and they preferred flat lands and the riversides’ (*FR* ‘Prologue’ 3). It is later in *The Fellowship of the Ring* that Gandalf provides further background details:

...there lived by the banks of the Great River on the edge of Wilderland a clever-handed and quiet-footed little people. I guess they were of hobbit-kind; akin to the fathers of the fathers of the Stoors, for they loved the River and often swam in it, or made little boats of reeds. There was among them a family of high repute [... t]he most curious-minded of that family was called Smeagol. He was interested in roots and beginnings; he dived into deep pools; he burrowed under trees and growing plants; he tunneled into green mounds. (*FR* 51)

Gandalf here suggests that he is distant kin to Bilbo, Frodo and the other Hobbits. This association provides ambiguity, as he is a corrupted figure, but comes from a familiar origin. He is not malevolent from birth, as Dragons, Trolls or Giant Spiders are, but instead is caught up in the evil of the Ring.

Gollum, or Smeagol, has a substantial role in the narrative of both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. As a former ring-bearer, he is a foil for both Bilbo and Frodo. We learn a great deal about Gollum’s early life through his riddles and comments in *The Hobbit* in ‘Riddles in the Dark.’ In *The Lord of the Rings*, Smeagol becomes guide and companion to Frodo and Sam through the Dead Marshes and into Mordor. Through the

text, Gollum's character shifts, which is reflected in his change in name.<sup>70</sup> When Gollum is reminded of his earlier life, prior to his corruption, he accepts his old name, though the narrative voice does not: "Smeagol," said Gollum suddenly and clearly, opening his eyes wide and staring at Frodo with a strange light. "Smeagol will swear on the Precious" (*TT* 603). Samwise recognises the character shifts, as he provides his own set of names for Smeagol/Gollum: Slinker/Stinker. Neither title is complimentary or positive, but reflect the shifting nature of Smeagol's behaviour within the text. The reader is constantly aware of the change in character through the dual use of names, indicative of a larger challenge the character faces.

Gollum's language is a key means by which Tolkien distinguishes him from other characters. His speech patterns differ from all other characters in the text in their syntax and his constant discussion with his 'precious.' The distinction in his use of language between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is actually a distinction between Gollum and Smeagol. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Gollum's language in *The Hobbit* is coherent, as he speaks consistently. Tolkien's revision of *The Hobbit* prior to the release of *The Lord of the Rings* focused primarily on Chapter 5, 'Riddles in the Dark.' Gergely Nagy describes the construction of the character of Gollum through his speech:

He speaks with a general phonetic and syntactic simplicity, which Chance calls "baby talk" (59), 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"). Repetitiveness, the automatism of language, reflects Gollum's deterioration into a state of control by corporeal drives and 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. These and other body-determined sounds dominate his speech: he even gets his name after one, the gulp (Chance 82, 84). (Nagy 59-60)

As Nagy and Chance point out, Gollum's language is not a mechanism of communication; it is a speech act to fill the emptiness and provide comfort. His speech is self-serving and not reliant on a listening audience. When he meets Bilbo after centuries of isolation, he alternates between speaking to Bilbo and himself. While he has maintained his capacity for riddling, his use of language is limited.

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<sup>70</sup> This name change is not unlike the separation of Lucifer / Satan in both in biblical texts and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Gollum's language complicates his identity as a monster-figure. Despite his long isolation in the Goblin caves under the Misty Mountains, he is able to communicate with Bilbo and other characters in the text. He speaks the language he learned in his youth, before his corruption, and there is no reference in the text to him speaking any other languages. Because he is not tortured or corrupted by another being, but rather by a dangerous object, he does not lose his history or language. He speaks the language of the Free Peoples, even when communicating with creatures conversant in the Black Speech. This preservation of his earlier language gives him ability to speak within the text, despite his affected hisses and repetition of the term 'precious,' his vocabulary is otherwise as broad and accessible as that of the Hobbits themselves.

Gollum's first words in *The Hobbit* demonstrate the distinction of Gollum's voice from all others in Tolkien's Middle-earth immediately: "Bless us and splash us, my preciousss! 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" (H 95). Despite the narrator's misunderstanding attribution of the term 'precious' to Gollum himself, this origin of the name remains fixed in Tolkien's mythology. His name throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is Gollum, to the point that the index at the end of the text lists 'Smeagol, see Gollum.' His name comes from the gulping sound he makes, not from any personal history. He lost his history through his corruption by the Ring. His onomatopoeic name and his use of extended voiceless alveolar fricatives distinguish his speech from any other character in the text. Further to this sibilance, he also speaks in a discord between plural and singular. His original name, Smeagol, is similar to the Old English *smeagan* and *smeagelegen*; *smeagan* means mediator, to inquire or to consider, while *smeagelegen* means a syllogism. Smeagol's name points to incomplete logic, an ongoing inquiry. He refers to himself in the plural, but still uses singular third-person verbs: 'we hates it.' This discordance is striking to the reader, as his words are jarring and disruptive to the flow of dialogue. He has not lost his language, but his voice has been corrupted through his isolation.

Gollum/Smeagol is the ideal demonstration of the ongoing struggle with corruption. Smeagol is a being who is not beyond redemption. In Tolkien's first edition of *The Hobbit*, Gollum is described in more groveling terms. He offers Bilbo the Ring as a prize, even though Bilbo has already found the Ring in the caverns, and willingly shows Bilbo the way out. "Here is the passage; it must squeeze in, and sneak down, – we durstn't go with it, my precious, no we durstn't: Gollum!" So Bilbo slipped under the arch, and said goodbye to the nasty miserable creature, and very glad he was. He wasn't comfortable till

he felt quite sure it was gone' (Rateliff *Baggins* 161). The later edition describes a moment of conflict, as Bilbo:

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. (*H* 112)

When Gandalf later describes this moment of pity to Frodo, he says, '[i]t 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' (*FR* 58). Gollum's ownership of the Ring begins with murder, thus marking him for further corruption. He is warped by the Ring, though not fully claimed, as Gandalf explains to Frodo: 'Even Gollum was not wholly ruined. He had proved tougher than even one of the Wise would have guessed – as a hobbit might. There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark: light out of the past' (*FR* 53). He still possesses 'light out of the past' and throughout *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates a willingness to return to that earlier state of innocence. Gandalf describes this sense of hope in *The Fellowship of the Ring* and it is a hope that Frodo holds on to throughout his interactions with Gollum. When he vouches for Gollum with Faramir and trusts Gollum's guidance through Eryn Muil and the Marshes, Frodo shows his trust in the creature; he believes Gollum when he says 'We didn't mean no harm [...] we'll be nice to them, very nice, if they'll be nice to us' (*TT* 600). Frodo replies '[p]oor wretch. He has done us no harm. [...] And yet, as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him' (*TT* 600; 601).

Upon meeting Gollum, Frodo gives him back his earlier name Smeagol. Gollum aims to serve Frodo, but is still drawn by the power of the Ring. In *The Two Towers*, this conflict is illustrated in Gollum/Smeagol's debate. The two sides of his nature are articulated as he argues the merits of trusting or betraying Frodo:

Gollum was talking to himself. Smeagol was holding a debate with some other thought that used the same voice but made it squeak and hiss. A pale light and a green light alternated in his eyes as he spoke.

"Smeagol promised," said the first thought.

“Yes, yes, my precious,” came the answer, “we promised: to save our Precious, not to let Him have it – never. But it’s going to Him, yes, nearer every step. [...] See my precious: if we has it, then we can escape, even from Him, eh? Perhaps we grows very strong, stronger than Wraiths. Lord Smeagol? Gollum the Great? *The Gollum!*” [...]

Each time that the second thought spoke, Gollum’s long hand crept out slowly, pawing towards Frodo, and then was drawn back with a jerk as Smeagol spoke again. Finally both arms, with long fingers flexed and twitching, clawed towards his neck. (*TT* 618-9)

The argument is a rather obvious illustration of corruption and the hope of redemption; he struggles and is eventually overcome by his need for power, comfort and happiness. What is important is that both sides of his personality are persuaded: the Gollum side speaks of the elevation of both Lord Smeagol and The Gollum. Each side has a craving for power, a craving for the security that comes with it: ‘stronger than Wraiths.’ Gollum uses logic to justify his actions: ‘promised [...] not to let Him have it – never.’ Gollum’s cleverness demonstrated in *The Hobbit* comes back in his ability to convince himself that saving the Ring is what he actually promised. His craving for power, the abstracted power described earlier by Arvidsson, overwhelms any redemption he may have. Tolkien’s moral statement on the fight for goodness and the danger of sin is clear, as Smeagol is not strong enough to overcome corruption on his own.

Gollum, as a character, is most interesting to the reader in the sense that he is a dark mirror. His corruption by the Ring foreshadows the gradual deterioration experienced by Frodo over the course of the journey. Though Frodo does not begin his ownership of the Ring with violence, as Gollum did, he shows more of the corrupting effects than Bilbo ever did, as he comes so much closer to the source of the Ring’s power. The reader must hope for the redemption of the monster, because if Gollum cannot be saved, Frodo cannot be either. The pathos induced by Gollum harkens back to Frankenstein’s creation, who is abandoned and isolated, resulting in his violence and anger. The dangers of the Ring are perfectly articulated in the once-Hobbit Gollum and the inexorable pull he feels to possess the Ring. His final act, his betrayal, is actually a liberation for Frodo: by possessing the Ring and falling into the fire, Gollum ends with his prize, his precious, while taking it beyond the reach of the current Ring-bearer. While his sacrifice is actually a selfish act, rather than a selfless one, he saves Frodo through his death.

Gollum is an example of incomplete corruption. As Gandalf points out to Frodo when explaining the history of the Ring, Bilbo’s ability to escape the Ring unscathed comes from the way he began his ownership of the dangerous object. Gollum began his

own ownership of the Ring with a brutal act: killing his best friend. ‘He caught Deagol by the throat and strangled him, because the gold looked so bright and beautiful. Then he put the ring on his finger’ (*FR* 52). The corruption of the character is determined, in some part, by its choices. There is little difference of character between the Bilbo and Gollum, as Gandalf points out: ‘even Bilbo’s story suggests the kinship. There was a great deal in the background of their minds and memories that was very similar. They understood one another remarkably well, very much better than a hobbit would understand, say, a Dwarf, or an Orc, or even an Elf’ (*FR* 53). The corruption comes down to a matter of choice. While Gollum is more susceptible to the corruption, Bilbo picks up the Ring and chooses not to strike down the former owner. While Bilbo and Frodo’s corruption by the Ring is foreshadowed by Gollum’s degradation, their loss of self is mitigated by their mercy and kindness to others. Frodo accepts the Ring without violence or aggression, but he does carry the Ring closer to its source. He undergoes greater corruption than Bilbo, but is still less damaged than Gollum. Virtue is not inherent or natural; it is a choice a character must make and act upon.

The character of Gollum as a pathetic fallen figure can be traced to a number of different sources. Not only can we look to Milton’s Satan for the idea of a fallen character who still preserves his self-delusion of right, but also the distortion of the natural shape which marks him as an aberration, as Penelope Doob discusses in *Nebuchadnezzar’s Children* and as I addressed in Chapter Two. John Rateliff, in his *The History of the Hobbit*, points also to the tradition of the invisible monster tracking back to Mallory’s *Le Morte D’arthur*. ‘[*Le Morte D’arthur*] features as a recurrent villain in Book I (*The Tale of King Arthur*) Part ii (“Balin or the Knight with Two Swords”) Sir Garlon, the invisible knight, infamous for ambushing foes, striking them down, and then escaping under the cover of his invisibility’ (Rateliff *Baggins* 183). Gollum’s use of the Ring in *The Hobbit* to strike down the unsuspecting Goblins echoes Garlon, but for a much more savage purpose. He is present as an echo of medieval sources, as a revision of Grendel, ambiguous like the Green Knight and as a voice of pathos, like Caliban or Frankenstein’s creature. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum is conflicted, torn by his dual nature, striving for salvation.

#### **4.2.8. Dwarves**

The Dwarves in Tolkien’s mythology are their own dark mirror and thus are both hero and monster in the history of Middle-earth. While they are presented on the side of the heroes in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the Dwarves’ role in *The Silmarillion* is as antagonist and challenge to the Elves. As creatures made of stone, like Trolls, they are created outside of their appointed time. ‘It is told that in their beginning the Dwarves were

made by Aulë in the darkness of Middle-earth; for so greatly did Aulë desire the coming of the Children, to have learners to whom he could teach his lore and crafts, that he was unwilling to await the fulfilment of the designs of Ilúvatar' (S 37). The Dwarves begin their existence in secret, a result of impatience. Ilúvatar discovers the Dwarves and demands that they be destroyed, but changes his mind. When Ilúvatar has forgiven Aulë's creation of the Dwarves and allows them existence, he describes a larger plan and order:

Even as I gave being to the thoughts of the Ainur at the beginning of the World, so now I have taken up thy desire and given it to a place therein; but in no other way will I amend thy handiwork, and as thou hast made it, so shall it be. But I will not suffer this: that these should come before the Firstborn of my design, nor that thy impatience should be rewarded. (S 38)

They become antagonists to the Eldar and Edain (Elves and Men); eventually Dwarves take on a positive role as the liberators of Lonely Mountain and allies of the Fellowship of the Ring. The fact that Dwarves pass through different roles in the history of Middle-earth shows the possibility of change and the idea of character redemption that is at the heart of Gollum's complexity. While early myths of dwarves refused a set moral position, Tolkien's Dwarves have a clear movement from ally to adversary to ally. Tolkien's Dwarves demonstrate the process of narrative redemption in their changing role in Middle-earth history. While they are not wholly monstrous, they are presented as physical and social others in the history of Middle-earth. They are demonstrative of greed and insularity, acting as adversaries to the Elven historians who compose *The Silmarillion*.

From their origin, Dwarves are isolated and protective of their language. Aulë creates the Dwarves and gives them their language. As 'Appendix F' of *The Lord of the Rings* tells us:

in secret (a secret which unlike Elves, they did not willingly unlock, even to their friends) they used their own strange tongue, changed little by the years; for it had become a tongue of lore rather than a cradle-speech, and they tended it and guarded it as a treasure of the past. Few of other race have succeeded in learning it. In this history it appears only in such place-names as Gimli revealed to his companions; and in the battle-cry which he uttered in the siege of the Hornburg. [...] [Dwarves'] own secret and "inner" names, their true names, the Dwarves have never revealed to any one of alien race. Not even on their tombs do they inscribe them. (RK 1106)

The isolation through language is culturally preservative and resulted from past conflicts with other races. Throughout the first two ages of Middle-earth, the Dwarves are described as complicit with Orcs or the actions of Morgoth, though these records are identified as



potentially false: ‘But they are not evil by nature, and few ever served the Enemy of free will, whatever the tales of Men may have alleged. For Men of old lusted after their wealth and the work of their hands, and there has been enmity between the races’ (*RK* 1106). Their isolation results in their demonization, as they have limited narrative space in the histories of the First and Second Ages of Middle-earth. Tolkien presents these creatures with narrative inconsistency, as they are outsiders from their origin.

Events in the Second Age of Middle-earth exacerbate the separation between the Elves and Dwarves and result in the presentation of Dwarves as monstrous. In the early years described in *The Silmarillion*, the dwarvish peoples appear as talented metal-smiths and honoured counselors. ‘[Thingol, the Elven king] sought aid and counsel of the Dwarves of Belegost. They gave it willingly, for they were unwearied in those days and eager for new works’ (*S* 101). As time passes in the narrative, Tolkien shows a shift in the relationship between Dwarves and Elves. As the wars with Morgoth wear on, Tolkien’s narrators describe the gradual wearing away of the friendship between these peoples, as:

though either people loved skill and were eager to learn, no great love was there between them; for the Dwarves were secret and quick to resentment, and Caranthir was haughty and scarce concealed his scorn for the unloveliness of the Naugrim [Dwarves], and his people followed their lord. Nevertheless since both peoples feared and hated Morgoth they made an alliance, and had of it great profit. (*S* 128)

The shift in the relationship is attributed here to the characteristics of the Dwarves, as they are ‘secret and quick to resentment;’ this sense of racial distancing continues through *The Silmarillion*, until the tale of Túrin Turambar, and the introduction of the character of Mím. Tolkien’s narrative voice shows bias against the Dwarves and fills in a history of their race that is otherwise unmentioned in *The Silmarillion*:

For Mím came of Dwarves that were banished in ancient days from the great Dwarf-cities of the east, and long before the return of Morgoth they wandered westward into Beleriand; but they became diminished in stature and in smith-craft, and they took to lives of stealth, walking with bowed shoulders and furtive steps. [...] They loved none but themselves, and if they feared and hated the Orcs, they hated the Eldar no less, and the Exiles most of all; for the Noldor, they said, had stolen their lands and their homes. (*S* 242)

There is even open violence, as the animosity between Dwarves and Elves comes to a head over the Nauglamir.<sup>71</sup> The exchange of malice between the two races is typified in this brief story in *The Silmarillion*, as the necklace, once commissioned as a symbol of friendship between the races, leads to death and destruction.

In *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, however, Dwarves are presented as active protagonists, and although *The Hobbit* accentuates their ambiguity, they are clearly hostile to the wholly monstrous races of Middle Earth. The Dwarves plot fight against Smaug, and battle the Goblins, Wargs and Spiders. While they are hostile to the Elves, refusing to explain their quest and denying the Elves a share of Smaug's treasure, they fight alongside the Elves when a true threat appears in the Battle of Five Armies. Throughout the history of Middle-earth, Dwarves are secretive and Elves are suspicious, but they unify when a threat is present: the Fifth Battle of the Second Age sees the Dwarves of the Belegost standing against the Orcs, Balrogs and Dragons: 'and thus [the Dwarves] won renown. For the Naugrim withstood fire more heartily than either Elves or Men, and it was their custom moreover to wear great masks in battle hideous to look upon' (*S* 229). This unity is echoed in Tolkien's children's story, as the Battle of Five Armies takes place. The bravery and strength of the Dwarves is clear in *The Hobbit* as the Dwarves of Moria and the Iron Hills charge and Thorin stands against the Goblins: 'Part of the wall, moved by levers, fell outward with a crash into the pool. Out leapt the King under the Mountain, and his companions followed him. Hood and cloak were gone; they were in shining armour, and red light leapt from their eyes. In the gloom the great dwarf gleamed like gold in a dying fire' (*H* 341). By *The Lord of the Rings*, Dwarves are included in the Council of Elrond to carry news of Moria and the offers of the enemy. Their message to the Council, however, reveals Sauron's belief in the corruptibility of the Dwarves:

Then about a year ago a messenger came to Dain, but not from Moria from Mordor: a horseman in the night, who called Dain to his gate. The Lord Sauron the Great, so he said, wished for our friendship. Rings he would give for it, such as he gave of old. [...] And then his voice lowered, and he would

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<sup>71</sup> The Nauglamir, the necklace of the Dwarves, was made for Finrod after he helped form the forges of Nargothrond for the Dwarves of the Blue Mountains. This necklace is lost for many years and, when discovered, it is reforged by the Dwarves and set with a Silmaril: the last of the three great jewels created by Feanor. The Silmarils have a dark history, as most individuals (be they Dwarf, Elf or Umaiari) who lay eyes on the stones covet them. When the Nauglamir is set with the Silmaril, Thingol (the elven king) demands the necklace from the Dwarven smiths, who lay claim to the necklace as part of their forefathers' work. 'Thingol perceived their hearts, and saw well that desiring the Silmaril they sought but a pretext and fair cloak for their true intent' (*S* 279). He is killed by the Dwarves, who then flee with the necklace and are hunted down by Thingol's kin in revenge. The final act of the Dwarven Lord of Norgord is to curse the necklace when he is killed by Beren, who gives the necklace to Luthien and she to Dior; the bloody treasure eventually brings his destruction, as other Elves turn on him for the necklace.

have sweetened it if he could. “As a small token only of your friendship Sauron asks this,” he said: “that you should find this thief,” such was his word, “and get from him, willing or no, a little ring, the least of rings, that once he stole. [...] Find it, and three rings that the Dwarf-sires possessed of old shall be returned to you, and the realm of Moria shall be yours for ever. (FR 235)

Even in the Third Age, the Dwarves are courted by Sauron. This offer points to their continued ambiguity, as Sauron still feels he can tempt the Dwarves with offers of wealth and security. They reject this offer, instead contributing a member to the Fellowship. What is important is the offer: no such promises are made to the Elves.<sup>72</sup> Instead, Dwarves remain ambiguous, a possible ally, but also a possible threat.

Dwarves in Tolkien’s Middle-earth reflect the key characteristics of the ancient Norse figures of story, but also take on a protectionism that reflects the modern era of international warfare. The Dwarves are stout, strong smiths who provide challenge and aid to the protagonists of the narratives, much like the dwarven figures of Norse legend. Tolkien maintains their subterranean lifestyle, though there is no threat of the Dwarves’ exposure to sunlight. Thor causes the dwarf Alvis to turn to stone at the end of ‘All-wise’s Sayings’ by tricking him into staying out when the sun rises. This is precisely the trick that Gandalf uses to transform the Trolls in *The Hobbit*, while his Dwarves in the same instance have no trouble with the sunrise and exist above ground without difficulty. The use of these traits to tap into the historical concept of the dwarf ties Tolkien’s work to the medieval materials he loved. His names were often drawn from the Poetic Edda, as the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* and Gandalf all have earlier namesakes in early Icelandic poetry. The dwarf and the troll were often conflated in early myth, to the point where Thomas Keightley, in *The Fairy Mythology*, blends the two character-types together in his catalogue of early Scandinavian myth. The dwarf-figure may be kind or murderous, friendly or malevolent; the character-type does not take on a singular role. Tolkien reflects this shifting nature in his own mercurial Dwarves throughout the history of Middle-earth.

What is unique about Tolkien’s Dwarves is their dissociation from magic and their protectionism. While they have incredible skill as smiths, there is no mention of the Dwarves possessing any form of magical ability. The isolationist behaviour of the Dwarves begins when they are forced to remain in the rock, separated from Ilúvatar’s other beings until Aulë receives permission to release them into Middle-earth. Their language is ‘their

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<sup>72</sup> There is also no offer made to Gondor and the Rohirrim, but they are each infiltrated and controlled through other means. Men are not offered a choice to betray the Free Peoples of Middle-earth; they are forced to do so through the *palantir* and possession by Saruman.

own strange tongue, changed little by the years; for it had become a tongue of lore rather than a cradle-speech, and they tended it and guarded it as a treasure of the past' (*RK* 1106). The forced separation as a result of their delayed arrival in Middle-earth results in their fear of the outsider and identity loss. The Elves and Men, the original races in Middle-earth, are created by Ilúvatar. The Dwarves are created by Aulë and thus are inherently different. This distinction works to their favour: the Dwarves protect against the influence of the outsider, keeping their culture safe from the corruptive force of Morgoth. Yet, despite this protectionism, they are presented as monstrous and corrupted beings in *The Silmarillion*. While Elves fell to the torture and debasement of Morgoth, and Ents and Men are counterfeited and corrupted in Trolls and Wraiths, there is no dark mirror of the Dwarves. Instead, Tolkien creates a race that is its own dark mirror.

### 4.3. The Monster Continues

Tolkien creates an imagined world in which old myth and new belief touch and ignite. His monsters are inconsistent, varying throughout his texts. He demonstrates an engagement with concepts of the monstrous from multiple eras and multiple traditions in his syncretic development of a new and influential fantasy. While many have looked at Tolkien's monsters and declared them simple,<sup>73</sup> or wholly representative of a Christian ethos,<sup>74</sup> his work extends beyond a single moral space or means of definition. Tolkien's genius is in his complexity and diversity.

Through language, Tolkien constructs characters and races that are morally defined and socially delineated. Characters' diction and vocabulary project readily to the reader the nature of the individual, while entire races can be understood through the history of their language. The limitations of the Black Speech stand in stark contrast to the open, pervasive language of Westron. Meanwhile, the powerful voice of the monster, either in the use of heroic diction by the Orcs or the refined vocabulary of the Dragons, identifies for the reader that this is not a simple text: the monsters gain complexity and defy easy categorization through their use of language.

Tolkien consistently uses oppositional relationships as a core element of definition for his monsters. Just as Grendel was Cain's kin and the pernicious spoiler for the men of Heorot, so too do the Orcs gain their import as monsters in their opposition to the Elves, the Trolls from their contrast to the Ents, the Wraiths and Ghosts in their contrast to Men

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<sup>73</sup> See Lobdell and Rutledge.

<sup>74</sup> See Purtil, Smith and Wood.

and the Dwarves in their internal contrast. Opposition is key to the idea of the monster, as it is through the fall of a creature that it becomes monstrous and didactic.

A fundamental element in the universality of Middle-earth is the creatures Tolkien drew upon. In taking creatures out of myth and history, Tolkien changed the way modern audiences read monsters. Tolkien, in '*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*' strove to reclaim the monster as a figure of importance: he was frustrated by the relegation of the monsters to the critical ephemera and wanted them to be returned to the centre of our reading. He defended the *Beowulf*-poet, pointing to the longevity of monster tales. His own writing continues the idea of the monster tale, and Middle-earth also possesses Dragons and Trolls to challenge the hero. It is not an error of judgement that puts the monsters at the centre of the narrative: though 'correct and sober taste may refuse to admit there can be an interest for *us* [...] in ogres and dragons' ('*B: M&C*' 16), these are the tales that carry on. Tolkien saw the power of the monster in early literature, and formed his Middle-earth around its history.

Tolkien's Middle-earth is a powerful space of moral re-evaluation. By drawing Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Scandinavian, Celtic and English myths into a single text and rewriting the mythic structure of the world, Tolkien has created a space in which characters of the mythic, superstitious past can be read through a contemporary lens. Middle-earth was created in a world of warfare, written in a time when the institutions and ideologies had lost the faith of the public. The governments of the world had brought their people into brutal, hard-fought war. Tolkien created an escape. Middle-earth experiences its own fight against darkness, acting as a reflection of our world while maintaining the distance of fantasy. It is not allegory: it is an applicable story that resonates with the reader. Tolkien draws the reader into a time 'long ago in the quiet of the world, when there was less noise and more green' (*H* 14). It is the sense of past and present, the moment when 'new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited' that demonstrates Tolkien's commitment to drawing out a new *Beowulf* ('*B: M&C*' 26), a text at the nexus of old and new; his key intersection and embodiment of past is the same as the *Beowulf*-poet's: the monsters.

## Chapter Five: Middle-earth Ignites

As I have shown throughout this thesis, Tolkien's reading of *Beowulf* is central to his creation of Middle-earth, and is fundamental to our reading of his monsters. His argument on *Beowulf* shows the emphasis he put on the monster as a marker of time and belief. Jeffrey Cohen would assert a century later that monsters are indicators of cultural belief and social limitations<sup>75</sup> and, while Tolkien does not argue that Grendel, his mother and the Dragon are mechanisms of social restraint, necessarily, he does assert that they are demonstrative figures, telling us about the intricate network of belief in the time of the poem's composition. As oral poetry, the tale of *Beowulf* would have passed through many voices, many incarnations, and the manuscript-version we have today is a single telling. The surviving text carries the voice of a poet that balances the community's superstitions and pagan history with the modern belief in Christ and His redemption. As Tolkien asserted and I have echoed, the intersection between these two belief systems creates the tension in the poem and makes it a powerful work of art. Tolkien admired this and argued simultaneous presence of old myth and new belief was at the core of what made the poem an important part of English literature:

We get in fact a poem from a pregnant moment of poise, looking back into the pit, by a man learned in old tales who was struggling, as it were, to get a general view of them all, perceiving their common tragedy of inevitable ruin, and yet feeling more *poetically* because he was himself removed from the direct pressure of its despair. He could view from without, but still feel immediately and from within the old dogma. ('*B: M&C*' 23, italics in original)

The poet does not create this tension subconsciously: he understands the tragedy of the past while embracing the redemption of the present. Tolkien's means of reading this intersection was through the figures of the superstitious past: the monsters. After arguing so fervently for the importance of creatures that had long faced critical disregard, it is not surprising that the didactic elements of Tolkien's fiction centre around monsters. He draws creatures from the superstitious past and brings them into a modern moral context in his creation of a twentieth century *Beowulf*.

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<sup>75</sup> 'From its position at the limits of knowing, the monster stands as a warning against exploration of its uncertain demesnes. The giants of Patagonia, the dragons of the Orient and the dinosaurs of Jurassic Park together declare that curiosity is more often punished than rewarded, that one is better off safely contained within one's own domestic sphere than abroad, away from the watchful eyes of the state. The monster prevents mobility [...] delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move' (Cohen 'Seven Theses' 12).

In his 1936 lecture, Tolkien ‘confine[d] [himself] mainly to the monsters’ (‘*B: M&C*’ 6), establishing the fundamental importance of the monster as an demonstration of cultural ignition: a meeting of past myth and present belief which results in a text that is greater than the sum of its parts. His lecture changed the face of contemporary medieval scholarship; yet, scholars have not emulated his mode of reading for the contact of past myth and current belief. While Monster Theory has embraced Tolkien’s identification of the monster as a key element in understanding culture, the theorists have focused on monsters within a single historical space. This approach, while interesting, misses the complex network of meanings Tolkien advocated and this thesis identified in his own fiction. It is through understanding Tolkien’s critical project that one can see the complexity in his own monsters as figures in a nexus of past and present, outside any singular metric of morality.

Tolkien’s abhorrence of allegory can be drawn back to his diversity of sources. Allegory is often a substitutive relationship: a literary event or character stands in for a real-world one. This simple relationship flattens the literary creation, tying the imagined character to a singular meaning and context. Tolkien often spoke of his hatred of allegory in response to questions about *The Lord of the Rings* as an allegory for the World Wars, but his frustrations run deeper than that. In his preface to the second edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Tolkien writes:

I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse ‘applicability’ with ‘allegory’; but one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author. (*FR* ‘Preface’ xv)

The applicability he speaks of is often read as the political applicability, seeing post-war Europe in the resolution of *The Lord of the Rings*. Instead, one can see the applicability in Tolkien’s creation of a twentieth century *Beowulf*: a text that transcends its original context through its ignition of past myth and present belief to create a work that is greater than the sum of its parts. Each reader has freedom to read the meanings she recognizes in the text, rather than the author dominating the interpretation through allegorical simplification.

By drawing characters from Norse and Anglo-Saxon poetry into a text with Late Medieval characteristics and Renaissance and Neo-Medieval elements written in the interwar and war years of the Modern era, Tolkien has not stripped these characters of their meaning, but has layered these frameworks. The monster is more complex, more intricate, because of its simultaneous existence in multiple moral contexts. Tolkien is not the first

author to draw historical characters into a contemporary moral framework or setting, as Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton and Walpole engaged in this trope before him. He is, however, the first to identify this method of reading as an analytical process, demonstrating his awareness of the nexus he constructed. His advocacy of the *Beowulf*-poet's skill shows his admiration for the process of historical reconceptualization. The poet's blending of the earlier myth and contemporary belief results in a timelessness that enables the reader to see further, to use the poem as Tolkien's imagined tower to 'look out upon the sea' ('*B*: M&C' 8).

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated the range of source materials that impacted Tolkien's construction of monsters. I have shown how these sources, mythic, medieval or modern, have come into contact with Tolkien's own time and personal values. His monsters demonstrate complexity in their language and ambiguity in their refusal to be categorized in a single framework of belief. Yet, the monster is more than historically illustrative. Tolkien's reading of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* demonstrates the importance of the monster as an introduction of the moral challenge. As I have discussed in Chapter Three, his 1953 lecture addresses the role of the monster as a reflection of the past and a figure of challenge to the modern moral context. The Green Knight, who appears physically monstrous but courtly in his manners, is not the focus of Tolkien's analysis. He spends little time addressing the monstrous interloper, particularly as so many contemporary critics had catalogued possible sources and influences for the Green Knight's complexion, challenge and behaviour, but instead focuses on the morality of the poem. Gawain's nobility, honour and humility are at the centre of Tolkien's reading, because the core of the monsters' purpose in Tolkien's analysis is their ability to present a moral lesson. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the monster's role is didactic.

At the core of Tolkien's formation of Middle-earth is the genre of Wisdom Literature. As Tolkien was creating a world that was 'a fundamentally religious and Catholic' (*Letters* 172), he remains aware throughout the text of the demonstrative moral role of the various races: the Dwarves who are redeemed through their role in the wars of the Third Age; the Dragons and their unrepentant greed; the Orcs and their incurable corruption. Each of these races plays a role in the larger moral messaging of the text, as Tolkien was drawing upon the traditions of these creatures in literary history to bring into contact with modern Catholic morality. 'There is indeed no better medium for moral teaching than the good fairy-story (by which I mean a real deep-rooted tale, told as a tale, and not a thinly disguised moral allegory)' (Tolkien 'Gawain' 73). The result is a text with a connection to deep history in its invocation of Wisdom Literature traditions. A key



element of Wisdom Literature is its contradiction and challenge to the reader.<sup>76</sup> The Book of Job, for example, shows a man wholly devoted to God, demonstrating his humility and faith; it also tells of this same man questioning God, demanding answers and explanation. The text asks the reader to consider the philosophical questions for herself: the contradiction demands a form of answer. *Beowulf* asks the same of the reader, as the pagan warrior performs noble acts, but does so without knowledge of God. Tolkien's fiction, with its contradictory representations of creatures between texts and shifting morality resulting from the long historical tradition of the different races, demand that same engagement from the reader. It is in contradiction and conflict that the true message of Wisdom Literature is found.

Tolkien's narratives of Middle-earth, like *Beowulf* before him, take their weight from the blending of past and present. Tolkien draws in multiple texts and characters in his construction of didactic texts. Through historical grounding, Middle-earth takes on greater significance than a narrative existing wholly within a single timeframe. Tolkien's weaving of multiple historical moral frameworks into his imagined world is syncretic, creating contradictions and complexities in his didactic space.

Tolkien's syncretic creative techniques can be read in terms familiar to him as a literary scholar: in particular, Medieval '*inventio*' and Romantic 'imagination.' The rhetorical concept of *inventio*, found in the writings of Quintilian and Geoffrey De Vinsauf, describes the process of what would now be called the discovery of ideas: '*Inventio* is a process of exhaustive productivity: it extracts (*excogitatio*) from the *res* [material] its more or less hidden possibilities for developing ideas' (Lausberg 119). To state more simply, *inventio* is the exploration of ideas to formulate an argument. Gideon Burton defines *inventio*, or Invention, as a process by which one finds something to say.

Invention is tied to the rhetorical appeal of *logos*, being oriented to what an author would say rather than how this might be said. Invention describes the argumentative, persu[a]sive [sic] core of rhetoric. Aristotle, in fact, defines rhetoric primarily as invention, "discovering the best available means of persuasion." ('*Inventio*')

Redefining and reconstituting source material as Tolkien did with his use of ancient texts is a form of *inventio* in that it involves 'discovering' resources that will prove effective in

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<sup>76</sup> 'The wisdom literature was part of a teaching tradition. Any intellectual movement seeks to pass down its unique insights to the next generation. Second generation sages received the passed-on wisdom, but sometimes rejected it and offered counterexplanations. This ongoing dialogue or debate too is part of the wisdom tradition. The wisdom books, taken together, are a field upon which a vast argument has taken place. The contemporary reader of ancient Israelite wisdom can eavesdrop upon the sages, but one is also forced to take part, to provide one's own answers to the deep and penetrating questions asked by the Israelite sages and their descendants' (Penchansky 3).

their new, twentieth century fictional context. This process of discovery is not a passive action; *inventio* requires intent: ‘Even someone endowed with fortune’s natural gift must **search** in order to find. [...] The person searching for something must know roughly where to look’ (Lausberg 119, emphasis in original). As a scholarly medievalist, Tolkien was deeply familiar with not only ancient texts, but also the commentaries of successive generations that had provided new analyses of them. His use of myths and stories that he studied meant that Tolkien was not necessarily searching outside of his own memory, but he did selectively draw on characters and scenes in his process of creation. His academic life was the collection of material that would coalesce in his composition of Middle-earth, in a means akin to what Coleridge calls ‘imagination.’

Coleridge’s concept of ‘imagination,’ as defined in *Biographia Literaria*, is separated into primary and secondary. Coleridge distinguishes between the two categories as follows:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (202, emphasis in original)

Coleridge is describing a spiritual interaction, in which the primary imagination, the ‘living Power’ of the ‘infinite I AM’ (Coleridge’s understanding of God) exists in the human mind. Imagination is ‘the repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation.’ Man’s imagination, both primary and secondary, is God’s influence. The primary is man’s perception of the world, while secondary imagination, an echo of the primary, involves intention and thought, as it is ‘co-existing with the conscious will.’ Primary imagination is thus man’s view of the world as he understands it, while secondary imagination is the creative process. Coleridge is careful not to diminish or disregard such imagination, declaring that it is ‘identical with the primary in its kind of agency, differing only in *degree*.’ The creative process, in which the writer derives his imaginative materials from the world around him, is a process of deconstruction and reconstruction: ‘It dissolves, it dissipates, in order to recreate.’ Artistic creation, or the imaginative process, is the taking in of material, man’s experience of the world – the primary imagination of the infinite I

AM – which is then subjected to conscious will and intention. The human mind then shapes, deconstructs, and re-forms the primary imagination into something new and different through the process of secondary imagination.

Tolkien's concepts of creation and sub-creation, as described in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories,' echo Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*. Tolkien's discussion of fairy-tale involves a process he calls 'sub-creation,' whereby the author constructs a 'Secondary World' that '[the reader's] mind can enter. Inside it, what [the author] relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. [The reader] therefore believe[s] it, while [she is], as it were, inside' ('Fairy-stories' 52). Just as Coleridge separates the primary imagination, the mind's response to the force of the I AM which enters and repeats itself in the human mind, from the shaping, unifying secondary imagination, so too does Tolkien identify creation and sub-creation as central to fantasy and literature; the primary imagination, or initial act of creation, is the influence of God, while the secondary imagination, or sub-creation, is an act of man:

The mental power of image-making is one thing, or aspect; and it should appropriately be called Imagination. The perception of the image, the grasp of its implications, and the control, which are necessary to a successful expression, may vary in vividness and strength: but this is a difference of degree in Imagination, not a difference in kind. The achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) "the inner consistency of reality", is indeed another thing, or aspect, needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation. For my present purpose I require a word which shall embrace both the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image: a quality essential to fairy-story. I propose, therefore, [...] to use Fantasy for this purpose. (Tolkien 'Fairy-stories' 59-60)

So, while Tolkien appears to disagree with Coleridge, declaring Imagination not differing in kind, he does echo the concept of degree, which Coleridge uses to distinguish the primary and secondary imaginations (each differs from the other 'only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation' (202)). Thus, Tolkien's concept of Fantasy is the incorporation of the Imagination into the process of Art, the drawing together of influences and materials to provide consistency and induce Secondary Belief:

To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such

difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode. ('Fairy-stories' 61)

Tolkien argues that the formulation of a story is a sub-creative act, the best of which will result in Secondary Belief. The sub-creative is Fantasy, 'which plays strange tricks with the world and all that is in it' ('Fairy-stories' 64). To play with the world the reader knows and change it to make it new, make it a place in which the reader can look at the familiar with new eyes, extends beyond Fantasy into Enchantment. It is Enchantment that inspires Secondary Belief. This achievement is Art. It is through Art, through the invocation of Secondary Belief, that the storyteller can inspire and teach the reader. The power of an imaginative space is its didactic capacity.

Tolkien's *inventio*, the seeking and gathering of ideas as the primary material of creativity, and his secondary imagination, the creative process, are the products of diverse times and texts; he constructs his fantasy and neo-medievalism from many different literary and cultural materials, engaging in literary synthesis. Middle-earth is a result of his historical context: he answers the medieval scholarship of his time and changes the representation of traditional monsters by blending the text and the critical response, addressed in Chapter Two. One of the forms in which this conflation of the medieval and the neo-medieval appears is in Tolkien's construction of the monsters. As a fiction writer and scholar, Tolkien's engagement with the monster pervades both sides of his work. His critical analyses on the monster influenced the writings of later critics who considered the monster as a key element of literature and culture; his literary work reinforced the idea of the monster as a culturally central figure.

The study of the monster-figures in *Beowulf* has increased since Tolkien's 1936 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics' lecture. Scholars approaching other elements of *Beowulf*, discussing language, kingship, inheritance, scripture or culture among other things, use ideas of monstrosity to support their work. The monster has become a cultural touchstone, as critics will read history, superstition, gender and biblical reference through the lenses of Grendel, Grendel's mother and the Dragon.<sup>77</sup> Scholars often now address the creatures directly, focusing on outsider-figures in the text; these works include Ruth

<sup>77</sup> A selection of modern scholars addressing literary, linguistic and social elements of the poem through the lens of the monster include:  
 Osborn, Marijane. "The Great Feud: Scriptural History and Strife in Beowulf." *PMLA* 93:5 (1978). 973-981.  
 Bonjour, Adrien. 'The Beowulf Dragon Debated' *PMLA* 68:1 (1953). 304-12.  
 Trilling, Renée R. 'Beyond Abjection: The Problem with Grendel's Mother Again.' *Parergon* 24.1 (2007). 1-20.  
 Gang, T.M. 'Approaches to Beowulf' *Review of English Studies* 3:9 (1952). 1-12.

Waterhouse's 'Beowulf as Palimpsest,' which looks at the influence of Grendel on other literary works, Andy Orchard's *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*, or Joseph Adriano's placement of Grendel as part of a tradition of fantastical beasts in *Immortal Monster*. Waterhouse and Adriano look at the universality of the monster figure from *Beowulf* throughout later literature, while Orchard examines the other materials bound with the *Beowulf* manuscript and the pervasiveness of monsters in medieval texts. Each of these critics looks at the monster as a culturally fixed unit that reflects its contemporary culture, not as a nexus point of history and belief as Tolkien did. However, these critics have focused their analysis on characters that were otherwise dismissed by the critics Tolkien challenged in his lecture.

Tolkien's argument defending the importance of the creatures of *Beowulf* has resulted in Monster Theory: the study of the Monster as a reflection of contemporary culture. As Matthew Woodcock points out in 'Elf Fashioning Revisited,'

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" ('Monster Culture' 4). 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 a purely literal reading of the poem and thus serves to signal the text's polysemous nature. (217)

Monster Theory derives from Tolkien's project to reclaim Grendel, Grendel's mother and the Dragon from critical disregard. He argued for reading the monster as the point of change, as 'this [presentation of Norse and Christian traditions together] is not due to mere confusion – it is rather an indication of the precise point at which an imagination, pondering old and new, was kindled. At this point new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited' ('B: M&C' 26). The monsters in *Beowulf* identify it as a poem rather than a purely historical record; they also demonstrate its unruly blending of the traces of past beliefs with emergent modern religion in the shape of Christianity. Later critical focus has used the lenses of psychoanalytic and postcolonial theories, schools of thought in which Tolkien showed no critical interest; yet the analysis still rests upon the centrality of the monster. Tolkien did not argue that the monster was a means of simply reading the culture, but that the monster pointed to the potent intersections of culture. The monsters in *Beowulf*

mark the crossing of past and present, just as Tolkien's monsters are the ignition of past myth and contemporary thought. Monster Theory grew from Tolkien's reading of the monster at a nexus of history and contemporary belief, but is a simplification of Tolkien's argument. Monster Theory examines the monster as the reflection of a single culture, while Tolkien saw greater possibility in the complexity of the monster-figure. It is for this reason this thesis has not read Tolkien's monsters wholly through the lens of Monster Theory, but instead used it as a theoretical school to inform my reading.

Tolkien has not only influenced a closer examination of monsters as cultural figures, but has also shaped the definition of epic High Fantasy. High Fantasy, a term applied retroactively to Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, has become synonymous with Tolkien. Writers who have followed after Tolkien, like Terry Brooks, R.A. Salvatore, Guy Gavriel Kay, Diana Wynne Jones, Garth Nix, George R.R. Martin, just to name a few, have modeled their work on Tolkien's concepts of neomedievalism and fantasy. Mendlesohn points out that while many writers have emulated Tolkien's epic quest narrative, they have drawn in language from action adventure, sword and sorcery narratives:

What there is surprisingly little of in the work of both Lewis and Tolkien, is the action adventure rhetoric that one associates with modern heroic fantasy. [...] The language appears to have leaked in from the sword and sorcery genre that increasingly influences the quest narrative as the century proceeds. (37)

In *The Wand and the Word*, Leonard Marcus interviews numerous writers about their influences; of his thirteen writers, nine point to Tolkien as an influence on their development as an author. While not all of them see Tolkien as a continuing influence, as Philip Pullman and Ursula K. Le Guin identify only a passing impact of *The Lord of the Rings*, Marcus argues the centrality of Tolkien to the world of modern fantasy in his introduction:

While Tolkien immersed himself in writing *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5), most members of his generation continued to place their hopes for the future in modern science and technology. Tales of elves, dwarves and tree people? Ha! Critics wondered why an educated person would waste his time on outmoded make-believe. It was not until late in life that Tolkien had his achievement recognized.

When that finally happened, during the 1960s and 1970s, things became a bit easier for other fantasy writers as well. [...] Tolkien's triumph had a lot

to do with the new, more receptive attitude to fantasy that cleared the way for, among other things, the forest-rattling success of Harry Potter. (2)

While Marcus's assertions are flawed, as he disregards the larger movement of fantasy and neomedieval writing which preceded Tolkien,<sup>78</sup> he does aptly point to a social shift that followed the widespread popularization of Tolkien's works; this concept is echoed by Edward James: 'After 1955 fantasy writers no longer had to explain away their worlds by framing them as dreams, or travellers' tales, or by providing them with any fictional link to our own world at all' (65). Tolkien's insistence on writing 'the kind of books we want to read' entrenched the sense of history and sense of morality found in earlier writers like George MacDonald and Lord Dunsany (*Letters* 209); he formed a world that resonated with the reader, as even the smallest of us can achieve great things. Tolkien tapped into deep history, drawing on mythic characters and familiar didactic structures to appeal to his audience. Tolkien's use of the traditional monster connected to a broad cultural history and the inherent appeal of a battle of good versus evil. Tolkien's Middle-earth shaped not only the next generation of writers, but also the face of neomedieval fantasy in all its forms.

In 1974, Tactical Studies Rules released a game called *Dungeons & Dragons*, the first of the tabletop role-playing games (Perlini 275). This game is structured around a group of heroes moving through a world designed by the Dungeon Master. The game takes place in an imagined world that is based upon Tolkien's Middle-earth.<sup>79</sup> The creatures that are at the core of the game, like elves, dwarves, goblins, trolls, wraiths and orcs, all follow the models of Middle-earth, entrenching Tolkien's neomedieval concept.<sup>80</sup> Tolkien's impact echoes through the world of gaming, tabletop, board and video included, as well as in film and television. Listing the numerous works that have drawn influence in their narrative structure or characters would be impossible: the body of materials is far too large to encompass. Tolkien's monsters extend beyond any singular catalogue, as his fiction shaped the standard presentation of the medieval world in modern media.

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<sup>78</sup> See the James & Mendlesohn 'Chronology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*.

<sup>79</sup> 'At that time, J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novels were hugely popular, and this popularity led to the idea of combining his work and wargames. [...] and allowed elves, dwarves and hobbits to take the field against other creatures of Tolkien's work – such as orcs, ents, balrogs – and other beings from various mythologies' (Perlini 277).

'D&D assumes a gigantic, continental-scale milieu – Gygas's World of Greyhawk is only the commercial one but really the template is Tolkien's painstaking imagining of Middle-earth' (Morton 160).

<sup>80</sup> Reading either the character descriptions in the *Players Guide* or the descriptions of the origins, traits and behaviours of the monsters in the *Monstrous Manual* makes the connection very clear. While earlier editions of the game emulated Tolkien's characteristics more closely, fourth and fifth edition have digressed from the original moral structure of Middle-earth. A player can now play as a half-orc, for example, a hybrid being that would be impossible in Tolkien's Middle-earth.

This thesis has established that Tolkien's reading of *Beowulf* is central to understanding Tolkien's Middle-earth; his critical reading of medieval materials fundamentally shaped his world-development and fiction throughout his career. He countered the prevailing understanding of the poem and turned the focus to the ignition of past and present evident in the monsters. He focused on the message this ignition provides for the audience, as the poem's didactic power is heightened through an understanding of the monster. His work on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Sir Orfeo* reflects this critical approach as well, as he looks at the moral message at the core of texts that centre on monsters as the key element of challenge. Both the Green Knight and the Faerie King are the mechanisms of moral conflict and present the trial for the hero. Tolkien's own creation of monsters is heavily influenced by later writers as well, as Chapter Three argues. His own monsters demonstrate the ignition of past and present that he praised in *Beowulf*; he uses earlier characters in his synthesis of Middle-earth, connecting his imagined world to our literary history. His inventio is a creative act, making a world of Enchantment that focuses on the lessons that one can learn from facing monsters.

Tolkien's concept of the monster as a blending of past myth and contemporary belief is central to the complexity of Middle-earth, and has been an inspiration for later writers of fantasy literature. His monsters are a blend of past and present, changing the moral context of the creatures from the epic heroic narratives into modern war-time frameworks; Tolkien draws ancient ideas of good versus evil into a modern, post-war world by creating monsters with sympathetic voices, creatures who undergo a narrative downfall and codeswitching villains. He maintains the original traits of the dragon, goblin, ghost and dwarf, but also gives them depth and motivation. The past and present meet and ignite in Tolkien's Middle-earth. Tolkien's epic world-building shook the world of fantasy and spurred the development of a now pervasive genre adapting to all forms of media. Tolkien's Middle-earth, as a twentieth century *Beowulf*, has defined modern High Fantasy and has changed the way we read the monster.



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