Norse Monstrosities in the Monstrous World of J.R.R. Tolkien

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Abstract

The work of J.R.R. Tolkien appears to resemble various aspects from Norse mythology and the Norse sagas. While many have researched these resemblances, few have done so specifically on the dark side of Tolkien's work. Since Tolkien himself was fascinated with the dark side of literature and was of the opinion that monsters served an essential role within a story, I argue that both the monsters and Tolkien's attraction to Norse mythology and sagas are essential phenomena within his work.

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Introduction

In 1966, roughly ten years after the final book of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy was published, an essay titled "The Shire, Mordor, and Minas Tirith" was released. In this article, the writer Charles Moorman made the following statement: "*The greatest single influence upon Tolkien is the Eddas and sagas of the North*" (Moorman as quoted in St. Clair, p.1).

Other critics and scholars made similar arguments that Tolkien's creation of Middle-earth was based on -or at least inspired by- the stories from Norse mythology and the sagas of the North. For example, the Elves and Dwarves from Middle-earth seem to have been largely inspired by the Elves and Dwarves from Norse mythology. Gandalf has been compared to Odin and the outline and layering of Tolkien's stories and poems have been compared to that of the *Poetic Edda* (Kuseela, p.30).

However, for many readers the astonishing beauty of the Elven realms or the remarkable Undying Lands of Valinor belong to the very attractive features associated with Tolkien's work. Evidently, these features have provided a bottomless source of inspiration for many works, both scholarly and artistic. However, the darker side of Tolkien's world, materialized by the monsters, is almost as frequently neglected (Benvenuto, *Mirror*, p.5). Yet, it is the dark side of Middle-earth that is the most intriguing in my opinion, just like the dark side of literature was in Tolkien's.

Mention has been made frequently of monsters in Tolkien studies, yet almost always briefly in essays regarding Tolkien and old Norse sources in general. Whenever they are mentioned, it usually concerns one or two monsters and the general meaning of their presence is hardly ever discussed. For example, Ármann Jakobsson analysed how the encounter between Bilbo and Smaug in *The Hobbit* resembles that of the old Norse poem *Fáfnismál*. He comes to the conclusion that not only the Dragons in the two stories are very similar, but that also their means of communication are very akin (Jakobsson, *Dragon*, p.30). Although his essay is unquestionably interesting and also

quite elaborate, it only concerns one monster and focuses more on the direct similarities between the Tolkienian and the Norse Dragon than on their actual meaning.

Therefore I set out to do both in this thesis. For especially in a thesis on Tolkien, the dark side of the narrative and its embodiment: the monsters, are very important. This is because he himself argued that what separates *Beowulf* from other old English poems and makes it such a "masterpiece", according to him, is that we as humans are fascinated by the ogres and the Dragons, that we derive pleasure from reading about such "unfashionable creatures" (Critics, p.6). In the same lecture, he continues to argue why the presence of monsters is important. He for example said that: "It is just because the main foes in Beowulf are inhuman that the story is larger and more significant" (Critics, p.14). And although I shall not discuss this now, the question of why we need monsters in our stories will be answered later on.

Since the resemblance between Tolkienian and Norse mythology is undeniable in some aspects and since monsters are at the center both of his critical work on *Beowulf* and of his own work, I argue that both the monsters and Tolkien's attraction to Norse mythology and the sagas are essential aspects in his work. Hence, the main question that I set out to answer in this thesis is: how are Tolkien's monsters inspired by Norse sources and what do these monsters mean?

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, I primarily set out a compact overview of similarities that scholars before me have found between Tolkien and the old Norse sources. Subsequently I provide a representative overview of Tolkienian monsters that can trace their roots to the stories of Norse mythology. Afterwards I attempt to illustrate as clearly as possible what the monsters actually mean, both in general and to Tolkien, which purpose they serve in literature, and in which manner Tolkien makes use of them. I do not only elaborate on the meaning of monsters, I also touch upon the notion of fear and horror within Tolkien's work.

Answering my research question also gave rise to some other questions regarding the struggle between good and evil in Tolkien's work. Since Tolkien's own experience of fighting in World War I might have influenced the 'warrior-ethos' he attributes to some of the characters in his work, I have devoted a final chapter to those aspects as well. In conclusion, I will review the content of my thesis, as I try to get to the bottom of what my results essentially mean.

1. Tolkien's Fascination with Norse Mythology

1.1 Introduction

As I previously stated, many scholars have researched the influence of Norse mythology on Tolkien's own mythology. However, not only the influence of Norse mythology has been researched, but also that of Greek and German mythology. Due to the fact that Tolkien was a devout Christian, the influence of Christianity has also come up, and the epic poem *Beowulf* as well. However, as shall become apparent in this chapter, Norse mythology seems to have taken the lead in influencing Tolkien's mind. For he occupied himself with the mythology and sagas from the North ever since he could read, an interest which continued while he matured. It is for this reason that I have limited myself to the Norse influences on Tolkien's work. Therefore, I shall primarily touch upon some of the findings that previous research on this topic has come to, to provide the reader with some background.

Before I start with my overview of findings from previous research, I shall provide a small introduction to the Norse sources that will be discussed within this thesis. The most important of these sources is the *Edda*. This is a body of ancient Icelandic literature, consisting of two books which were both written during the 13th century (Britannica, 2019). These two volumes are commonly referred to as the *Prose* or *Younger Edda*, and the *Poetic* or the *Elder Edda*. While the *Younger Edda* is predominantly intended as a textbook on poetics, the *Elder Edda* is a collection of myths and poems of unknown authorship. The *Eddas* are the most important works due to the fact that these are the most complete and detailed sources on the subject.

However, there are more relevant old Norse sources when analyzing Tolkien's work. These are some of the Icelandic "sagas" which could have been retrieved from the *Edda*, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. The word "saga" can refer to any type of story or history written in prose, yet it is predominantly used to refer to medieval Icelandic narrative fiction, confined to legendary and historical fiction (Britannica, 2019). The sagas that seem to have

been of most importance for Tolkien are the *Heimskringla, Völsungasaga* and *Fáfnismál*. Therefore, these sagas have often been the main focus within previous research and will therefore be mentioned multiple times within this thesis as well. While the sagas can be defined as different short stories, the *Eddas* also include multiple stories. Since providing background to these stories would result in another thesis I will not do so now. However, I will mention what is important for you to know regarding a saga or an Eddic story when it is mentioned within this thesis.

Another source that often comes up in previous research is *Beowulf*. There is some debate regarding the interpretation of *Beowulf* as either a solely English, Germanic or an old Norse source, and I therefore do not pay much attention to it in my own research. However, I will provide a short clarification on the story since it was nonetheless an important source of inspiration for Tolkien as well. *Beowulf* is an epic, old English poem, believed to have been composed during the 8th century. Although it is part of the old English literary canon, the story itself takes place in Denmark and involves other parts of Scandinavia as well. The most compact way to describe the story narrative would be that it concerns the battles of the hero Beowulf against the giant Grendel, whom he slays, the giant's mother, whom he also slays, and a Dragon, who slays him.

1.2 Humphrey Carpenter: Tolkien's Biographer

First and foremost, I shall turn to Humphrey Carpenter, who undoubtedly wrote one of the (if not the) most important works on Tolkien: *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*. Despite the fact that this was not necessarily his goal within the book, he also paid attention to Tolkien's fascination with Norse mythology, and made the clearest outline of the respective development of his own mythology to date.

According to Carpenter, Tolkien's fascination with the 'nameless North' (as Tolkien referred to it himself in 'On Fairy Stories', p.13) was fostered at a very young age. Even before Tolkien had started school as a young boy, his mother had always provided him with many storybooks (Carpenter, p.39). His favorite storybook had been the *Red Fairy Book* by Andrew Lang. For that book contained the

story of Sigurd who slew the Dragon Fáfnir, which was "the best story he had ever read", according to Carpenter (Carpenter, p.39). This story, which is originally part of the old Norse *Völsungasaga*, was transformed into a fairytale by Andrew Lang and included in his children's book. Shortly after having read about the Norse Sigurd and the slaying of Fáfnir, Tolkien began to write his first story at the age of 7. Even though he never finished this story, the protagonist of the story was, not surprisingly, a "great green Dragon" (Carpenter, p.39).

The *Red Fairy Book* remained important to Tolkien, as a few years later it also helped him to take his first steps in learning the Old Norse language (Carpenter, p.55). Through reading the story of Sigurd and Fáfnir in its original language and subsequently translating the sentences from his English version of the story, Tolkien became acquainted with the language and effectively created more opportunities for himself to become familiar with more stories from the North (Carpenter, p.56).

His early endeavours in mastering this language were successful, as a few years later he was telling his friends the exciting and scary episodes from the Norse *Völsungasaga* (Carpenter, p.70). He even ended up reading to the School Literary Society on Norse Sagas, while illustrating it with readings in its original language (Carpenter, p.73).

Tolkien's fascination with Norse mythology eventually developed to the point where he started a club in college named *the Kolbítar*, which devoted itself to translating the *Eddas* and the Sagas of the North. In Old Norse, the word 'Kolbítar' literally meant 'coalbiters', and referred to men who gathered close enough around the fire to 'bite' the coals as they told each other tales of old (Chance, p. 191).

1.3 Concrete Examples From Jakobsson and Shippey

In addition to Carpenter, many other scholars have added valuable findings to the discussion regarding the connection between Norse mythology and Tolkien's works. For example, Ármann Jakobsson,

already mentioned in the introduction, analysed the encounter between Bilbo and the Dragon Smaug in his paper titled "Talk to the Dragon: Tolkien as Translator" (Jakobsson, *Dragon,* 2009). He states that primarily the notion of a talking Dragon stems from the poem *Fafnismál* -which was used as a source for the *Völsungasaga*-, and that the way in which Smaug speaks is also highly similar to the manner in which Fáfnir communicates. Smaug is a highly intelligent being that initially seems to outsmart the protagonist (Jakobsson, Dragon, p.31). However, both Sigurd and Bilbo eventually outwit their Dragon opponents by talking in riddles, for "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" (*Hobbit*, p.213).

In addition, Tom Shippey, who wrote multiple books and essays on Tolkien, is together with Carpenter the most significant scholar on the topic of Tolkien studies. Like Carpenter, Shippey does not set out to create an overview of the influences of the Norse sources on Tolkien, but mentions many interesting matters on the topic nonetheless. Among them is the fact that the Eddic poem *Skirnismál*, seems to have inspired Tolkien's creation of the tribes of the Orcs and the Misty Mountains, as well as the fact that another Eddic poem named *Völuspá* gave birth to the names of the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* (Shippey, *Road*, p.70/p.55).

1.4 St. Clair: An Overview

Gloriana St. Clair, who wrote "An Overview of the Northern Influences on Tolkien's Works", comes to the same conclusion as Shippey regarding the names of the Dwarves (St. Clair, p.64). She adds to this that the catalogue of Dwarves in the *Poetic Edda* provides the names for sixteen Dwarves in *The Hobbit*, while two more of those names come from the *Prose Edda* as well. Not only their first names, but also their patronymics follow Norse tradition (St. Clair, p.64). For instance, Thorin son of Thráin son of Thror, King

under the Mountain, resembles the *Edda's* Leif Erikson, which means: Leif, son of Erik.

In addition, she says that many Dwarf characteristics -such as the short stature with long beards, their love of treasure, their being skillful smiths and having a bad temper- derive from their description in the *Eddas* and the Icelandic family sagas (St. Clair, p.64).

Furthermore, St. Clair explores the wizards Gandalf, Saruman and Radagast, and their possibly Nordic origins. She argues that Gandalf has been inspired by the leader of the Norse gods: Odin (St. Clair, p.64). For, besides the fact that Gandalf resembles Odin in the sense that they are both described as wise old men who travel the world and are known by multiple names, Tolkien once wrote a letter to his son Christopher in which he referred to Gandalf as his "Odinic wanderer" (*Letters*, as cited in St. Clair, p.64). Additionally, Saruman could have been inspired by the wicked God Loki, and Radagast perhaps by Frey, the God of fertility (St. Clair, p.64).

In short, as opposed to Carpenter and Shippey, St. Clair does create an overview of (some of) the Norse influences that one can recognize within Tolkien's work and concludes that he was indeed profoundly influenced by them (St. Clair, p. 67). She refers to Humphrey Carpenter, whom (we know) already mentioned that Old Norse literature and mythology "had a profound appeal to Tolkien's imagination" (St. Clair, p.64).

1.5 Kuseela's Theory on Gandalf

This brings me to the next work on this subject, which also argues that it was well-nigh inevitable that Tolkien would have been influenced by the works of Norse mythology. In "In Search of a National Epic: The use of Old Norse myths in Tolkien's vision of Middle-earth", Kuseela writes that due to the fact that Tolkien was a professor in Anglo-Saxon and later in English language and literature, he was studying and teaching works such as the *Poetic Edda*, the Icelandic Sagas or Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* and

Heimskringla, on a daily basis (Kuusela, p.25). This naturally made him very familiar with these works. And the fact that he included them in his curriculum also shows that he was clearly fond of them as well.

Similar to St. Clair, Kuseela draws on the resemblance between Gandalf and Odin. However, he also points out that, internally, they are not completely the same. For example, Gandalf favours the morally strong, while Odin favours those who are physically strong, because he needs them for the final battle in Valhalla. Yet, Gandalf's Norse origins cannot to be denied, as Kuseela also seems to have uncovered that the name *Gandalf* probably comes from the name *Gandalfr.* This name is both to be found in the *Völuspá*, (together with the other Dwarf-names) and in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (Kuusela, p.32). However, the difference between these two sources is that in the *Völuspá*, the name *Gandalfr* is part of the 'Dvergatal', a list of approximately 60 Dwarf-names. In the *Heimskringla*, however, the name is used for a famous Norwegian king named *Gandálfr Álfgeirsson* (Kuusela, p.32). Therefore, the fact that Gandalf has a name that can be traced back to the 'Dvergatal' does not necessarily imply that Gandalf possessed something 'Dwarvish'. Since the name can also be used for a human, as in the *Heimskringla*, it could also point to Gandalf being a human who is somehow affiliated with Dwarves. Within *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf essentially fulfills the role of the leader of the Dwarves, so to speak. Hence, having a human/Dwarvish name fits his character quite well.

1.6 Chapter Overview

There seems to be a general consensus amongst Tolkien scholars that there are some undeniably Norse features to Tolkien's mythology. The number of scholars who have looked into these elements is rather large, and therefore a number of the findings are repeatedly mentioned within multiple essays on this subject. Therefore, those are the findings that I have discussed in this chapter, as well as the general conclusions from previous research on the topic of Norse and 'Tolkienian' mythology. Naturally, some smaller findings from

previous research have not been mentioned within this chapter. However, the chapter should have provided the reader with sufficient background for the remainder of this thesis.

In summary, the foregoing chapter has listed the following findings: Bilbo's encounter with the Dragon Smaug in *The Hobbit* has many similarities to the encounter between Sigurd and the Dragon Fáfnir in the *Voluspá.* Tolkien's wizards bear similarities to the Norse Gods: Gandalf to Odin, Saruman to Loki and Radagast to Frey. Furthermore, the Eddic poem *Skirnismál* seems to have inspired the tribes of the Orcs and the Misty Mountains, and the 'Dvergatal' in the *Völuspá* gave birth to the names of the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* and also contributed to the creation of Gandalf. However, since the name *Gandalfr* also exists in the *Heimskringla*, we cannot be certain which of these names -or perhaps both- inspired Tolkien in the creation of this 'Odinic' wizard.

2. The monsters Compared: Midgard vs Middle-earth

2.1 Introduction

"Like its Old Norse namesake, Middle-earth is threatened by the forces of evil and darkness. In many respects, Tolkien's depiction of the evil host leaving the cursed citadel of the Ringwraiths echoes the blood-chilling description of the hordes of darkness marching towards the Valhalla, as presented in both the Völuspá and Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda…" (Benvenuto, in *The Mirror Crack'd*, p.8)

As was previously stated, this thesis is meant to make a comparison between the monsters from the old Norse sagas and mythology and the monsters from Tolkien's mythology. Therefore, we have now arrived at the main chapter of this thesis, as comparing is exactly what this chapter will do.

I have decided on six monsters to analyze: the Dragons, the Dwarves, the Orcs, the Trolls, the Wargs and the Wights. It is important for the reader to keep in mind that this does not mean that these are the only monsters from Tolkien's mythology that seem to be derived from old Norse sources. It merely means that, for the scope of this thesis, six was the number to go with. For, according to David Day's *Tolkien Bestiary*, there are at least 66 creatures to analyze, and doing so would mean writing a book instead of a thesis.

The reason why I decided to go with the six monsters that I chose was for no other reason than my personal interest. During my research I found that the monsters in this chapter were the most fascinating study cases and I therefore wanted to learn more about them. I have listed them in alphabetical order and have used approximately the same set-up for every analysis.

Tolkien was a philologist and considered linguistics to be of great importance, both in literature and in research. In a letter of 1955 to his American publishers, he stated the following:

"The invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stories' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse.

To me a name comes first and the story follows" (*Letters* as quoted in Shippey, *Author of the Century*, p.13)

Therefore, I have started every analysis with elaborating on the linguistic origins of the monster in question. I subsequently move on to the characteristics and/or the similarities with the Norse sources. I end with a conclusion for each analysis.
Although some analyses do not follow the exact pattern that I have just described, they do each have those elements, though some will have one or some extra paragraph(s).

2.2 Dragons

2.2.1 (Linguistic) origins

The word *Dragon* comes from the Latin word *draco*, which referred to a giant serpent or snake. This is also the physical origin of the Dragon: a great serpent or a sea monster, as it first appeared in Mediterranean mythology.

The Latin *draco* is actually derived from the Greek word *drakôn*, which is derived from the Greek verb *derkein*, which means 'to see clearly'(Pao, p.80). An important characteristic of the Dragon is their clear vision: literally, for they are the watchful keepers of their treasures, but also figuratively, as to their intelligence. Hence, the etymology could have been a primal indication of the Dragon's intelligence.

At the time that the word 'Dragon' entered the English language, it was no longer in the shape of a serpent but had taken the shape of a fire-breathing and winged beast (Fawcett, p.138).

2.2.2 Characteristics

Just as the concept of a Dragon started with a great serpent, so did Tolkien's Dragons (Day, p.59). Later came also the fire-Dragons, those that are now commonly referred to as 'just' Dragons. The Dragons were created in the mines of Angband and each and everyone of them was as evil as the next (Day, p.59). They were giant in statute and well-nigh invincible in their strength. Their bodies

were covered with iron-like scales and their tail could shatter half an army (Day, p.59).

Not only are the Dragons remarkable for their incredible strength, they also have other talents, more subtle in nature. Their eyes, for one, are sharper than a hawk's. And also their vision and sense of smell is phenomenal. They are known for their intelligence and they have a true affinity for riddles (Day, p.60).
Due to their immortality, their slyness and intelligence is of an uncanny scope. However, sheer wisdom is something that Dragons lack, for they are fundamentally characterized by their vanity, greed, deceit and rage (Day, p.60).

> "The Dragon as a bestiary figure is an embodiment of vice, with special emphasis on its deceitfulness and greed" (Fawcett, p.138).

2.2.3 Similarities and Examples

Both deceitfulness and greed are elemental characteristics for both Tolkien's and the Norse Dragons, as well as intelligence. As opposed to the Dragon in *Beowulf*, Tolkienian Dragons have the power of speech, through which they are able to express their intelligence. Being able to directly address their victims also makes deceiving them much easier.

For example, in *The Children of Húrin*, the Dragon Glaurung speaks to his opponent of such horrible things that Túrin is eventually overcome by his own sins. Instead of burning him with his fire-breath, he uses the power of words and hypnosis to mentally crush him:

> "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, as quoted in Fawcett, p.140)

The foregoing passage clearly outlines Glaurung's intelligence, power of hypnosis and ability to manipulate. It also indicates that Glaurung knows more than he can actually see, just like Fáfnir, who warns Sigurd against the machinations of the Dwarf Mime -which he could not have known by natural means (Fawcett, p.142). The aforementioned features make it difficult to define Glaurung (or Fáfnir for that matter) as animal-like, for the way in which he tackles his opponents seems rather human.

Evidently, this also applies to Smaug, Bilbo's antagonist in *The Hobbit*. As was previously stated, Smaug is extremely compatible with the Norse Dragon Fáfnir. One of those compatibilities is in fact the human aspect of the Dragon. In fact, Fáfnir did not only seem human, he actually was once a human being himself. According to the *Eddas*, Fáfnir was originally a human who was turned into a Dragon to keep his gold safe (Jakobsson, *Dragon*, p.30). On top of that, Fáfnir and Smaug communicate in a highly similar manner, as a highly intelligent being that initially seems to outsmart the protagonist. Most importantly, both scenes revolve more around the verbal battle taking place between the protagonists and their Dragons than around any physical confrontation. This results in the horror of the monsters residing more in their intelligence and slyness than in their bestial attributes.

Both Sigurd and Frodo find themselves in tricky situations when they have exposed more information about themselves than they intended to. Their Dragon opponents are sly and extremely clever, and they carefully nudge the protagonists into revealing more than they mean to. For instance, Frodo unintentionally reveals to Smaug that he has been a guest to the people of the lake town Esgaroth (Jakobsson, *Dragon*, p.31). Both Dragons also warn the protagonists about the treachery of their comrades, to shake their faith and weaken them.

I agree with Jakobsson when he writes:

"The most important thing that Tolkien gained from Fáfnismál is that the conversation between the Dragon and the hero and the intellectual game they play moves the Dragon from one monster category to the other. The Dragon is no longer merely terrible and bestial, he now also becomes uncanny, strange and yet familiar, human and yet not human... " (Jakobsson, *Dragon*, p.34).

Fáfnismál is not the only (semi) Norse source that Tolkien used as an inspiration for his Dragon lore. In fact, Bilbo's confrontation with Smaug seems to be a mix from both *Fáfnismál* and *Beowulf*. Although the Dragon in Beowulf is not able to speak and is in any case more bestial than human, the storyline of the poem is very similar to that of the chapter in *The Hobbit* dealing with Smaug. For Smaug sets fire to the entire town of Dale after Bilbo manages to escape with a golden cup from his treasure, whereas in Beowulf, the theft of one of the Dragon's golden cups brings about the destruction of the adjacent countryside (Brunsdale, p.50).

2.2.4 Conclusion

Thus, "the Dragon's intelligence is a central characteristic, in Norse myth, in Beowulf and in Tolkien's work. It is this intelligence and strategic awareness that makes Bilbo's challenge to Smaug so impressive" (Fawcett, p.140). As will become evident in the subsequent chapter, it is not merely their intelligence, but also their respective 'underlying humanity' is what makes these Dragons so frightening. This 'underlying humanity', defined by the Dragon's capacity for speech and reasoning, is generally perceived as that which distinguishes humans from other animals. Hence, I am utterly convinced that I am not alone when I say that my heart jumped when I first read the words: "… *and then Smaug spoke*…". It is both the threat of not being able to 'degrade' these Dragons as being mere monsters, combined with the fact that they most definitely are monsters, that makes these encounters formidably daunting.

Both Glaurung and Smaug seem to be derived from the first intelligent, speaking Dragon: Fáfnir, from the poem *Fáfnismal*. On top of that, there are also similarities with Beowulf to be found in

the encounter of Bilbo and Smaug. Withal, it is not surprising that Tolkien's most famous Dragon-scène seems to be inspired by both Beowulf and *Fáfnismal*. For in the lecture that he gave about "Beowulf: The monsters and the Critics", he himself said that:

> "Dragons, real Dragons, essential both to the machinery and the ideas of a poem or tale, are actually rare. In the northern literature there are only two that are significant. . . . we have but the Dragon of the Volsungs, Fáfnir, and Beowulf's bane" (Critics, p.4)

2.3 Dwarves

2.3.1 (Linguistic) origins

Discovering the linguistic origins of the Dwarves is a rather problematic endeavor, as it is still uncertain which term comes from which, which came first, and whether they refer to the same or similar creatures (Lecouteux, p.155). Hence, I shall elaborate on the most common assumptions within scholarship, but keep in mind that these are assumptions and that the linguistic origins could be different from what I have stated below.

Lecouteux suggests that the English word *Dwarf* has become an umbrella term for a diverse array of words that have indicated more or less the same creature. These being: the old Norse 'dvergr', the Middle High German 'zwerc', and the Old English 'dweorg' (Lecouteux, p.157). He also states that most recent studies have proposed the root 'dhuer', which stems from the Proto-Indo-European term to indicate harm or deceitfulness of some sort (Lecouteux, p.157). In Germanic -and respectively Norse- mythology, Dwarves had the reputation of 'tricksters' (Anderson, para.1). The mythological creature of a Dwarf is first to be found in Germanic folklore where they were sometimes portrayed as comic figures, but generally as underground metal smiths. The Dwarves were known for their wealth and skill and may have even been worshipped during the Viking ages (Battles as cited in Anderson, para.1).

2.3.2 The Dark Mirror of Dwarves

For readers unfamiliar with Norse mythology, it might seem rather odd that I have placed the Dwarves in my 'monster index'. Both in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, dwarves fight courageously next to those trying to keep Middle-earth from harm. Furthermore, one might think of *Snow White* at the mention of Dwarves, where they provide her with shelter and food and mourn her extensively when she passes away. However, in old Norse sources Dwarves are not the comic little creatures that one might like to have as a travel companion. In Norse sources they were described as:

> "creatures with strange names, who bred in the earth like maggots, and dwelt in hills and rocks. These were skilled craftsmen, and it was they who wrought the great treasure of the gods" (Davidson as quoted in Brunsdale, p.49).

In Tolkien's mythology, Dwarves are not essentially evil but have a dark mirror within them (Fawcett, p.160). This means that they are not essentially evil, but corruptible and susceptible to the temptation of the dark side. Hence, they are both hero and monster in the history of Middle-earth. While their heroic actions in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* speak of good character, their part in *The Silmarillion* is as antagonists and they provide many challenges to the Elves. If one were to pay close attention, the hostility between Dwarves and Elves is also apparent outside of *The Silmarillion.* For example, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, at the council of Elrond, Gloin shows some hostility towards Legolas when he remembers his captivity by Legolas' father some years ago, to which Gandalf says:

> "If all the grievances that stand between Elves and Dwarves are to be brought up here, we may as well abandon this Council" (*Fellowship,* p.273).

2.3.3 Similarities

As was previously stated, the Dwarves from Tolkien's work bear great resemblance to those from Norse tradition. In both sources, Dwarves are very courageous, strong and talented smiths with long and thick beards (St. Clair, p.64). They are essentially male and provide both

"challenge and aid to the protagonists of the narratives" (Fawcett, p.164).

Not only did Tolkien base the nature of his Dwarves on those from Norse mythology, he also used their names for his own. For example, the Dwarves most commonly referred to in Tolkien's mythology are those from the line of Durin, who lived in Moria (or Khazad-Dûm). When the *Völuspá* turns to the history of the creation of the Dwarfs it becomes evident that these Dwarves also descend from a Dwarf named *Durinn*, for the poem says:

"There Mótsognir had
become the foremost
of all Dwarfs,
and Durinn the second;
human likeness they
made many, those Dwarfs, out of earth,
as Durinn told" (*Völuspá* as quoted in Lindow, 2002, p.99)

Somewhat further down the *Völuspá* the characteristics of the Dwarves are also described. According to this poem, they are "associated with the dead, with battle, with wisdom, with craftsmanship, with the supernatural and to some extent with the elves" (Lindow, p.100). Day mentions some of the same characteristics in his *Tolkien Bestiary*, such as: extremely brave in battle, knowledgeable and described by the Elves as 'the masters of stone' (Day, p.71). The Dwarves and the Elves traded with each other and fought side-by-side in many wars (Day, p.72). Despite their differences, they always managed to work together for the greater good. Day additionally stated that the Dwarves' endurance and resistance to both the cold and the heat made them exceptional in their craftsmanship and resilient in battle (Day, p.72).

Lindow also writes that "the conception of Dwarfs as dwelling in the earth or in rocks or mountains is deeply rooted" (Lindow, p.101). Hence, this is another parallel that can be drawn with Tolkien's Dwarves. For they were said to live under the mountains of Middle-earth (Day, p.71). This could be interpreted as an indication of the evil aspects in their character. As under the ground they are further removed from the gods and the light -which symbolizes that

which is good both in Norse mythology and in Tolkien-, and they effectively reside in the dark -which symbolizes evil in both sources as well- (Larsen in *Mirror*, p.169-197).
Even though they lived in the dark, deep under the ground, their residencies were formidable just like those of the Norse Dwarves, who were admired for their wealth and often guided by their love of gold (Anderson, para.1).

2.3.4 Dwarves and rings in Norse mythology

Another reason why I included the Dwarves in this overview, that does not have as much to do with their embodiment of evil as much as with their craftsmanship, is that in Norse mythology, they are ring-forgers. It has already been mentioned that the Dwarves from Norse mythology were extremely crafty. They could create just about anything the gods would ask them to.

One of their most important creations was the golden ring that Sigurd carries with him during his encounter with the Dragon Fáfnir. Although this ring helped Sigurd vanquish the Dragon and take from the treasure what he wanted, this ring was a dangerous artifact as it brought nothing but destruction to those who wore it (Brunsdale, p.49). For those familiar with *The Hobbit*, this probably sounds recognizable. Similar to Sigurds confrontation with Fáfnir, the Ring also helps Bilbo to complete his task with Smaug -which is to steal back the dwarves' treasure-. However, although the ring helped Bilbo outwit Smaug, it also resulted in the rise of The Battle of the Five Armies (the climactic battle of the story)(Brunsdale, p.49). In *The Lord of the Rings* it becomes even more evident how also this ring -The Ring to rule them all- brings nothing but destruction to those who wear it.

Another one of the Dwarves' most important creations was 'Draupnir': the golden arm-ring they had produced for Odin, the allfather. This arm-ring would produce eight new armrings every night, each one as strong and beautiful as the next. In Viking tradition, arm-rings were used for (male) warriors to swear allegiance to their lords. They were often given to the men as a symbol of their coming of age. This was not only the case in Viking tradition but also in Norse

mythology. The only difference was that in Norse mythology, the arm-rings would also protect one magically against the blow of a sword. Although these rings are meant to be worn on arms and not on fingers, the allegiance of the ring-wearers to their lords is highly similar to the Ringwraiths' allegiance to Sauron. Sauron, the forger and owner of the 'One ring to rule them all', gave nine other rings to the race of men. They perished to the power of the One Ring and became its servants ever since:

"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" (*Fellowship*, p.51).

2.3.5 Conclusion

Thus, Tolkien's Dwarves are similar to those from Norse mythology: with their long beards, courageous characters, hunch for gold and inclination to the dark side. Additionally, they also provide an important link to the long tradition of old Norse ring magic, which Tolkien seems to be employing (Brunsdale, p.49). Although the Dwarves did not play any part in the forging of the Rings in Tolkien's work, the ones that they created in Norse mythology seem to have been a big inspiration for Tolkien's magic rings.

2.4 Orcs

2.4.1 (Linguistic) origins

The most eminent monster to threaten Middle-earth is undoubtedly the Orc. Tolkien made his first acquaintance with the word in the form of 'orcnéas', being the 'demon-corpses' of the Beowulf-poet (Shippey, p.65). Another etymological origin is the Latin *Orcus*, which refers to either Hades or Hell, which is highly fitting as the Orcs first appear in the dark and deadly underworld of Moria. However, as Tolkien wrote in a letter in 1954, he derived the word *Orc* from the Anglo-Saxon language:

"The word is as far as I am concerned actually derived from Old English Orc "demon", but only because of its phonetic suitability" (*Letters*, p.177)

Tolkien implies that the meaning of his word 'Orc' might be different from the Beowulfian term 'orcnéas'. This is indeed the case, since Grendel and Tolkien's Orcs differ from one another in physical appearance. However, they have in common that both Grendel and the Orcs can be defined as societal outsiders, separated from their former lives (Fawcett, p.113).

In short, regardless of which linguistic origin the word 'Orc' had for Tolkien, they are all direct indications of the Orcs' exceptionally heinous character.

2.4.2 Characteristics

> "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" (Fawcett, p.114).

There is no way to say where Orcs come from with full certainty, for there are two different explanations available. In *The Silmarillion,* Tolkien elaborates on the origins of the Orcs and explains that they were once elves, who were captured by Morgoth (the ancient Dark Lord of Middle-earth) and tortured to corruption. Their Elvish tongue was stripped from them and they consequently communicated in 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" (*Silmarillion*, as quoted in Fawcett, p.122).

However, in *The History of Middle-earth,* the following is said about the creation of the Orcs:

> "…the Orcs were not made until [Morgoth] had looked upon the Elves, and he made them in mockery of the Children of Ilúvatar" (*The History of Middle-earth*, as quoted in Fawcett, p.114)

In either case, they can be defined as absolutely miserable beings who live in the dark in caves, pits and tunnels, who are seldom out in daylight, and who descend (in)directly from Elves: either as corrupted Elves who have fallen under the pressure of the evils of Morgoth, or created in a mocking image of them.

2.4.3 Similarities

Since *The Silmarillion* is essentially the 'original' history of Middle-earth and written by Tolkien himself I shall take the first explanation to set out from. Hence, the Orcs who were once elves could be interpreted as the Tolkienian counterpart of the 'dark' or 'black Elves' (Alfar) from the old Norse sources. In Norse mythology, as rendered by Snorri Sturluson in the *Prose Edda*, there exist two different kinds of Elves. Primarily, there are the light-Elves, who are of good nature and live in Alfheim (or "Elf-home"). However, opposed to the light-Elves are the dark-Elves, who live underground and do nothing but harm to mankind (Keightley, p.78). The way that Snorri describes it is as following:

> "There is one place that is called Alfheim. There live the folk called light-elves, but dark-elves live down in the ground, and they are unlike them in appearance, and even more unlike them in nature. Light-elves are fairer than the sun to look at, but dark-elves are blacker than pitch" (Sturluson, as quoted in Shippey, p.4).

I am of the impression that anyone who has read *The Lord of the Rings* or even seen the movies does not need more clarification after reading the foregoing quote. It will be clear to them in which ways Tolkien's Orcs resemble these dark-Elves from the *Prose Edda*. For Orcs, descended from Elves -either as a mocking image or as corrupted Elves themselves- are, just as the dark-Elves from Norse mythology, nothing like the Elves (or light-Elves). The only thing they have in common is their shared bloodline. For they are the complete opposite, both in body and in mind. While both in Norse and Tolkienian mythology the Elves are exquisitely beautiful, magical and light - the Orcs and the dark-Elves are abominable, dark creatures that bring nothing but sorrow to the world. They reside underground and shun the light and are the Elves' adversaries.

However, in Tolkien's work, the Elves are not always fully pure, light and good. They also have some rough edges that could do with some polishing. One could think of the passage in *The Lord of the Rings* where Frodo offers Galadriel the Ring and she reveals what

would happen if she were to use it. She is described as "terrible and worshipful" when she utters the following words:

"And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the fountains of the earth. All shall love me and despair!" (*LotR*, p.474).

However, the scene of Frodo and Galadriel is not the only example of corruptible Elves in Tolkien's mythology. In fact, Tolkien himself also writes about Dark Elves. Although they are different from Norse mythology, they are an example of the inner darkness that the Elves carry within them. In the Silmarillion they are described as the Elves who did not adhere to the calling of the Gods to join them in the light of the trees. These Elves remained in Middle-earth and were henceforth never 'enlightened' by the trees (*Silmarillion*, p.87).

However, even of those Elves who did adhere to the calling of the Gods and went overseas -and were therefore not referred to as Dark Elves-, some were corruptible. They had been receptive to the evils of Melkor (the fallen angel who later gained the name Morgoth, dark lord of Middle-earth), which eventually resulted in the killing of other Elves, by Elves (*Silmarillion*, p.91).

The very fact that Norse mythology makes a distinction between two kinds of Elves, of which one kind is good and the other is not, could be an indication that they are in fact corruptible. Tolkien could have followed this indication. Maybe, the relation between the Elves and Orcs is somewhat more complicated and holds more than meets the eye.

In fact, the dark-Elves are not the only resemblance that the Orcs have to Norse mythology. Tribes of Orcs are actually mentioned in the Eddic poem *Skirnismál* (Shippey, *Road*, p.55). This is when the Norse God Freyr, utterly in love with a giantess, sends his servant to go ask her for her hand in marriage in his name. When the servant

has started the journey, he speaks to his horse and says the following:

"The mirk is outside, I call it our business to fare over the misty mountains, over the tribes of orcs; we will both come back, or else he will take us both, he the mighty giant" (*Skirnismál*, as quoted in Shippey, *Road*, p. 55).

Mirkwood, both present in Tolkien's work and a number of Norse sagas (such as *Skirnismál* and *The Saga of King Heidrek*), is in both works a place in the East that constitutes some sort of boundary.
As becomes clear in the foregoing passage, this 'mirk' or Mirkwood, in *Skirnismál*, is not a happy place. Neither is it that in *The Lord of the Rings*, where it has fallen under the control of Sauron. However, while it is where the tribes of the Orcs dwell in Norse mythology, it is home to not only Orcs, but also spiders and even Elves in *The Lord of the Rings*. Once again, living in a place of evil could be a possible indication of the Elves' dark side.

2.4.4 Conclusion

Although Tolkien's first encounter with the word 'Orc' is generally assumed to have been in the form of 'orcnéas' during his readings of the poem *Beowulf*, other research shows that he himself stated to have derived the word from the Anglo-Saxon word for 'demon'. There have also been utterances about the Orcs being in fact inspired by Grendel. However, with those statements I have to disagree. For the similarities that I find are between the Orcs and the dark-Elves from Norse mythology, as described by Snorri in the *Prose Edda*. This is because they have many similar characteristics, both in body and in mind. On top of that, they are also both related to Elves -the good version that is, in Snorri's words: the 'light' version-, yet they are nothing alike.

However, as I have shown in the foregoing paragraph, the relationship between the Elves and the Orcs might be more complicated than it seems. For even though they do not resemble each other at first glance, the Elves have something rather 'monstrous' in themselves as well. While some Elves deliberately ignored the calling of the Gods to join them in the light of the trees, others

adhered to their calling and yet still ended up with blood on their hands. Maybe one could conclude from the foregoing information that Orcs are indeed the total opposite of Elves. However, this is not a remote opposite, such as the Jungle and the Sahara, which have absolutely nothing to do with one another, but rather an opposite like one's reflection in the mirror -the complete opposite yes, but not remote from the original image.

2.5 Wargs

2.5.1 (Linguistic) origins

Directly related to the Orcs are certainly the beasts they ride on: the Wargs. These beasts that carry the monsters that Tolkien calls Orcs are also unquestionably monsters themselves. They are most easily described as an 'evil breed of wolves' (Day, p.263). The word *Warg* is generally understood to come from the old Norse 'vargr', which means both 'wolf' and 'outlaw' (Shippey, *Author*, p.31). In the old Norse tradition the word was used to indicate either a regular wolf or a 'wolvish creature' of either an exceptionally ferocious or prehistoric nature (Leederman, p.190). However, Tolkien's Wargs are a combination of the old Norse 'vargr' and the Old English word 'wearh'. Hence, a composition of two words of which one means 'wolf' and the other 'human outlaw' (Shippey, p.65). Tolkien himself wrote the following on the linguistic origins of the name of the creature: "[…]warg is an old word for wolf, which also had the sense of an outlaw or hunted criminal (a)[…] good sound for the meaning as a name for this particular brand of demonic wolf in the story" (*Letters* 381, as quoted in Pridmore, *Mirror*, p.199).

The Warg has had a long tradition in Norse mythology and first appears in *Hervarar Saga*, written in the 13th century (Leederman, p.190). This saga indicates that 'Warg' refers to specifically Fenris-wolf and his wolf-children: Sköll and Hati. When Ragnarök comes, one of them will swallow the sun and one of them will swallow the moon, and all will be dark.

Green states that Tolkien gained his inspiration for the Warg from his readings of 'horrific episodes' from the *Völsungasaga* to his

friends (Green as quoted in Anwar, p.3). For in this specific poem are many accounts of wolves in human form, or rather, 'human wolves'.

2.5.2 Similarities

It is common for the old Norse sources to include wolves for different objectives. Yet, regardless of their function in a story they always play a part for evil:

"Tolkien's intelligent wolflike Wargs, this time, instead of the Old Norse Fenriswulf" (Dimond, as quoted in Anwar, p.5).

Just like the wolves in the sagas are humanized, Tolkien's wolves are equipped with the ability of speech and the worst of human traits. They too shun the light and move by dark (Burns, p.185).

In old Norse tradition, it is typical for wolves to appear in dreams as a sign of evil, or for them to serve as mounts for dangerous manlike creatures (Burns, p.184). Whereas in Tolkienian mythology these are the Orcs, in Norse mythology these are often Trolls. Tolkien follows suit on both accounts. First, Frodo dreams of Gandalf standing on a stone ledge with wolves clawing up at him from below:

"On its top stood the figure of a man. The moon as it rose seemed to hang for a moment above his head and glistened in his white hair as the wind stirred it. Up from the dark plain below came the crying of fell voices, and the howling of many wolves" (*Hobbit*, p.177).

This dream in which wolves appear follows the Norse tradition that it is a foretoken of evil.

Furthermore, Tolkien also uses his Wargs as mounts for dangerous and humanoid creatures. Due to an ancient alliance between the Wargs and the Orcs, which are both monsters of battle, they would often enter battle together -Orcs riding on the backs of Wargs (Day, p.263). As Tolkien writes in *The Lord of the Rings*:

"where the warg howls, there also the orc prowls" (*LotR*, p. 290-291).

In *The Hobbit*, the Wargs are somewhat smaller and more wolf-like, -not unlikely due to the fact that it was a children's book- where the goblins ride on them like "men do on horses" (*Hobbit*, p.112). In

The Lord of the Rings they appear both with and without their Orc-riders. In *The Fellowship of the Ring* a pack of Wargs attacks the fellowship without any Orcs being present to steer them, While in *The Two Towers*, Wargs appear with Orcs on their backs on multiple occasions.

2.5.3 Conclusion

Thus, drawing from their old Norse roots, Tolkien created a species of "semi-intelligent, but evil-aligned mount wolves called Wargs, on whom the Orcs rode into battle" (Leederman, p.190). Wolves that are similar to Tolkien's Wargs appear in multiple Norse-Icelandic sagas, which Tolkien was quite familiar with. He correspondingly follows suit with Norse traditions regarding the wolves' appearance in dreams as a bad omen, their use as mounts and their 'exceptionally ferocious', or downright evil, nature.

2.6 Wights

2.6.1 (Linguistic) origins

The word *Wight* originates from the Old English word *wiht* and was originally used to refer to a living being (https://www.dictionary.com/browse/wight, accessed 18/06/2019). However, the meaning of the word changed with William Morris' translation of the *Grettis Saga*, wherein he translated 'draugr' as 'barrow-wight':

> "... the barrow-wight setting on with hideous eagerness; Grettir gave back before him for a long time" (*Grettis Saga* as quoted in Burns, p.190)

As of then, the word 'wight' has been used in literary fantasy to describe certain 'undead'. For *Draugr* is the Icelandic term for a certain undead being (McLennan, p.66) and therefore the English word 'Wight' is essentially a direct translation of this, following Morris' translation. *Draugr* are commonly defined as 'ghost', 'spirit' or 'the dead inhabitant of a cairn' (Mclennan, p.66).

3.6.3 Similarities

Just like the draugr in the sagas, Tolkien's Wights are not merely ghosts, but they also inhabit a human body. In Tolkien's mythology, the Barrow-Wights came into existence through a number of tormented spirits who had fled the realm of the witch-king of Angmar and needed a new hideout that would protect them from the rays of the sun (Day, p.120). These tormented spirits had once been demons whose body had been destroyed and therefore needed new bodies for their physical encasement. This is how these demons animated the dead bones of the Dúnedain with an evil presence and respectively became the Barrow-Wights (Day, p.120).

It is worth stressing the physical aspect of the Barrow-Wights as it is not common for ghosts or evil spirits to have a (permanent) physical encasement. Yet this is the case for both Tolkien's Barrow-Wights and the Norse draugr, as it is through physical confrontation and devastation that these creatures make their mark (Mclennan, p.66).

William Sayers describes draugr by stating that within them:

> "[…] spirit is not breathed into matter so much as material corporeality is retained by the restless spirit […]. Not only are their bodies uncorrupted, but in the cases of the physically most active and temperamentally most malevolent, they are larger, heavier, and, above all, stronger than in life, the faces darker and the eyes more terrifying" (Sayers, p.242)

Hence, the physical appearance of Tolkien's Barrow-Wights is almost identical to that of the draugr. As Day affirms, the Barrow-Wights were extremely powerful in the dark and could only possibly be overpowered by either magic or the light. For when an unsuspecting voyager was unfortunate enough to cross its tomb (or barrow), its skeleton-hand would strike him as an "iron jaw" (Day, p.120). And he would be ambushed by the shape of a "dark phantom, with bright and terrifying eyes" (Day, p.120).

As opposed to the draugr, Tolkien's Wights are not defeated in physical combat. Neither are the Wights the reanimated corpses belonging to the barrow (like the draugr), but "an opportunist who

has moved -the way a hermit crab does- into someone else's abode" (Burns, p.191). However, regardless of their opportunistic habits, the Wights are also bound to the treasure that they guard in the barrow and therefore still echo the draugr in respect of its malevolence and wealth (Fawcett, p.146).

2.6.4 Examples

An example of a notorious and particularly destructive draugr would be Old Kerr from *The Grettis Saga*. When Grettir enters the burial mound he experiences his first 'draugr encounter':

> "Now he groped about to see how things were below: first he found horse bones, and then he stumbled against the arm of a high-chair, and in that chair found a man sitting: great treasures of gold and silver were heaped together there, and a small chest was set under the feet of him full of silver; all these riches Grettir carried together to the rope: but as he went out through the barrow he was gripped at right strongly; thereon he let go the treasure and rushed against the barrow-dweller, and now they set on one another unsparingly enough" (*Grettis Saga*, as quoted in Burns, p.190)

The previous scene from *Grettis Saga* can be compared to The Fellowship's entering of the burial mound on the Barrow Downs in *The Lord of the Rings*. For while Grettir fears "the sight of the moonlight reflected in the revenant Glam's eyes", Frodo also believes to be seeing "two eyes, very cold though lit with a pale light that seemed to come from some remote distance" (Raduege in *Mirror*, p.140-141).

Not only the Wight and the treasure that awaits The Fellowship in the burial follow Norse tradition. Also the entire setting, with an indisputable eerie atmosphere, the darkness and the malice that awaits them, could have been directly drawn from the sagas (Burns, p.191). Even the fact that during Tom Bombadil's rescue there is a "rumbling sound of stones rolling and falling" (*Hobbit* as quoted in Burns, p.191) resembles the Norse sagas, where the draugr are able to move in and out of their barrows without needing a door, while others need to break their way in (Burns, p.191).

Another unexpected yet distinctive trait that the Barrow-Wights share with the Norse draugr is the association with music and poetry (Raduege in *Mirror*, p.141). In multiple sagas, the draugr is said to sing in its grave. For example, in *Njal's Saga*, the protagonist sees his father recite a verse in his burial mound, so loud that it was audible at a distance (Raduege in *Mirror*, p.141). When Frodo wakes up in the Barrow in *The Lord of the Rings*, he hears "a song both heartless and despairing" (Raduege in *M*, p.141). The song later appears to be the spell that condemns the listener to infinitely remain in the grave mound.
Not only is The Fellowship initially imprisoned by a song, it is poetry which incidentally saves them. For Frodo manages to cite the verse that calls for Tom Bombadil's aid, who eventually rescues them from the Barrow-Wight (Raduege in *M*, p.142).

2.6.5 Conclusion

Tolkien followed the old Norse tradition of the undead residing in grave mounds, tied to the treasure of their barrow by having to protect it and being especially malicious when doing so. Their linguistic correlation between the Wights and the draugr is not the only aspect the two have in common, for the creatures seem to be well-nigh identical as well. Both draugr and Wights are evil spirits inhabiting a corpse, and connected to song and poetry. Both are extremely strong, dark phantoms with light and scary eyes with every intention of destroying the person that dares to enter their barrow.

Although the Wights do not appear very often in *The Lord of the Rings*, they belong to the most terrifying and complicated monsters. They are extremely frightening due to the fact that they "embody both medieval and modern anxiety about the dead and places they inhabit" (Raduege in *M*, p.139). They are complicated because it is difficult to grasp their essence. For they resemble ghosts but are in fact not ghosts: although they are life-like, they are not actually alive, and they are haunting but also haunted (Raduege in *M*, p.139). The Barrow-Wights embody the ancient and universal fear of not entering any kind of afterlife after one's death, the fear of

being doomed to remain captured in a decomposing corpse while being fully aware of what is going on (Raduege in *M*, p.141).

2.7 Trolls

2.7.1 (Linguistic) origins

The Troll finds its origins in Scandinavian mythology -in multiple sources, from *Bárdur saga* in the *Poetic Edda* to the *Voluspá* in the *Prose Edda*-, where they mostly appear synonymously with the giants (jötnar) (Jakobsson, *Trolls*, p.62). Within the Scandinavian tradition, the concept of a Troll started as a "supernatural giant figure of enchantment that possesses magic" (Fawcett, p.125). They lived inside caves, mounds or hills (hidden beneath the surface like the other monsters, illustrating their evil nature) and were therefore also referred to as the Hill People (*Bjergfolk*). They are most often depicted as creatures partly resembling humans, but larger, and much less intelligent.

The word *Troll* has multiple possible origins. It can either stem from the word *trold*, a word found both in Icelandic and in Finnish, indicating an evil spirit, giant monster, magician or an evil person (Keightley, p.94). Or it could come from the old Swedish word *trylla/trylde,* which means to charm or enchant, whereas *trolldómr* means 'witchcraft' (Fawcett, p.125). This word is still being used in Scandinavian languages, so much so that in the Norwegian translation of *The Lord of the Rings* Gandalf is called 'Trollmannen Gandalv', meaning Gandalf the Trollman (Burns, 187).

2.7.2 Characteristics

Morgoth created the Trolls because he wanted to have creatures that would possess the same strength as the Ents (ancient talking trees in Middle-earth) did. Therefore, he created giant monsters, bloodthirsty and strong, however without any wit to them. The fact that they did not possess any intelligence is another subtle indication by Tolkien of their evil nature, as you will read in the following chapter.

They were twice as tall and twice as heavy as the biggest of men. And they had skin made of green scales, like that of a Dragon, which was rock-hard. However, the sorcery preceding their creation contained one fatal flaw: these monsters feared the light like nothing else. For they were created in the darkest pits of the earth, and if light shone upon them, their rock-hard skin would grow inwards and they would turn to stone (Day, p.241).

The Trolls had so little wits about them that most of them could not speak any language, while a small group managed to learn some basic words of the Orcs' Black Speech. Due to their simplicity, smart individuals could outwit them (such as Gandalf). However, within dark places the Trolls are justly feared. For they prefer their meat raw, relish in killing and collect the treasures that they steal from their enemies as a result of an insatiable greed (Day, p241).

2.7.3 Similarities

Correspondingly to Tolkien's Trolls, the saga Trolls are:

> "[…] as depicted both in the Sagas and in more recent tales, are huge: they were so big and tall that their heads reached as high as the tops of the fir trees […] misshapen creatures: a great ugly Troll, with eyes as big as saucers, and a nose as long as a poker" (Asbjörnsen, p.20).

Even though they bear some resemblance to the human form, they are both in Tolkienian and Norse mythology "always hideously ugly" (Johnson, p.7).

> "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, p.160).

The foregoing passage indicates that the Trolls from Scandinavian mythology also lived inside hills, caves or generally dark places. This is because these Trolls also shun the light. Because of this, tricking the Trolls into staying outside until the sun comes out is also a maneuver that appeared in the sagas before it was also

included in *The Hobbit* (Johnson, p.7). As one who is familiar with the book might remember, Gandalf distracts the Trolls by upholding a false argument between them until the daylight appears and turns them into stone.

According to Tolkien's friend and colleague Helen T.M. Buckhurst, who researched Trolls in old Icelandic folklore, Jón Árnoson's volume on Icelandic folktales includes such a story as well (Johnson, p.7). The story involves a farm-girl who encounters a Troll outside of her house and whom she tricks to keep outside until dawn, which consequently turns him into stone. Tolkien was familiar with this volume and probably picked up his inspiration for the scene with Gandalf and the Trolls from the story with the farm-girl (Johnson, p.7).

Even though the Trolls started out as evil mythological beings, later in time Swedish and Danish societies started to perceive Trolls as increasingly smaller. On top of that, they transformed in such a way that in those cultures, they could also have positive traits. For example; wealth, generosity and neighborly behavior (Keightley, p.95).
Taking the foregoing information into account, it seems that Tolkien adhered to the original Scandinavian definition of a Troll for the creation of his own Trolls. Whereas the later (Danish and Swedish) perception of Trolls sounds more like the description of Hobbits. For Hobbits are wealthy, comfortable and hospitable little creatures, who are very fond of the places where they come from -and the people they grew up with-, and usually remain in that place for their whole lives. Adding to this new perception the original character trait of Trolls having an affinity with living inside and under the hills, one nearly has oneself a Baggins.

2.7.4 Trolls, Giants & Balrogs

The Norse Trolls, as legend has it, descend from the frost Giant Ymir (Klepeis, p.17). Giants and Trolls do not differ much from each other in any case, so the fact that they are from the same bloodline is not that hard to believe.

In Norse mythology, Giants were known as ‘jötner’ or ‘jötunn’. Very much like the Trolls, the Giants were also enormous, ugly in both appearance and in mind, and profoundly dim-witted. They too were said to dwell in the mountains due to their aversion to the daylight, and they were the worst enemies of the Gods (Klepeis, p.18).

Not only did the Norse Giants give rise to the Trolls, one particular Giant might have also inspired Tolkien in his creation of the Balrogs, who were, respectively, in control of many of the most giant of Trolls.

The Balrogs are gigantic human-like creatures with flaming manes and nostrils. Their most prominent weapon is their whip of fire, but they also sometimes fight with a flaming sword (Day, p.28). They resemble the Norse fire Giant Surtr in various aspects. For one, both the Balrogs and Surtr are enormous creatures, huge both in size and in strength, which makes them exceptionally feared. Just like the Balrog of Moria fights one of the greatest protectors of Middle-earth: Gandalf, Surtr fights one of the greatest protectors of Midgard at Ragnarök: the Norse God Freyr. And similar to the Balrog controlling an army of Trolls (and Orcs and other Balrogs), Surtr arrives at Ragnarök steering the ship of the dead, leading the sons of Múspell (the other fire Giants) to the day of doom. On top of that, both the Balrogs and Surtr fight with flaming swords and generally bring fire into battle (Benvenuto, in *Mirror*, p.8). Especially the Balrog of Moria, taking down a bridge leading to the way out of the mines, echoes the characteristics of Surtr, who will also break the bridge at the beginning of the end.

> “In this din shall the heaven be cloven, and the Sons of Múspell ride thence: Surtr shall ride first, and both before him and after him burning fire; his sword is exceeding good: from it radiance shines brighter than from the sun; when they ride over Bifröst, then the bridge shall break, as has been told before” (Sturluson, as quoted in Benvenuto, p.9).

2.7.5 Conclusion

As the previous paragraphs have shown: Tolkien's Trolls resemble Norse Trolls, resemble Giants, resemble Balrogs, and they even have some things in common with Hobbits. As a result, my conclusion becomes unclear to myself as I question whether all these similarities and shared heritage contributes to the strength of the argument that Tolkien's Trolls -and Balrogs- have indisputable Norse roots, or whether it actually weakens this argument.

Although it is clear that Tolkien's Trolls are essentially based on those from the Norse tradition, the Balrogs might be a bit of a stretch.
However, I am not the only one who has noticed the similarities between the Balrogs and Surtr, as multiple scholars have done so before me. Yet, I cannot help but also notice that fire-breathing demons have roots in other beliefs as well. For example, miners in Wales used to believe in a 'fire-damp demon' that blew fire from his nostrils and haunted the mines (Dyer, p.2). Furthermore, the native inhabitants of California used to believe in a fire demon that lived in Mount Diablo (Ortiz, p.464). However, the Balrogs do have rather specific similarities with Surtr, and Tolkien's special affinity with Norse mythology could be a significant reason to believe that the Balrogs are indeed inspired by the fire Jötun Surtr. For now, I shall put the Balrogs' status of being derived from Surtr as 'inconclusive', for the phenomenon of a fire-demon is too common for me to do otherwise.

2.8 Chapter conclusion

After having visited both the Dragons and the Dwarves, the Wargs and the Wights, and the Trolls and the Orcs, a thorough monster-analysis has been provided. Above all, I hope to have sufficiently demonstrated that the similarities between Tolkien's monsters and those from the old Norse sources are rather remarkable.

While some of the monsters have specific similarities to the old Norse monsters, such as the Orcs or the Balrogs, others stem directly from the old Norse sources, such as the Wights, Wargs,

Dwarves and the Trolls. Not only do the last four monsters find their linguistic origins in the old Norse language, their 'monster-characteristics' are also strikingly similar.

However, the Norse roots of the Orcs and the Balrogs are somewhat more speculative. For the Orcs seem to be inspired by the dark-Elves, yet they also resemble Trolls in some ways.
The Balrogs have many similarities with the Norse fire giant Surtr, yet examples of demons similar to the Balrogs can also be found in other beliefs, such as that of the miners of Wales or the natives of U.S., Carolina.

Then again, Tolkien's Barrow-Wights are not only close to a literal translation from the Norse *draugr,* they are well-nigh identical. Considering both are vicious, undead creatures inhabiting a corpse, tied to their barrow by having to protect its treasure.
The same goes for Trolls, who are originally Norse creatures. Similar to Scandinavian tradition, Tolkien's Trolls are also enormous, ugly, bloodthirsty and profoundly dim-witted.
Also the Wargs, who get their name from the Norse word 'vargr', are -just like in Norse mythology-, wolf-like creatures, capable of speech, and are often used as mounts.

Even though the Dwarves are also profoundly similar to their Norse forebears, their case is slightly different from that of the Wights, Wargs and Trolls. For the Dwarves, who are essentially malicious creatures in Norse mythology, are good-hearted in both *The Hobbit* and in *The Lord of the Rings*. In *The Silmarillion*, however, they are much more akin to the Dwarves in Norse mythology. However, the most prominent characteristic of the Dwarves that originates from Norse mythology and which remains consistent throughout Tolkien's work is their talent as blacksmiths. On top of that is the common element that they largely live underground. They also form a close connection to the old Norse traditions of ring-magic, which seems to have inspired Tolkien greatly in his creation of *The Lord of the Rings*.

There is one interesting aspect which all the aforementioned monsters have in common, besides the fact that they are monstrous, they all live underground in some way. Far removed from the world of the gods, the world of humans and other good-hearted creatures, they are doomed to reside in the darkness. This is where the interdependence between evil and darkness illustrates the evil character of the monsters. I would say that it is symbolic for evil creatures (read: monsters) to reside underground, removed from the rest of the world and in the dark. While the good creatures live above ground, close to the light and in proximity of the gods.

Taking all the foregoing information into account, I believe that it is safe to say that the similarities between Tolkien's monsters and those from the old Norse sources are rather remarkable.

3. The Meaning of Monsters

3.1 Introduction

As I have done in the foregoing chapter, I shall start with the linguistic origins of that which I set out to analyze. In this case that is the monster. The English word 'monster' has its etymological roots in the Latin 'monstrare', which means 'to demonstrate' (Fawcett, p.127). This, in turn, has a deeper root as it comes from the Latin 'moneo', which means 'to warn' or 'to remind' (Russel, p.75). This original meaning of the word is as much of a reference to the inherent meaning of monsters in literature as 'derkein' is for the Dragon's intelligence. For the monster essentially serves the purpose of demonstration in a story. However, the demonstration is not neutral. The monster is there to *warn* those who contemplate transgression, to *remind* them of what happens when social rules are broken (Hantke, p.186, as cited in Burke, *Mirror,* p.27).

> "The monster is the taboo, as well as a representation of the social order's attempts to leech that taboo" (Burke, *Mirror*, p.27)

Hence, the monsters are there to demonstrate or translate a certain message which the writer is trying to get across. Think for example of the Norse poem *Fafnismál*, in which Fáfnir is transformed into a Dragon as a result of his greed. In plain English, this can be interpreted as the writer attempting to say "do not be greedy". Is demonstration then the only purpose which the monsters serve? Could the author not have illustrated his message without the use of, in Tolkien's words, such an 'unfashionable creature'? The answer to the first question is *no*, whereas the answer to the second is: *probably yes*.

Especially within Tolkien's work, monsters serve a much more elaborate purpose than to demonstrate certain vices for example. In his lecture "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics", Tolkien explained that many critics had been displeased with monsters being at the center of *Beowulf* and, as a result, had disregarded the entire poem because of it. He cites W.P. Ker, who dismissed these 'trivialities' put at the center of something serious, and thereby

'cheapening the whole'(Critics, p.11). Tolkien, on the contrary, deemed the monsters the most important devices of a story: it was due to the monsters that Beowulf differs from other old English poems, making it such a 'masterpiece', according to him (Critics, p.13). For not only are the monsters an important device to entertain and intrigue one's readers, they are also there to warn and remind the readers of evil and corruption.

3.2 The Dark Side of Literature

In his essay "On Fairy Stories", Tolkien wrote the following: "The Locked Door stands as an eternal Temptation" (Fairy, p.10). This means that we as humans are fascinated by things that are somehow out of our reach. In general, Tolkien argued that our interests get piqued by that which we cannot understand, what we should not want to understand, or that which is simply forbidden to us. This is why we are often intrigued by things such as taboos, mythology and horror. Even though fairytales typically have -and must remain to have- happy endings, the road leading up to that happy ending does not fascinate us if it does not touch upon something 'horrific'. For "most good fairy-stories", Tolkien states, "are about the adventures of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches" (Fairy, p.3). Hence, a story needs a dark side to spark our fascination. This could for example be a witch, connected to the taboo of witchcraft, or a 'perilous realm with shadowy marches' -a dark and scary place where one does not dare to go.

In this essay, Tolkien's own inclination to the 'darker side' of literature becomes apparent when he explains why, as a child, he was very fascinated by a story from the collection by the brothers Grimm, that of *The Juniper Tree*:

> "The beauty and horror of The Juniper Tree (Von dem Machandelboom), with its exquisite and tragic beginning, the abominable cannibal stew, the gruesome bones, the gay and vengeful bird-spirit coming out of a mist that rose from the tree, has remained with me since childhood… Without the stew and the bones —which children are now too often spared in mollified versions of Grimm— that vision would largely have been lost. I do not think I was harmed by the horror in

the fairytale setting, out of whatever dark beliefs and practices of the past it may have come" (Fairy, p.10).

North-Western Europe knows many literary pieces stemming from as early as the Middle Ages that include brilliant horror. Not surprisingly, among those mentioned by H.P. Lovecraft in his book *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, these are in fact some of Tolkien's major sources, such as the *Eddas*, the Norse sagas, and *Beowulf*.

3.3 A Horrifically Human Fascination

Evidently, the human fascination with horror appears to be a natural phenomenon, something which is inherent in us and has always been. One might even take it as far as saying that this human fascination with horror is an *archetype*, and that monsters are its *metaphors*. Anyone remotely familiar with Jung's definition of an archetype knows that he defines it as an inherited part of our *psyche* that is connected to our *instinct* (Samuels et al, p.39). In plain English: the fascination with horror and the things which we fear is something that humans are born with, and which returns throughout the ages, such as symbols, gods or myths.

Apparently, humanity is instinctively fascinated with horror, which often manifests itself in the appearance of monsters. The monsters are the embodiment of the horror that has always been there and always will be, whether in myth, legend or book. Monsters as the embodiment of human vice are relatable to us and are effectively terrifying as well, for it reminds us of what can become of us if we open ourselves up to corruption. At the same time the monsters are an effective and accessible way to demonize an enemy, which justifies for example killing or hating the monster (Tally, p.1). As Gilmore argued:

"The mind needs monsters. monsters embody all that is dangerous and horrible in the human imagination. Since earliest times, people have invented fantasy creatures on which their fears could safely settle" (Gilmore, as quoted in Larsson, *Mirror*, p.183).

3.3.1 Two Categories of Representation

Jessica Burke also delves into the topic of horror and fear in literature, in particular in Tolkien and in *Beowulf*. In her essay "Fear and Horror: monsters in Tolkien and *Beowulf*" she explains that monsters conjure feelings of horror and fear, and that these particular feelings require some sort of stimuli (this could be either internal or external) in order to be felt (Burke, in *Mirror*, p.15). However, as one might initially suspect, these stimuli do not come from the monster itself, but from what it represents (going once again back to the original meaning of the word: *demonstrare*). She divides the monster's possible representation into two categories: 1) the unknown, and 2) the "known made unreal, unnatural, the grotesque which causes an imbalance in the fibres of being" (Burke in *M*, p.15).

The first category of what a monster represents, that is: the unknown, is a monster born monstrous, or 'the deformed' as David Williams refers to it (B in *M*, p.26). monsters as such could for example be Trolls or Wargs. For these creatures have not completed any sort of action to become what they are now, they have always been the monster that they are.

The second category, that of the known made unreal, Burke defines as the "adulterated 'human' (that which serves as the 'natural order' of the social norm perverted)" (B in *M*, p.15). Those monsters would for example be the Dragon Fáfnir, or Gollum –to whom I have not paid any attention yet, but have saved for this chapter-. These monsters were in fact not born in the state they are in now, but are 'fallen' or corrupted creatures. This is the category of monsters that often makes the most substantial impact on a reader according to Burke, for they symbolize the horror of the natural order being unmade. Another reason for this might be that we can more easily identify with this type of monster: we are much further from becoming a Warg than from becoming Gollum (wretched by his being consumed by greed).

Tolkien himself stated that monsters of more or less human shape were naturally entangled with the Christian ideas of sin and spirits of evil (Critics, p.15). Hence, the connection of our fear to

creatures that embody in some way the parodies of the human form is an age-old phenomenon. Perhaps this is due to the fact that it is natural for us to fear for ourselves more than to fear something remote or unfamiliar. And perhaps we even fear becoming remote from ourselves.

The most well-known example of a fallen individual which represents the natural order being unmade would evidently be Lucifer, the fallen Angel who was cast down to the underworld and is now referred to as 'the Devil'. Tolkien, a devout Christian, used this story as an inspiration for Morgoth, which is the name given to the fallen Angel Melkor. Both Lucifer and Melkor found their doom in their appetite for power -which is a concept that I will return to somewhat further in this chapter- and both became ruler of that which is dark and evil. Hence, they symbolize the horror of the natural order being unmade.

3.3.2 The Notion of Fear

What is it exactly that we fear in monsters? Evidently, the physical appearance of a monster is abhorrent. Though that alone does not seem to me enough reason to fear a creature. Both Burke and Petty seem to be convinced that it is the fear of the unknown that makes monsters terrifying. Maybe, if we were to have a complete understanding of the monster, and what it represents, we would not fear it (as much). For example, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo's fear of Gollum gradually decreases according to his understanding of the powers of the Ring, and his own vulnerability to it. As opposed to Sam, who has not carried the Ring and therefore is not able to (fully) grasp its powers and consequently wants to eliminate Gollum every time he sees a possibility. However, although Frodo comes to fear Gollum less as he comes to understand him more, his gradual undoing and his increasing similarity to Gollum are actually terrifying for the reader. In short: we understand Frodo, which is scary, but we do not fully understand the monster, which is also scary.

In *Tolkien in the land of Heroes*, Anne Petty states that:

"Often what's not described in gory detail or explained in rational terminology can be the most frightening. It's one thing to combat an opponent when you can see and estimate its strength. It's another situation entirely to combat something you can't see and therefore don't know what to expect: fear of the unknown may be more paralyzing than the physical threat itself" (Petty as quoted in B, *M*, p.16).

As Petty states it, what underlies being able to estimate the strength of one's opponent is that the chances of survival are higher than when being ambushed, for example. According to Burke, the fear of death is the most primitive and primeval form of fear and is also a highly significant reason for us to fear monsters. In all honesty, there is absolutely no chance of survival if one were to be faced with a Dragon, Orc, Warg, Troll or many other monsters that roam the grounds of Middle-earth.

Charles Darwin describes fear as an utterly depressing and incapacitating emotion (Darwin as cited in B, *M*, p.19). However, that is when we experience it in our daily lives. Naturally, the feeling of fear is considerably different when we experience it in literature. For when we are sitting on the couch, reading about Gollum battling himself about whether or not he should 'kill the hobbitsess', we know that we are not in any kind of danger ourselves. This kind of fear is what Burke refers to as a 'safe fear': it does not result in a depressed feeling, rather in a feeling of exhilaration (B in *M*, p.19). This, in turn, stimulates our curiosity and makes us want to continue reading.

Hence, the monsters in literature do not only serve the purpose of demonstration but also that of entertainment. For they emanate feelings of fear and horror, which are highly significant features in literature, not only according to Burke, but also to Tolkien.

3.2.4 The Notion of Evil

Burke also argues that the notion of evil is just as essential to Tolkien's work as the primeval fear of death. However, the notion of evil in Tolkien's work is rather complicated for two reasons:

- Tolkien himself did not believe in pure evil (B in *M*, p.28).
- The presence of evil is not restricted to the monsters in Tolkien's work (B in *M*, p.22).

In a note that he wrote to W.H. Auden in 1956, Tolkien illustrates the reason as to why he does not believe in the existence of absolute, unadulterated evil: beings capable of rational thought cannot be wholly evil because their capability of rationality prevents them from existing by means of their pure evil (B in *M*, p.28). Shippey argues that Tolkien, as a Christian, believed that there was no such thing as pure evil, but that which is defined as evil is merely the absence of good (Shippey in *Road*, p.130).

According to Shippey, even the Orcs cannot be defined as purely evil, because even they have clear ideas about what is right and what is wrong. He mentions an example from the last chapter of *The Two Towers*, where the Orcs have captured Frodo, who is paralyzed by Shelob's venom. One of the Orcs is arguing that the 'little fellow' they have caught:

"[…] may have had nothing to do with the real mischief. The big fellow with the sharp sword doesn't seem to have thought him worth much anyhow - just left him lying: regular elvish trick" (Shippey in *Road*, p.132).

The Orc that is talking "is convinced that it is wrong, and contemptible, to abandon your companions" (S, *Road*, p.132).

Thus, pure evil is not dealt with in Middle-earth, or so Tolkien claims (B in *M*, p.28). However, this does not mean that he fully denied the existence of evil. He merely denied evil as an absolute. "He said that in daily life causes are not clear-cut because earth-bound tyrants are seldomly wholly corrupted into pure embodiments of evil intent " (*Letters* as cited by B, in *M*, p.29).

Now, does the absence of pure evil indicate that there is also nothing purely good in Middle-earth?
This brings me to the second point: that the presence of evil is not restricted to the monsters. The fact that seemingly the monsters are not wholly evil and that evil resides in creatures that are not

monsters is a concept that I have also come across in the previous chapter, in my analysis of the Orcs.
When looking at the relationship between the Elves and the Orcs it becomes apparent that neither are the Orcs fully evil, nor are the Elves fully good. The Orcs were once Elves, who are supposed to be essentially good, hence the Orcs derive from something good and are not wholly evil. However, the Elves seem to have something 'monstrous' about them as well. For the monsters generate feelings of fear in the reader, which is what I (for I can only speak for myself on this matter) feel when the Dwarves are kidnapped by the Wood-Elves in *The Hobbit* or when Frodo offers Galadriel the Ring.

Similar to Elves, Hobbits are also described as essentially good creatures. However, as previously stated: the Hobbits' increasing likeness to Gollum is terrifying all the same. I for example feel fear when there appears a wretched creature not unlike Gollum in the Hall of Fire, rather than Bilbo (*LotR*, p.226). Or when Frodo disturbingly utters the words that the Ring is his (*LotR*, p.924).

Even though I do not have any difficulty grasping the fact that creatures of Middle-earth that are essentially good are not an absolute, complete sort of good -if that even exists in the first place-, I initially had difficulty grasping how there is no pure evil in Middle-earth. Therefore, I shall provide some examples of this for the reader, as I understand how it might be confusing.

Tolkien argues that the notion of evil is connected to the appetite for power (B in *M*, p.28). Hence, what is evil lacks intelligence and/or craves power. For example: Saruman (the wizard), craves power but does not lack intelligence. Yet, he is evil. A Troll lacks intelligence, but craves power in a different way than Saruman does, as he craves physical power, instead of a spiritual or collective sort of power. The Troll is also evil. Even though they are not equal in intelligence and crave different kinds of power, they both aim at destruction and are both evil beings.
Another example would be the Warg, which does not crave power in the sense that Saruman does and is also in the possession of some form of intelligence, but is evil nonetheless.

However, like the Troll, the Warg craves physical power and aims at destruction. Even though the Warg is in possession of *some sort* of intelligence, he is not capable of *rational thought*, which Tolkien specifically mentioned in his 'prerequisites for evil'. Thus, although the Wargs might be intelligent enough to learn a language and construct an alliance with the Orcs, they were designed for battle and therefore did not need the capability of rationality and are consequently evil.

3.4 *Demonstrare*: The Applicability of Monsters

3.4.1 Introduction

> "Monsters are deformed versions of ourselves, used since the Middle Ages as a tool of self-understanding; pushed to the margins, they are both warnings against and scapegoats for the violation of society's rules. Even in the safety of reading, they excite terror, particularly when they invite us to imagine our being unmade"
> (Houghton, p.273)

In her essay "From Saga to Romance: The Use of monsters in Old Norse Literature", Kathryn Hume states that regardless of the shape of the monster, it always serves the purpose of hindering the protagonist on his quest -whatever that may be-. Although her focus within this essay is mainly on the position of the protagonist/hero in a narrative, and on how monsters are related to this, she provides an interesting overview of the possible functions monsters can serve in literature (Hume, p.3):

- To affirm the protagonist's status as a professional hero
- To create an opening for the hero to put his strengths/powers to the service of society
- A comic or ironic device to reduce exaggerated heroes to a more human stature
- Or through allegory, being the embodiment of human vices

This last option seems to be the meaning that Tolkien mainly addresses to the monsters in his fiction, as his monsters certainly serve a demonstrative purpose through the embodiment of human vices. However, Tolkien himself "cordially dislikes allegory in all its

manifestations" since he "grew old and wary enough to detect its presence" and uses the word 'applicability' instead (*LotR*, p.11). For "applicability resides in the freedom of the reader, whereas allegory lies in the purposed domination of the author" (*LotR*, p.11). Hence, I will not refer to the monsters as 'allegorical creatures' but rather as creatures "applicable to the thought and experience of the reader", just as Tolkien would have done (*LotR*, p.11).

It first became apparent to me that Tolkien's monsters were not part of Middle-earth merely to entertain the reader, when he stated in his text: "*Beowulf:* The monsters and the Critics", that the Giants are "parodies of the human form" and that the Dragon is the personification of "malice, greed and destruction". I subsequently noticed that his monsters might be in some way a commentary or criticism on the modernizing society in which he lived, when he argued in "On Fairy Stories" that:

> "The notion that motor-cars are more "alive" than, say, centaurs or Dragons is curious; that they are more "real" than, say, horses is pathetically absurd" (Fairy, p.21).

I believe that what he means to say by this is that while fantasy -with its power to both entertain and to demonstrate or warn- is restricted to children in the opinion of many (Fairy, p.11), cars and planes and other modern devices that have the ability to destroy much of that which is beautiful in the world, are becoming available -and normal- to all. For example, the Norse draugr or the Tolkienian Barrow-Wights can be interpreted accordingly, as Hume argued that:

> "[…] draugar are dark shadows of society, and that the portrayal of draugar reflects the society's subliminal awareness of its own weaknesses: desire for gold and love of special objects, bloodthirstiness, selfishness, and belief in physical strength as a trait valued for itself rather than for what it can do for a society" (Hume, p.13).

First, I shall proceed by delving further into the 'applicability' of the monsters and respectively argue that Gollum is more than a mere wretched creature. In the subsequent chapter, I shall also

elaborate more on the applicability of Tolkien's work to his own life; to modernization, industrialisation, and the two World Wars that he unfortunately witnessed.

3.4.2 Smeagol/Gollum

> "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... He is the counterpart, but he is not wholly lost" (Fawcett, p.154).

As I previously stated, apart from the thrill and excitement which the presence of monsters adds to a story, they most importantly present us with a concept applicable to humanity, and especially human vice. Undoubtedly, the very best example of a monster as a means to demonstrate is Gollum -I will remain to refer to him as Gollum and not as Smeagol as Gollum is the name for the monster, while Smeagol was the name of the person he once was-.

For the ones unfamiliar with Gollum, I shall first explain who -or rather what- he is. Gollum is the creature who found the Ring after it had been lost for many years. Gollum was of 'Hobbit-kin', but his kind differed from Hobbits in the sense that they "were broader, heavier in build; their feet and hands were larger, and they preferred flat lands and the riversides" (*Fellowship*, p.3).

When Gollum found the Ring, his name was Smeagol. And at that very moment, he was with his best friend Deagol. Deagol wanted to take the Ring, thus Smeagol killed him for it "because the gold looked so bright and beautiful" (*Fellowship*, p.52). After the murder he fled the scene and went into hiding together with the Ring. Centuries passed and the Ring -which Gollum calls 'the Precious'- not only extended his life beyond natural limits, but also corrupted his mind and wrecked his body to the extent that he transformed into a monster, and became Gollum.

In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo took the Ring from Gollum, after which Gollum devoted his 'life' to get it back in his possession. Bilbo

eventually passed the Ring onto Frodo, who sets out to destroy it in *The Lord of the Rings*. In this work, Gollum becomes both guide and betrayer to Frodo.

Gollum's 'demonstration' fundamentally confronts first Bilbo, and then Frodo, with the intrinsic, twisted version of themselves. He serves as a warning, to show the Hobbits what will happen if they go down the wrong path, which is to use the Ring.

Just like Lucifer became the Devil and Melkor became Morgoth, Smeagol became Gollum. All of them are fallen individuals, who opened their hearts to corruption and became the evil versions of themselves. Compared to Smeagol, Gollum becomes much lighter and thinner. This is again -just as the Wargs, Trolls and Saruman- an illustration of the connection between evil and destruction. In this case, the destruction of the self.

However, Gollum is different from Morgoth and the Devil in that he was not corrupted as a consequence of his appetite for power. He opened his heart to corruption and fell completely under the spell of the Ring. He kills Deagol not because he desires to put the Ring to use but out of greed. Hence, Gollum is not wholly evil. Tolkien shows this through his constant shifting in name and respectively his personality as well. Moreover, he suggests that Gollum is to be pitied instead of feared (*Fellowship*, p.58).

When Frodo addresses the creature with its original name Smeagol, the residing good in the creature takes the upper hand and decides to help the Hobbits get to Mordor without deceit. However, when the Hobbits and Gollum are captured by Faramir and his posse, Gollum feels betrayed and his evil side tries to take the lead again.

This ongoing, inherent struggle that Gollum experiences shows that he is a predominantly corrupted creature that still has hope. This is explained to Frodo by Gandalf when he says:

> "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" (*Fellowship*, p.53)

Thus, Gollum is the "ideal demonstration of the ongoing struggle with corruption" (Fawcett, p.157). For we have seen by now that all is corruptible, even Elves, and even Hobbits. Placing Gollum next to the Hobbits throughout *The Lord of the Rings* is the most evident indication/warning of possible corruption and a trigger of fear for the reader. Gollum is what Frodo can be. Therefore, Gollum's inner struggle with his dark side, which craves the comfort and happiness of the 'Precious', is interesting and also important to the reader because:

"The reader must hope for the redemption of the monster, because if Gollum cannot be saved, Frodo cannot be either" (Fawcett, p.159).

In the end, Gollum dies, indicating that his personal battle between good and evil, light and dark, had not ended yet. For he guides the Hobbits to Mount Doom and even sacrifices himself for them - indicating he has turned to being Smeagol again, having won the battle from his dark side, from Gollum-. However, in the end he jumps after the Ring and dies with it, illustrating that in the end the darkness inside him won, and he died as Gollum. This, in turn, is a demonstration of Tolkien's personal beliefs on this matter. The idea that the battle between good and evil is an everlasting cycle that will always begin anew when the previous one has ended, is something that he has inherited from the Norse sources, as I will explain in the following chapter.

3.5 Chapter Conclusion

I hope to have clearly shown that the meaning of monsters in a narrative is essentially to demonstrate, remind, and warn against the consequences of a certain transgression. This respectively results in fascination and entertainment of the reader, due to - among other things- a feeling of 'safe fear' and the natural human fascination with horror.

We typically fear monsters because they are either foreign to us and we, as humans, fear the unknown, and yet we are also fascinated by

them. Or we fear them because they are a representation of that which could become in the case of corruption, and we are able to relate to them.

Even though monsters are fundamentally linked to evil, this is not necessarily the case in Middle-earth. For Tolkien adhered to the Christian belief that an absolute evil did not exist and that the only way to become (predominantly) evil, is either through lacking the ability of rational thought or through an appetite for power.

The most evident example of the extensive grey area regarding the separation of good and evil, is Gollum. Not only does he represent despair for that which is good, for he is a fallen 'sort-of' Hobbit and Hobbits are essentially good. He also illustrates hope of redemption of the dark. For, even though he has fallen to the power of the Ring a long time ago and has transformed into a monstrous being that is alien to his original self (Smeagol), he can still do good and continues to try to do so. This is a hopeful suggestion for the reader to hold onto through the perils that the Hobbits must conquer to accomplish an act which is essentially good: to destroy the Ring.

4. The 20th Century and the Northern Warrior-Ethos in Middle-earth

4.1 Introduction

Now that we have gone through a number of Tolkien's monsters and how they are similar to those of Norse mythology, what the meaning of monsters actually is and how that is applicable to Tolkien's work, it is time to take a look at the relationship of Tolkien's work with his own life. For some of Tolkien's personal experiences are likely to have contributed to the inclusion of some Northern aspects into his own work, as I will explain somewhat further on in this chapter.

Being alive during the 20th century and witnessing many of the atrocities committed during those times, such as two World Wars, the rise of fascism, and England's countryside being subjected to the changes of industrialization, Tolkien's perception of the world has surely been influenced by the foregoing matters.
I believe that Tolkien's mythology examines the contemporary conditions of his century by facing the ravages of, for example war, head on. I argue that he uses his fantasy to articulate the horrendous and unfathomable events of his own lifetime and that through his writing he is 'battling his own monsters (or demons)' as well (Mortimer, p.120). The most obvious support to this argument would be a letter that Tolkien wrote in 1944 to his son Christopher, who was at war during that time:

> "I think if you could begin to write […] you would find it a great relief. I sense amongst all your pains […] the desire to express your feeling about good, evil, fair, foul in some way: to rationalize it, and prevent it just festering. In my case it generated Morgoth and the History of the Gnomes. Lots of the early parts of which (and the languages)—discarded or absorbed—were done in grimy canteens, at lectures in cold fogs, in huts full of blasphemy and smut, or by candle light in bell-tents, even some down in dugouts under shell fire" (*Letters,* p.78).

The foregoing passage indicates that Tolkien used his fantasy to cope with his own animosity towards the war. *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, could be interpreted as Tolkien articulating the modernity of his age and the wars that had engulfed two generations of Tolkien men, as both he and his sons had to fight in the wars (Mortimer, p.123). In that case it is no wonder that Sam observes that he and Frodo are "in the same tale still" (as Bilbo was) (*Two Towers*, p.321, as quoted in Mortimer, p.123). This could be compared to Tolkien's sons, who found themselves amidst the ravages of a World War after their father had also served in the World War before that.

Not only can we recognize contemporary elements in Tolkien's work, the prevalent presence of war and battle again echoes a certain level of 'Northernness'. In the Norse sagas and mythology, war -or rather battle in general- is a dominant presence in the majority of the stories: going to battle was the most heroic thing someone could do and was the source of honor in the Viking tradition, as I will explain more elaborately later.

I have previously argued that what is predominantly battled in both the sagas and in Tolkien's work, is the monster(s), as monsters are an accessible way to demonize an enemy that one can kill without remorse (Tally, p.1). This is not the case with humans because we -as humans- can and will relate to other humans more than we will to a horrendous, evil being. Henceforth, writing a story in which battling monsters is central is in all likelihood more conceivable, and more entertaining -as I have stated before-, than a narrative which revolves around battling humans.

Not only do the many battles against the monsters correspond with the Norse sources but how they were fought also follows a Northern tradition. For together with the many battles that had to be fought both in Midgard and in Middle-earth came the Northern 'warrior-ethos', that of courage and unquestionable loyalty (Deyo, p.59). Shippey argued that the reason why this 'Northern courage' is this prevailing in Tolkien's work was due to the fact that he recognized certain Northern battle-attitudes in Nazi Germany:

"He felt that the heathen spirit of the Vikings and the berserks had come back in his own time, and had to be fought once more. To fight it, two things had to be done: one, an acceptable image of heroism had to be created; and two, Tolkien had to commit an act of parricide. He had in fact to take 'the northern heroic spirit' and sacrifice it" (Shippey as quoted in Bowman, p.92).

However, Bowman comments on this -and I feel more inclined to follow his view rather than Shippey's- by arguing that instead of Tolkien rejecting the 'Northern heroic spirit' he:

> "...reshaped the northern into an acceptable image of heroism, thus reclaiming it from the Nazis and redeeming it of its heathenism" (Bowman, p.106).

I am in favor of Bowman's argument and will adhere to this theory for the remainder of this chapter. For Tolkien did not seem to be unaccepting of Norse customs, creatures or stories. Yet, he naturally made his own reformations, as he has done with all the Northern influences which he decided to include in his own mythology. I shall elaborate more on how Tolkien once again seems to follow Northern traditions regarding the warrior-ethos in his own mythology, after clarifying how contemporary aspects have also influenced his work and respectively the inclusion of some of their Northern influences.

4.2 An Author of His Century

Tolkien's work has known immense popularity since the beginning of his publications. On the flipside, this also means that it has been subject to plenty of criticism, some of which rather unfiltered. His work has been defined as, for example: infantile, escapist, sexist and even racist. Without adhering to any of these foregoing labels, I would like to classify Tolkien as nothing else than an author of his century. By this, I do not mean to criticize Tolkien's work, but merely analyze how it relates to his contemporary situation. Verlyn Flieger, a professor in comparative mythology and Tolkien studies, seems to be of the same opinion when she argues:

> "Though on the surface Tolkien's fiction appears to reject the present in favor of an apparently romanticized past, at a deeper level it is very much informed by our present time. His work could not have spoken so powerfully to his own century if he had completely succeeded in escaping it. The fact is that he could not escape and was in actuality both responding to and using the most typical aspects of his own age as essential elements of his fantasy" (Flieger as quoted in Mortimer, p.119).

I believe that both Flieger's and my own take on this is the more plausible line of thought than of those who have dismissed Tolkien as a romantic or escapist. For he himself stated in his essay "On Fairy Stories" that that which is important in fantasy is that it is "founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun" (*Fairy*, p.18). In plain English, the primary or real world from which the story originates should be in some way connected to the secondary or fantasy world created by it (Curry, p.27).

For Tolkien, I believe, this meant in some way including those major 20th century events through which he lived, e.g. the First World War, the rise of communism and fascism, the Second World War, the decline of the British Empire and the Cold War (Jackson, p.66). The occurrence of all those impacting developments respectively generated a sense of nostalgia for the years of peace preceding this era. For many war writers, and indubitably for many people in general, the period before 1914 -that is, before the threat of industrialization, before the war and before the ruin of England- began to symbolize this golden age of peace and prosperity (Jackson, p.61).

Although Tolkien should not be identified as a war writer, it is clear that both the idea of this golden age preceding the war and the havoc that succeeds it, is something that has manifested itself in *The Hobbit*. For it is in this golden age that the opening chapter of *The Hobbit* takes place (Jackson, p.61). Here, Bilbo, a very comfortable Hobbit, living in a very comfortable home, who gets his

meat "delivered by the butcher all ready to cook" (*Hobbit*, p.15), has to leave his beloved and beautiful Shire to go fight someone else's battle. Tolkien himself comments on this by saying that the Shire does not represent England. However, it is not completely disconnected, as he also states the following:

> "It has indeed some basis in experience, though slender (for the economic situation was entirely different), and much further back. The country in which I lived in childhood was being shabbily destroyed before I was ten, in days when motor-cars were rare objects (I had never seen one) and men were still building suburban railways" (*LotR*, p.10).

Others before me have argued that Middle-earth can be interpreted as a mirror of the modern world. For example, eco-activist David Taggart, who found solace in reading *The Lord of the Rings* when he sailed into the French nuclear testing area in 1972, noted that the land of Mordor "[…] is one of industrial desolation, polluted beyond renewal; and that such desecration is inseparable from its autocratic, unaccountable and unrestrained exercise of political power" (Taggart, as quoted in Curry, p.12).

Taggart was not wrong to draw this comparison, for Tolkien himself compared the horrors that threaten Middle-earth to the horrors of war on earth as well. Tolkien himself fought in World War I, and while this undoubtedly influenced his anti-war sentiments, the service of his sons after him was also an immense blow (Carpenter, p.68). It is during this period that he writes his son a letter in which he makes this comparison between Middle-earth and his own earth:

> "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*, p.115)

4.3 Norse Warrior-Ethos

> "He is a man, and that, for him and many, is sufficient tragedy[…] For the monsters do not depart, whether the gods go or come" (Critics, p.18-22).

As previously stated, the Norse warrior-ethos is focused on courage and unquestionable loyalty. The kind of courage which I am referring to is a particular one, for according to Tolkien, it is the act of perseverance with the certainty of ultimate defeat that makes one courageous (Bowman, p.92).

In Norse mythology, eventual defeat is certain, even in the afterlife. For the Vikings, it was an honor to die in battle, to die as a great warrior. In addition, the Vikings believed (for Norse mythology states) that the ones who died in battle continued their afterlife feasting in Valhalla, the great halls of Odin, and this was aspired by all. However, once one had entered Valhalla, the battle was not yet over. For the warriors in Valhalla were to fight each other to the death, every night, only to be reborn again the next day and feast more. This pattern would repeat itself every day until the final battle: Ragnarök. During this ultimate battle -which all know will end in the ending of the world, hence defeat is certain- the gods will fight alongside men against the monsters. Eventually, the monsters and the darkness will prevail and all will end in one enormous bloodbath. However, legend has it that a few gods and two humans will survive and start new life in Midgard, and everything will repeat itself once more. Hence, the view of Norse mythology is cyclical, as there will be an everlasting battle between light and darkness, just as in Middle-earth.

In a letter that Tolkien wrote regarding the ending of *The Silmarillion*, he himself mentions an example of the influence of Norse mythology on his work regarding the battle-field:

> "This legendarium ends with a vision of the end of the world, its breaking and remaking, and the recovery of the Silmarilli and the 'light before the Sun' - after a final battle which owes, I suppose, more to the Norse vision of Ragnarok than to

anything else, though it is not much like it" (*Letters*, p.149).

Not only does the concept of Ragnarök return in the final battle of the Silmarillion, also in *The Lord of the Rings* Gandalf predicts that the Shadow will return and therefore the fight against evil is not really over.

Tolkien and the Norse sources have in common that there seems to be some sort of everlasting debate, or quest rather, about the mechanisms of good and evil and light versus dark. The ultimate answer on which both seem to land is that it is in fact an everlasting struggle and that ultimately neither is able to wholly eradicate the other.
This struggle of good versus evil is an actual battle between creatures who are essentially good, and creatures who are essentially evil; the monsters.

> "Moreover, the wars with Morgoth are framed almost exclusively in the language and tradition of the […] Norse sagas. These are not "real" battles for territory, land, and power; they are mythological conflicts of light versus dark, driven by hasty oaths and meted dooms" (Mortimer, p.122).

The "real final battle", Tolkien argues, is between "the soul and its adversaries" (Critics, p.9). Additionally, the fact that Tolkien speaks of this "final battle" and human heroes, reflects again on his Northern influences. For in Norse mythology, the final battle is at the gates of Valhalla, where the human heroes battle the monsters alongside the gods. Whereas in Greek mythology, immortality is a significant part of being a hero. However, Northern mythology had plain will and courage as a solution, instead of immortality (Critics, p.11).

Hence, it is the everlasting, mythological battle against the evil and the dark, embodied by the monsters, that is fought by good and mortal creatures, with the amazing courage that arises from the certainty of eventual defeat, which Tolkien and the Norse sources have in common.

4.3.1 Comitatus

Underlying the Northern courage and unfaltering loyalty in battle was the concept of *comitatus*. The definition given by Merriam Webster for this word is: "a body of wellborn men attached to a king or chieftain by the duty of military service" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/comitatus, accessed 17/06/2019).
Even though this is a decent description of the word, it does not completely clarify the actual concept underpinning it -in Northern tradition that is-. In fact, *comitatus* was based on loyalty rather than on duty. This indeed meant loyalty to one's lord, but perhaps even more to friends, kin and fellow warriors. The effect of *comitatus* was "to make the bonds of friendship as close as that of kinship" (St. Clair, p.65). Another important element of *comitatus* was revenge. Revenge would be taken on the death of both friends and kinsmen. Although revenge is what motivates many occurrences in the sagas, it does not play such an essential part in Tolkien's mythology. However, one example of revenge in *The Lord of the Rings* is the dwarves' long war to avenge the killing and humiliation of Thrór (St. Clair, p.65).

However, unfaltering loyalty to friends who have become as close as kinsmen does play a major role in Tolkien's work. For example, when The Fellowship sets out from Rivendell (*LotR*, book one) they are bound to the Ringbearer -in that case their leader/lord-, to each other, and to seeing their mission through to the end (St. Clair, p.65). This is where their loyalty begins, but afterwards there are many more examples of it. Think of Gandalf, who (momentarily, as we discover later in the story) sacrifices his own life to facilitate the escape of the rest of the Fellowship. Or Boromir, who atones his debt to Frodo by defending Merry and Pippin from the Orcs, to the death. Merry and Eowyn give their last attempt to protect Theoden (their lord) against the terrifying Nazgul. Sam protects his fallen 'master' Frodo from Shelob's (a giant spider) attack, even though he hardly stands a chance against this vile creature (St. Clair, p.65).

Not only do the foregoing examples have in common an unwavering loyalty towards friends, lords, and fellow warriors, they also radiate a spectacular courage. This is the kind of courage that one

finds in Northern tradition and mythology and which Tolkien thought very highly of: the courage to persevere when defeat is certain. Even though in many of the foregoing examples ultimate defeat is not always the result, at the time of battle defeat seemed to be the only outcome.

The fact that Tolkien differs from Norse mythology in this respect might reflect on the matter which I have mentioned before: the reshaping of the Northern into an -to him- acceptable image of heroism. This heroism does not necessarily result in personal defeat but also knows occasions of mercy. For when Bilbo leaps over Gollum, and effectively shows him mercy, he also leaps "over the whole vicious Siegfriedian, Rosenbergian Nazi mindset that finds it more self-justifying to kill an enemy it views as threatening and contemptible than to try to understand him" (Chism, p.77-78, as quoted in Mortimer, p.106).

Since Tolkien himself was a devout Christian, this could be interpreted as a reflection of his attempt to turn the 'pagan' into a more Christian acceptable image. For mercy is an important element in Christianity, while Northern tradition revolved more around revenge rather than mercy. This Norse mercilessness is something which was also practiced by the Nazis and therefore extremely likely to be an aspect which Tolkien reformed to his own Christian approval.

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

Once again, it is evident that Tolkien has been highly influenced by the Northern sources. Not only have the monsters from Norse mythology and the sagas given him much inspiration for the creation of his own, the way in which they are fought -by the good and the light- radiates a certain 'Northernness'. Not only the appearance of the Northern courage and *comitatus* are illustrations of this resemblance, also the mythological battle of 'good versus evil' is central in both sources. While the Northern landscape in the Viking age could have been perceived as rough, cold and dark, only illuminated by courageous and heroic acts, this can most certainly be said of the situation during the World Wars as well. As Tolkien

lived through both World Wars, fought in the first, and had to witness his sons go off to battle during the second, his perception of the world was inevitably affected.

Shippey argued that Tolkien must have recognized the Viking spirit in the merciless attitudes of the Nazis. Mortimer agrees with Shippey and argues that Tolkien effectively reformed the Northern warrior-ethos in his own mythology because of that. I agree with Mortimer and believe that Tolkien might have been attempting to convert the Northern, and respectively Nazi mercilessness into a more merciful attitude that was acceptable to him, both as a Christian and as a war veteran.

Furthermore, I believe that writing was a way for Tolkien to articulate his sentiments towards his contemporary situation. This has resulted in beautiful books that do not only entertain, but also reflect on what is corrupt and dark about our world. I would not dare to define Tolkien's work as escapist, it is anything but. Without suggesting any sort of allegory, it is in my perspective, a beautiful and skillful articulation of what was inside of him. Amongst other things, this was the 20th century and that which Tolkien himself refers to as the 'nameless North' (Fairy, p.13).

"It was during 1944 that, leaving the loose ends and perplexities of a war which it was my task to conduct, or at least report, I forced myself to tackle the journey of Frodo to Mordor" (*LotR*, p.10).

Discussion

When I started the journey of writing this thesis, I was, as a matter of fact, quite baffled to find such an interesting topic. I had only recently discovered my interest in Norse mythology and combining this with Tolkien seemed simply brilliant to me. However, shortly after I had started to read up on the topic, I discovered that I had been overconfident, to say the least. Many before me have had the brilliant idea of combining these two literary -and cultural- gems into one field of research and have respectively come to some interesting conclusions.

At least I was not wrong in establishing many similarities between Norse and 'Tolkienian' mythology.
Due to the fact that writing a thesis on the similarities between Tolkien's work and the old Norse sources would not add much to what is already available on this topic, I had to take a different approach. Since monsters and/or magical creatures have always been a fascination of mine, and since I have that in common with nobody else than Tolkien himself, I decided that monsters were going to be the focus of my thesis.

Yet, this could not be done without first doing some extensive research on what has already been written on Tolkien's use of old Norse sources. When I started reading even more about Tolkien and his putative sources, I came to another conclusion that I would like to share in conclusion: a great variety of essays, books and papers is available that attempt to find 'the origins' of Tolkien's work. Germanic and/or Norse mythology seems one of the most popular angles from which to view his works. However, there are also works that look for its 'origins' in Anglo-Saxon sources, in Greek mythology or in Christianity. Now, what I am getting at -and I realize now that it is taking me a while so I better get to it-, is that one can interpret Tolkien's work in different ways. For Middle-earth is so full of creatures, histories and dialogues, there are -in all honesty- more similarities to be found than only those with Norse mythology. Therefore, I believe it is important to realize that the fact that Tolkien can be connected to many sources does not make his

work any less authentic. If anything, it proves that the sole origin of his work is his own mind, not a mythology or a religion. Even though there always seems to be a connection of some kind, there is also always a distinction.

> "The prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them" (*LotR*, p.10).

Tolkien was a university professor, and in general a person who loved to read. His knowledge of many different sources is therefore simply a given. However, the fact that he created his own mythology, with or without the help of other sources, should not be forgotten.

As for the fact that Tolkien claims that there is no allegory to be found within his work, I am not sure what to think about this. He himself says the following:

> "As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical" (*LotR*, p.10).

However, I have also put forward a number of other scholars who argue differently. Tolkien had started writing both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* earlier than they were published and he could have possibly changed his mind about the concept of allegory. In *The Road to Middle-earth*, Shippey argues that some of Tolkien's earlier works are unquestionably allegorical (Shippey, *Road*, p.34). So he stated that both "Leaf by Niggle" and his foreword to the translation of *Beowulf* contain allegory. As "Leaf by Niggle" is actually about Tolkien himself, so is the story of 'the man in the tower' in the foreword of *Beowulf* about the Beowulf-poet (Shippey, *Road*, p.36).

Hence, interpreting Middle-earth as reflecting our own world might not be that wrong. For it is possible that Tolkien simply changed his mind about allegory, and wanted to deny the presence of it in his own work as soon as he himself found he disliked it. At the

moment of writing the foreword to *The Lord of the Rings*, in which he denies the presence of allegory, the story itself had long been finished and could have contained allegory nonetheless. However, I do not believe that his work should be read as an allegory. I am merely saying that his work possibly contained allegory in the sense of references or allusions to his own time, for example.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that we can not only affirm that Norse sources inspired and influenced Tolkien in the creation of his own mythology, but that they also largely inspired him in the creation of his monsters. However, it is important to adhere to the word 'influence' in conclusions drawn from research conducted such as my own. For, as I have discussed above already, there are various angles from which Tolkien's work can be interpreted. Not only does he have creatures and features in common with the Norse sources, but also with Anglo-Saxon stories and Christianity, for example. Yet, as I have argued before, the Norse sources seem to have taken the lead in Tolkien's mind, as his early fascination, his later academic endeavors, his letters and his books indicate.

In the introduction I stated that the main question that I was going to answer within this thesis was: how are Tolkien's monsters inspired by those from the Norse sources and what do these monsters mean?
The first part of the question I believe to have illustrated the answer within the second chapter where I analyze a number of monsters to discover in which way they bear resemblance to monsters from the Norse mythology and sagas. Without repeating myself by going through the conclusion of the chapter once more, I believe that the chapter has shown that not only aesthetically, but also linguistically and symbolically, Tolkienian monsters have many similarities to those from the old Norse sources.

The answer to the second part of the question I tackled in the third chapter, where I explained that both to Tolkien and in general the presence of monsters in a story is a valuable addition both to entertain the reader and to demonstrate, warn or remind the reader of the consequences of certain transgressions.
Tolkien himself believed that a certain hint of darkness and horror is an important part of a successful fantasy narrative (Fairy, p.10), which is embodied by the monsters.

Not only do we as humans enjoy reading about such "unfashionable creatures" (Critics, p.9), but monsters as the embodiment of human vice are relatable to us and are effectively terrifying as well. However, the reason why we enjoy the fact that they are terrifying

is due to the fact that it is a 'safe fear' that we experience whilst reading about them. Hence, it does not result in a depressed, incapacitating feeling - which experiencing fear in real life does, according to Darwin -, but rather in a feeling of exhilaration which inspires us to continue reading.

The most important function of the monsters in a story is illustrated by its linguistic origins, from which we can derive that it is their purpose to 'warn' and 'remind' through 'demonstration'. The Tolkienian monster in which we can find the purpose of demonstration most clearly is Gollum. For Gollum confronts first Bilbo, and then Frodo, with the intrinsic, twisted version of themselves. Hence, he serves as a warning, to show the Hobbits what will happen if they go down the wrong path, which is to use the Ring.
Gollum also shows us his intrinsic battle between good and evil. He was not born evil, but opened himself to corruption and succumbed to the powers of the Ring. Within *The Lord of the Rings* the switching between Smeagol and Gollum indicates his internal will to be and do good, but being too weak to defeat his own dark self.

This battle between good and evil is something which I reflect on in my final chapter as this is an important part in both Tolkienian and Norse mythology and the underlying essence of the battle against the monsters, which are the embodiment of evil.
Since Tolkien himself fought in World War I and later had to send his sons off to World War II, he was well-familiar with the battle between good and evil. I argue that he possibly wrote about it to articulate his own emotions on the subject, as a letter to his son Christopher indicates.

In Tolkien's work, the battle between good and evil is portrayed as everlasting , which is also the case in Norse mythology.
Essentially, creatures that are essentially good will battle that which is evil: the monsters, until either good or evil prevails and the cycle starts again. Within Norse sources this is evil, while within Tolkien's work this is the good.

The way in which the monsters are battled within Tolkien's work is also with a Northern courage and sense of *comitatus*. However, while mercy is not a very prevalent power within the Norse sources, it is

present in Tolkien's work. Shippey argued that Tolkien must have recognized certain Northern battle-attitudes in Nazi Germany, such as being merciless and destructive. Hence, he took this Northern 'warrior-ethos' and reconstructed it into a one that was acceptable to him as a devout Christian. Thus, he kept what was good about these pagan ways of fighting, but changed that which was abominable about it from a Christian perspective.

All in all, I hope to have successfully illustrated the relevance of the monsters within Tolkien's work, and their similarity to those in the old Norse sources. Not only are the monsters essential to understanding Tolkien's work in a more thorough manner, they also illustrate the underlying and everlasting conflict between good and evil. This conflict was not only a substantial part of Tolkien's life, but effectively of his own work, and of Norse mythology as well.

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