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# Perfection, Deviance and Disability: Bodily Norms in Tolkien's Medievalist World

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*Perfection, Deviance, and Disability:  
Bodily Norms in Tolkien's Medievalist World*

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Sous la direction de Claire Vial

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## Abstract

This thesis looks at the representations of bodies in J.R.R. Tolkien's work. Using disability studies as framework, the goal is to analyse the medievalist world built by Tolkien and dissect the characterization of its human and non-human inhabitants. As medieval conceptions of disability are explored, their study aims to explain Tolkien's handling of themes such as monstrosity, evil and war. Then, the thesis examines the foundational narratives contained in the *Silmarillion* to unveil the eugenicist and racially hierarchical nature of Tolkien's universe. Not focusing only on deviance, a third part probes at the construction of an ideal body through the promotion of ableist and eurocentrist norms, notably by looking at the races of the Elves and the Númenoreans in contrast to the other, less noble races. In a final part, a more sociological approach is taken as the thesis delves into the social and cultural impacts of disability and makes a link with Tolkien's own experience of the First World War. Ultimately, this thesis reveals Tolkien's use of deviant bodies and disability as narrative tools reflecting contemporary biases, as well as a surprising scarcity of impairment in a medievalist world regularly torn by war.

**Keywords:** Tolkien, disability, medievalism, ableism, fantasy, deviance.

Ce mémoire explore la représentation des corps dans l'œuvre de J. R. R. Tolkien. Prenant les *disability studies* comme cadre théorique, le but est d'analyser le monde médiévaliste construit par Tolkien et disséquer la caractérisation de ses habitants humains et non-humains. L'étude des conceptions médiévales du handicap tente d'expliquer l'usage par Tolkien de certains thèmes, tels que la monstruosité, le mal, et la guerre. Ensuite, le mémoire examine les récits fondateurs contenus dans le *Silmarillion* et révèle la nature eugéniste et hiérarchique de l'univers de Tolkien. Ne se limitant pas à la déviance, une troisième partie sonde la construction d'un corps idéal à travers la promotion de normes validistes et eurocentriques, notamment en analysant le discours biologique derrière les races des Elfes et des Númenoréens, en opposition aux autres races moins nobles. Dans une dernière partie, avec une approche plus sociologique, le mémoire se concentre sur l'impact social et culturel du handicap, en faisant un lien avec l'expérience personnelle de Tolkien de la Première Guerre Mondiale. Les conclusions, plutôt que de contribuer à une représentation fidèle et historiquement juste de la diversité humaine, révèlent que la déviance corporelle et le handicap sont utilisés par Tolkien comme des outils purement narratifs pétris de préjugés modernes, ainsi qu'une surprenante rareté de cas d'infirmité dans un monde médiévaliste régulièrement déchiré par la guerre.

**Mots-clés :** Tolkien, handicap, médiévalisme, validisme, fantasy, déviance.

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## Abbreviations

For more clarity, I use the short title-page system when referring to Tolkien's works, and the author-page system for secondary sources.

<i>H</i>	<i>The Hobbit</i>
<i>LotR</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i>
<i>FotR</i>	<i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i>
<i>TT</i>	<i>The Two Towers</i>
<i>RK</i>	<i>The Return of the King</i>
<i>S</i>	<i>The Silmarillion</i>
<i>UT</i>	<i>Unfinished Tales</i>
<i>BL</i>	<i>Beren and Lúthien</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>The Children of Húrin</i>
<i>HoMe</i>	<i>The History of Middle-earth (I, II, III)</i>
<i>Letters</i>	<i>Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien</i>
<i>OFS</i>	<i>On Fairy-stories</i>
<i>Nature</i>	<i>The Nature of Middle-earth</i>

## Introduction

From Norse and classical mythological poems to modern and contemporary novels, by way of medieval tales and Christian writings, disability has always been omnipresent in literature, although rarely in a striking way. Yet, in all its changing conceptions and infinite shapes and forms, disability is an undeniable component of humanity, which inevitably leads to literary representation. However, as difference is often a trigger of strong feelings, such as fascination, fear, disgust or pity, the portrayal of disability is more often than not a narrative tool, a metaphor, or a symbolic undertext, rather than an attempt at accurate and authentic representation of human diversity. Throughout the ages, bodies and spirits deviating from contemporary norms have been portrayed in literature as the result of a tragic twist of fate deserving of pity and meant to be healed or overcome, or as a divine punishment and as the outward expression of an immoral nature. Disabled literary characters, in their deviance, have been especially useful in the valorisation by contrast of the figures surrounding them, and in the reinforcement of cultural and physical norms. In parallel, in literature, in the arts, and in society in general, a cult of beauty has thrived, associating beauty to good and ugliness to evil, to the point that it has become a natural preconception. J.R.R. Tolkien is no exception to the rule and evokes this phenomenon himself, in his essay ‘On Fairy-Stories’: “So that to us evil and ugliness seem indissolubly allied. We find it difficult to conceive of evil and beauty together” (*OFS* 72). Yet, when considering (human) bodies, what is ugliness if not a euphemism to talk about the grotesque, deformed, mutilated or impaired? The ‘ugly-disabled’, being “indissolubly” associated to evil, is bound to be monstrous, even more so in contrast to those embodying ideals of beauty and goodness.

Bodily norms, in terms of aesthetics and physical ability, dictate both the ideal and the deviant, and thus delimitate categories of monstrosity, ugliness and disability. If disability is often looked at as a separate and more dignified notion, in literature and in our collective consciousness it often insidiously overlaps with monstrosity or ugliness, being at times even synonymous. To shed light on these—unfortunate—crossings, I have thus decided to focus my research on physical and visible disability. However, it is crucial to be aware of the infinite meanings shoved into the term ‘disability,’ in order to consider it in its globality and propose an accurate definition. As an umbrella term, disability encompasses an extremely wide and diverse array of conditions—either physical, cognitive, sensory or intellectual—each translating into a unique individual experience, often difficultly comparable to one another. On what grounds then, is the ‘disabled’ category based? An answer is provided by Garland-Thomson, who explains in her seminal work *Extraordinary Bodies* that “the concept of disability unites a highly marked, heterogeneous group whose only commonality is being considered abnormal” (24). Disability thus defines itself in opposition to normality, but also simultaneously “demarcate[s] the fictive boundaries of normal,



able bodies” (Jenkins 1). A reciprocal process takes place, where bodily norms define what is acceptable or ideal, but are themselves, at the same time, continually redefined and narrowed down by occurrences of abnormality. If society perceives disability as abnormality, then its congeniality to monstrosity and ugliness becomes even more evident, while revealing the scope and influence of strict bodily norms.

What this further reveals, is that disability is nothing more than a social construct, dictated by ever-changing physical, psychological, and medical standards. According to these standards, the disabled subject is considered abnormal, defective, flawed: a deviance from how humans are supposed to be—able, healthy, sane and, if possible, aesthetically pleasing. Disability activists and scholars, to expose and counter this reductive view of disability, have first identified two opposing models: the medical model and the social model. The medical model is based on the above-mentioned view of disability that considers it as a defect inherent to the individual, a medical condition to be eradicated, corrected or cured. On the other hand, the social model recognises disability as a social construct and considers that the limitations and difficulties encountered by disabled people are systemic rather than individual, within a society that is designed by and for non-disabled people only. This model is also somewhat contested today since it ignores the physiological dimension and the suffering inherent to certain disabilities, which can be directly responsible for the isolation or hindering of the disabled person, without any interference from the environment.<sup>1</sup> Other models have been proposed to better account for these specificities and/or to better fit certain socio-cultural and historical contexts—some of which will be addressed in this thesis. However, while keeping a nuanced approach, the social model offers nonetheless a helpful framework to study disability in our modern and contemporary societies. To better understand the social model, a distinction is made between disability and impairment: the former being the social disadvantage experienced by people having an impairment, while the latter is the actual condition. It is not a particular impairment that disables people, but rather society’s perception of it and its lack of inclusion. This precision can be important when we look at disability throughout times, and get rid of our own modern biases. As Irina Metzler explains in the introduction to *Disability in Medieval Europe* “if disability is a social construct, as times and societies change so should notions of what is and what is not disability” (21). For example, someone having myopia today, in our modern Western societies, is not considered disabled, because their impairment is corrected by glasses, a device usually accessible and affordable.

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<sup>1</sup> On this issue, see Anastasiou, Dimitris, and James M. Kauffman. “The Social Model of Disability: Dichotomy between Impairment and Disability.” *Journal of Medicine & Philosophy*, vol. 38, no. 4, Aug. 2013, pp. 441–59.

However, before the invention of glasses,<sup>2</sup> myopia was a serious visual impairment, an actual disability, although not disabling in the same way it would be today since medieval life and tasks varied from our own. But Metzler goes even further, questioning the nature of impairment itself, she notes that it is neither a physical ahistorical fact, but “just as much a manifestation of time and space as disability” (*Disability in Medieval Europe* 21). She explains that medieval ‘scientific’ notions of impairment diverged from our modern conception of impairment, and thus produced different ‘scientific’ discourses for the same physiological condition:

a ‘cripple’ in the thirteenth century could share the same physiological condition with a ‘cripple’ in the later twentieth century, yet the scientific, medical or biological discourse of each time would already describe each body, though outwardly manifesting the same symptoms, in different ways (Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 21).

Hence, both disability and impairment are unstable cultural notions whose applicability varies culturally, historically and geographically. Metzler’s approach is, as we will see in the first part, to some extent contested by other scholars of medieval disability, however her monograph *Disability in Medieval Europe* published in 2006, as one of the first and most extensive research conducted on the subject, was foundational for the field of medieval disability studies and allowed new perspectives to emerge. Looking at disability in medieval times may seem at odds with research focusing on a work published in the twentieth century, yet one must remember that Middle-earth stems from the imagination of an erudite and meticulous medievalist scholar.

One cannot fully grasp the depth of J.R.R. Tolkien’s universe without taking into account his life and his academic career. His legendarium—as he liked to call it—was born first from his love of language, medieval literature, and the English countryside, but it was also deeply marked by his personal life. It is impossible to reduce Tolkien’s imagination to a definite number of influences, but I will focus on the four elements that I find the most pertinent to my research. The first are Tolkien’s childhood memories: they were crucial to the invention of Middle-earth, especially the few years he spent in the Warwickshire countryside. It is during that time, from the age of four until he was eight, that his love for nature and his taste for tales blossomed, as he discovered the Arthurian legends and the Fairy Books of Andrew Lang. A second strong influence is his faith, inherited from his mother. The rejection from her family because of her conversion to Catholicism and her early passing made Tolkien into a fervent Catholic. Even though religion is absent from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, God makes an appearance in *The Silmarillion*.

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<sup>2</sup> Or even today among precarious communities who cannot access ophthalmic prevention and care, myopia can become a disability. It is notably the cause of a health crisis in India where myopia is not detected soon enough, left untreated, and has become one of the leading causes of ‘avoidable blindness.’ See Saxena, Rohit et al. “Is myopia a public health problem in India?” *Indian journal of community medicine: official publication of Indian Association of Preventive & Social Medicine* vol. 38,2, 2013. pp 83-5.

The book, which presents the creation of the universe by ‘the One,’ Eru Ilúvatar, and the events of the First and Second Ages of Middle-earth, is of almost biblical nature. The first part, *The Ainulindalë*, works as a sort of Genesis, while the events following it portray the tragic fates of Elves and Men who defy divine authority. If there is no direct allusion to Christianity, God is there as the Creator, and as we will see, Christian values underlie the imaginary faith. A third influencing event is his participation in the First World War and the Battle of the Somme. Tolkien saw horror, mutilation and death from up close and it left on him an indelible mark that has inspired the darkest aspects of Middle-earth. Finally, comes the impact of Tolkien’s academic work on his legendarium. It was the work of a lifetime that grew alongside his research: an entire mythology built over decades as his philological work fed his fertile imagination. Tolkien had a perfect command of Old and Middle English and throughout his life studied, translated and interpreted medieval texts including *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*, *Pearl*, *Sir Orfeo*, and *The Wanderer*. Accordingly, his expertise in, and passion for, medieval literature played an important part in his sub-creation. From such readings, he was inspired to write an epic novel in a similar ‘high’ style, sometimes borrowing names and motifs, but always intertwining them into his narrative in a very subtle and personal way. But if Tolkien had an impressive knowledge of medieval literature, he was not a historian, and his vision of the Middle Ages was based on romanced accounts rather than historical data. And even if he most likely had excellent notions of medieval reality through his personal readings, the limited knowledge at this time must be taken into account: research fields were not as diverse as they can be today, many biases persisted among historians and people in general, and many preconceived ideas on the Middle Ages had yet to be discredited.

At this point, it seems necessary to make a distinction that is not always clear in the English language, but which has been explored in French: that between the notions of *médiévisme* and *médiévalisme*. In English the term ‘medievalism’ encompasses both notions interchangeably, and refers to the study of the Middle-Ages, as well as the revival of the period and the works it inspires. In French however, *médiévisme* refers only to the academic study of the civilisations and cultures of the time period defined by historians as the Middle Ages, while, as defined by Vincent Ferré, *médiévalisme* refers to the reception of the Middle Ages in the following centuries, including both its creative and erudite aspects (Ferré, *Médiévalisme* 8). A more precise and recent definition is given by Ferré in the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge imaginaire*:

Le médiévalisme, envisagé ici dans une perspective temporelle et un empan géographique larges, recouvre aussi bien la création de fictions (littéraires et artistiques) se référant au « Moyen Âge » que l’étude scientifique de cette période dont la délimitation temporelle fait débat ; aussi bien la réception que la réinvention d’un « Moyen Âge » qui apparaît comme une « création continue » (Ferré in Besson et al. 279).

Tolkien was thus a *médiéviste* by his academic career and a *médiévaliste* when it came to sub-creation. His intention was certainly not to reproduce exactly a medieval primary world, he never claimed that he did, nor was it the point of his endeavour. As he explains in “On Fairy-stories,” to build a credible Secondary World, rather than simply “arresting strangeness” Fantasy should lead to Secondary Belief. This state is reached through Enchantment which “produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose” (*OFS* 64). To achieve Enchantment, the sub-creator must find balance between sub-creating and drawing from the primary world so that the “inner consistency of reality” is maintained. He writes “‘the inner consistency of reality’ is more difficult to produce, the more unlike are the images and the rearrangements of primary material to the actual arrangements of the Primary World” (*OFS* 60). It can be agreed that Middle-earth is a quite successful secondary world, and that Tolkien did follow his own directives and found the balance required for effective Enchantment. Here, I want to look more closely at the “primary material” Tolkien used, which contributes to both the credibility and the appeal of his universe. Middle-earth is similar to our own world, or rather to a past version of it. Tolkien says so himself as he wrote in letter No. 183:

I am historically minded. Middle-earth is not an imaginary world... The theatre of my tale is this earth, the one in which we now live, but the historical period is imaginary. The essentials of that abiding place are all there (at any rate for inhabitants of N.W. Europe), so naturally it feels familiar, even if a little glorified by the enchantment of distance in time (*Letters* 239).

If he claims the historical period is imaginary, it is nonetheless very reminiscent of an actual historical period, the Middle Ages, and many of the ‘essentials’ are of medieval inspiration, although sometimes remodelled to fit the tale. In *Tolkien et le Moyen Âge*, researchers from various fields look at Tolkien’s medieval sources of inspiration and how they have seeped into Middle-earth. They note Tolkien’s accuracy in the use of feudalism, the similarity of warfare, armours and weapons, the closeness of onomastics, the architecture and edifices, and the importance of lineage: all elements borrowed from Western medieval civilisation. Moreover, Middle-earth is a pre-industrial world dependent on a rural economy,<sup>3</sup> where people travel by foot or by horse, and live in small villages or in cities dominated by grand castles and fortifications. It is a world where people are still called maidens, knights or lords, and in which the goal of the ultimate quest—beside defeating Evil—is the reinstatement of monarchy, of the rightful king onto the throne. If Tolkien had other sources of inspiration, and Middle-earth is not *stricto sensu* medieval, the Middle Ages are still a dominant theme. Ultimately, Middle-earth is a world that reflects an

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<sup>3</sup> Although Sauron and Saruman’s industries threaten this world, they are only anomalies to abolish to eventually retrieve the natural state of things—for a while at least.

idealised version of the Middle Ages, but that is still faithful in many regards, owing to Tolkien's knowledge of medieval literature and his 'historical mindedness' tainting his imaginary world with authenticity.

Within such an elaborate medievalist world, Fantasy can thrive, and it does chiefly through the peculiar inhabitants it harbours. Beyond Enchantment, Fantasy offers worlds that can be filled at will by its sub-creator with characters defying all biological rules. In the *Dictionnaire de la fantasy*, a sidebar on 'peoples and creatures' reads:

Gobelins, trolls, elfes et autres lutins : les mondes de fantasy sont peuplés d'êtres fabuleux, hérités du folklore populaire ou de mythes antiques et médiévaux, qui prennent toutes les tailles, toutes les formes, contribuant activement à un sentiment de dépaysement. À partir de Tolkien, ces créatures quittent l'imprécision merveilleuse des légendes pour être définies selon des caractéristiques plus précises et classées en différentes « races » (Besson et al. 224).

Fantasy, then, is an infinite source of strange, extraordinary and deviant bodies that Tolkien has exploited and refined. In the context of my research, Middle-earth offers a wide range of bodies to explore, both human and non-human, where physical characteristics can be taken to their extremes, where abnormality and monstrosity can thrive alongside ethereal beauty.

The goal of this thesis is thus to analyse the representations of bodies in Tolkien's legendarium. Seeing the apparent reluctance of Tolkien to write about and describe bodies, physiological aspects and impairment in depth, I needed to go and look for the smallest details, the briefest mentions, across almost all of his works set in Middle-earth. My corpus will thus not be limited to *The Lord of the Rings*, but will extend to *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, *The Children of Húrin*, and even some extracts from *The History of Middle-Earth*. Through the analysis of these works, I will look at deviant and ideal bodies, in order to identify the norms to which they answer, both in terms of aesthetics and physical ability. Taking the medievalist dimension of Middle-earth and disability studies as frameworks, medieval conceptions of physical disability will be compared to Tolkien's representations and help reveal how disability and impairment are portrayed and intertwined with other notions such as monstrosity and ugliness. Ultimately, the goal is to identify the vision of (dis)ability these representations reveal, and whether it is somewhat historically accurate or rather the reflection of modern biases. In a first part, focus will be put on the place of disability within medieval culture—its historical reality as well as its literary representations and symbolism—which will be consistently compared to Tolkien's characterisation and narrative. A second part will look at the cosmogony and the sub-creation of the various peoples and races, by studying their coming into the world, their place in the legendarium, their fate and characteristics. Then, I will analyse in the third part how the ideal

body is conceived by Tolkien and how it is enhanced and valued from an ableist<sup>4</sup> and Eurocentric perspective. Finally, through a more sociological prism, a look at the social and cultural impact of disability will allow to delve into the collective and individual reactions to disability in order to better understand its portrayal in literature—while a link impossible to ignore will be made with Tolkien's own experience of war.

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<sup>4</sup> The adjective 'ableist' refers to 'ableism,' that is, the discrimination and prejudice against disabled people. A more precise and comprehensive definition of this notion will be given in the final part.

## Part I

### Disability and its Medieval Conceptions

The Middle Ages are a largely romanticised period, to which are attached many stereotypes. Both idealised and undervalued, they have often been dubbed as the “Dark Ages” and considered a time of decline in knowledge and the arts, of dubious hygiene, great violence and backward medicine. It can be tempting to believe then, that in such a society, the fate of impaired individuals was miserable, especially from a progressist perspective which assumes that our contemporary societies are necessarily more advanced in terms of minorities’ rights and inclusion. Adding to this the weight of religious discourse as Christianity dominated the medieval West, it seems natural that would emerge the “popular modern stereotypical image of the medieval impaired as outcast, demonised, sinful and always disabled” (Metzler, “Disability in the Middle Ages” 46). And yet medieval reality is much more complex and nuanced than might be implied by literary representations. This part thus aims at exploring the reality of disability and impairment in medieval times and its representation in medieval texts while comparing its use by Tolkien in his mediievally inspired world.

#### *Disability and Impairment in the Middle Ages and in Middle-earth*

If impairment has always been a parameter of humanity, disability, according to the social model, is a modern notion, emerging from our capitalist, productivist, medicalised and normative societies. As mentioned in the introduction, it is through this prism that we apprehend disability today, and that it has been defined. This medical vision is tightly entwined with modern social security systems, since according to Goodley: “Authorised definitions of disability reflect bureaucratic requirements of governments to define their population, their institutions and key welfare professionals” (5). Then, outlining disability as a definite category has become a necessity as soon as states developed their own social security systems and took charge of the care of their impaired and ill population. People benefitting from social services needed to be clearly identified, according to precise criteria unified across the territory.

During the Middle Ages, long before the creation of any state-wide social security system, it was the Church who, locally, would take charge of people who could not provide for themselves, a portion of which were impaired. In her paper “Abled, Disabled, Enabled: An Attempt to Define Disability in Anglo-Saxon England,” Christina Lee explains this local process: “The measure of

charity or care that is given to the needy is not defined and depends on local and regional traditions: what may be regarded as ‘sick’ and in aid of support in one place, may be seen as normal somewhere else” (42-43). This model based on charity has been defined by Edward Wheatly as the religious model of disability (“Disability in Medieval Literature” 18). He explains that this religious model intersects with the social model, since it relied on help from medieval society at large, through the giving of alms, and the functioning of hospices and hospitals related to the Church. However, impaired people were not all poor beggars. Lee adds: “we should remember that Anglo-Saxon communities required a large range of occupations, many of which could be performed with an impairment” (43). Thus, impaired individuals were not all dependent on charity and many, thanks to the flexibility of the precapitalist workday (Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* 25), participated in the collective effort and were paid—without mentioning other forms of wealth creation, from which the clergy and aristocracy benefitted.

Impaired people thus worked and contributed to society according to their specificities. Medieval life was far from being as architecturally exclusive as modern urban life can be, and all sorts of prostheses, canes and solutions were found to accommodate those in need, since environmental obstacles were more easily overcome. Moreover, because of wars, the absence of corrective tools and of accessible and efficient reconstructive surgery, the prevalence and visibility of impairments of all sorts was great and meant that bodies were far from being as standardised as they are today. The fact that impairment was more common in the Middle Age makes its perception much less negative, thus impaired people were not excluded, invisibilised, segregated into institutions, or hindered for lack of accessibility, but were an integrant part of the community.

Finally, another reason for this absence of ‘disabled category’ is the lack of a term for it before the seventeenth century. Accordingly, Metzler writes:

The absence of an umbrella term for ‘disability’ during the medieval period allows for the linguistic taming of individual crippled, blind, deaf or otherwise impaired people, whereas modern society, by referring to ‘the disabled,’ places a collective emphasis on physical deviance (*Disability in Medieval Europe* 32).

This absence of collective identity—which will arrive much later with the medicalised and pathologizing view of disability and the need for a common fight for equal rights and accessibility—isolated impaired people while preserving their individuality. As Wheatley explains, medieval people would differentiate among impaired people rather than see them as a unified entity (“Disability in Medieval Literature” 17). Talking about disability in the Middle Ages is thus, at least according to Metzler, anachronistic. She concludes her study by stating that one



cannot speak of disability in this period because, apart from a few exceptions, impaired people were not specifically stigmatised or distanced from society because of their impairment.

Studying medieval disability can thus be tricky because it means looking back to the past from a rather modern perspective. Without surprise, some matters seem to have been overlooked: both Metzler and Wheatley's approaches have been nuanced and criticised. In the introduction to *Disability in the Middle Ages*, Joshua Eyler proposes to let go of the social model which opposes too strictly disability and impairment, but also to extend on Wheatley's religious model whose blind spot is to assume that all medieval people believed and followed Christian dictums and tied sin and holiness to impairment, thus leaving aside a portion of medieval culture. For Eyler, it is the cultural model, as defined notably by Mitchell and Snyder, which would be at this point the most fitting to the medieval context. In *Cultural Locations of Disability*, Mitchell and Snyder explain that the cultural model

recognize[s] disability as a site of phenomenological value that is not purely synonymous with the processes of social disablement. Such an emphasis does not hide the degree to which social obstacles and biological capacities may impinge upon our lives, but rather suggests that the result of those differences comes to bear significantly on the ways disabled people experience their environments and their bodies. Environment and bodily variation (particularly those traits experienced as socially stigmatized differences) inevitably impinge upon each other (6-7).

This means that the cultural model does not distinguish between disability and impairment, but rather understands disability as a more general term taking into account both corporeal and social limitations. Eyler adds: "This less divisive model allows us to take into account the entire spectrum of experiences for people with disabilities and does not force us to focus on constructed perceptions of disability at the expense of real, bodily phenomena" (6), but he also warns that the cultural model should be a template to improve and tailor to the needs of medieval disability studies, rather than an unquestionable theoretical framework to force onto it. Flexibility is required when it comes to such a complex notion as disability necessarily tied to our modern experiences, especially when trying to account for its reality in a period so far removed from us, with limited sources. It is no wonder then, that even Metzler herself struggled to maintain the distinction between disability and impairment: as pointed by Beth Tovey, she concludes her book by affirming that disability was not a medieval reality, and yet decided to name her book *Disability in Medieval Europe* (Tovey 136). This leaves us with a complex and multifaceted framework to study Tolkien's medievalist universe. Of course, Middle-earth is a fantasy world created by an author from the twentieth century, analysing it through a strictly medieval theoretical framework would not make sense since it is necessarily tainted by the beliefs and biases of its author. Rather, I choose to resort to the social model as used by Metzler, while borrowing the flexibility and

nuance of the cultural model. This means using the terms ‘disability’ and ‘disabled’ more loosely and, when needed, make the distinction to shed light on specific and more contemporary dynamics. This approach is completed by a further definitional split as introduced by Tovey and which seems fitting to my endeavour. She first builds on Tom Shakespeare’s “critical realist perspective” and his distinction between epistemology and ontology.<sup>5</sup> Disability is thus used to define social processes such as exclusion and prejudice arising from a negative epistemology of impairment, while impairment simply refers to the ontological reality of a condition (Tovey 136). But Tovey adds a third notion, incapacity, which is used

to denote those effects which arise from impairment without social mediation; physical effects which are basically unavoidable regardless of social attitudes. This concept becomes particularly useful when we consider a relatively technologically undeveloped society like Anglo-Saxon England, in which correctives for impairments were simply unavailable, rather than being denied deliberately or through social neglect (137).

And like pre-Conquest England, Middle-earth, as a proper medievalist world, is without question a “relatively technologically undeveloped society.” Hence, I use disability, impairment, and incapacity to examine the social and physical experiences of Tolkien’s characters. With this in mind, we can turn to medieval literature to look at how these notions were apprehended and deployed by medieval writers.

If Metzler’s postulate about medieval disability is right, or at least, partly right—that disability, as we understand it today, is anachronistic and that impaired people were not discriminated against because of their impairment—we can wonder, then, where do our preconceptions about disability come from? Edward Wheatley provides part of the answer, stating that “if medieval *society* found most disability unremarkable, such was not usually the case with medieval *literature*” (“Disability in Medieval Literature” 17). Literary representation is where our notions of disability and impairment were tainted with the extraordinary and tied to narratives of punishment and healing. Wheatley thus classifies examples of disabled characters from medieval literature into three categories: monsters, saints and sinners. We will look at monsters more closely below but the link between monstrosity and impairment—and often race and gender—is indeed frequently made in medieval literature according to Wheatley, as “monstrous deformity” is represented as “a genuine physical disability resulting in social ostracism” (“Disability in Medieval Literature” 21).

As for saints and sinners, the first sources are found in the Bible. As shown by Metzler, a few narratives linking sin and impairment are located in the Old Testament, while the New

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<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare, Tom. *Disability Rights and Wrongs*. Abingdon, 2006.

Testament rather contains tales of miraculous healings meant to prove Christ's power (*Disability in Medieval Europe* 42-43). This contrast marks a change in paradigm, from a vengeful God to a—slightly more—merciful and healing one, which is later reflected in medieval hagiographies full of narratives of martyrdom and healing miracles. Impairment was then either placed as a necessary condition for holiness, a laudable sacrifice, or as vessel for the intercession of God through healing. Punished sinners, on the other hand, continued to exist within popular texts such as Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath" or Langland's *Piers Plowman* (Wheatley, "Disability in Medieval Literature" 26).

But impairment was not always linked to the Christian beliefs of continental Europe. In medieval Norse literature, pre-Christian myths were recorded and revealed different representations of impairment. In his thesis *Children of a One-Eyed God: Impairment in the Myth and Memory of Medieval Scandinavia*, Michael David Lawson explains:

In the Norse world, impairment was interpreted not as a liability or weakness but as a normative element in human existence – one that even the gods themselves were beholden to. Therein, impairment was viewed as an aspect of the divine or a sacrifice that gained the affected something beyond the scope of human understanding, whether that be prophecy or another heightened sense. In other words, impaired individuals were made in their gods' image (54-55).

With its fallible and mortal gods, Norse mythology offers a much less moralising take on impairment than Christian narratives do, and it does not aim at the eradication of said impairment. If the divine also comes into play, it is not for the same reasons and even then, positive gain from impairment is not the rule: "An impaired individual was not cursed or lacking, at best they shared a mark with the divine and at worst they simply were experiencing a facet of life unknown to some" (Lawson 54). Accordingly, the *Poetic Edda* gives a rather surprisingly inclusive perspective:

The lame can ride horses, the handless drive herds,  
the deaf can fight and do well,  
better be blind than to be burnt,  
no one has use for a corpse (qtd. in Barker and Murray 1)

In these few lines dating back to the thirteenth century, impairment is relativised, and acknowledged as a part of humanity which does not necessarily result in total disablement, exclusion, or stigma, nor is it attributed any particular meaning. Rather, it is fact of life that puts death into perspective and advocates for the impaired active participation in society.

Tolkien, as a medievalist scholar, was evidently influenced by Christian, Old English, and Old Norse medieval literature when it came to his own characterisation. And yet, impairment is far from being as present in his work as it is in the medieval corpus. In *LotR* and *The Hobbit*,

there are no characters actually disabled, nor impaired, except for Frodo with his wounds, and Sauron who lost a finger, but since he then existed without body it cannot be considered especially significant. If we delve a bit further into Tolkien's work, we find in the 'Silmarillion'<sup>6</sup> and its related texts, a handful of characters actually impaired: Morgoth, Maedhros, Beren, Sador, Brandir, Gwindor—and Niënor temporarily.<sup>7</sup> But they remain a minority compared to the myriad of characters devised by Tolkien, and their visibility is often limited. This is even more puzzling when we look at medieval chronicle accounts of combat. McInnes explains:

chronicle descriptions are often resonant of the cut and thrust of battle and include the sort of detail that would have appealed to warriors themselves. They provide a realistic alternative to the more flowery depictions of conflict in contemporary romance, many of which are seriously unrealistic, and they do not recoil from sanguinary accounts of the realities of medieval warfare (104).

Compared to "sanguinary accounts," Tolkien's descriptions of war scenes indeed seem quite unrealistic, or at the very least softened. This relative discretion about physical harm could be attributed to the fact that *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are part of the 'Red Book' written by Bilbo, Frodo and completed by Sam, while the 'Silmarillion' is a record of oral Elven myths and legends: they are all presented by Tolkien as tales written for posterity. We can imagine their authors' intentions to depict their own side in slightly better light, or at least—maybe even unconsciously—to downplay the harm and death they have suffered. This is in line with what McInnes write about medieval chroniclers, who despite describing injuries and death much more extensively than Tolkien does, altered reality in other ways: first, they were not eye-witnesses of the battles they described which means they had to embellish the battles and fill some gaps themselves; second, they were meant to please a certain audience and thus used flattering depictions of their patrons; third, they were "accused of focusing solely on the elite to the detriment of the 'common man' and of exaggerating losses among the opposition while moderating the losses of their own side" (104). Frodo—and the other Middle-earth chroniclers—like a primary world medieval chronicler, recounts battles he has not always witnessed, thus writing from other people's reports who might not have wished to linger on the gruesome fate of their fellow warriors. Then, if the Hobbits are embodiments of the 'common man,' due to the requirements and limitations of the novel, Tolkien could not write too much about the death

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<sup>6</sup> The 'Silmarillion' is the totality of the foundational myths passed on by Elves and Men, which contains the *Ainulindalë*, the *Valaquenta*, the *Quenta Silmarillion*, the *Akallabêth*, and Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age, but extends to many more narratives and alternative versions, some recollected in *The History of Middle-earth*. *The Silmarillion* is a simplified version of selected texts from the 'Silmarillion', edited and published by Christopher Tolkien in 1977, after his father's death.

<sup>7</sup> Niënor or Niniel, Túrin's sister, is temporarily disabled as she loses her memory, regresses to the state of child and needs to learn everything again. But since her impairment is psychological and cognitive rather than physical, it will not be addressed in this thesis.

and injuries of every ‘common’ soldier and had to focus on his protagonists—but still, very little is said about the resulting losses and the cost paid by the armies of Gondor and Rohan. Finally, as Frodo participated and played a decisive part in winning the war and helped put Aragorn on the throne, the projected image of the King, his companions and the armies on their side needed to be a positive, strong one, as too much blood and loss would have tarnished the memory of the collective victory.

Despite this flagrant scarcity of impairment, what Tolkien gets right about it, however, is that individual identity prevailed over collective identity, and the way it transpired through onomastics. In “What’s in a Name? Considering the Onomastics of Disability in the Middle Ages,” Metzler found that during medieval times it was common to find personal names which reflected or described significant physical traits and thus often referred to actual impairments. She gives examples such as “Eadmer Anhande” (the one-handed), “Robert clubfoot,” or “Herman the Lame” and she underlines the passive nature of these names: they were not selected by the person but attributed by others (Metzler, “What’s in a Name?”<sup>21</sup>). Among the many examples given by Metzler I did not choose these randomly, but precisely because they echo Tolkien’s own choice of names for his characters: Beren *Erchamion*, or the “One-handed”, Sador *Labadal* or “Hopafot” and Brandir the Lame, also called “Club-foot” by Túrin. All names are given to them by others, to reflect a main trait of their identity. The few characters with an impairment are reduced to it: it becomes the main facet of their identity, the stigma being not only physical but directly tied to their name.

If we extend the definition of impairment and take on an etic approach at an extra-diegetic level (as readers and observers outside of Middle-earth) we could include the short Dwarves and Hobbits but, as they are endemic to Middle-earth, they do not qualify as impaired within the secondary world—their particular case will be explored in the final part. Looking at Middle-earth from within then, with so few impaired characters, it is difficult to identify which model of disability fits the inhabitants’ episteme. Impaired characters must get on by themselves, or seem to be supported by their communities and never seem to be actually disabled, which could suggest a social model, where society understands that disability is mainly rooted in environmental limitations and attempts to reduce them rather than eradicate the impairment. However, with so few occurrences and since no character has a seriously incapacitating impairment it is difficult to confirm. On the other hand, the absence of religion, or at least of religious institutions, prevents the setting of a religious model of disability based on charity. The closest thing there is to a hospital are the Houses of Healing found within the fortified city of Minas Tirith. They are the only example of institutionalised care for the sick and wounded, and point rather to a medical model as their function, as stated in their name, seems not to go further

than healing. Nonetheless, there are no information on the kind of medical care provided: is it meant only to mend battle-wounds and punctual injuries? Or does it also offer long-term care for lasting conditions? Since no other place of this type is mentioned in all of Tolkien's work and with so little details given, this is not enough to settle on the medical model of disability either. But the way Tolkien writes about wounding and healing can give us the beginning of an answer.

### *Wounding and Healing*

Impairment, as we have seen, was common in the Middle Ages and one of the reason is medieval warfare was not as lethal as modern warfare with the arrival of gunpowder. Woosnam-Savage and DeVries found startling survival rates among wounded soldiers for which they give credit to the efficiency of protective armours and war surgery (47). According to them the most common way to die on the medieval battlefield was exsanguination:

Battlefield victims could suffer sharp-force trauma wounds from being cut or stabbed; penetration-force trauma wounds from being shot by projectile weapons, such as arrows, bolts, or balls; or blunt-force trauma wounds from being bashed or smashed. Sometimes these wounds were fatal immediately (if a vital organ or the brain were hit) or almost immediately (if one of the major arteries were hit or an organ ruptured). At other times, if stabbed or cut, and the blood flow not quickly and completely stanching, those wounded would linger until too much of their blood had been spilled for them to survive: exsanguination. Bashed soldiers, again, if there was no brain damage or internal bleeding, generally survived their wounds, although not without resulting fractures, tears, or bruises (Woosnam-Savage and DeVries 28-29).

And indeed, surviving does not mean avoiding impairment. More than fractures, tears, and bruises, Turner, in "The Aftermath of Wounds," notes that "skeletal remains tell stories of those who lived for days, if not years, after damage to eyes, teeth, and heads, or missing hands, feet, arms, and legs, or damage to other internal ribs, hips, or backs" (574). This explains why impairment was especially visible in medieval literature in which wounding could be graphically detailed as has been established with McInnes' research on medieval chronicles of war. In addition, Sayers explains that "wounds are the very makings of epic literature" (494). However, in Tolkien's work this does not seem to be the case: epic resides elsewhere. Tolkien does describe some wounds, but compared to the number of wars, attacks and dangerous situations the characters find themselves in, they are not that numerous. Few characters die, very few get impaired, and even fewer require medical care or surgery.

In "Médecine et guérison dans *Le Seigneur des Anneaux*," Jérôme Coudurier-Abaléa analyses Tolkien's limited use of medicine in a world where bodies are regularly put under extreme

pressure, and notes a form of aversion for bodies and physiological issues. Middle-earth medicine is clearly rudimentary, based on plants and herbs. It resembles to some extent medieval medicine with the use of “simple” medicine, that is a remedy made from a single ingredient like the *athelas* plant—which Coudurier-Abaléa likens to sage—used by Aragorn on Frodo’s wound at Weathertop, and at the Houses of Healing. He also mentions the use of strong revitalising potions, like the Elves’ *miruvor*, or the Orcs’ “burning liquid” which recalls the medieval use of analgesic or narcotic alcoholic beverages aptly named “eau de vie,” or beverages made from hemlock or poppy (Coudurier-Abaléa 271). Indeed, the Orcs, despite their beastly characterisation, nonetheless possess unappealing but efficient medicinal practices—again from plants or non-identified ingredients. Coudurier-Abaléa finally points to the philosophical and theological aspects of medieval medicine that are lacking in the healing methods pictured by Tolkien.

If his medicine is not accurately medieval, Tolkien does taint it with a medievalist touch as he refers to it as “leechcraft” (*LotR* 860), an archaic term from the Old English *lāce* or physician, giving *lāce-bōc* or “leech book” for a book of remedies, and *lāce-craeft* for the art of healing. This choice of an archaic term inevitably denotes an archaic practice. In a note from *The Nature of Middle-earth*, he compares this leechcraft to the much more elevated *bröangolmë*<sup>8</sup> or “lore of the body” and arts of healing which the Númenoreans learned from the Elves (322). As their superior constitution meant that they seldom fell ill, they were not in much need of it, but when sickness struck them, they saw it as an opportunity to advance their knowledge.

An example of this is shown in *RK*, when Aragorn appears as the great healer and saviour after being called forth by Ioreth: “For it is said in the old lore: *The hand of the kings are the hands of a healer*. And so the rightful king could ever be known” (*LotR* 860). As Aragorn “held a hand upon [Faramir’s] brow” (*LotR* 865) and required *athelas* or “kingsfoil” to heal Faramir, Eowyn, Merry, and many others, how could we not recognise in him the figure of the thaumaturgic king? Although it is not a divine healing miracle, it is a sort of miracle nonetheless for he is the only one left versed in *bröangolmë*: his knowledge passed on from his ancestors makes him the only one who can save the wounded. Suffering and impairment are used as narrative tools in order to prove that Aragorn is the rightful king, the true descendent of the Númenoreans Kings of Men, blessed with the favour of the forgotten Valar.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Coudurier-Abaléa denounces the fact that in *LotR* medicinal acts are always effective: no one dies, everybody heals (274)—at least

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<sup>8</sup> Quenya, from *bröa* (“body”) + *ñolmë* (“lore, knowledge”).

<sup>9</sup> The Valar are fourteen of the Ainur who decided to enter the world, shape it for the arrival of Elves and Men, watch over it and protect it from Morgoth. The Ainur are secondary divinities, angelic powers in the service of the One God, Eru Ilúvatar.

physically. I would add that not only are they effective, but they are completely devoid of any physical interaction, they are 'clean', without blood, infection, stitches, surgery, or amputation.

In a secondary world where illness and impairment are not fatal or disabling but used as narrative tools, and bodies are by default healthy and resistant, it is no surprise that very limited medicine is sufficient. Ultimately, even if there are no occurrences of corrective treatment or mentions of prosthesis intending to make impaired bodies fit into a norm, the few medicinal acts performed in Middle-earth and the systematic healing let transpire Tolkien's contemporary medical approach to disability and impairment. Tolkien's work, despite being punctuated by many great battles, has limited depictions of wounding and physical pain, and even these have a narrative purpose, are succinctly described, and short-lasting, or simply never mentioned again. As explained by Clare Moore, "if there is a continued suffering that results from the injury sustained by a character it is almost always transformed into psychological pain" (00:10:32).

Physical pain is maybe to be read as a sign of spiritual weakness, and one's ability to control and overcome it is proof of one's mental strength and faith, as it was the case with salvific wounds in tales of self-mutilating saints who rather than being enslaved "by a ferocious force that could dehumanize people, ascetics and self-inflictors became masters of pain, embracing it freely and using their sensations to reach new levels of spirituality" (Cohen, qtd. in Tracy and DeVries 18). In Tolkien's world, only evil characters like Morgoth suffer from lasting physical pain which is a possible sign of his 'dehumanisation'. He is wounded several times, first by the burning of the Silmarils<sup>10</sup> as his "hands were burned black by the touch of those hallowed jewels, and black they remained ever after, nor was he ever free from the pain of the burning, and the anger of the pain" (*S* 86). And another time by Fingolfin and the great Eagle Thorondor: "Morgoth went ever halt of one foot after that day, and the pain of his wounds could not be healed; and in his face was the scar that Thorondor made" (*S* 180). Pain is a sensory experience, physical and lasting. According to Moore, "it is the villain of the story who exemplifies the most vivid and sustained experience of physical pain resulting from disability" (00:13:34). Despite being a Vala, a spirit, and supposedly one of the most powerful beings in the universe, his physical pain relegates him to the rank of a mere body, a soulless monster, devoid of the capacity to overcome physical pain granted only to those moved by pure intentions and goodness.

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<sup>10</sup> The three inestimable jewels crafted by Fëanor, within which is contained the Light from the Two Trees illuminating Valinor before being destroyed by Morgoth and the monstrous spider Ungoliant. The Silmarils were stolen by Morgoth and sought out by the Elves throughout the First Age, causing the long War of the Jewels. They are at the origin of the name 'Silmarillion.'



On the other hand, good characters experience a pain that has more psychological depth, a sign that wounds have reached deeper, and that there is in fact, a soul to be maimed. Maedhros and Beren, mentioned above, retain a similar psychological pain from the loss of their hand: Maedhros heals but “the shadow of his pain was in his heart” while for Beren “suffering was graven in his face” (S 215). The phantom of their pain hangs over them, not as a bodily sensation but as a spiritual torment. Similarly, Frodo’s physical wounds trigger psychological pain, so that he never truly recovers from them and knows it, as he tells Sam: “‘I am wounded,’ he answered, ‘wounded; it will never really heal’” (*LotR* 1025). Yet he does not reach the solace experienced by medieval saints, but rather remains in a melancholic state, his salvation eventually awaiting him in the Undying Lands. There, he and the other mortals will get “peace of mind, and *being healed of all hurts both of mind and body*, could at last surrender themselves: die of free will, and even of desire, in *estel* [trust] (*HoMe III: Morgoth’s Ring* 340-341, emphasis added). This means that despite Metzler’s interpretation of Frodo as martyr who will retain his disability (“Tolkien and Disability” 51), he actually will not sustain his wounds in the Elves’ last resting place, but be fully healed before his ultimate death.

Finally, another important aspect to keep in mind is the distinction between types of wounds and their perception. Wounds received in battles did not grant the same social status as wounds received in punishment, torture, those self-inflicted or accidental. Morgoth’s abovementioned face scar can be read as a mark of humiliation. For Skinner, in early medieval Europe, face scars were a source of shame and humiliation: “far from being markers of a warrior’s prowess, scars bore testimony to being hit or failing to defend oneself” (100), especially when the victim could not retaliate against his assailant and prove he injured him back or killed him. Here, Fingolfin and Thorondor escape alive, making revenge impossible and the wounds and scar even more shameful for Morgoth who is trying to assert his domination over Middle-earth but is humiliated by an Elf and an eagle, his failure displayed on his face, impossible to conceal. The fact that Aragorn escapes of all battles and confrontations completely unscathed then makes sense: he is expected to become king and, as will be touched on in the final part, a scar or impairment would harm his honour and compromise his legitimacy as leader.

### *Medieval and Tolkienian Aesthetics of Good and Evil*

During the Middle Ages, good and evil are defined by the Church and generally answer to diametrically opposed aesthetic norms, in order to facilitate their representation, and their understanding. Hence, all that is good is beautiful, and all that is evil is ugly. If Augustine of Hippo argues that all creation of God, whether ugly or disharmonious, remains a creation of God

and thus deserves its place within Nature, most representations use ugliness as symbol of evil. Emmanuelle Klinka, in “La laideur, stigmaté du Mal” evokes this dichotomy: “Dans l’esprit des exégètes chrétiens, dont Beatus, le Beau était d’essence divine, corollaire au Bien, en tant que manifestation visible de l’ordre de Dieu. Ces concepts se traduisent dans la réalisation artistique par les notions de perfection, d’ordre, de stabilité, d’harmonie...” (5). She then mentions that the figures expressing the opposing values such as imperfection or physical and moral disorder, are “référénts du Laid, corollaire du Mal” (Klinka 22). As mentioned in the introduction, Tolkien presents a similar vision in “On Fairy-stories,” he writes: “So that to us evil and ugliness seem indissolubly allied. We find it difficult to conceive of evil and beauty together” (*OFS* 72). This dichotomy inherited from our medieval past has gone beyond its simple function of religious representation to become, according to Tolkien, something engraved in our minds, difficult to conceive otherwise.

This aesthetic dichotomy thus invokes a Manicheism whose opposing sides are easily identified, clearly distinct: the Beautiful and Good against the Ugly and Evil. In one of his letters Tolkien writes about *LotR*:

The story is cast in terms of a good side, and a bad side, beauty against ruthless ugliness, tyranny against kinship, moderated freedom with consent against compulsion that has long lost any object save mere power, and so on; but both sides in some degree, conservative or destructive, want a measure of control (*Letters* 178-179).

How could we not see in these lines blatant Manicheism? Moreover, one that is tied to aesthetic norms: nothing is more telling than the words “beauty against ruthless ugliness.” This apparent resort to Manicheism is one of the main criticism Tolkien received on his work, and at this point it does seem fair. But in spite of those words, Tolkien strongly denied it. He does nuance his take by admitting that both sides eventually aim to take control, even though of course one is more extreme than the other. More importantly, the plot of *LotR* should not be isolated from the rest of Tolkien’s work. In *The Silmarillion*, Elves are far from being altar boys. If in *LotR* they seem to be gentle and on the ‘good side,’ it is not representative of their nature in the long run. A first hint is given by Galadriel’s reaction to the sight of the Ring in *FotR*. Then, in *The Silmarillion*, Elves kill each other. Fëanor commits the first “Kinslaying” by attacking Teleri Elves. Despite the fact that Elves are remarkable for their beauty, they are far from being indisputably good but are complex characters, sometimes victims of their pride, capable of cruelty and abuse of power.

Even in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, God himself can be wrathful and his servants vengeful. Behrooz demonstrates this in her analysis of Apocalypse manuscripts: she

mentions the “terrifyingly destructive power of angels” who, despite being agents of God and intended as forces for good, can be violent and destructive, but are never depicted as ugly or monstrous (7). This is clearly reminding of the punishment cast by the Valar upon Númenor. When the Númenórean elites defy them, refusing to honour them and going against their rules, their punishment is fatal: a giant wave destroys the island and engulfs Beleriand, the Western part of the map, leading to the quasi-extinction of the Númenórean people. This episode does go against the simplistic Manicheism reproached to Tolkien. The Valar, who are divine entities described as majestic, cause the destruction of thousands of people, for the most part innocent, and thus cannot be considered as unequivocally good.

Tolkien was thus more nuanced than he first lets on and the separation between beauty and evil is indeed sometimes crossed. However, Elvish linguistics tell us a different story and give interesting insight on how Elves apprehended the world. In *The Nature of Middle-earth*, a chapter entitled by Carl F. Hostetter “Beauty and Goodness” gives us etymological information on the Elvish stem word √man, meaning ‘good.’ Tolkien writes:

This implies that a person/thing is (relatively or absolutely) ‘unmarred’: that is in Elvish thought unaffected by the disorders introduced into Arda by Morgoth: and therefore is true to its nature and function. If applied to mind/spirit it is more or less equivalent to morally good; but applied to bodies it naturally refers to *health* and to *absence of distortions, damages, blemishes*, etc. (*Nature* 173).

The word for good then also refers to bodily perfection, the emphasis, made by the author himself, is revealing of a certain idea of goodness indissociable from physical integrity and aestheticism. But what is even more interesting is the stem word √ban referring to ‘beauty’ and its derivatives in Quenya and Sindarin:

Quenya *vana*, name of Valië, the most perfectly ‘beautiful’ in form and feature (also ‘holy’ but not august or sublime), representing the natural unmarred perfection of form in living things. *vanya*, beautiful, unmarred, of fair unspoiled form, &c. *vanima* (only of living things, especially Elves or Men) ‘beautiful’. *úvano*, *úvanimo*, a monster, corrupt or evil creature. Sindarin *bân* or *bain*, fair good, whole-some, favourable, *not* dangerous, evil or hostile (*Nature* 173).

The root for beauty also holds the notion of physical integrity as natural: “the natural unmarred perfection of form” suggests an initial uncorrupted state of living things, leaving no room for deviance at the stage of creation—the marring of form can come only later and incidentally. Furthermore, the antonyms created with the negative prefix *-ú* do not equate the contrary of beauty simply to ugliness or impairment, but rather refer to “a monster, corrupt or evil creature,” linking physical appearance to morality. In Sindarin, *bân* means something “whole-some,” or

physically healthful and “*not* dangerous, evil or hostile” (*Nature* 173). Again, the opposite of beautiful is evil. The semantic proximity between Elvish ‘good’ and ‘beautiful’ is telling of Tolkien’s aesthetic and moralistic vision of the world. This vision transpires through the languages he invented, while in turn these languages provide mental shortcuts to the Elves that speak it, ensuring the perennity of aesthetic norms. In short, what is physically perfect cannot be evil, and what is evil or monstrous cannot be beautiful.

In the Appendices to *The Nature of Middle-earth*, Carl F. Hostetter elaborates on “Metaphysical and Theological Themes” with a particularly relevant entry on “Evil (as Lack of Perfection).” Hostetter links Tolkien’s conception of evil to that of St. Thomas Aquinas, arguing that evil is a lack or deficiency in a “thing’s *perfection of form*: that is a failure or prevention of a thing to fully be or become that which by its nature it ought to be, in all its essentials” (*Nature* 406). If evil as deficiency is a hindrance to the natural form intended by God, this means that deficiency, impairment, or any kind of defect are not natural, not allowed to be simple facts of nature or random variations of corporeality, but rather necessarily the result of a corruption by evil. Hostetter then gives an interesting example:

Hence it is in this sense evil if, say, a squirrel, which has the form (in Tolkien’s parlance, pattern) of a quadrupedal tree-dwelling rodent with a bushy tail that typically feeds on nuts and seeds, either lacks or is deprived of one or more limbs: it does not fully realize, or no longer fully realizes, its form. This of course does not mean that such a squirrel is itself evil, only that it has suffered an evil (in this Thomistic sense) (*Nature* 406).

It is not the subject that is evil because of an impairment, but the impairment itself, which deprives the subject of its intended function. Impairment is thus attributed an inherently negative connotation. Yet, even more relevant to our argument are the following lines: “Obviously, too, there are degrees of such evil: if losing one or more limbs, a squirrel is no longer able to dwell in trees or even obtain food for itself, then it suffers more of an evil than if, say, it lacked/lost part of its tail” (*Nature* 406). Here Hostetter touches on a crucial point: impairment in itself is problematic, but true evil is actually proportional to the degree of disability caused by the impairment. This distinction is somewhat in line with the social model. Evil is the harm resulting from disability, it is what the social model would identify with hindering environmental factors, inaccessibility and ableism. If goodness is dependent on a subject or object being “true to its nature and function” (*Nature* 406), then evil can be understood as a disabling process. Inversely, impairment and disability are evils imposed to the subject, who then is necessarily a victim whose suffering depends on their degree of disablement.

## *Monstrosity, Impairment, Ugliness*

Monstrosity is difficult to define as a cultural and subjective notion. During the Middle Ages, as explained by Lecouteux, monstrosity takes on a theological dimension: “pour l’Occident médiéval, si le monstre existe, c’est par permission divine” (10). Not only are monsters far from being imaginary, since people actually believe in them, but they are part of God’s plan. In the first medieval definition of monstrosity given in his *Book of Etymologies*, Isidore of Seville explains:

Les monstres, dit Varron, sont ceux que l’on voit naître contre nature, mais ils ne naissent pas contre nature puisqu’ils sont faits par volonté divine... Les gentils appellent Dieu tantôt Dieu, tantôt nature. Le monstre ne va donc pas l’encontre de la nature mais simplement de ce que nous nommons nature” (XI,3, 1sq, qtd. in Lecouteux 10).

But even if monsters are theoretically divine creations, they embody all the anxieties of a society at a given time. Monstrosity takes root in what seems to us unnatural, inadequate with God’s presumed will. It takes root in deviance, in extraordinary bodies, either subject to simple physical alterations, mutilations or impairments, or deformities of all kinds, or are either born of exaggerated and exotic travel narratives, producing fantasies of hybrid creatures and ‘wild men’ where difference in ethnicity and/or religion, as well as geographical distance, become constituents of the monstrous. The Middle Ages are filled with such tales, including the above-mentioned *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, John Mandeville and Marco Polo’s *Travels*, or the legends of Alexander the Great. Such stories fed the already fertile imagination of humans eager for marvellous stories and wanting to uncover the world and its mysteries. Because the monster is both the mystery and the explanation, or as put by Kappler: “il obscurcit, autant qu’il le révèle, l’ordre universel ; il l’obscurcit pour le révéler” (43). Terrifying or repulsive, sometimes mythical or imaginary, coming from distant lands or born next door, neither fully human nor fully animal, monsters destabilise us, they scare us and fascinate us at the same time, and thus blur the categories of our episteme. Like impairment and deviance help define the norm, the monstrous disrupts our vision of the world to help us question it and redefine it.

A more recent approach to the question by Asa Simon Mittman agrees with this and proposes to define monsters not only by their physical traits, their real or supposed existence, or their geographical distance (which are nonetheless crucial), but by the impact they produce on us. He writes:

Above all, the monstrous is that which creates this sense of vertigo, that which call into question our (their, anyone’s) epistemological worldview, highlights its fragmentary and inadequate nature and thereby asks us...to acknowledge the failures of our systems of categorization (8).

Monsters, according to him, are also defined from the inside, as our vision of the world is upset by the unclassifiable monstrous, but also from the outside when we apply an external perspective on other cultures. Mittman adds: “similar processes are enacted within individual cultures to marginalize segments of their own populace: sexual, gender, ethnic and religious minorities, or the *disabled*” (8, emphasis added). The monster is thus either deemed monstrous from the start because it is not part of our known world and society, or, if considered deviant within said society, it is made monstrous by the societal normative gaze and expelled from it. Either way, monsters are deviant and marginalised, excluded and stigmatised, they are the ultimate embodiment of Otherness.

Now if, as seen the previous part and according to Tolkien’s Thomistic view of evil, all that is ugly and impaired can be considered evil, or a corruption of the intended perfection of form and function, then what of monstrosity? When ugliness and/or impairment are taken to their extreme, materialising a deviance so visibly striking and unfamiliar, questioning the very nature and categorisation of the creature involved, and thus effectively producing a significant impact on others—whether fear, fascination or disgust—then we can consider that all the conditions for monstrosity are met. And it inevitably makes monstrosity a manifestation of evil, at least in Middle-earth.

But on the premise that monsters are defined in part by the impact they produce on us and are culturally subjective, what do we make of the fictional fantasy beings of Middle-earth? In a successful secondary world, what would seem to be a monster in our primary world could seem strange and unfamiliar, but not necessarily monstrous, since it would make sense within that world. The impact must then be produced first on the other inhabitants of the secondary world, the ones we can relate with, and whose stance will reinforce and confirm our own biases. In Middle-earth, the inhabitants the readers will relate with are mainly the Hobbits, who despite their small size are the protagonists, and of course the Men. We can count to a lesser extent Elves, who are too otherworldly to be truly relatable, but function as ideals—as will be touched on in part III—and Dwarves who are a bit particular but still possess a humane character. The monsters then, are those who produce an impact on these people, but also those who deviates the most from them. The monsters must be *their* Others, before being ours.

Evidently, the first example of monstrous beings in Middle-earth are the Orcs, they are literal “corruptions” of Men and Elves, “mockeries of the Children of Ilúvatar” (S 310). Their nature and form will be dealt with in the second part, but their monstrosity is undeniable. To the kidnapped Hobbit Pippin, they are a literal nightmare: “Pippin lay in a dark and troubled dream... hundreds of hideous orc-faces grinned at him out the shadows, hundreds of hideous arms grasped

at him from every side” (*LotR* 444). Orcs are described as “swart, slant eyed” (*LotR* 451), “beastly” (*LotR* 453) and “unclean” (*S* 310) which emphasises their savagery, while their eating habits are decried by the poor Hobbit who implies they eat human flesh: “He was famished but not yet so famished as to eat flesh flung to him by an Orc, the flesh of he dared not guess what creature” (*LotR* 450). Orcs are thus monsters by their physical deviance, but by their cultural difference too, anthropophagy being a common trait of medieval monstrosity. Debra Higgs-Strickland, making a link between monstrosity, race and religion in the late Middle-ages, notes a similar process involving Muslims and Mongols who were accused “among other abhorrent behaviors, of the most atrocious crime of cannibalism, which linked them directly to the monstrous race of Anthropophagi (Man-Eaters)” (375). We will see that the Orcs share other similitudes with the infamous Mongols, but either way their monstrosity is defined from the outside, the whole race being considered monstrous, too far removed from the other Incarnates.

On the other hand, Gollum can be defined as monstrous too, but this time from the inside. Even though Bilbo does not know it when he encounters the creature, Sméagol is originally a Hobbit. It is the Ring which initiates his monstrous transformation, first worsening his behaviour, making him vile and malicious. This leads to his effective exclusion from society as he was “shunned by all his relations (when visible)” (*LotR* 53) and “they called him *Gollum*, and cursed him, and told him to go far away; and his grandmother, desiring peace, expelled him from the family and turned him out of her hole” (*LotR* 54). His appearance becomes monstrous only later: “he had become deformed during his long inhabiting of the dark lake” (*Nature* 195). His initial form is impaired, he has become completely disproportionate: “he had for his size a very large head and a long thin neck, very large eyes (protuberant) and thin lank hair” (*Nature* 195-196). Tolkien continues: “He remained a human being, not animal or a mere bogey, even if deformed in mind and body: an object of disgust, but also of pity” (*Nature* 196). His monstrosity thus meets all the conditions required: Gollum has been marginalised, pushed to the depths of the earth, he is physically deformed and produces a strong impact on those that see him. The Orcs and Gollum are only the two most obvious examples of monstrosity, but many other monstrous creatures populate Middle-earth, some of which will be studied below.

## *Conclusion*

Tolkien borrows from medieval literature more than from medieval history. His representation of impairment and disability is greatly limited compared to the actual banality of impairment in the Middle Ages. This absence prevents us from identifying with certainty any model of disability governing Middle-earth, where society does not seem either particularly preoccupied or

completely hostile to the disabled. Most of the characters are in fact highly resistant, which explains the scarcity of medical acts and the fact that greater structure of care or social organisation are not required. Such strong and healthy characters might be explained by Tolkien's notions of good and evil which give us an interesting take on impairment, beauty and monstrosity. Despite claiming to avoid Manicheanism, Tolkien does oppose beauty, perfection of form and function, and goodness—embodied by the 'good side'—to ugliness, impairment, and evil—embodied by the 'bad side' filled with monstrous figures. This perspective will help us understand the genesis of Middle-earth and the part attributed to each of its category of inhabitants.



## Part II

### Norms and Deviance in the Foundational Narratives

The first part revealed that Middle-earth's conception of evil was borrowed from Thomas Aquinas and constructed as any kind of impairment to the natural perfection of form. It also appeared that, compared to the medieval reality of impairment, the medievalist and war-torn world of Middle-earth greatly lacks disabled presence and representation. Apart for the few above-mentioned exceptions, the characters are mysteriously spared any impairment and blessed with incredible constitutions. To better understand this phenomenon, this part looks at the foundational narratives found in the 'Silmarillion' in order to uncover the bodily norms stemming from the creation of the world and its inhabitants.

#### *Ainulindalë: Genesis and Harmony*

The creation of Æa, the world encompassing Middle-earth, occurred through a musical theme called the *Ainulindalë* and as a result of the Vision of the God Eru Ilúvatar. This *Ainulindalë*, or Music of the Ainur, was initiated by Ilúvatar who showed the Ainur, his secondary divinities, his Vision of the world so that they could each participate in the creation through their own song, producing together a perfect harmony.

Then Ilúvatar said to them: 'Of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty had been awakened into song.' (S 3).

This new world devised in harmony is thus clearly expected to result in "great beauty" and reflects medieval conceptions of the universe based on order, harmony and beauty. In line with the importance of the universe's harmony, medieval thoughts linked the macrocosmic universe to the microcosmic human body, and posited that the harmony between body and soul reflected the harmony of the universe. Tolkien explores this idea in his distinction between *fëa* and *hröa*, Sindarin for spirit and body, and insists on the necessary harmony between the two.

As for beauty, Umberto Eco writes about the "Pancalistic view of the universe" (44) which prevails during the Middle Ages and posits that the universe is inherently beautiful because it is God's creation. How then can such view clearly underlying the *Ainulindalë* be reconciled not only

with reality, but with Tolkien's world marred by evil and filled with ugly Orcs? How do the wicked and monstrous fit into such a universe? A theoretical solution is given by Augustine of Hippo, and reappropriated by Tolkien. Augustine, drawing from Pythagoras, Plato and Boethius' notions of *musica universalis*, also conceives of the universe as a cosmic symphony in which discord and error are legitimate parts of God's creation and of the global harmony. Stiker in his *Corps infirmes et sociétés* writes that Augustine's stance justifies the existence of monsters who function as contrasting figures: "La cause et le rôle du monstre, c'est la Gloire du Dieu" (91). And he quotes from Augustine's *La Cité de Dieu*: "Le chant de l'univers ne saurait livrer son secret tout entier : harmonies et discordances, dissonances et consonances s'y livrent bataille en bonne intelligence selon les principes des grandes polyphonies médiévales" (Stiker 91). Indeed, in the *Ainulindalë* a battle takes place, when Melkor—the future evil Morgoth—driven by pride and craving power, decides to impose his own vision and sings out of time, instigating dissonance in the theme and sowing discord between the Ainur. A war of sounds begins between him and Ilúvatar, affecting the creation. Ilúvatar ultimately triumphs and claims:

And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined (S 5-6).

In a very Christian tradition, this confirms that any deviance is part of Ilúvatar's plan, that all creation has its "uttermost source" in him. Melkor cannot have the creative Vision of Ilúvatar, his power is only subcreative and corruptive, ever dependent on God's will and plan. And that plan's ultimate goal is "great beauty" and "things more wonderful." As seen above, Tolkien was largely inspired by Thomas Aquinas, and this is further confirmed by McIntosh who argues in his dissertation *The Flame Imperishable* that Tolkien's metaphysics are actually more influenced by Thomas Aquinas than Augustine or other theologians, and evokes how Thomistic aesthetical norms align with Ilúvatar's Vision and the Music of the Ainur. Beauty, according to Thomas Aquinas, is defined by three principles—integrity, proportion and clarity:

By integrity or perfection, Thomas means something close to what Tolkien has in mind in his requirement that sub-created, secondary world's exhibit the 'inner consistency of reality.' Integrity, in other words, refers to a thing's completeness, wholeness, or togetherness, its having and displaying the structure and requisite parts proper, to a thing of that particular essence or nature. The second aesthetic property of proportion, sometimes referred to as harmony or consonance, is of Pythagorean extraction and designates in Thomas's usage a sense of qualitative proportion that he calls *convenientia*, or what Liberato Santoro-Brienza describes as an 'intrinsic attunement' or 'correspondence between inner and outer reality, appearance and essence, matter and form.' It is the *harmony* of beauty, in other words, that is especially involved the aforementioned, pleasing correspondence obtaining both between the parts and metaphysical principles within the object and between the object and the

sensory faculties of the perceiver. Finally, there is the aesthetic criterion of clarity, or brightness or 'splendor,' i.e., the shining forth of form or radiating of intelligible light from the beautiful object, an idea that Robert Wood suggests is further linked to the Greek word *doxa* or 'glory' and which Tolkien gives us an apt image of in the *Ainulindalë* when the Ainur first glimpse the world, newly created by the Flame Imperishable of Ilúvatar, as 'a cloud with a living heart of flame' (S 20) (McIntosh 208–209).

This importance given to aesthetics, and especially to integrity, proportion and clarity is confirmed and reiterated through many aspects of Tolkien's work beyond the genesis narrative, as it underpins the entire nature of Middle-earth. It is especially revealed when aesthetic norms are threatened and corrupted, and as we will see, they are often expressed through 'real', corporeal phenomena and not restricted to mere metaphysical notions.

### *Defying Eru: The Marring of Arda and Impairment as Punishment*

Despite Melkor's discord being part of Eru's plan, Melkor eventually succeeds in causing actual harm to the world and altering it. Arda is corrupted by Melkor/Morgoth during the first war with the Valar, as they had shaped it for the arrival of the Elves and Men. Melkor's 'Marring' is described in these terms:

The evil of Melkor and the blight of his hatred flowed out thence, and the Spring of Arda was marred. Green things fell sick and rotted, and rivers were choked with weeds and slime, and fens were made, rank and poisonous, the breeding place of flies; and forests grew dark and perilous, the haunts of fear; and beasts became monsters of horn and ivory and dyed the earth with blood... And the shape of Arda and the symmetry of its waters and its lands was marred in that time, so that the first designs of the Valar were never restored (S 29).

In this marred world, the animals become "monsters," and shape and symmetry are disrupted. The physical world is not simply altered, it is hurt, damaged, impaired in its initial perfection of form and nature. The event is so significant that there is a before and an after: the Elves refer to 'Arda Marred' as the world wounded by Melkor and to 'Arda Unmarred' that is, the world as it should have been, as the Valar had initially designed it.

The consistent use of the verb 'to mar' is crucial. From Old English, 'to mar' means "to hamper or hinder; to impair or damage" or "to damage (a material thing) so as to render useless; to destroy or impair the quality of (an object); to produce a flaw or blemish in" (*OED* "mar"). Knowing Tolkien's command of Old English, his choice of word was certainly well thought out and significant. Some of Tolkien's etymological notes on Elvish mentioned in the first part confirm this idea. The radical *√ban* originally referred to 'beauty' and Tolkien adds "but with

implications that it was due to *lack of fault*, or *blemish*. Thus Q[uenya] *Arda Vanya* ‘Arda Unmarred,’ *Arda Úvana* = Arda Marred. *ilvanya*, *ilvana* ‘perfect’” (*Nature* 173). This idea that beauty necessarily implies perfection, that it excludes from its definition any form of blemish or flaw, underlines the physicality of Arda and emphasises its subsequent impairment by Melkor. Looking at the derivatives of *√ban*, the implications are clear: “*Vána*... representing the natural unmarred perfection of form in living things” (*Nature* 173). The use of ‘natural’ suggests an initial perfect state at the stage of creation which was only later corrupted. Arda can thus be read as an impaired body, wounded and thus no longer perfect, forever compared to its idealised ‘Unmarred’ version.

In this respect, the derivatives of *√man* ‘good’ must also be noted: “Quenya *Aman* (*aman-*), Sindarin *Avon*, ‘Unmarred State,’ especially applied to the ‘unmarred’ western regions, of which Valinor (abode of the Valar) was part” (*Nature* 173). *Aman*, or the continent of the Valar unmarred by Morgoth, is perfection uncorrupted, as opposed to Arda. There, the Valar “maintained all things in bliss and health, and corporeal living things (such as plants and beasts) appear to have ‘aged’ or changed no quicker than Arda itself” and “each was maintained in some form of beauty or use” (*Nature* 89). As for the Elves who came into *Aman* “in the bliss and health or *Aman* *their bodies remained in vigour*” (*Nature* 89, emphasis by Tolkien). In this ideal unimpaired land, deterioration and impairment of its inhabitants are not even possibilities.

Even more telling is how Tolkien explains that the Elves were “tainted by the Marring (which affected all the ‘flesh of Arda’ from which their *bröar* [bodies] were derived and were nourished)” (*Nature* 88). The flesh of Arda is contaminated and, as put by Christopher Tolkien, it is due to “the debility introduced by Melkor into the substance of Arda upon which it must feed” (*HoMe III: Morgoth’s Ring* 342). The first *OED* sense describes debility as “the condition of being weak or feeble; weakness, infirmity; want of strength; esp. that condition of the body in which the vital functions generally are feebly discharged” (*OED* “debility”). Again, this reinforces the corporeal aspect of Arda: the debility introduced is like a cancer spreading in the flesh and endangering its vital functions, feeding on the initially healthy body to grow, and resulting in a diminished and impaired state.

The Marring affects not only Arda but its inhabitants, Tolkien writes “the Incarnate only entered into the design of *Ēa* after the rebellion of Melcor[*sic*]; so that their whole being is bound up with the Marring” (*Nature* 270). One thing the Marring did was to make death “abhorrent to look on” (*Nature* 270), thus causing suffering to the Incarnate who experienced loss, he pursues:

at death... it is the material of the thing itself that disintegrating seems horrible. And in Arda Marred this process may be long. Indeed, death may be slow, and even before all life

has departed the living thing may become sickly, or deformed. We do not think that this sickening and after it decay and putrescence can seem beautiful (as surely all things in Arda Unmarred should be) or at least not regrettable... (*Nature* 271).

This abhorrence for sickness and decay of the body may be understandable, yet what is interesting here is the inclusion of “deformed,” as if deformation were equivalent to sickness and decay. The deformation of the physical form intended by Ilúvatar seems to translate into Tolkien’s idea not only of evil as seen in the first part, but of horror and pain. In this case, the impairment caused by Melkor is rooted in hatred and jealousy and thus punitive, causing suffering not only to the one enduring it, but to those witnessing it. Melkor, jealous of the Valar and their work, wages a war against them and seeks dominion over Arda. As retribution he inflicts physical punishment upon Arda and by extension upon its future inhabitants: “this perfection of all things was impaired by Morgoth, so that everything in Arda has been subjected to an evil, and every being in Arda is in turn susceptible to an inclination to do evil” (*Nature* 406).

What ultimately transpires is that without the Marring, the world, like the Garden of Eden and Aman, was initially thought of as devoid of illness, sickness and weakening, thus making Tolkien’s ideal world a eugenicist utopia.

### *Hierarchy between the Children of Ilúvatar?*

The Children of Ilúvatar were created during the third theme of the *Ainulindalë*, by Ilúvatar alone. From the start, there is a deliberate hierarchy between the two races: “Now the Children of Ilúvatar are Elves and Men, the First-born and the Followers” (*S* 7). Not only were the Elves made first and entered the world first while Men only followed, but further in *The Silmarillion* the narrator soon confirms a form of favouritism towards the Elves: “The dealings of the Ainur have indeed been mostly with the Elves, for Ilúvatar made them more like in nature to the Ainur, though less in might and stature; whereas to Men he gave strange gifts” (35). The Elves are more alike the divine beings, while the Men must content themselves with “strange gifts”: Death, and the fact that they are not tied to Arda as the Elves are, giving them a unique spiritual freedom. But unsurprisingly, these gifts—which Ilúvatar and Tolkien deem precious—are not always well received by Men, who envy the immortality and superior qualities of the Elves. On a theological and metaphysical level, the gift of Death and the prospect that the Rule of Men will eventually come—while the Elves are doomed to wane—make the Men seem ultimately more ‘fortunate.’ But in terms of physicality and aesthetics they are clearly inferior to the Elves who surpass all:

“But the Quendi<sup>11</sup> shall be the fairest of all earthly creature, and they shall have and shall conceive and bring forth more beauty than all my Children, and they shall have the greater bliss in this world” (S 35). The nature and function of the Elves revolve around beauty, which they possess but also produce. But beyond mere aesthetics, focus is also put on physical health and ability:

Immortal were the Elves, and their wisdom waxed from age to age, and no sickness nor pestilence brought death to them. Their bodies indeed were of the stuff of the Earth, and could be destroyed; and in those days they were more like to the bodies of Men, since they had not so long been inhabited by the fire of their spirit, which consumes them from within in the courses of time. But Men were more frail, more easily slain by weapon or mischance, and less easily healed; subject to sickness and many ills; and they grew old and died (S 117).

Having spent millennia in Arda before the awakening of Men, when the latter finally arrive, the Elves’ bodies are already “more like to the bodies of Men,” which clearly implies a weakening in their constitution. Overall, the Elves are physically more resistant, less likely to suffer an impairment than Men. Yet the Elves are condemned to wane and fade with the world, a process they deem “not natural”:

‘Not natural’ whether it is due wholly, as they earlier thought, to the weakening of the *bröa* (derived from the debility introduced by Melkor into the substance of Arda upon which it must feed), or partly to the inevitable working of a dominant *fëa* upon a material *bröa* through many ages. (In the latter case ‘natural’ can refer only to an ideal state, in which unmarred matter could for ever endure the indwelling of a perfectly adapted *fëa* (*HoMe III: Morgoth’s Ring* 342).

Their material bodies are unable to withstand their spirit, impaired by the Marring of Morgoth which compromised their natural ‘ideal state,’ initially more resistant and adapted to their spirit.

Dimitra Fimi, in her monograph *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History*, explores in depth the origins and possible inspirations for such a hierarchical world, mentioning the likely influence of pseudo-scientific racial theories and the Eugenics movement popular in Tolkien’s time—not yet disproved when he started the ‘Silmarillion’—as well as the influence of his academic discipline. Fimi points that philology and Anglo-Saxon studies “retained some facets of the ideology of race, often as an amalgamation of concepts surrounding nationhood and language community” (135). To these influences, she adds the hierarchical order of the ‘Great Chain of Beings’ which was derived from Aristotle’s biology, co-opted by medieval theologians and turned into a Christian divine order, a *scalae naturae* or ‘scale of nature,’ that ranked beings from the

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<sup>11</sup> Another name for the Elves: “Themselves they named the Quendi, signifying those that speak with voices; for as yet they had met no other living things that spoke or sang” (S 45).

most perfect, immutable, and spiritual—God—to the most basic, material and devoid of spirit: minerals. In between, there were angelic beings, humans, animals and plants—the higher the rank, the more positive attributes were credited. And the hierarchy was replicated within each category, so that the most prestigious elements were at the top of their own grouping, with for instance the lion being considered the king of animals, the oak the noblest tree, and gold the most precious metal. In the medieval period it was used to uphold feudal society and warrant the legitimacy and superiority of kings:

The Great Chain was used to justify the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, the idea that the monarch was subject to no earthly authority. The Chain had its reflection in this authoritarian social order that saw kings at the pinnacle, aristocratic lords below, and the great mass of peasants way down the societal scale. The king derived his right to rule directly from above, and was not subject to the will of his people, the aristocracy, or any other estate of the realm, but to the will of God (Brake 90).

And as we will see, this hierarchy within the human category is borrowed by Tolkien who distinguishes not only between the different races, but between different strains of Men. Indeed, the Númenoreans are considered a superior line once favoured by the Valar, justifying Aragorn's claim of the throne. Yet if some are meant to be at the top, their place is not necessarily guaranteed. In an engraving from the *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579), Hell is found at the bottom of the scale: Valades depicts Satan, his demons, and the fallen sinners undergoing torture (see Figure 1).

The Great Chain is more than a question of essence then, the placing of Hell below adds to it a moral dimension and threatens humans with a possible fall. Brake explains:

Spiritually, man was a special instance in the Chain. He was both mortal in flesh and potentially pure in spirit. The resolution of this struggle between his two aspects meant that he could either go the higher noble way of the spirit, or be dragged down to the devil, the way of all flesh, just as Lucifer himself had fallen (90).



Figure 1. Didacus Valades, “The Great Chain of Beings,” copperplate engraving in *Rhetorica Christiana*, 1579.

Tolkien, in one of his early linguistic documents (*Parma Eldalamberon*: 14, 7) classifies the different species of Middle-earth in a similar way, from most divine and spiritual to the monstrous (see Figure 2).



- (1) E Valar and their folk
- (2) D Fays
- (3) A Elves or Fairies
- (4) F Children of Men \* who thus occupy the middle place in the seven orders
- (5) C Earthlings
- (6) G Beasts & Creatures
- (7) Monsters

Figure 2. Tolkien's classification of the "Creatures of the Earth." Extract from the Parma Eldalamberon n°14, *The Tolkien Trust*, 2003. p. 10.

The Valar, essentially 'spirits' and the highest angelic beings before the god Ilúvatar, are at the top of the chain. They are followed by Fays, which appear only in this document, and logically by the Elves. With their "dominant *fëa*" over their "material *bröa*" it is no wonder that Elves are ranked higher than Men, the 'Followers', whose *fëa* is weaker and *bröa* more dominant. Among the 'Earthlings', Tolkien counted the giants, dwarves and pygmies (his future Hobbits?), already hinting at the lesser prestige that would be attributed to these races. The chain ends with beasts and creatures and, as in Valades' representation, with the corrupted evil monsters or "Melko's folk" as the lowliest forms of life—comprising goblins (Orcs), trolls and ogres. Tolkien also includes demons and balrogs which are specified to be "evil forms of D" (see Figure 3).

**B. Ūvanimor or monsters.**

<b>Rauki</b>	demons *	}	Melko's folk	* These are probably an evil form of D.
<b>Orqi</b>	goblins			
<b>malkarauki</b>	balrogs *	}	cannibal giants of lesser size	
<b>hongwir</b>	ogres of the north			
<b>sarqindi</b>	ogres of the south			
<b>maulir</b>	trolls.			

Figure 3. Tolkien's subcategory of monsters as part of the "Creatures of the Earth." Extract from the Parma Eldalamberon n°14, *The Tolkien Trust*, 2003. p. 9.

The fact that these two creatures are versions of what Tolkien named "Fays," means that the categories are not fixed, that it is not the essence of a creature that defines its final place in the chain but its moral standing and potential corruption. If there are no further mentions of demons, Tolkien reiterated that he considered the Balrogs to be fallen Maiar.

Brake also argues that the hierarchical order of the 'Great Chain of Being' was not just spiritual or moral: aesthetics, which were nevertheless closely tied to morals, also came into play:

Attractive creatures such as dragonflies and ladybirds were considered more worthy of God's glory than unpleasant insects such as flies and, no doubt, dung beetles. The poor snake languished at the very bottom of the animal segment, relegated there as punishment for the serpent's actions in the Garden of Eden (90).

In Tolkien's own hierarchy one cannot ignore that the ranking also goes beyond the simple degree of *fëa* or the state of corruption, but coincidentally corresponds to the aesthetic norms of Middle-earth, going from the most beautiful and majestic beings, to the most repulsive. Despite this rather obvious similarity, this hierarchical order is never explicitly mentioned again in any of Tolkien's writings<sup>12</sup> even though it undeniably underlies the whole structure of Middle-earth.

Something else appears in this ranking that is taken up in the rest of Tolkien's legendarium and worth noting: Elves and Men are considered two different species with different biological and spiritual constitutions and fates, and yet they could occasionally procreate. Fimi notes that Tolkien actually struggled with this question of Half-Elven unions and was aware of the dilemma since, according to terrestrial scientific consensus, mating is impossible between two different species (152). Yet, in Middle-earth it is possible, and Tolkien justifies this in one of his letters, stating that his secondary world had its own "biological dictum" which differed from that of our primary world (*Letters* 189). In Middle-earth, Elves and Men are thus at the same time different races, while being able to procreate and engender viable offspring. But this remains exceptional, and the racial hierarchy is otherwise upheld.

With the race of the Elves condemned to leave Middle-earth and the race of Men meant to eventually replace it, racial hybridisation allows for the perpetuation of Elven genetic material long after their departure while ensuring a certain standard for the remaining Men: "the entering into Men of the Elven Strain is indeed represented as part of a Divine Plan for the ennoblement of the Human Race, from the beginning destined to replace the Elves" (*Letters* 194). This plainly eugenicist idea of "ennoblement of the Human Race" can be attained only through the inbreeding of Men with their superiors, the Elves. There are three great unions of Men and Elves recorded—Beren and Lúthien, Tuor and Idril, and Aragorn and Arwen—but considering the Elves' immortality, it is enough to make Aragorn and Arwen distant cousins, both descendants of the previous Half-elven unions. If we take into account that the legitimacy of Aragorn to take the throne is based on his direct Númenórean ancestry, making him the last "King among Men" (*S* 311), his pairing with the Elven Arwen ensures the continuation of his superior lineage in the Human Race but also upgrades it. The ennoblement is then not only genetical, but social and political, as it establishes an ultimate strain of Men (Númenóreans mixed with Elves) to their 'rightful' position of power. And in a monarchic system based on heredity, this means that power will remain in the hands of the genetically strongest Men.

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<sup>12</sup> It happens actually once in *LotR*, in a rather light-hearted way: Treebeard sings a song to Merry and Pippin in which classifies the creatures of Middle-earth from higher to lower, but not in the order necessarily expected, as noted by Fimi (141).

Aragorn was already advantaged, since, as mentioned above, he descended from the Númenóreans, a scion of Men who in the Second Age had helped defeat Morgoth and in reward had been granted long life: the royal family, starting with the first king Elros—a Half-Elf who chose the fate of Men—could live for over 400 years. Númenóreans thus had an Elven ancestor and enjoyed an incredible life-span, as well as “an extension of the period of their vigour of mind and body” (*Nature* 317). They are introduced in *The Silmarillion* in these terms:

This was the beginning of that people that in the Grey-elven speech are called the Dúnedain: the Númenoreans, Kings among Men. But they did not thus escape from the doom of death that Ilúvatar had set upon all Mankind, and they were mortal still, though their years were long, and they knew no sickness, ere the shadow fell upon them. Therefore they grew wise and glorious, and in all things more like to the Firstborn than any other of the kindreds of Men; and they were tall taller than the tallest of the sons of Middle-earth; and the light of their eyes was like the bright stars. But their numbers increased only slowly in the land, for though daughters and sons were born to them, fairer than their fathers, yet their children were few (322).

The Númenóreans were not part of the initial vision of Ilúvatar, but they became a distinct and superior people, genetically speaking, which justified their kingship. Here too, a racial hierarchy is implied, placing Númenóreans above the rest of Men, and is threatened by interracial procreation. If between Elves and Men it results in the “ennoblement” of Men, miscegenation<sup>13</sup> between Númenóreans and lesser Men in the Third Age results on the contrary in the damaging of the race: “For the blood of Númenóreans became much mingled with that of other men, and their power and wisdom was diminished, and their life-span was shortened, and the watch upon Mordor slumbered” (*S* 355-356). The dilution of the Númenorean race leads to physical weakening as well as a spoiling of their character and skills since they no longer seem able to plan ahead strategically. The ‘mingling’ thus has a significant impact on the physical constitution of descendants but what is telling is how it is seen as beneficial when it involves Elves and detrimental when it involves Men, reinforcing the idea of a racial hierarchy between the two, primarily based on health, strength, and physical appearance.

Another obscure point on the subject that should be touched on is the origin of Hobbits. Tolkien never gives a clear explanation of their origin since he initially imagined *The Hobbit* as a separate tale from *The Silmarillion*, and only linked the two during the conception of *LotR*. They are not part of Ilúvatar’s vision as it was related and passed on, and in the prologue to *LotR* he justifies this notable absence of backstory in such a developed secondary world:

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<sup>13</sup> The use of this problematic term going back to segregationist America seems fitting here since Tolkien explicitly makes use of racist and eugenicist notions: interracial procreation, not between white and black people, but nonetheless between a race deemed superior and one deemed inferior, the latter supposedly tainting the former.

The beginning of Hobbits lies far back in the Elder Days that are now lost and forgotten. Only the Elves still preserve any records of that vanished time, and their traditions are concerned almost entirely with their own history, in which Men appear seldom and Hobbits are not mentioned at all (18-19).

The “Little People” are thus absent from History, the narrative being directed by the Elves, and their nature remains mysterious. But in a letter to Arthur Ransom from 1937, Tolkien writes:

As for hobbits no high legends deal with their origin, and having no better information I am inclined to claim them as a pleasant if miniature variety of our own kind, or of some related strain. They are ‘mortals’ anyway: but the scribe avoided that word as too puckish, and apparently inaccurate (Hall 266).

If Hobbits are a “variety” of Men, or “of some related strain,” this means that they were once very close to Men and got smaller with time, which is hinted at in the prologue: “They seldom now reach three feet; but they have dwindled, they say, and in ancient day they were taller” (2). This dwindling in size give us a first hint at the importance of tallness and the negative connotations tied to shortness; both notions will be explored in the next part and prove to buttress the hierarchy uncovered here.

### *The Breeding of the “Foul Folk”, the Orcs*

After looking at how Elves and Men came into the world, we now turn to the infamous Orcs. Their origin is shrouded in mystery, in one of his letters Tolkien states: “Orcs [...] are nowhere clearly stated to be of any particular origin. But since they are servants of the Dark Power, and later of Sauron, neither of whom could, or would, produce living things, they must be ‘corruptions’” (*Letters* 178). One of the first possible origin story is found in *The Silmarillion*:

All those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes. For Orcs had life and multiplied after the manner of the Children of Ilúvatar; and naught that had life of its own, nor the semblance of life, could ever Melkor make since his rebellion in the Ainulindalë before the Beginning (47).

Here too, Tolkien insists that the Orcs were not made so by Ilúvatar, but were corruptions of his creation. But Tolkien struggled with the idea of the Orcs being originally Elves, especially since Orcs are mortals. In *The History of Middle-earth*, Christopher Tolkien assembled notes from his father regarding their origins, evoking several different possibilities and eventually settling on the idea that Orcs were bred from Men (*III: Morgoth’s Ring* 421). Nevertheless, whether initially

Elves or Men, the proto-Orcs were created by Eru himself and it can thus be assumed, like all things created in Arda before the Marring by Morgoth, that they also at first enjoyed a natural perfection of form. But Morgoth did not merely mar them, frustrated by his impossibility to create he went to extreme lengths to make them his own, and corrupted them “by slow arts of cruelty” and inbreeding, such evil resulting in serious impairment of their natural perfect form. If Tolkien does not mention any lasting scarring or defacement, he does refer to Morgoth’s intent of “degrading the very forms of the Children” (*HoMe III: Morgoth’s Ring* 416). Peter Jackson’s interpretation of the Orcs reflects this idea and supposes that torture left irremediable stigma on the Orcs’ faces: the director chose to portray them as extremely disfigured and mutilated (see Figure 4). Faces which could be qualified as grotesque, ignoring the body’s surface, with their creases, orifices and excrescences (Bakhtine 316).



Figure 4. Orcs from Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*, 2001-2003, and *The Hobbit*, 2012-2014.

Ultimately, Morgoth needed to break them to the point of no return, so that they would become something else entirely both physically and mentally, and would serve him unfalteringly. Through torture and enslavement—that is through physical and psychological violence—he instilled hatred and fear in them, turning them into a monstrous race deformed and traumatised, both servile and violent. Orcs, then, are monsters because they have an impact on their enemies: Elves, Men, Dwarves and Hobbits are faced with creatures so different from them, beings that do not fit into any of the categories initially created by Ilúvatar, halfway between humans and beasts. For the Hobbits especially, Orcs had been relegated to the realm of tales and legends since they had never left the Shire and finally encountering and seeing up close these terrifying figures definitely has a destabilising impact on them.

Yet, despite their monstrous appearance and lawlessness, Tolkien eventually confirms that the Orcs are not inherently evil, but that Morgoth had ensnared their minds, “for in their corruption they had lost almost all possibility of resisting the domination of his will” (*HoMe III: Morgoth’s Ring* 419). In their thralldom, they are not completely dehumanised and retain relative humanness—if not humanity—as pointed by Frodo in *RK* when Sam asks whether Orcs live on poison:

No, they eat and drink, Sam. The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own. I don’t think it gave life to the orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them; and if they are to live at all, they have to live like other living creatures. Foul waters and foul meats they’ll take, if they can get no better, but not poison (*LotR* 914).

The Orcs thus have basic physiological needs, even though they can tolerate ‘foul’ things, and as we have seen above, they resort to medicine and heal themselves. Moreover, as shown in the chapter “The Uruk-Hai” of *TT*, when a band of Orcs kidnap Merry and Pippin, it becomes clear that they have their own languages—depending on the ‘tribe’, names and personalities, however vile they might be.

The question remains of their reproduction: if they are not inherently evil but merely the result of Morgoth’s corruption, how can Orcs become a separate race, reproduce and “multipl[y] after the manner of the Children of Ilúvatar” (*S* 47)? This would mean that they spawn infant Orcs, monstrous and vile from birth. As pointed by Brown in her paper “Fruits of the Poison Vine,” Tolkien struggled with this idea, which implied that Eru Ilúvatar tolerated the evil perpetrated by Morgoth. The dilemma is touched on in a letter: “by accepting or tolerating their making necessary to their actual existence—even Orcs would become part of the World, which is God’s and ultimately good” (*Letters* 195) and in *HoMe*, Tolkien underlines once more this inconsistency:

It also seems clear...that though Melkor could utterly corrupt and ruin individuals, it is not possible to contemplate his absolute perversion of a whole people, or group of peoples, and his making that heritable. [Added later: This latter must (if a fact) be an act of Eru.] (*III: Morgoth’s Ring* 409).

And yet it is heritable. It appears that no solution has been given by Tolkien; he struggled with it and never found a satisfactory answer, getting himself cornered by his own initial idea: offering the ‘good’ side a convenient enemy. Because if the Orcs are not merely unidimensional evil monsters, their ultimate purpose cannot be ignored. In the notes collected in *HoMe*, Tolkien states:

We may assume that the idea of breeding the Orcs came from Melkor, not at first maybe so much for the provision of servants or the infantry for his wars of destruction, as for the defilement of the Children and the blasphemous mockery of the designs of Eru. The details of the accomplishment of this wickedness were, however, left mainly to the subtleties of Sauron (*III: Morgoth's Ring* 420).

Melkor has the initial blasphemous idea, but it is through the impulse and calculating mind of his lieutenant Sauron that Orcs would become cannon fodder and a workforce exploitable at will. Later, Saruman would do the same and breed his own Uruk-Hai, more resistant to the sun and answering to his command, destroying trees and land to develop a large-scale war industry. Orcs are thus first and foremost an expendable force to their masters. But to the 'good' side, they also represent a perfect enemy that can be killed without second thought or remorse, or as Tom Shippey puts it "a continual supply of enemies over whom one need feel no compunction" (*The Road to Middle-earth* 265). Tolkien does mention that they remain "within the Law" (*HoMe III: Morgoth's Ring* 419) of Elves and Men, meaning that the ones captured are not to be tortured and the ones who surrendered should be granted mercy. Yet, how often does this happen? Not once in any of the published tales. Orcs are thus a thorn in Tolkien's side, and a stain in Ilúvatar's Vision. They embody deviance from Ilúvatar's norms of beauty and goodness in the most flagrant and extreme ways, defying both his material design and his moral values.

## ***Conclusion***

It becomes clear that with the genesis of Middle-earth, meant as a Christianised representation of God's creative power, Tolkien does end up subcreating a world in which evil has, if not the ability to create, that to corrupt to an exceptionally great extent, as Morgoth mars Eru Ilúvatar's entire creation. Ideals of health and purity of race are revealed, underlying a hierarchy between the different races and eugenicist practices. The breeding of the Orcs also leaves the question of the inheritance and heredity of evil partly unanswered.

## Part III

### Construction of the Ideal Body

Light has been shed upon the origins of the world and its various people, and the basis on which they were designed along with their relative place within this world has been uncovered. If a hierarchy has begun to appear quite clearly, I would like to delve further into the actual norms into which Middle-earth's bodies are constrained. This part looks at the bodies held as paragons of beauty and nobility, and their depreciated opposites due to Eurocentric standards and the intent to hide them away.

#### *Fairness, Youth and Height: Elves as the Canon*

In the previous part a racial hierarchy has been established between Elves and Men, and between different strains of Men, from the moment of their creation—one notably based on health, physical capacity and longevity/immortality. Here I would like to look closer at aesthetical norms and look at how Elves are held as the most perfect specimens of “Incarnates,” with Númenóreans coming close seconds. Beauty is central to the nature of the Elves and accordingly they are repeatedly referred to as the “Fair Folk.” They are the highest embodiments of fairness in Middle-earth, in *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth* Robert Foster presents them as “the fairest of all earthly creatures” (110). As their physical capacities dwindle with time, their beauty remains and even increases:

In the beginning the Elder Children of Ilúvatar were stronger and greater than they have since become; but not more fair, for though the beauty of the Quendi in the days of their youth was beyond all other beauty that Ilúvatar has caused to be, it has not perished, but lives in the West, and sorrow and wisdom have enriched it (*S* 46).

Interestingly, beauty is supposedly enriched with time, yet this does not mean ageing in the common sense but rather that beauty is tied to a form of eternal physical youth. In the chapter “Many Meetings” from *FotR*, Tolkien gives descriptions for some of the Elves present at Rivendell: Glorfindel is “tall and straight, his hair was of shining gold, his face fair and young and fearless and full of joy... on his brow sat wisdom and in his hand strength” (*LotR* 226). The thousands-year old Elf is tall, fair, wise and strong, all while looking young. As for Elrond, he is “neither old nor young” but “ageless” (*LotR* 227), which in terms of physical appearance means a face spared by the ravages of time. Finally, Arwen is described in these words: “Young she was



and yet not so. The braids of her dark hair were touched by no frost; her white arms and clear face were flawless and smooth” (*LotR* 227). Later in Lothlórien, the narrator comments on the “grave and beautiful” Celeborn and Galadriel and notes that “no sign of age was upon them” (*LotR* 354). Physical youth and fairness are thus tightly intertwined, Elves do not age like Men, they do not get wrinkles or white hair: they remain unblemished. Tolkien wrote extensively on the ageing and rates of growth of Elves, but he focuses primarily on maturity, vigour and procreation. However, he does mention this: “when Quendi spoke of their bodies ‘waning’ it did not mean that these became *decrepit*” (*Nature* 84, emphasis added). *Decrepit*, defined as “wasted or worn out with old age, decayed and enfeebled with infirmities” (*OED* “*decrepit*”) is thus a term loaded with meaning, which insists on the fact that no matter how old Elves become, their bodies never suffer from great physical alteration or infirmities, they never become impaired in any way—as is usual in old age. The body is supposed to remain permanently in a functional and aesthetical ideal state, without room for flaws or impairment—except those acquired in battle.

Height is also a *sine qua none* of nobleness and fairness, which distinguishes Elves and the greatest Men. Humphrey Carpenter, as he recalls his meeting with the author, remarks in the opening to his biography of Tolkien: “Tallness is quality of which he makes much in his books, so it is a little surprising to see that he himself is slightly less than the average height” (13). And truly one cannot ignore the importance given to height in his work. According to McCormack, tallness became a masculine ideal during the Georgian era, but also a sign of health and maturity. (83–84). People ‘grow up’ both physically and mentally, and becoming tall can signify having gone through a healthy and full development, unlike, as we will see, the ‘stunted’ dwarves and hobbits. During the medieval period height was tied to the humoral scheme, and as McCormack explains, it was cholera which combined height and masculinity. But balance between the humours was primordial and excessive height could be seen as a sign of unhealthiness and fragility (86). Proportion of form, as contended by Thomas Aquinas, was then more important than just height. However, the military in the eighteenth century played a role in promoting tallness, and height became not only a practical advantage but a sign of strength. Through height requirements, protein-heavy diet, exercise, and tailored uniforms, soldiers were taller, stronger and stood straighter. McCormack notes that “tall soldiers were therefore prestigious and commanders jealously eyed the height of rival regiments” (92). These ideas surrounding tallness must have inspired Tolkien, if only subconsciously, for him to emphasise height so much in his descriptions.

About Celeborn and Galadriel, he writes: “Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord” (*LotR* 354). A note on “Heights” is given in *The Nature of Middle-earth* and explains that the Elves—both men and women—were a tall people, generally reaching up to 6ft. 6 and specifies: “while some of the great kings and leaders were taller” (194). This confirms the

correlation between tallness and nobleness—or at least elevated social rank—and its necessarily hereditary nature. Another proof of this link between height and nobility is the case of the Valar. The gods of Middle-earth choose to give their *fanar* (visible shape) the form of the Children of Ilúvatar when they deal with them; but Tolkien specifies that their *fanar* usually “had a stature far greater than that of the tallest Elves, and when performing some great deed or rite, or issuing commands, to have assumed an awe-inspiring height” (*Nature* 243). If the most powerful beings choose to present themselves as tall, and even taller when in a position of ceremony or authority, this goes to show that height, for Tolkien, is a marker of superiority. This is in line with McCormack’s argument who finds a correlation between height and social rank:

Roy Porter notes that ‘the upper classes of society were literally taller — superiority of height enshrined and blazoned forth superiority of spirit: the lower classes were meant to look up to their betters’. Their higher station in life was confirmed by their bodies. Being better fed and above manual labour, men of the aristocracy grew taller and did so younger, and their bodies were deliberately cultivated to develop an elegant and elongated frame (88).

The highest-ranking beings of Middle-earth are all defined by their great height, asserting their dominance by towering over lesser creatures. Height is important, but it must be accompanied by elegance and beauty, and the tall characters are generally described as fair.

Among the First Men, who are divided into three Houses, stature is also a defining characteristic. The first House is that of Hador who is a “peer of the Elven lords” and whose folk are “of great strength and stature” and “eager of mind” (*S* 172-173). They are compared to the folk of Haleth, who are deemed “of lesser stature, and less eager for lore” (*S* 173). Height is again a mark of superiority and a hereditary trait distinguishing between the Houses, making that of Hador “the greatest among [the three Houses]” (*S* 172). Túrin, a descendent of Hador and great hero of the First Age, is said to have grown “in stature until he became tall among Men” (*UT* 100), while in *The Silmarillion* he is described as having a “face more beautiful than any other among mortal Men, in the Elder Days... even among the Elves he might be taken for one from the great houses of the Noldor; therefore many called him Adanedhel, the Elf-Man” (*S* 250). We find the same aesthetics of tallness combined to Elven beauty, which seems to be the Tolkienian norm for a hero of Men. When Men are beautiful, the canon they are compared to are always the Elves, to the point that Túrin’s beauty, height, and bearing, make him not simply a great Man, but an ‘Elf-Man’.

From the same Folk of Hador descend the Númenoreans in the Second Age, and they are the Men who come closest to Elven canons, and in turn become canons for lesser Men. They share aesthetic qualities with Elves: they are “tall, taller than the tallest sons of Middle-earth” and increasingly beautiful, as their children are born “fairer than their fathers” (*S* 311). Regarding

fairness, the story of the union of Imrazôr the Númenórean and the Elven-lady Mithrellas gives details on the consequence of the entering of an Elven strain into Human lineage:

But though Mithrellas was of the lesser Sylvan race (and not of the High Elves or the Grey)<sup>14</sup> it was ever held that the house and kin of the Lords of Dol Amroth was noble by blood as they were fair in face and mind (*UT* 321).

This union—which is not comprised in the three most famous half-elven unions—points again to the ‘ennoblement’ of Men with Elven blood, and confirms that this inherited nobility is physically identifiable and at the origin of a fairness peculiar to Elves and unlike that of Men, even Númenóreans. As for height, among the Númenóreans, men can be even taller, especially if they are noble:

The Númenóreans before the Downfall were a people of great stature and strength, the Kings of Men; their full-grown men were commonly 7 ft. tall, especially in the royal and noble houses. In the North where men of other kinds were fewer and their race remained purer this stature remained more frequent (*Nature* 194).

The ‘purity’ of the race ensures the heredity of great stature through generations, as seen in Aragorn who is still 6 ft. 6 in the Third Age. Tolkien then explains that their “dwindling of height and longevity” is due to the loss of their ancient land, but also to “the mixture of race” (*Nature* 195). This shortening, distancing them from their nobleness, is the result of a painful loss combined with the impossibility to maintain a pure lineage, and thus perceived as negative.

Similarly, the already small Hobbits later go through a dwindling. With the expansion of the rule of Men, their territories are gnawed, they are sometimes hunted and thus pushed to live in fear and misery, wandering and hidden. Tolkien explains that as a consequence Hobbits “relapsed into the state of ‘pygmies’” and dubs them a “stunted race” (*Nature* 195). This clearly pejorative characterisation reinforces the idea of shortness as an unfortunate evil, an undesirable impairment. The phrase “relapsed into” expresses the idea of a degeneration, a reversion to a worse state, while “stunted” suggests a sort of arrested development, implying that a “normal” and unhindered development is that of the tall Elves and Men. Dwarves, too, are called a “stunted people” (*S* 279) by an Elf King, and some of them have also known a dwindling. In the tale of Túrin Turambar, as he encounters Mîm the Dwarf, it is said that his folk who were banished by other Dwarves “became diminished in stature and in smith-craft” (*S* 242). Again, reduced height

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<sup>14</sup> Here “lesser Sylvan race” and “High Elves” do not refer to a degree of physical capacity or nobility, rather Elves were categorized according to whether they had answered the call of the Valar to go to Aman and had seen the Light of the Trees, or rather chose to remain in Middle-earth. The High Elves had gone and seen the light, the Grey ones had answered the call but eventually had not cross the sea to Aman, and the “lesser” Dark Elves had refused to go from the start.

is a negative and undesirable consequence suffered by an uprooted people. To go back to McCormack, the dwarves, miners and blacksmiths, do manual labour in dangerous conditions and narrow spaces, which might explain their “stunted” height. Even if shortness is not as decried as tallness is praised, the latter is held so significantly as the epitome of physical incarnation and nobility that in comparison short stature is inevitably perceived as inferior and less prestigious. In a footnote to one of his letters, Tolkien explains why he made the Hobbits small:

They are made *small* (little more than half human stature, but dwindling as the years pass) partly to exhibit the pettiness of man, plain unimaginative parochial mind—though not with either the smallness or savageness of Swift, and mostly to show up, in creature of very small physical power, the amazing and unexpected of heroism of ordinary men ‘at a pinch’ (*Letters* 158).

It is clear then that for Tolkien, physical shortness is used as narrative prosthesis to symbolise smallness of mind and limited world view, and render the heroism of these mundane and physically weaker characters even more striking.

### ***Racist, Ableist and Eurocentric Standards: Elves as Normates***

As the tall, ever young and healthy bodies of Elves are held as epitomes of nobility and fairness, we can consider that Elves, and to a lesser extent Númenóreans, are the normates of Middle-earth, just as white northern able-bodied heterosexual men are the normates of our primary world. Normate, as coined by Garland-Thomson, is “the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (8). This coincides closely with the Elves and Númenóreans’ physical and cultural superiority—as pointed by the many references to their great wisdom, long recorded history and superior knowledge—which justifies their claim to power and legitimacy as rulers and counsellors. Elven normate figures are “outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate’s boundaries” (Garland-Thomson 8) and thus the normate’s boundaries become universal physical norms within Middle-earth, used to measure deviance and signal Otherness.

But it is important to note that, whether in Middle-earth or in the primary world, these norms are not solely dependent on beauty and able-bodiedness, but just as much, and if not more, on race. The intersection of race is crucial to consider, not just as a pseudo-biological notion that Tolkien intentionally used—as we have seen with questions of heredity and ‘mingling’—but as a social construct. As Garland-Thomson points, “no firm distinction exists between primarily formal disabilities and racial physical features considered atypical by dominant, white standards”

(14). Like impairments, racial physical features are visible and allow for the immediate signalling of Otherness. From the point of view of the normate, both bodily and racial deviances, although different in nature, are thus amalgamated into the wider label of Otherness<sup>15</sup> and sometimes even of monstrosity.

The normate figure embodied primarily by the fair Elves, and secondly by the Númenóreans and the Men of the West, is confirmed by the occurrence of racial conflict and prejudice within the secondary world. Indeed, there are several examples of enmity between races, and it is often expressed with racist invectives. That between Elves and Dwarves is the most deep-rooted and longstanding. In “The Ruin of Doriath,” Thingol, who suspects the Dwarves of being after his Silmaril, addresses them with these words:

‘How do ye of *uncouth* race dare to demand aught of me, Elu Thingol, Lord of Beleriand, whose life began by the waters of Cuiviénen years uncounted ere the fathers of *the stunted people* awoke?’ And standing tall and proud among them he bade them with shameful words be gone unrequited out of Doriath (*S* 279, emphasis added).

Here both racial and ableist prejudices are invoked: the use of “uncouth” suggests a civilisational inferiority, while “stunted” is clearly an ableist argument referring to an abnormal body development. But humiliating the Dwarves is not enough and Thingol must prove his superiority: first by invoking his Elven lineage to assert his racial superiority and remind them he is a Firstborn, true child of Ilúvatar, and then, as he underlines their short stature, he rises and stands “tall and proud” to assert his physical advantage.

Another occurrence of racism is found in “The Children of Húrin” where the Elf Daeron reveals biases towards Men as “he had no love for Men, and least of all for any kinsman of Beren Erchamion. ‘Is it not strange,’ said he, ‘that this land should be opened to yet another of this unhappy race?’” (*UT* 101). He regrets the welcoming into the kingdom of Doriath of the young Túrin, a stranger of an “unhappy” race. This disdain from Elves towards Men is also reflected in the reaction of Thingol and Elrond who are reluctant to marry their Elven daughters, Lúthien and Arwen, to Men. As pointed by Fimi, “both fathers consider union with Men as a debasement of their daughters’ superior Elvish race” (154). The only reason these unions are eventually tolerated is because Beren and Aragorn prove themselves to be superior Men—Beren defies Morgoth and obtains the Silmarillion, while Aragorn is a Númenórean and the future king of Middle-earth. There is thus racial prejudice between Elves, Men and Dwarves, but since Tolkien created them as actual different races with a long history of conflicts, it can be considered a

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<sup>15</sup> In the primary world, queerness could be added to this mix, but in Middle-earth, the complete absence of explicitly queer representation prevents us from considering it in this case.

coherent social dynamic, especially since it is manifested only occasionally by unfair characters, and since the prejudice is meant to be overcome during the story, notably through Legolas and Gimli's friendship.

But besides the invented races, racial prejudice manifests itself in a much more realistic way through the depiction of, and reaction towards, Men of the East and the South. They are described by Gollum in Ithilien:

'More Men going to Mordor,' he said in a low voice. 'Dark faces. We have not seen Men like these before, no Sméagol has not. They are fierce. They have black eyes, and long black hair, and gold rings in their ears; yes, lots of beautiful gold. And some have red paint on their cheeks, and red cloaks; and their flags are red, and the tips of their spears, and they have round shields, yellow and black with big spikes. Not nice, very cruel wicked Men they look. Almost as bad as Orcs, and much bigger. Sméagol thinks they have come out of the South beyond the Great River's end: they came up that road (*LotR* 646).

This clearly orientalist description paints these foreign men as an amalgam of stereotypes on African and/or Middle-eastern people, as both ostentatious and barbarous. The Southrons are noted for their dark complexion and compared to Orcs, but also immediately identified as cruel and wicked. When Frodo, Sam and Gollum encounter Faramir, he tells them: "the Enemy has been among them, and they are gone over to Him, or back to Him—they were ever ready to His will—as have so many also in the East" (*LotR* 659). Easterlings and Southrons are thus considered more inclined to succumb to the evil promises and deceit of Sauron than Men of the West or North. When Faramir talks of the Rohirrim he calls them "men of fierce valour, but of our kin from afar off, unlike the wild Easterlings or the cruel Haradrim" (*LotR* 678), emphasising his affiliation to the Western men of Rohan while reinforcing the Otherness of the remote and savage Eastern and Southern men. In the battle of the Pelennor fields all the peoples from the East and South are united under the banner of Sauron: "Easterlings with axes, and Variags of Khand, Southrons in scarlet, and out of Far Harad black men like half-trolls with white eyes and red tongues" (*LotR* 846). This last description of the Far Harad men is blatantly racist and their likening to half-trolls, after having already compared them to Orcs, contributes to their vilification and dehumanisation, relegating them to the rank of blood-thirsty beasts. The orientalist and racist biases would not be as obvious if there were other people of colour in Middle-earth, or if Western and Northern men were said to have joined Sauron on the same scale, but it is not the case.

Ultimately, the Easterlings and Southrons are orientalist versions of Asian and Middle-eastern people used as convenient foreign enemies, whom the Western armies easily construct as barbarians having chosen the wrong side because of their dubious morals and thus deserving of

their fate. These wild men of colour are set against the righteous white Western normates, and are doomed to lose, to die or retreat to their faraway lands, and leave the West in peace. Margaret Sinex draws a parallel with medieval beliefs and the way moral failings were imputed to the Haradrim much like they were to the Saracens by European Christians:

medieval ethnological theory drew a crucial correspondence between a race's inner spiritual state and its outer appearance. Bodily features deviating from the aesthetic canons of the western European analyst—such as a very dark complexion—were often held to be deformities signalling serious, hidden, spiritual defects (178).

Yet these biased descriptions are carefully brought on by Tolkien by way of his characters' impressions and opinions, telling of their own biases rather than presenting them as unequivocally true. The "swarthy men" (*LotR* 660) are presented by Westerners as the bad guys, but one of them is humanised by Sam in a passing thought, who thus challenges his own bias :

It was Sam's first view of a battle of Men against Men, and he did not like it much. He was glad that he could not see the dead face. He wondered what the man's name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart, or what lies or threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would not really rather have stayed there in peace—all in a flash of thought which was quickly driven from his mind (*LotR* 661).

For Margaret Sinex, this is part and parcel of Middle-earth's medievalist quality and coherent with Tolkien's intellectual approach, as he chose "to mirror the medieval ethnologist's theorizing" (190) and "the othering process of the Christian West" (176).

In very similar but much more exaggerated way, the Orcs reflect similar racist biases. The Easterlings and Southrons are still considered 'humane' as mentioned by Tolkien in one of his letters, explaining that Frodo's quest had for object "the liberation from an evil tyranny of all the 'humane'—including those, such as 'easterlings' and Haradrim, that were still servants of the tyranny" (*Letters* 241). Tolkien in a footnote specifies his use of 'humane': "this (being a fairy-story) includes of course Elves, and indeed all 'speaking creatures'" (*Letters* 241). Yet, although the Orcs are 'speaking creatures' it is difficult to attribute to them a humane status based on their fate in the story: they are not liberated from the evil tyranny, or pardoned by Aragorn in the end, but are considered part of that tyranny and consequently dehumanised.

As seen in the second part, Orcs are corruptions of the normate Elves and Men. For Morgoth, this meant producing the most contrary and horrible form of the fair Elves and well-built Men, turning what was once the same into something completely Other, monstrous, beastlike and disproportioned. If various breeds of Orcs are encountered, such as "a large black Orc" or "a short crook-legged creature, very broad and with long arms that hung almost to the

ground” (*LotR* 447), the descriptions all point to a similar black and ape-like figure. The accent is put on the disproportion of their bodies, which makes Orcs embodiments of a combination of racial stereotypes and impairments, far from the perfectly proportioned tall and slender Elves. In a letter from 1958, Tolkien gives a more comprehensive description of the Orcs:

The Orcs are definitely stated to be corruptions of the ‘human’ form seen in Elves and Men. They are (or were) squat, broad, flat-nosed, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes: in fact degraded and repulsive versions of the (to Europeans) least lovely Mongol-types (*Letters* 274).

The choice made by Tolkien to liken them to versions of “Mongol-types,” as degraded as they can be, still points to a racist bias classifying Asian features as inferior to Caucasian ones. Tolkien does acknowledge his Eurocentric standpoint by adding “(to Europeans),” yet their part in the story is still to be corruptions of the normates meant to be butchered.

Dimitra Fimi finds in the particular features of the Orcs and their comparison to “Mongol-types” a link with the so-called Mongoloid race which she deems “evokes popular ideas on racial degeneration and mental disability” (156). These ideas were particularly developed by John Langdon Down, whose name was given to the syndrome he studied: Down’s Syndrome. This genetic disorder was also commonly referred to as ‘Mongolian idiocy’ or ‘Mongolism’—problematic terms that persist to this day, often in the form of insults. Fimi remarks that Down’s description of his patients was extremely similar to Tolkien’s description of the Orcs. She adds:

Writing during the second half of the nineteenth century and influenced by racial anthropology, Down came to view mental disability as a form of regression to earlier, less ‘developed’ races of humans. He categorised the patients of the asylum he was working in into different racial groups. He observed that a great number of them were ‘typical Mongols’ (Fimi 156).

If Tolkien might not have been aware of these theories which persisted until the second half the twentieth century, he at least must have encountered its popular retellings and been influenced by the stereotypes that ensued from it. The result is a mix of racism and ableism, an amalgamation of unfamiliar and undesirable features which paints both people with Down’s syndrome and the Orcs as degraded Others, both physically and mentally.

But the fact that Tolkien specifically refers to Mongols could have another implication, and that is the likening of Orcs to the apocalyptic hordes of Gog and Magog. Claude Kappler in *Monstres, Démones et Merveilles* refers to them as initially associated to the Tartars, quoting the call of Frederic II in 1241: “Ils ont été poussés par Satan lui-même. Et quand tous les peuples du côté du couchant voudront envoyer de bon accord des soldats, ils n’auront pas à combattre contre



des hommes mais contre des démons” (48). The parallel with the Orcs is already visible with the figures of Morgoth (and Sauron) as Satan, and the Westerners fighting, not against men like them, but against demons. It is worth noting here that the term “Orcs” is borrowed from *Beowulf* and its Old English *orcneas* or demon-corpses (Shippey 74), itself derived from *orcus*, the Latin word for hell and the god of the underworld. Kappler adds that Gog and Magog are eventually identified with the Mongols by contagion of sonority (48) and this association is confirmed in a paper entitled “Alexander and the Mongols” in which Boyle explains that “having been identified... with every successive invader from the North and North East, Gog and Magog were in the thirteenth century, as was both logical and predictable, identified with the Mongols” (20). It seems plausible that the very specific choice of Tolkien to make the Orcs look like evil and repulsive versions of the Mongols—or of a Northern Asian people—might stem from this legend. Across time various versions of the story developed along these lines: “Alexander enclosed Gog and Magog, a most filthy people, and many others, and they will issue forth at the end of time and carry out a great slaughter of mankind” (Boyle 23). In medieval fashion, the foreign and distant tribes of men were distorted through tales and biblical associations into mysterious, savage and monstrous armies—pending threats for the western civilisations. Similarly, the Orcs were bred by Morgoth in his fortress of Utumno below the Iron Mountains in the far North of Beleriand, and then released into Middle-earth to destroy the peaceful land of the Children of Ilúvatar and slaughter them. But whether the Orcs were inspired by Gog and Magog or not, it cannot be ignored that their clearly racialised and misshapen bodies were crafted by Tolkien in opposition to the normate Elves and Men.

### *Hiding Deviant Bodies*

Monsters are by essence marginal beings. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in his “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” paints the monster essentially as a liminal figure in most of his theses: a “harbinger of category crisis” (III), which “dwells at the gates of difference” (IV), “polices the border of the possible” (V) and “stands at the threshold of becoming” (VII). In as many different ways, monsters are bound, whether metaphorically or literally, to liminal spaces: when they transgress these spaces, they must be eliminated—and when we reach them ourselves, we may become one of them. Monsters then must be contained, marginalised and allowed to escape only temporarily. Berhoos explains how this marginalisation became literal in medieval manuscripts:

This marginalisation relates to Bildhauer and Mills's idea of the monster being vilified and excluded and therefore pushed to the edges of society for, as Camille discusses, “during the Middle Ages, the edges of the known world were at the same time the limits of representation...”—hence the many *mappae mundi*, including the thirteenth-century

Ebstorf map, which feature monstrous races such as cannibals on their outer edges. This marginalization of monstrosity extends to general manuscript illumination, where the monstrous and the grotesque are often found within the margins (2).

Beyond the limits of representations, monsters can be fantasised and exaggerated. Their wondrous quality and the fear they inspire resides in their geographic remoteness, in the mystery surrounding their true shape and nature, and in the rarity of their apparitions before the eyes of “civilised,” normate men. Cohen confirms this tendency and explains it as a kind of escapist desire:

Maps and travel accounts inherited from antiquity invented whole geographies of the mind and peopled them with exotic and fantastic creatures; Ultima Thule, Ethiopia, and the Antipodes were the medieval equivalents of outer space and virtual reality, imaginary (wholly verbal) geographies accessible from anywhere, never meant to be discovered but always waiting to be explored (18).

This need to push monsters back to the margins, not just socially but geographically, is then a way to distance ourselves from them, not because we are merely afraid of them, but because we are afraid to recognise too plainly ourselves in them. And thus “through the body of the monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space” (Cohen 17). Orcs in particular, but the other evil creatures as well, were made by Tolkien to embody the darkest and vilest aspects of humanity: the unbridled cruelty, violence, arrogance, or thirst for power that can be manifested in some men of our primary world. Tolkien allows the safe expression of these dark urges within the delimited space of his narrative, but he also replicates the process within his secondary world and places his monsters on the margins of Middle-earth to threaten the ‘good’ protagonists and reassure them of their humanity: killing orcs is justified because they are essentially evil, even though the ‘good’ side kills just as mercilessly, they are only doing it to get rid of monsters. Some of these monsters make irruption within the known world and needs to be pushed back, while others act as “monstrous border patrol” (Cohen 12) when the protagonists dare enter their territory.

In Tolkien’s Middle-earth, monsters then roam in the shadows. Not only are they bound to darkness, but they dwell in liminal spaces found in the far reaches of unexplored territories. Morgoth, after his rebellion, chooses the far north to breed his Orcs and evil creatures. In secret he “came to Middle-earth far in the north...[and] began the delving and building of a vast fortress, deep under Earth, beneath dark mountains where the beams of Illuin were cold and dim” (S 29). This fortress of Utumno, and his second one, Angband, are located so far North that they are not depicted on the map: Angband appears only on the two first maps drawn by Tolkien and his son in the 1930s, and on their very edges, but in the one eventually published in *The Silmarillion*,

the realm of Morgoth is nowhere to be seen and stands literally beyond the margins of the known world (see Appendices 1-3). This location offers to Morgoth perfect conditions for his designs: remote, hard to reach, and under cover of darkness; secrecy is ensured, and evil unchecked. Tolkien had several theories on Eldarin concepts of light and darkness, but one reason he proposes for the negative connotation tied to darkness is this very idea of Morgoth plotting and corrupting in secret. In one of his notes on Elven ‘mytho-astronomy’, Tolkien argues that Elves believed that it was only during their first strife with Morgoth that the Valar discovered “the danger of darkness, which favoured the secret machinations and works of Melkor” (*Nature* 281). Either way, darkness became a place to dread, where one can hide and give free rein to their vilest instincts, a place where evil can grow and proliferate.

Similarly, Ungoliant and Shelob, the monstrous spiders, both hide away from the world in darkness. Ungoliant, the ancient beast who helps Morgoth destroy the Trees, hides away from the world: “There, beneath the sheer walls of the mountains and the cold dark sea, the shadows were deepest and thickest in the world; and there in Avathar, secret and unknown, Ungoliant had made her abode” (*S* 76). As for Shelob, she lives far in a pass over the mountains of the Ephel Dúath. Her lair is at the top of the stairs of Cirith Ungol, in a cave within a labyrinth of dark tunnels. Frodo and Sam, taken there unknowingly by Gollum, have no choice but to go through her lair to enter Mordor. She sits on the edge between relative safety and the perilous land under Sauron’s control. Tolkien describes the oppressive darkness:

They walked as it were in black vapour wrought of veritable darkness itself that, as it was breathed, brought blindness not only to the eyes but to the mind, so that even in the memory of colours and of forms and of any light faded out of thought. Night always had been, and always would be, and night was all (*LotR* 718).

In *The Hobbit*, the goblins—which Tolkien later stipulated were simply Orcs—live under the mountain in “deep, deep, dark, such as only goblins that have taken to live in the hearts of the mountains can see through” (*H* 57). But other creatures are said to dwell there:

Even in the tunnels and caves the goblins have made for themselves there are other things living unbeknown to them that have sneaked in from outside to lie up in the dark. Some of these caves, too, go back in their beginnings to ages before the goblins, who only widened them up with passages, and the original owners are still there in odd corners, slinking and nosing about” (*H* 67-68).

Unknown beings also roam in the dark, new and old creatures whose shapes are kept hidden. Among them, one is uncovered by Bilbo: “Deep down here by the dark water lived old Gollum, a small slimy creature. I don’t know where he came from or what he was. He was Gollum—as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face” (*H* 68). In *LotR*, Gandalf

explains his exile into the heart of the mountain and how he “vanished out of all knowledge. The Ring went into the shadows with him” (54). This retreat into the depths of the earth away from any light has not only deteriorated his body, but confined it to the darkness, away from anyone’s sight and memory.

The marginal dwellings of these evil creatures are strongly reminiscent of that of the *Beowulf*’s monsters.<sup>16</sup> Grendel and his mother come from a similar remote and dark place. Tolkien, in his translation, describes them in these terms:

two such mighty stalkers of the outer places, who kept the moors, alien creatures... In a hidden land they dwell upon highlands wolfhaunted, and windy cliffs, and the perilous passes of the fens, where the mountain-stream goes down beneath the shadows of the cliffs, a river beneath the earth. It is not far hence in measurement of miles that that mere lies, over which there hangs rimy thickets, and a wood clinging by its roots overshadows the water. There may each night be seen a wonder grim, fire upon the flood. There lives not of the children of men one so wise that he should know the depth of it (*Beowulf* l.1125-1142).

Not only did Grendel and his mother chose an “outer space,” but a liminal one between water and land, between mountain and an underground river, between cliffs and a deep lake. This description translated by Tolkien is very reminiscent of his descriptions of all the aforementioned dark places of Middle-earth. Like the mountains of Angband or the Ephel Dúath, the deep caves of Ungoliant and Shelob, or the subterranean lake of Gollum, Grendel and his mother dwell in a dark, cold, deep, and hidden place, where people—usually—do not dare to venture. It is the place they retreat to, but it is first and foremost a place of exile: all have been forced into these spaces because of their monstrosity, as corrupted beings—Grendel and his mother included. Grendel is said to “trod the ways of exile” (*Beowulf* l.1129) as for his mother “misery was in her heart, she who must abide in the dreadful waters and the cold streams, since Cain with the sword became the slayer of his own brother” (*Beowulf* l. 1147-48). For Charlotte Ball, Grendel’s mere acts as a representation of primordial chaos, a place where God has not yet laid his hand, where darkness reigns as light has not yet been created. She argues that “Grendel and his Mother, then, are anomalies of creation; they are outside of God’s plan for the world, and live accordingly in the chaos of the mere” (Ball). Much like Morgoth after his Fall, and his corruption of Ilúvatar’s creation, they are tolerated by Ilúvatar but not part of his plan. Their place then can only be separated and hidden from the world.

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<sup>16</sup> I will focus here on Grendel and his mother, but the same parallel could be drawn between *Beowulf*’s dragon, and Tolkien’s dragons Glaurung, and especially Smaug: they all live hidden underground—in a barrow, cave or under a mountain—near a lake, away from civilisation until disturbed by humans.

Another aspect common to the *Beowulf* monsters and their Tolkienian counterparts is their propensity to hide from light and move under cover of darkness. Grendel went “forth when night was come” (*Beowulf* 1.93); “came in darkling night passing, a shadow walking” (*Beowulf* 1.574) and “under cloud he went” (*Beowulf* 1.583) as he attacks Heorot’s hall only by night, and then goes back to his lair. In the same way, his mother comes “under the covering of dark” (*Beowulf* 1.1086). Incidentally, Grendel and his mother are never precisely described, there is no clear detailing of their shapes, they are characterised by their savagery rather than by the monstrosity of their form which remains obscured.

Gollum and the Orcs do the same. The former is hurt by sunlight from his first moments with the Ring, as he “felt a burning on the back of his head, and a dazzling light from the water pained his wet eyes. He wondered at it, for he had almost forgotten about the Sun. Then for the last time he looked up and shook his fist at her” (*LotR* 54). In this moment Gollum decides to hide in a cave, away from all light and warmth. And when hundreds of years later Bilbo takes the Ring from him, he is forced to get out: “Light, light of Sun and Moon, he still feared and hated, and he always will, I think; but he was cunning. He found he could hide from daylight and moonshine, and make his way swiftly and softly by dead of night” (*LotR* 57). This is what he does when he guides Frodo and Sam to Mordor, as they travel by night and rest by day.

Orcs, not corrupted by the Ring but by Morgoth, grew in “the bowels of the earth” (*S* 86) and thus they avoid sunlight and prefer to travel by night, or under a cloudy sky. In *LotR*, Aragorn informs the rest of the company that the “Orcs will not, maybe, come out till after dusk” (334) and after the capture of Merry and Pippin, Legolas remarks: “Seldom will Orcs journey in the open under the sun, yet these have done so” (*LotR* 425). And the reason for this odd behaviour is given by Treebeard:

It is mark of evil things that came in the Great Darkness that they cannot abide the Sun; but Saruman’s Orcs can endure it, even if they hate it. I wonder what he has done? Are they Men he has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be black evil!” (*LotR* 473).

Not only does Treebeard reveal the breeding of the Uruk-hai by Saruman in order to make them stronger and resistant to the sun, but he confirms that all evil creatures called forth by Morgoth are by nature averse to it. It becomes clear through these descriptions that darkness, like ugliness, is associated to evil, and light, like beauty, to good—the ‘splendour’ or ‘clarity’ as defined by Thomas Aquinas. Accordingly, in *The Silmarillion*, it is said about Morgoth that “darkness he used most in his evil works upon Arda” (23). Monstrous and deviant bodies are thus hidden away, confined to the darkness not only as a matter of preference it seems, but because they are bound

to it, forced to recoil in its secrecy. Light, on the other hand, reveals their shapes and deeds so far concealed by the dark; it uncovers the monstrosity that could until then only be imagined.

It is in the morning light that Grendel's monstrosity is revealed: "Thereafter at dawn with the first light of day was Grendel's strength in battle made plain to men" (*Beowulf* l.101-102), not his shape but the extent of his savagery. It is the light of the Phial of Galadriel that allows the Hobbits to discover what awaits them at the pass of Cirith Ungol. At first the Hobbits only see the eyes of the mysterious creature: "Monstrous and abominable eyes they were, bestial and yet filled with purpose and with hideous delight" (*LotR* 721). The impact made on them by the monster now partly-revealed is intense and immediate: Frodo and Sam are "horror-stricken" (*LotR* 721), they back away and Frodo drops the Phial. But he regains his courage, and threatens her eyes with the Phial:

No brightness so deadly had ever afflicted them before. From sun and moon and star they had been safe underground, but now a star had descended into the very earth. Still it approached, and the eyes began to quail. One by one they all went dark; they turned away, and a great bulk, beyond the light's reach, heaved its huge shadow in between. They were gone" (*LotR* 721).

The aggression is too violent for the evil spider Shelob, who is forced to retreat before having exposed her entire body. The light protects the Hobbits from an attack, but also from seeing the mysterious "great bulk," and thus from beholding the full scale of her monstrosity—she remains "some shape beyond [Sam's] imagining" (*LotR* 723). But when Sam finally sees her in her entirety, the hyperbolic description is telling of the dreadful impact she has on him: "the most loathly shape that he had ever beheld, horrible beyond the horror of an evil dream." (*LotR* 725). If her eyes were frightening, her body is far more repulsive and grotesque: "Great horns she had, and behind her short stalk-like neck was her huge swollen body, a vast bloated bag, swaying and sagging between her legs; its great bulk was black, blotched with livid marks" (*LotR* 725).

But where darkness allows horror to unfold, light promises to end it, and thus more than a way of illuminating, it symbolises hope. It is the case in *Beowulf*, where victory is expected at dawn: "He will return who may, triumphant to the mead, when the light of the morning of the following day, the sun in skiey robes, shines from the south over the children of men!" (*Beowulf* l.490-493). And this also the primary function of the Phial of Galadriel, which helps reveal but also saves the hobbits in a moment of complete despair and gives them hope to continue. Frodo suddenly remembers the words of Galadriel: "*A light when all other lights go out!* And indeed light alone can help us!" (*LotR* 720). Darkness is used by Tolkien as manifestation of evil, but also as a place to generate it and conceal its monstrous forms, leaving to good and pure light the power to uncover it and drive it away.

## *The Fall of the Rebel Angels and the Ephemeral Beauty of Evil*

Light and darkness, like beauty and ugliness, were thus rival manifestations of Good and Evil. But when those meant to be good cross the boundary of evil, Tolkien, with his strict notions about beauty and evil, ultimately could not condone evil to retain pure beauty. Before being dubbed Morgoth and Sauron, the main figures of evil were respectively Melkor, a Vala, and Mairon, a Maia. This means that initially they must have been beautiful, as creations of Ilúvatar, and only when they strayed on the evil path could their beauty no longer be sustained. Melkor/Morgoth, a clearly Luciferian figure, and Mairon/Sauron his first lieutenant, along with the other evil Maiar who then become Balrogs, clearly enact the Fall of the rebel angels, as described in the twelfth revelation of St John's *Apocalypse*, "The War in Heaven":

Then a war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But the dragon was not strong enough, and no longer was any place found in heaven for him and his angels. And the great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (12 :7-9).

Although "The War in Heaven" is only mentioned by St John, it has been interpreted and represented by many poets and artists throughout time, and these representations leave no doubt that the Fall implies a degradation of physical appearance: the downgrading from heaven to hell is a punishment involving humiliation and revocation of angelic beauty. In *The Silmarillion*, rebellion against Ilúvatar and the other Valar is explicitly referred to as a fall. As Melkor turns to evil, it is said that "From splendour he fell through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself" (S 23) and that he "descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness" (S 23). Here, the reference to John Milton's extensive retelling of the Fall in *Paradise Lost* cannot be overlooked. In the famous poem, Lucifer goes through a very similar process as he was "Hurled headlong flaming from th'ethereal sky/ With hideous ruin and combustion down/ To bottomless perdition, there to dwell.../ As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames/ No light but darkness visible" (Milton I:45-63). This descent into darkness through fire is a first stage in the punishment that will result in physical alteration. In the Old English poems from the *Junius Manuscript*, "Genesis A" and "Genesis B" which retell the Fall, Fitzgerald notes that both poems "represent the angelic rebellion as the first state of emergency that threatens the integrity of creation" (167-8). God's creation is corrupted, its integrity spoiled, and it extends to its embodiment.

In another poem of the *Julius Manuscript* “Christ and Satan,” there is a clear mention of the resulting physical change:

The consequences of these actions are manifested in Satan’s unstable embodiment in hell: he ‘spits sparks’ (*spearcade* [l. 78a]) when he speaks and is ‘entirely ... unlike’ (*ealle ... ungelice* [l. 149]) his former angelic self, who once possessed ‘beauty and worth’ (*wlita and weorðmynt* [l. 151a]) (Fitzgerald 238).

The change is both visible and radical. In the illustrated Old English Hexateuch from the *Cotton Claudius B.IV*, a miniature represents the Fall of the rebel angels (see Figure 5). They are represented heads down and legs up, either barely covered by some primitive paigne of leaves, or completely naked. In contrast to the angels remaining in heaven, standing proud and fully dressed, the illustration denotes the rebels’ reversal to what was most likely considered a state of savagery, their humiliation only heightened by the juxtaposition with the dignified heavenly figures.

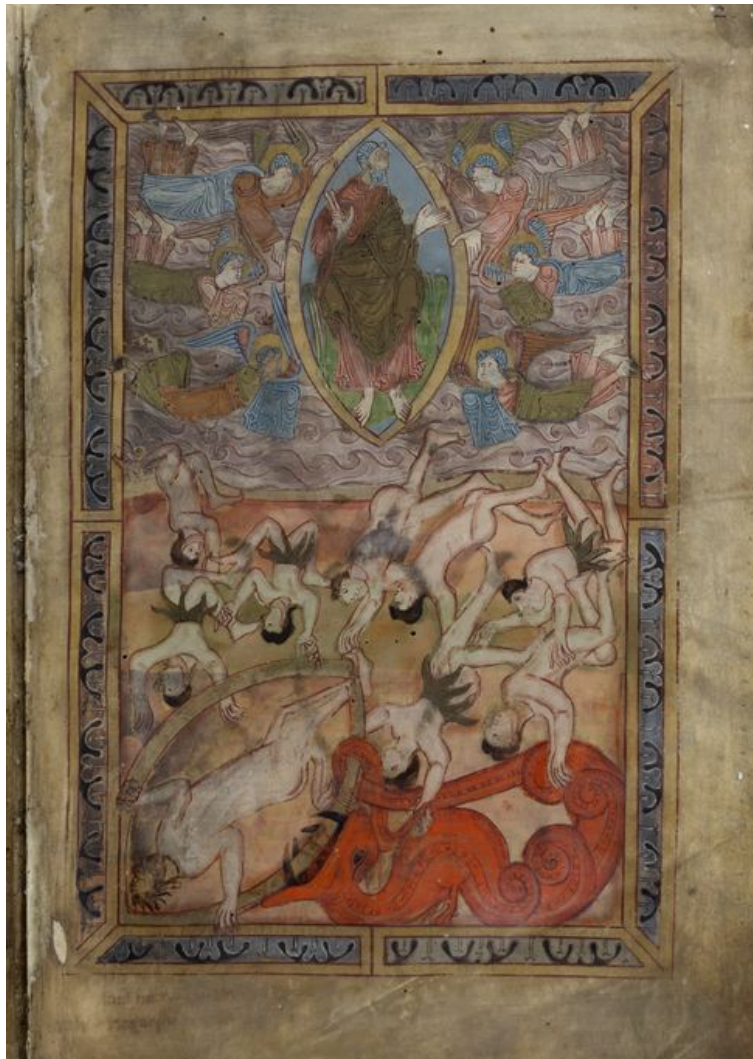


Figure 5. *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* miniature, 11th century. Old English Hexateuch, Cotton MS Claudius B.IV, f. 2r. British Library.



Another interesting interpretation of this apocalyptic episode is the painting *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* by Peter Bruegel the Elder (see Figure 6). In this painting the fallen angels are no longer merely naked but depicted as hybrid monsters. The lower part of the painting, representing hell, is so saturated with figures and dark that it is difficult to distinguish where one creature ends, and another begins. These creatures, in darker shades and improbable shapes, are made to contrast even more with the light and rightful angels who remain in heaven. There is no confusing the monsters with the angels: their shapes are neither angelic nor human, but clearly monstrous and grotesque: naked humanoid bodies with their bottoms in evidence and gaping animals, for the most part exotic sea creatures, are merged with various artefacts such as armours, weapons, musical instruments and even a sundial.



Figure 6. Bruegel, Pieter. *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, 1562. Oil on panel. Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.

This complete chaos, full of deformed, inhuman bodies, represents the Fall both as disorder introduced into God's ordered creation, but also, like the Marring of Arda, as an impairment, or a complete disruption, of the natural perfection of form. It is interesting to note that Bruegel is famous for his representations of physical deviance, notably in *Dulle Griet* (1563) which is set in hell and reemploys similar fantastical monstrous figures, but he also commits to

more realistic depictions of deviance by representing ordinary human impairments in *The Cripples* (1568) and *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1568). About these representations, Mitchell and Snyder mention that Bruegel “saturates his landscapes with displays of human deviance” and turns to “subjects who distorted the ideals of bodily symmetry in painting” (*Narrative Prosthesis* 4). They insist on Bruegel’s use of the contrasting role of impairment and deviance and, in *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, the hellish figures are decidedly made to contrast with the immaculate angels and the aesthetic conventions they follow. The fight between good and evil requires to be easily legible, and to emphasise evil, monstrosity and deformity are even more efficient than nakedness, thus widening the gap between the true angels and their rebel counterparts. Here, we could quote Stiker once more: “La cause et le rôle du monstre, c’est la Gloire du Dieu” (91).

In short, there must be a perceptible alteration that signals the transformative experience of the Fall, and Tolkien indeed makes use of this with Morgoth and Sauron. He explains that the Valar, when unclad of their *fanar*, are perceived as light, and the Maiar are invisible but emanate a perceptible fragrance (*Nature* 242). Before their rebellion then, both Melkor and Mairon must have been perceptible as light and as an agreeable fragrance. This idea of beautiful angel embodied as light is found repeatedly in interpretations of the Fall. In “Genesis B,” Lucifer, full of pride before his Fall, boasts about his angelic form: “cwæð þæt his lic wære leoht and scene, hwit and hiowbeohrt” (he said that his body was bright and shiny, beautiful and radiant) (Fitzgerald 202). Coming back to *Paradise Lost*, Milton also evokes Lucifer’s former angelic form: “how changed/ From him, who in the happy realms of light/ Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine/ Myriads though bright” (I:1.84-87). Like Melkor who fell “from splendour” (*S* 23), Lucifer sees his brightness mentioned as a bygone state. Tolkien points that once corrupted, Melkor “was invisible, and his presence was revealed only by great dread and by a darkness that dimmed or blotted out the light and hues of all things near him” (*Nature* 242). He becomes not merely invisible, but absorbs light around him. For the fallen Melkor and Lucifer, arrogance and rebellion caused their expulsion from God’s ranks and their brightness to be revoked only for darkness to take over. The address to Satan by the angel Zephon could very well be applied to Morgoth:

Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same,  
 Or undiminished brightness, to be known  
 As when thou stood’st in Heav’n upright and pure;  
 That glory then, when thou no more wast good,  
 Departed from thee, and thou resembles now  
 Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul (Milton IV:l.835-840).

Whether in *Paradise Lost* or in the *Silmarillion*, beauty, purity and brightness are integrant parts of angelic identity; when one turns to evil, this identity is impaired and no longer the face of goodness but that of sin, “obscure and foul.” The corrupted Morgoth and Sauron, by becoming evil, lose their ability to appear beautiful and thus can no longer pass as good to the eyes of the other Valar. Evilness cannot be concealed: it manifests itself physically, and signals its presence. Not only does this link once again morality to physical appearance, but it aims, much like Bruegel’s painting, at reinforcing the contrast between the ‘good’ angels/Valar and the ‘evil’ ones, and help onlookers identify them.

And yet, in spite of this forced exposure, evil can be resourceful as the corrupted Vala and Maiar can for some time continue to use their *fanar* and cheat the Elves:

Neither [Melkor/Morgoth] nor any of the evil Maiar ever approached one of the Eldar that they wished to persuade or deceive except clad in their *fanar*. These they could still make to appear beautiful to Elvish eyes, if they wished...(Nature 242).

Similarly, after his Fall, Satan manages to cheat the angels to go and tempt Eve, passing “in the shape of a good angel down to Paradise” (Milton IV: “The Argument”). Later, to compel Eve to sin, he whispers to her in a dream and then takes the shape of a serpent, showing that despite his Fall, his ability to shapeshift and seduce is still effective, in the same way that the *fanar* of Morgoth and his servants were still operative. And indeed Sauron, much like the devil, is deemed the “most perilous, for he could assume many forms, and for long if he willed he could still appear noble and beautiful, so as to deceive all but the most wary” (S 342). Sauron can also continue to deceive for a while, “a mask he still could wear so that if he wished he might deceive the eyes of Men, seeming to them wise and fair” (S 346). For Jeffrey Jerome Cohen this is a sign of the monstrous, as the monster always escapes since his “body is both corporeal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift” (5). If the devil infamously retains his seductive abilities to shift and cheat humans, Morgoth’s illusory beauty is completely lifted after he commits the great crime of destroying the Trees of Valinor. This unpardonable affront costs him to be ever revealed in his evil form. Tolkien explains that the *fanar* of the corrupted Vala and Maiar worked only “until after the great treachery of Melkor and the destruction of the Trees. After that Melkor (Morgoth) and his servants were perceived as forms of evil and enemies undisguised” (Nature 242). Morgoth escapes for some time but is eventually defeated and exiled by the Valar. However, the figure he represents, that of a monstrous dark lord, is perpetuated by Sauron, who comes in his place and shifts again and again to escape and come back until complete destruction. His deceptive beauty lasts at least until the fall of Númenor—his own unforgivable deed—and after that he can still shift into a more frightening, monstrous shape:

There now he brooded in the dark, until he had wrought himself a new shape; and it was terrible, for his fair semblance had departed for ever when he was cast into the abyss at the drowning of Númenor. He took up again the great Ring and clothed himself in power; and the malice of the Eye of Sauron few even of the great among the Elves and Men could endure (S 351).

His shape then goes from fair to terrible, his evilness now impossible to contain. After being defeated by Gil Galad and Elendil, and being dispossessed of the Ring by Isildur, his shape is altered even further, to the point of losing corporeality: “Then Sauron was for that time vanquished, and he forsook his body, and his spirit fled far away and hid in waste places; and he took no visible shape again for many long years” (S 353). In *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of The Rings*, no mention of his physical shape is made, Sauron corrupts Men by other means than his deceptive fair hue: he is an invisible threat, one without body. For Tolkien, evil cannot be beautiful, not in the long term anyway. Whether it comes to Morgoth or Sauron, their beauty can only be deceptive and ephemeral: as Ilúvatar’s creations, their physical manifestations are irreversibly corrupted when they turn to evil. Their initial forms are impaired, never again allowed to retrieve the splendour once attributed by the One God—that privilege is reserved to those committed to good.

## ***Conclusion***

The hierarchy evoked in the preceding part is then confirmed and validated by the aesthetic norms uncovered through the analysis of characters’ physical descriptions. The Elves emerge unsurprisingly as both the beauty canons and the normates of Middle-earth. Close behind them the Númenóreans, the superior strain of Men, reinforce this hierarchy and these norms by being systematically held as the best specimens of Men and praised for their Elven attributes. The races that cannot answer to the established norms of fairness, tallness and nobility, are considered not only less prestigious, but less morally virtuous, their difference often seen as an abnormal defect. It comes as no surprise that racist and ableist prejudices intersect to construct such strict physical standards—impairment and race being the most visible attributes of Otherness. Not only are beautiful bodies praised and described at length, but deviant ones are hidden, marginalised and confined to darkness. Finally, as ties between beauty and morality have already been established, those initially good who turn to evil cannot be allowed to retain their beauty, rather their Fall precipitates their physical degradation, allowing in time the full display of their evilness through their terrible shape.

## Part IV

### Social and Cultural Impacts of Disability

After exploring disability in the Middle Ages and the moral and aesthetic rules upholding Tolkien's secondary world, this part looks more closely at the use of disability made by Tolkien. A first look is given to the most famous cases of impairment found in the legendarium and the symbolisms that hide behind them through the notion of narrative prosthesis. However, the social and cultural impacts of disability reach much further than mere symbolism and the following sections aim at delving into the manifestations of conscious and unconscious stereotypes, behaviours and attitudes towards disability, both between the characters within the stories, and from Tolkien himself, influenced by his own time and personal experience.

#### *Symbolic disability*

In *Narrative Prosthesis*, Mitchell and Snyder endeavoured to dissect the use of disability in literature, arguing that it almost systematically take on the function of 'narrative prosthesis' which can manifest in two ways:

[D]isability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device. We term this perpetual discursive dependency upon disability *narrative prosthesis*. Disability lends a distinctive idiosyncrasy to any character that differentiates from the anonymous background of the "norm" (47).

When disability is used it thus aims at the same time to distinguish a character from the others through their deviance, while trapping them in a predetermined identity formatted by stereotypes tied to disability. Moreover, writers often resort to disability as a metaphorical signifier, which Mitchell and Snyder name the "materiality of metaphor." According to them, "physical and cognitive anomalies promise to lend a 'tangible' body to textual abstraction" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 47). Then, disability—or impairment—allows the materialization of the social and individual collapse of a character, to give body to fall, decline and tragedy. Wheatley summarises perfectly Mitchell and Snyder's theory: "disability in literature generally requires a narrative explanation of its origin or a narrative of its eradication, whether through cure or social exclusion" ("Disability in Medieval Literature" 2). Indeed, two possibilities present themselves which will be further explored below: either the disabled character must overcome, heal or compensate their disability—inciting admiration from others; or they are condemned to lasting suffering and/or frustration—inciting pity, or provoking rejection and exclusion.

In Tolkien's work, occurrences of impairment and disability answer to these rules. First, impairment appears as a punitive tool. Infirmity is menacing, it is considered as a fair retribution for the one who has sinned. Morgoth and Sauron, figures of the Dark Lords, suffer from incapacitating wounds. These injuries are added to their banishment, which by itself is not enough, the physical harm allowing for the materialisation of punishment in the shape of stigma impossible to get rid of, signifying wrongdoing or defeat: "Morgoth went ever halt of one foot after that day, and the pain of his wounds could not be healed; and in his face was the scar that Thorondor made" (S 180). Here, Morgoth is not only disabled, condemned to limp and suffer, but also marked on his face with a visible stigma, a face scar, as seen in the first part, functioning as an eternal reminder of his humiliation. Moreover, when Sauron is defeated by Gil-Galad and Elendil, and Isildur "cut the Ruling Ring from the hand of Sauron" (S 353) he not only seals Sauron's defeat: "then Sauron was for that time vanquished," but also performs a highly symbolic gesture. As Sauron loses the finger which held the Ring, the impairment materialises the loss of the object, and thus the loss of power: the materiality of the metaphor is paradoxically produced by the absence of the finger, (in)tangible proof of Sauron's fall—although ephemeral since he then "forsook his body" (S 353).

When impairment is not a voluntary punishment, it can nonetheless be punitive and limiting, and thus become a realistic disability. In "Tolkien and Disability: The Narrative Function of Disabled Characters in Middle-earth," Irina Metzler proposes three categories of disabled characters: realistic, heroic and metaphysical. I will thus reemploy these categories and broaden them. Realistic disability concerns the characters of Sador and Brandir,<sup>17</sup> the only two characters truly incapacitated and disabled, affected both physically and socially by their impairment. As put by Metzler: "they neither lose their disability (as some others do...), nor overcome it, nor are seemingly unaffected by disability (in which case it is not actually disability)" ("Tolkien and Disability" 45). They both had an accident: Sador "had been a woodman, and by ill-luck or the mishandling of his axe he had hewn his right foot, and the footless leg had shrunken" (UT 78) while Brandir was "lamed by a leg broken in a misadventure in childhood" (UT 142). These unfortunate events make them both lame, and owe them a form contempt and pity from the other characters, attitudes which will be addressed below. To these two examples, Victoria Holtz Wodzack adds the Elf Gwindor who, severely wounded and having escaped from Morgoth's thralldom, ends up in a depressive state, loses his warrior status and becomes truly disabled: "He has suffered in the darkness of Angband; and it is hard for one so valiant to be thus crippled and backward perforce" (UT 203). However, even though these disabilities seem not to

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<sup>17</sup> Sador and Brandir are two Men gravitating around Túrin in the tale "*Narn i Chîn Húrin: The Children of Húrin*," found in various versions in *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales* and in *The Children of Húrin*.

have any narrative function besides characterisation, Wodzack makes an interesting remark: Tolkien seems to have attributed to these characters the function of oracles, insofar as they embody the voice of wisdom and caution in the face of discourses often hasty and violent of young warriors, like Túrin. The three of them, in turn, attempt to heed Turin in his thirst for attack and vengeance, somehow foreseeing the negative outcome. Wodzack writes:

At your peril, Tolkien seems to suggest, do you listen only to fighters. They miss things, or they act out of haste and hubris. It is a warning that often seems to go unheeded. His disabled share something with the prophet Cassandra: they are often right and rarely believed... Tolkien's characters reenact a debate over the relative merits of quiet resistance vs. confrontation, and it seems that the advocates of quiet resistance often represent the greater wisdom (116).

Disability becomes a narrative prosthesis which endows the characters with a kind of prophetic wisdom. This trope has been used since at least Indo-European mythology and identified by Georges Dumézil as "*mutilations qualifiantes*" (91). The mutilation suffered offers to the mutilated subject a new capacity, and instead of being invalidating it is thus qualifying. As noted by Lawson and evoked in the first part, these *mutilations qualifiantes* were particularly used in Norse mythology: "impairment was viewed as an aspect of the divine or a sacrifice that gained the affected something beyond the scope of human understanding, whether that be prophecy or another heightened sense" (54). It is the case when Odin gives up his eye to acquire wisdom. In the *Prose Edda* of Sturluson, Odin wants to drink from the Well of Mimir where wisdom and intelligence are hidden: "All-Father went there and asked for one drink from the well, but he did not get this until he gave one of his eyes as a pledge" (24-25). Losing an eye then allows him to gain wisdom and see 'better,' beyond the frontiers of the physical world. Similarly, for Sador, Brandir and Gwindor, the loss of physical capacity is compensated by a gain in mental or even spiritual capacity, transcending their physical condition.

But sometimes an impairment does not actually lead to disability or incapacity, and can on the contrary become a symbol of heroism, as shown by Irina Metzler who draws from Tolkien's tales two characters she deems "heroic figures;" who "transcend their impairment to the extent of being unaffected by their presumed disability" ("Tolkien and Disability" 46). These are Maedhros and Beren, heroes of the First Age, who both lose a hand, but unlike Sador and Brandir, not in banal accidents but as valiant warriors. The Elf Maedhros, captured by Morgoth after a battle, is hung by his wrist on the face of a cliff. When Fingon eventually finds him decades later, the shackles enchaining him being indestructible, he must cut off Maedhros' right hand to free him: "in his pain Maedhros begged that he would slay him; but Fingon cut off his hand above the wrist" (S 125). Maedhros heals, but the loss of his hand does not truly affect him since "he lived to wield his sword with left hand more deadly than his right had been" (S 125). The

compensation of his impairment will be addressed below, but in any case, the impairment is evacuated from the narrative almost as soon as it happens: after the brief description, it will never be mentioned in the rest of the adventures of the Elf, proof that it does not become an obstacle in his life and in the accomplishment of tasks, or a source of shame, mockery or pity. Mitchell and Snyder identify a similar pattern in other stories with disabled characters:

Disability cannot be accommodated within the ranks of the norm(als), and, thus, the options for dealing with the difference that drives the story's plot is twofold: a disability is either left behind or punished for its lack of conformity (*Narrative Prosthesis* 56).

Here, it is clearly left behind: the loss of Maedhros' hand is a narrative prosthesis only meant to display his saving by Fëanor and later his heroism and resilience, along with his superior swordsmanship no matter the hand he uses.

As for Beren, the Man in love with the Elf Lúthien, he is sent on a suicide mission to get the right to marry her: stealing a Silmaril from Morgoth's crown.<sup>18</sup> However, when Beren actually succeeds in getting the jewel and is about to escape, his hand holding the jewel is devoured by the demonic wolf Carcharoth.<sup>19</sup> He presents himself to Thingol without the Silmaril, his missing hand in evidence: "Even now a Silmaril is in my hand'... And Beren put forth his left hand, slowly opening its fingers; but it was empty. Then he held up his right arm; and from that hour he named himself *Camlost*, the Empty-handed" (S 84). Beren thus showed

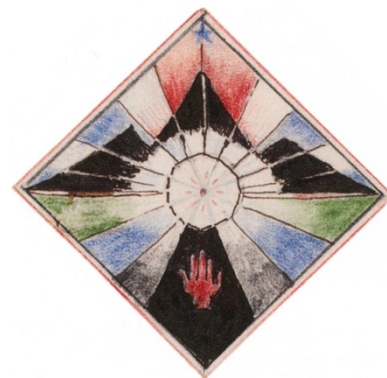


Figure 7. Beren's heraldic device by J.R.R. Tolkien. MS. Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 29. Bodleian Libraries, Oxford. ©Tolkien Estate

Thingol his stump and punished himself by choosing a name reminding of his failure. Nevertheless, the feat of stealing a Silmaril from the terrible Morgoth in his own fortress and coming out of it alive is so extraordinary—something no Elf had ever accomplished or even attempted—that the missing hand which held the Silmaril, even briefly, becomes a symbol of heroism and bravery, elevating the Man to the rank of the most valiant Elves. Unlike Maedhros, the loss of this hand is so meaningful that it becomes an integrant part of Beren's identity, and this time owing him a name that was chosen for him: "Thereafter Beren was named *Erchamion*, which is the One-handed" (S 215). This hand also becomes a symbol adorning Beren's heraldic device, representing the cut-off red hand under the shining Silmaril (see Figure 7). But like

<sup>18</sup> The Elf Thingol, King of Doriath and Lúthien's father, does not want his daughter to marry a Man, and thus asks the impossible of Beren, convinced he will renounce.

<sup>19</sup> This episode is most likely inspired by Norse mythology, as the god Tyr's hand is devoured by the wolf Fenrir.



Maedhros, Beren is not affected by the loss of his hand. In his case too, the impairment is left behind, evacuated from the narrative and never mentioned again. Beren goes back to face the wolf and get the jewel back, but he is gravely hurt in the process. The wolf is slain, and Mablung the Elf manages to get Beren's hand back from the wolf's entrails: "but the hand of Beren that held the jewel was yet incorrupt. But when Mablung reached forth to touch it, the hand was no more, and the Silmaril lay there unveiled" (S 219). The quest is finally completed but Beren dies from his wounds. Metzler sees in Beren's impairment the mark of the martyr, she explains: "The symbolic nature of Beren's loss of hand as a mark of martyrdom becomes even more apparent when one considers that in Tolkien's texts, Beren is the only (human) person to have been resurrected" ("Tolkien and Disability" 47). Indeed, Lúthien, in a sort of reversed *Sir Orfeo*, manages to bring Beren back from the Halls of Mandos<sup>20</sup>. Only, after his resurrection, Tolkien never specifies whether the integrity of his body has been restored and his hand reconstituted. If, as Metzler proposes, Beren's amputation is actually a mark of martyrdom, then it can be argued that the hand was not recovered. Bodies are supposed to be mended after resurrection, but the same is not true for martyrs: "An exception might be the bodies of saints and martyrs, whose physical scars and deformities would still be present at the Resurrection, thereby setting them apart from the average impaired individual of this world" ("Tolkien and Disability" 50). Again, impairment is used as a narrative prosthesis meant to embody Beren's incredible feat, a visible sign of his sacrifice and eventual triumph, but above all a mark of his dedication and boundless love for Lúthien.

Frodo's character is ambiguous: although held as hero as he contributes to the destruction of the Ring, the injuries he suffers, and the impairment caused by Gollum biting his finger off, prevent him from fully enjoying this status. The loss of his finger, which reflects the identical injury of Sauron, is both a symbol of victory and defeat. *In fine*, the amputation of this finger is proof that the mission has been accomplished, admittedly by Gollum, but accomplished nonetheless. The destruction of the finger is indissociable from the destruction of the Ring and was an indispensable sacrifice ensuring Sauron's fall. However, this narrative prosthesis also functions as a metaphor of Frodo's personal failure: he succumbs to the power of the Ring in the most crucial moment, his will fails him and he cannot throw the Ring into the fire of Mount Doom, is he then really a hero? Despite this guilt, Frodo shares with Beren the role of martyr, since in losing his finger, he accumulates a "trinity of wounds" (Metzler, "Tolkien and

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<sup>20</sup> The Halls of Mandos are a form a purgatory in the shape of several medieval halls, much like *Valhalla*, and they are ruled by the Vala Mandos. Lúthien, dying of grief, goes there too and performs a song so moving that Mandos accepts to send her and Beren back to Middle-earth, in exchange for Lúthien's immortality. The comparison between *Sir Orfeo* and the Lay of Beren and Lúthien is made by Tom Shippey in *The Road to Middle-earth*, and further explored by Jane Beal in "Orphic Powers in J.R.R. Tolkien's Legend of Beren and Lúthien," *Journal of Tolkien Research*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 1, 2014.

Disability” 51) and afterwards plunges into great despair, all in order to save Middle-earth. As we have seen in the first part, Frodo’s wounds leave a permanent trace, not only physical, but psychological: “There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?” (*LotR* 989). Metzler considers Frodo’s disability as metaphysical since it transcends the strictly physical condition of impairment to impact the mental state of the character, not just as an aftereffect, but symbolising the prodigious cost of the task. Another interesting aspect of Frodo’s storyline is how it is perceived by Sam. If Frodo refuses to see himself as a hero, Sam quickly advocates for the legendary potential of their adventure and compares Frodo to Beren. The Hobbit’s impairment, like Beren’s, becomes a signifier of heroism that owes him a name which Sam imagines will pass into legend:

‘What a tale we have been in Mr. Frodo, haven’t we?’ he said. ‘I wish I could hear it told! Do you think they’ll say: *Now comes the story of Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom?* And then everyone will hush, like we did, when in Rivendell they told us the tale of Beren One-hand and the Great Jewel. I wish I could hear it! And I wonder how it will go on after our part’ (*LotR* 950).

Sam is the only one to use this name, and a bit later he switches it with “Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom” (*LotR* 954). In either case, the loss of the finger is used as literary device meant to draw the audience in by mimicking Beren’s already legendary tale.

### ***When the Extraordinary becomes Ordinary...***

Dwarves are popular and recurring figures of our imaginary worlds and the fascination for smaller beings seem to be confirmed by the wide variety of short mythical and fictional peoples: from pygmies by way of leprechauns, fairies, pixies, *lutins*, *farfadets*, gnomes and the like, to Tolkien’s beloved Hobbits. While Tolkien invented the Hobbits and endowed them with a character much similar to his own,<sup>21</sup> his Dwarves are directly inspired from Norse myths as he reuses the names found in the *Poetic* and *Prose Edda* and, as noted by St Clair, he also borrows characteristics from the mythical Norse dwarves such as short stature with long beards, love for treasure, skill as smiths, and bad temper (64). With specific physical characteristics (including in both cases short stature) and personality traits amalgamated into each respective races, Middle-earth Dwarves and Hobbits constitute their own categories, distinct from the Men and their ‘normal’ height. Rather than simple variations of humanity, they are made into fantasy products whose extraordinary quality resides, mostly, if not entirely, in their reduced size.

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<sup>21</sup> As he writes in letter n°213: “I am in fact a *Hobbit* (in all but size)” (*Letters* 288).

And yet little people do exist in our primary world: they are fully fledged ‘Men’ and far from being fantastical. But it is their relative exceptionality within the general population that helps construct their difference as extraordinary and allows an enfreakment process that takes place through their representation as fantasy creatures in legends, literature and films and through their use as “a form of entertainment for others throughout history, including within royal courts, freaks shows, and circuses” (Pritchard 3). As a result of these representations, little people have been turned into freaks who “simultaneously embodied exceptionality as marvel and exceptionality as anomaly” (Garland-Thomson 17).

The predominance of the medical model of disability slowly took over fanciful beliefs to justify difference in more rational but equally othering terms by pathologising short stature— anomaly now generally taking precedence over marvel. In our primary world, the Dwarves and Hobbits would thus be considered as abnormal and impaired, pathologised as having one of the two hundred types of ‘dwarfism’—a vague term encompassing different conditions that can have many different origins: genetical, hormonal, metabolic, or even malnutrition. An article from *Medical News Today* explains that “dwarfism itself is not a disease and, as a result, it has no single medical definition” (Villines). The British National Health Service rather employs the term “restricted growth” and defines it as a “condition characterised by unusually short height” (*NHS “Restricted Growth”*). The use of “unusually” implies an arbitrary norm, defined by society, condemning short stature to be assimilated with dwarfism whether or not the person actually has a medical condition. This is confirmed by the NHS: “most people don't have any other serious problems and are able to live a relatively normal life, with a normal life expectancy” (“Restricted Growth”) while Villines indicates: “society might consider a person to be a dwarf based on short stature alone.” Here, the pathologisation of difference is evident and enables, in line with the social model, a disabling process which is exclusively social and cultural in cases where short height does not include comorbidities, does not constitute an actual impairment and does not engender any incapacity. Rather, disability resides in the difficulties linked to inaccessibility in a society designed for people of ‘usual’ height, hindering simple everyday tasks, and in social interactions, as little people continue to be subjected to an othering and/or mocking gaze and used as entertainment.<sup>22</sup>

However, this analysis functions only from an etic perspective, when we look at Dwarves and Hobbits from our external point of view and with our primary-world biases. But, if in a more

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<sup>22</sup> Beyond the perduring stereotypical casting of little people in cinema as humorous, mischievous and/or fantasy characters, see for example the controversial theme park *The Kingdom of the Little People* in China which exclusively employs little people as attractions for display and performances in small decors. See Campbell, Charlie. “Finding Love in the Kingdom of the Little People.” *TIME*, 1 Jun. 2018. <https://time.com/5293240/dwarfism-china-kingdom-of-the-little-people/>. Accessed 16 Jul. 2024.

anthropologic approach we switch to an emic perspective, that is, if we place ourselves first within the secondary world and second within their communities as though we were one of them, letting go of our cultural norms and assuming theirs, the endemic Dwarves and Hobbits would appear as positively ‘normal.’ Metzler explains that “the acceptance or rejection or perceived disabilities is culturally specific, and also linked to its prevalence in a society” (*Disability in Medieval Europe* 29). Whether among Dwarves or Hobbits, both communities are exclusively composed of members sharing similar physical characteristics, the most prominent being their short stature. For them, short stature is not only prevalent, it is the norm; it is not an anomaly or an impairment, but an expected racial trait. What is considered extraordinary or anomalous in our primary world is ordinary in the secondary world, or at least within their respective communities.

In these contexts, Dwarves and Hobbits are not of “unusually” short height, their societies are adapted to their size and needs—everything is built and made by them and for them. When they leave the comfort of their dwellings and enter the realms of Elves and Men, this is when their stature might become an issue, and accessibility might be challenged. If, as seen above, Dwarves and Hobbits are, due to their short stature, considered less noble ‘races’ in comparison to Men and Elves, there are almost no mentions of incapacity caused by their stature. There are very few difficulties mentioned in *The Hobbit* when Bilbo and the Dwarves are trapped in the Mountain and “the steps were not made, all the same, for hobbit-legs” (220). Gimli, despite his Dwarven endurance, seems to struggle more than Aragorn and Legolas in the chase of the Uruk-hai to retrieve Merry and Pippin, and he will not—or cannot—ride a horse of Rohan and thus has to ride with Legolas. Apart from that, short stature is never an impediment to accessibility. Alternatives are found and Dwarves, like Hobbits, can ride steeds adapted to their size: ponies instead of horses. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo and the Dwarves are surprisingly accommodated when welcomed into the house of Beorn. The animals living with Beorn install trestle-tables and chairs adapted to the short stature of the guests: “these were very low, low enough for even Bilbo to sit at comfortably” (*H* 117). Similarly, when Gandalf and Pippin pay a visit to Denethor in Minas Tirith, Pippin is offered “a low stool” (*LotR* 757). When Merry becomes Théoden’s esquire, Eowyn deplors “No mail have we to fit you” but she manages to arm him for battle giving him a “small helm” and a shield “like the shield that had been given to Gimli,” (*LotR* 802). Even if it is not optimal, both the Hobbit and the Dwarf are given equipment adequate to their size. These examples reveal that Tolkien is conscious that size difference could lead to accessibility issues and chooses to insert this aspect into the narrative. He takes into account the ‘special needs’ of the Dwarves and Hobbits and underlines some of the barriers they encounter due to their size, although they are very few. This rarity of difficulties specifically relating to shorter stature can also be explained by the adventures being set for the most part in exterior locations, in the wilderness devoid of inaccessible constructions. What is more, the aforementioned examples

present spontaneous reactions from tall hosts to accommodate their shorter guests as best they can and without question. This goes to show that Dwarves and Hobbits, within the secondary world, are not incapacitated by their difference as people with dwarfism are in our modern primary world. However, if short stature does not constitute a physical impairment in Middle-earth, it still triggers cultural and social prejudices from the other races that are rooted in modern primary-world ableism.

### *Attitudes and Reactions to Disability: Ableism*

When faced with disability, especially visible and physical disability, people can have various reactions, such as hostility, fear, pity: reactions tied to our social anxieties about deviance, dependence and uselessness. Ableism, much like racism, entails a hierarchical classification of bodies, not depending primarily on pseudoscientific racial criteria—even though they often intersect—but on arbitrary norms of ability and health setting disabled bodies as necessarily inferior to non-disabled ones. From this hierarchical mindset, the notion of ableism extends to a widespread and systemic phenomenon of prejudiced, discriminatory and/or oppressive behaviours and attitudes aimed at disabled individuals because of their disability. It is important to note that ableism is a modern concept which has evolved alongside disability and, accordingly, its most significant manifestations are dependent on modern and contemporary biases and beliefs that did not necessarily exist in medieval times, but were often initiated and amplified by the progressive medical pathologisation of difference and by various ideologies, such as physiognomy in the eighteenth century, or later capitalism, social Darwinism and eugenics—thriving during Tolkien’s time as shown by Fimi in her monograph *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*.

Ableist attitudes can thus take different forms, and they are not all necessarily hostile. When thinking about discrimination, what first comes to mind are aggressive attitudes. Hostile ableism is indeed a reality, maybe the most visible and easily condemnable—which includes, but is not limited to verbal attacks, physical and sexual assaults, abandon, neglect, objectification, and invasion of privacy. Within Middle-earth, there are very few occurrences of such behaviours. Besides the aforementioned “stunted race” aimed at Dwarves from Thingol, the only other notable occurrence is the change in character of Túrin who, blinded by hatred, proves to be capable of blatant ableism taking the form of disability-related insults towards Brandir, such as “Club-foot” (S 182, 183) and “limping evil” (S 183). He also accuses Brandir of being frustrated because of his impairment: “Would you slay us then with your foul words, since you can wield no other weapon?” (S 182). The disability resulting from his impairment is at the core of his frustration and made to explain his behaviour. This process answers to the last two of three

stereotypes identified by Paul Longmore: “disability is a punishment for evil; disabled people are embittered by their ‘fate’; disabled people resent the nondisabled and would, if they could, destroy them” (134). He goes on by saying that in historic and contemporary instances, it is rather the contrary that occurs and the nondisabled that eventually eliminate the disabled character:

As with popular portrayals of other minorities, the unacknowledged hostile fantasies of the stigmatizers are transferred to the stigmatized. The nondisabled audience is allowed to disown its fears and biases by “blaming the victims,” making them responsible for their own ostracism and destruction (Longmore 134).

And indeed, as Túrin accuses Brandir of wanting him dead, he ends up slaying him. Túrin refuses to acknowledge his own responsibility, the curse made by Morgoth on his family, and the part played by fate or chance. Rather, he blames everything on Brandir: the revelation of his parentage to Niniel who turns out to be his sister, the realisation of their incestuous relationship, and the tragic suicide of his pregnant beloved. The result is the killing of the disabled character who has become an acceptable collateral damage.

While there is little doubt as to the immoral nature of such hostile ableism, there exist other discriminative behaviours that are much more insidious—under cover of benevolence—and just as harmful and problematic as hostile ones. Nario-Redmond, Kemerling and Silverman have identified various expressions of ableism: “from the seemingly benevolent to the blatantly hostile, and more ambivalent or mixed forms” (Nario-Redmond et al.). In the study they conducted among 185 disabled adults, the results surprisingly showed that benevolent forms of ableism, rather than hostile ones, were the most prevalent—that is, paternalizing and condescending forms of ableism, amounting to 35, 5%. Within this category, several behaviours were identified:

Across impairment classifications, patronizing speech and behaviors, classified as paternalistic ableism, were most commonly experienced as unwanted help (35.0%), followed by reports of infantilization (30.0%), general pity (25.0%), invalidation (20.0%), and overprotective families (18.3%). (Nario-Redmond et al. 743)

With this in mind, let us first go back to the young Túrin Turambar. As we have seen above, he eventually resorts to hostile ableism towards Brandir. This might seem surprising as he was once more than amiable to Sador. This is what Nario-Redmond, Kemerling and Silverman call ‘ambivalent ableism’: “More often than not, ableism involves a mixture of both positive and negative sentiments, and can shift from one to the other depending on the situation, goals, needs, and characteristics of those involved” (729). A shift does occur within Túrin, who in the beginning of the tale is benevolent with Sador, and ends up being hostile towards Brandir. However, looking closely at their relationship, his benevolence towards Sador is nonetheless ableism, albeit in a milder form, but merely hiding a deeply-rooted repulsion for disability only

waiting to surface when bolstered by anger and despair. From the introduction of Sador, the pity felt towards him is made clear and presented as an altruistic and compassionate sentiment. First, “Túrin called him Labadal, which is ‘Hopafoot’, though the name did not displease Sador, for it was given in pity and not in scorn” (*UT* 78). And when Túrin wants to offer to Sador the knife gifted to him by his father he explains: “I love Sador, and I feel pity for him” (*UT* 84). While his mother judges he does not deserve pity as he is “self-maimed,” Túrin’s father intercedes: “‘Give him pity nonetheless,’ said Húrin. ‘An honest hand and a true heart may hew amiss; and the harm may be harder to bear than the work of a foe’” (*UT* 85). But pity, classified in the study as the third most common type of paternalistic ableist behaviour, necessarily implies a condescending posture:

Pity is a deceptive emotion. When people pity a person or a group of people, it may seem like they care about them and are interested in improving their lives. But beneath this seeming benevolence actually lies rejection, fear, discomfort, and a strong sense of the inferiority of the person who is pitied (Presley in Nario-Redmond et al. 729).

Not only does pity place the disabled person as someone necessarily weak and helpless, but it endows the people pitying them<sup>23</sup> with an illegitimate sense of moral duty towards them. Indeed, Sador is described as merely “a houseman in the service of Húrin; he was lame and of small account” (*UT* 78), and after Húrin grants him his pity he also changes his attitude: “Túrin saw that Sador was treated more kindly thereafter” (*UT* 85). Gwindor, too, is the receiver of pity: Túrin “loved Gwindor as his guide and healer, and was filled with pity for him” while Finduilas “honoured Gwindor and pitied him” (*CH* 165). Again, Túrin loves Gwindor not as his equal but as his subordinate, as implied by the possessive pronoun ‘his’. Moved by pity, people feel compelled to help, protect, care for and/or praise the disabled people they encounter—even if it is unjustified, even if they are not asked to. This is exactly what happens with Túrin, who provides unwanted help to Sador, as “he would fetch him what he lacked, to spare his leg” (*UT* 79), just as Niniel does with Brandir the Lame and “would lend him an arm for his lameness” (*UT* 159).

Other forms of benevolent ableism identified in the study are infantilisation and overprotectiveness, which are usually combined. It is the case of Hobbits who are at times treated as eternal children. Their infantilisation first takes place through their naming. The “halflings” are named so because they are exactly half the size of a Númenórean man, but the term itself

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<sup>23</sup> This concerns mostly nondisabled people, but disability prejudice is so deeply rooted in our society that disabled people are bound to experience internalised ableism, thus reproducing ableist discourse and directing it either towards themselves, and/or towards other disabled folks. On this issue, see Campbell, Fiona Kumari. “Internalised Ableism: The Tyranny Within.” *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness*, edited by Fiona Kumari Campbell, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009, pp. 16–29.

contributes to this infantilising view. If in Old English the suffix “-ling” was simply used to qualify “a person or thing belonging to or concerned with (what is denoted by the primary noun)” (*OED* “-ling”), it was used as a diminutive as well, in terms designating infant animals as in “duckling” or “gosling,” but also since the sixteenth century in “contemptuous appellations of persons, as godling, lordling, kingling, princeling” (*OED* “-ling”). In a medievalist society that values warriors and fighters above all, those who cannot fight are necessarily less considered. If the Dwarves’ warrior status is not questioned, the Hobbits are seen as unfit for battle and relegated to the sidelines. Size could have no link with this bias but as Théoden orders Merry to stay behind, he underlines his shortness: “And in such battle as we think to make on the fields of Gondor what would you do, Master Meriadoc, swordthain though you be, and greater of heart than of stature?” (*LotR* 803). He continues by confessing he took him as esquire not for his skills but for his own “safe-keeping” (*LotR* 804). The hobbit is patronised, and much like a child, he is given a pretend role which is in fact a way to ensure his protection, without ever having a say in it. Such dynamics are common towards disabled people and very similar to the way women tend to be treated by men, and to how Eowyn is also asked to stay behind. Nario-Redmond, Kemerling and Silverman note that these “fatherly or paternalistic tendencies contribute to the overprotectiveness, patronization, and infantilization common to women, older adults and disabled people alike” (729). Like women, the disabled are denied their status of adults and, to borrow Mary Wollstonecraft’s famous expression about women, perceived in “a state of perpetual childhood” (21). As a consequence, they are then deprived of autonomy and say in decisions concerning them. If Merry is not *per se* disabled and his short stature is not an actual impairment within Middle-earth, his difference still sets him aside and owes him a differential, prejudiced treatment in the form of paternalistic, condescending ableism.

Another ableist trope that surfaces in Théoden’s reaction is the perception of the disabled person as burden. To justify Merry’s sidelining, the King argues that his pony is not fitted for long journeys and explains that “None of my Riders can bear you as a burden” (*LotR* 804). Nowadays, with the spread of liberal individualism, it is fairly common to consider disabled people as burden: to their family, and to society in general. Disabled people, before being seen as people in their own right, are seen primarily through the prism of the burden that their care represents in terms of energy, time, finances, mental workload and processes of inclusion, that weigh both on carers and social security systems. At the same time, the perceived burden is heightened as disabled people are seen as passive, incapable to contribute to society, unable to give back what is invested in them and thus often seen to represent unnecessary costs. Merry is considered a burden by Théoden since he literally adds weight to the Rider and the horse who would carry him and, once they reach their destination, he would not be able to contribute significantly to the battle. Hence, Merry represents an unnecessary cost for the army of Rohan.



Yet, this theory will be proven wrong and Merry the ‘burden’ will be taken on by the one Rider who is also overprotected and denied a warrior status: Eowyn. Disguised as a male Rider she conceals him and carries him along to participate in the battle of the Pelennor fields. They will both prove their worth despite—or thanks to—their respective faults: short stature for Merry, and gender for Eowyn. The perpetual children accomplish together what “no living man” (*LotR* 841) could do: the feat of slaying the Witch-King of Angmar. All in all, the prejudice actually lies in Théoden’s perspective, but Tolkien, by bringing both Merry and Eowyn into the battle and giving them a crucial part in its victory, aims to counter this bias and show that those we less expect can accomplish extraordinary deeds—which further exemplifies why he chose Hobbits as protagonists: to exhibit “the amazing and unexpected heroism of ordinary men ‘at a pinch’” (*Letters* 158).

However, this kind of exceptional heroism also feeds another form of ableism, admiring and praising attitudes which place disabled people as objects of inspiration for the non-disabled, also known as ‘inspiration porn.’ Jan Grue proposes a general definition:

Inspiration porn is the representation of disability as a desirable but undesired characteristic, usually by showing impairment as a visually or symbolically distinct biophysical deficit in one person, a deficit that can and must be overcome through the display of physical prowess (9).

Within the context of Middle-earth, this is enacted by the character of Maedhros who, after being amputated of his right hand, “lived to wield his sword with left hand more deadly than his right had been” (*S* 125). The impairment was undesired, but ends up being desirable since Maedhros actually gains in ability because of it, and it is overcome through the display of his swordsmanship. As explained by Grue, for inspiration porn to function, the inspiring person must be “so impaired that ordinary achievement looks inspirational, but not so impaired as to be incapable of truly inspirational, extraordinary accomplishment” (5). Maedhros has ‘simply’ lost a hand while the rest of his capacities are not affected, which makes him a good contender to become an inspirational figure—he is not *too* disabled. Unlike Sador or Gwindor, who have lost the ability to fight because of their impairment, encounter difficulties, and are portrayed as actually disabled, Maedhros’ maiming, as mentioned above, is dropped almost as soon as it happens and never alluded to again.

When it depicts extraordinary achievement, inspiration porn [has] the property of being representational fantasy... In this mode, inspiration porn does not invite a thorough consideration of the actual lives of the people being depicted. It presents a single, impressive aspect, and glosses over whatever might disrupt the fantasy (Grue 4).

Representing Maedhros as unaffected by his impairment feeds the fantasy that impairment is a mere peculiarity that can even be desirable, and thus reduces impairment to an individual issue that can be overcome by sheer will while ignoring the social dimension of disability and its systemic limitations. The amputation is used to prove Maedhros' willpower; however, it also demeans the other disabled figures who by contrast do not seem to possess the same willpower to overcome their own impairments and are stigmatized and shamed because of it. Among these more unfortunate characters, Maedhros embodies the figure of the 'supercrip,' an impaired individual that becomes a kind of superhero despite his impairment, an inspirational and glorified role model. For Alaniz, the supercrip is the antithesis of our mainstream idea of the disabled as a sentimentalized and pathetic character, rather "the supercrip *defies* pity" (33). And indeed, Maedhros is admired but never pitied as we have seen Sador and Gwindor to be. In most cases, however, disability does not reap admiration but rather results in social discredit.

### ***Disability and Discredit: Social Role, Masculinity and Leadership***

Obsessed with health, physical prowess, productivity and attractiveness, our modern societies have established strict norms of ability invalidating disabled bodies and minds. When the Middle Ages saw impairment and deformity as wonders of nature willed by God, a shift occurred with the medical pathologisation of disability and the industrial revolution. Social anxieties developed and evolved around deviance, dependence and uselessness giving way to ableist conceptions which elevate the able body as the epitome of humanity in its full functionality and worth, and thus consider disabled bodies as necessarily inferior.

As explained by Marta Russel in *Capitalism and Disability*, "Capitalism set up production dynamics that devalued less exploitable or non-exploitable bodies, and Social Darwinism theorized their disposability" (39). While capitalism requires able and performant bodies to maintain high production rates, war necessitates able and resistant bodies to fight and defend nations from enemies and invaders. Ironically, both work and war in turn disable these bodies and exclude them, requiring a continuous incoming flow of new able bodies to replace those impaired in labour or combat. Disability is thus maintained as a condition to be feared, condemning men to a state of uselessness whereby it becomes almost impossible to earn wages or attain glory. This is in line with yet another model of disability, the economic model:

the inability to perform socially valued roles, most often work roles (sometimes referred to as 'role failure'). Similar to the medical model of disability, the economic model of disability is normative, meaning that the desired condition is the ability to work and that deviance is, therefore, the inability to work. In short, although the biomedical model reduces the

definition to the single dimension of biology, the economic model reduces the definition to an economic dimension (Smart 37-38).

If deviance is the inability to work, it is no wonder then that labour “transforms necessity into virtue and equates productive work with moral worth, idleness with depravity” (Garland-Thomson 47).

Perceived inactivity or idleness, whether imagined or forced upon the disabled because of their impairment, leads to moral judgement and role failure and becomes a justification for stigmatisation. This in turn feeds a long-standing fear of feigned and self-inflicted disabilities. Wheatley, in *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind*, identifies a “distrust of blind people [which] intersects with a common medieval anxiety about beggars who feign disability” (22). The fear of feigned disability was widespread during the Middle Ages as beggars would pretend to be impaired in order to receive more alms. Mentioning Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, Wheatley also evokes the “the purposeful mutilation of children” and “a disability-related social problem that appears repeatedly in medieval literature: able-bodied people who feign disabilities in order not to have to work” (“Disability in Medieval Literature” 26). He concludes that these occurrences “gave normates yet another reason to be suspicious about people with disabilities: to what extent might they be pretending?” (“Disability in Medieval Literature” 26).

In Middle-earth, this is exemplified by the reactions towards the above-mentioned character of Sador who “by ill-luck or the mishandling of his axe... had hewn his right foot” (*UT* 78). The young Túrin feels both pity and love for Sador, and offers him his own knife as a gift. Unlike the pity from his father, his mother’s reaction is quite telling: “Yet I doubt if Sador deserves them,” said Morwen. ‘He is self-maimed by his own want of skill, and he is slow with his tasks, for he spends much time on trifles unbidden.’” (*UT* 85). According to her, Sador’s impairment is seen as unworthy, since self-inflicted, and undeserving of either love or pity. Sador says so himself and considers his wounding dishonourable as it was not acquired in battle: “I might have got my hurt with more honour” (*UT* 79). Moreover, his social role is also threatened: he is seen as almost useless, too slow, and wasting time on “trifles,” thus not answering to the standards of productivity implied by Morwen and failing to fulfil a socially valued role. Finally, this is also in line with Tolkien’s Thomistic principle about ‘perfection of form’ which is not just about aesthetics but also function, “that is a failure or prevention of a thing to fully be or become that which by its nature it ought to be, in all its essentials” (*Nature* 406). Impaired, Sador can no longer perform adequately his initial function of carpenter.

As Wodzack points, this suspicion towards Sador might reflect Tolkien’s own experience of scepticism towards injured soldiers as his “contemporaries in World War I were suspected of

self-injury to escape the trenches. Self-inflicted wounds could, in theory, be punished by firing squad, although in practice imprisonment was the usual result” (105). It is no wonder then, since Tolkien had himself been bedridden for a great part of the war, that such anxieties are echoed in his work. Today, these anxieties still exist as disabled people are often accused of faking or exaggerating their disability in order to benefit from adjustments or financial compensation. Suspecting disability to be used as a trick to remain idle, whether to avoid labour or war, has fed ableist ideas about what bodies should do, and encouraged contempt towards those unable, or unwilling, to participate in the collective effort.

Accordingly, in the context of war, the refusal or incapacity to participate can be seen as idleness but also as weakness or cowardice, especially in a world like Middle-earth filled with conflicts that contribute to the epic quality of the various tales. War heroes are celebrated and held as paragons of masculinity, as legitimate leaders and their exploits become legends passed on through generations. Those who cannot fit into these standards, the impaired men unable to assume what is considered a proper social role—in this case of warrior and/or leader—are thus logically looked down upon by others and trigger either pity, suspicion or contempt. For Goffman, their stigma discredits them, and constitutes a “discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity” (*Stigma 2*). The impairment or stigma reduces the disabled character to a unidimensional identity revolving around it, which considerably limits the perception of their actual identity and attaches every one of their behaviours and reactions, failings and successes, to their stigma.

It is the case of Gwindor. The Elf encounters Túrin after having escaped from Angband “with one hand cut off” (*CH 152*) where he had been enslaved by Morgoth. Weakened by his thralldom, Gwindor seems “as one of the aged among mortal Men, because of his torments and his labours; and now also he was maimed” (*CH 159*). Returning impaired to Nargothrond with Túrin, Gwindor is welcomed by Finduilas who “had loved him, and indeed they were betrothed, before the Nirnaeth” (*CH 159*). Yet, quickly Finduilas falls for Túrin. This change of heart comes as no surprise seeing how blatantly Gwindor is used as a foil to Turin, with emphasis laid on his disablement:

Gwindor fell into dishonour, for he was no longer forwards in arms, and his strength was small; and the pain of his maimed left arm was often upon him. But Túrin was young, and only now reached his full manhood... and his face more beautiful than any other among mortal men... even among the Elves he might be taken at first meeting for one from the great houses of the Noldor. So valiant was Turin, and so exceedingly skilled in arms, especially with sword and shield, that the Elves said that he could not be slain... (*CH 163-164*).

While Gwindor is dishonoured because his impairment led to an incapacity to fight—and thus to disability and role failure—Túrin is praised for his manhood, beauty, valour and swordsmanship. Through this juxtaposition, Gwindor is belittled and Túrin is made to embody hegemonic masculinity in Middle-earth. Coined by R.W. Connell in her seminal essay *Masculinities*, hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant and most prestigious embodiment of masculinity within a given cultural context, ensuring the legitimacy of the patriarchy and the domination of men over women, but also establishing a hierarchy between men and types of masculinities (77-78). Here, Gwindor's masculinity is clearly presented as subordinated to Túrin's. Connell also explains: "the constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained—for instance, as a result of physical disability" (54). The emasculating quality of disability is also explicitly established by Tolkien with Sador's case: his manhood has been compromised by his impairment, as shown by the line: "the short days of his full manhood before his maiming" (*UT* 79). Hence, the same most likely applies to Gwindor: as his body can no longer perform, he sees his manhood implicitly expunged, which also implies that he can no longer be an object of desire for Finduilas who will 'naturally' turn to the strong, able-bodied and manly hero. He says so himself: "for I am unfit to wed you; and neither my prowess nor my counsel have any honour anymore" (*CH* 167). This state of subordination to Túrin not only makes Gwindor appear less desirable to the eyes of his beloved, but also disqualifies his counsel. The King of Nargothrond listens to Túrin's bold strategy of attack rather than to the cautious advice of Gwindor, and the Elf regrets: "Nonetheless your deeds and your counsels have changed my home and my kin" (*CH* 167). Finally, maimed, no longer a full man, and even less a warrior, his identity is reduced to his disability, defined only by what he can no longer do. The Elf's frustration at Túrin's reckless behaviour and at his relationship with Finduilas is pinned on his disability: he is simply dismissed by Túrin, as "it is hard for one so valiant to be thus crippled and backward perforce" (*CH* 166).

A similar situation happens with Brandir who also sees his masculinity challenged by the hegemonic masculinity of Túrin.<sup>24</sup> Besides his impairment, his masculinity is threatened by the rivalry that surfaces between him and Túrin as they compete for Niniel's love. Exactly like Gwindor and Finduilas, the young and beautiful maiden does not reciprocate the love of the disabled character and chooses Túrin. Ironically, Niniel "called [Brandir] her brother. But to Turambar her heart was given" (*UT* 159). Brandir's masculinity is thus further diminished and subordinated to Túrin, for how could he compete in the eyes of the young maiden, he the lame and passive healer, against the whole and brave warrior Túrin—and accessorially her actual brother.

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<sup>24</sup> This argument applied to Brandir and Maedhros was first evoked by Clare Moore during the International Congress of Medieval Studies of 2024 in her paper "Disability, Leadership and Society in the Irish *Tuatha Dé Danann* and Tolkien's First Age."

He recognises so himself when Niniel calls him “wise brother” and corrects her: “‘Wise brother?’ he answered. ‘Lame brother, rather, unloved and unlovely.’” (*UT* 160), thus admitting that his disability makes him unlovable and exemplifying a form of internalised ableism.

But unlike Gwindor, Brandir is a lord, and the combination of a maimed body and a discounted manhood directly impacts his legitimacy as leader. Wodzack rightly points that “unlike Sador and Gwindor, both of whom can claim some sort of status as former warriors, though it counts for little Brandir of Brethil was ‘no man or war’” (107) because of his impairment, and he was considered somewhat soft or “gentle in mood” (*UT* 142). This already implies that, in times of war, Brandir will not be able to lead strongly and make difficult decisions. With the coming of Túrin, the leader of the people of Brethil soon sees his role questioned because of his impairment. The impaired Brandir, again like Gwindor, functions as a foil to the young abled-bodied hero: next to him, Brandir appears too weak, too cautious, and illegitimate as leader while Túrin is revealed as a preferable, more competent alternative. His own people turn against him and want to replace him, “There is no escape by hiding. Will none of you take the place of the son of Handir, that the House of Haleth be not put to shame?” (*UT* 166). Like Gwindor who chooses caution and is not heeded by his people, Brandir’s refusal to confront the dragon Glaurung and his choice to hide are seen as weakness and cowardice rather than as a reasonable strategy to protect his people. His ruling is perceived as shameful passiveness, while being tied to his impairment as shown by the reply given by another: “You do evilly, Dorlas, to speak thus to the shame of your lord, whose limb by ill hazard cannot do as his heart would” (*UT* 166). This implies that if not for his impairment, Brandir would make a different choice, and that his lame foot—and not caution and reflexion—is the reason for his inaction and by extension for his role failure. His impairment is used to discredit his leadership. Túrin agrees by insisting that “our task needs strong limbs” (*UT* 166), a task reserved to able-bodied men that he is the one to initiate and lead. Asserting his dominance over Brandir, he relegates him to another role, not that of a leader, but of a healer: “I deem that your place is with your people. For you are wise, and are a healer; and it may be that there will be great need of wisdom and healing here long” (*UT* 166). To these patronising words Brandir reacts bitterly as he is ordered to passively await the return of the active warriors, a role seemingly more fitted for his disabled self. Eventually, due to Turin’s show of force, Brandir relinquishes his lordship: “Let Turambar be your lord in my name, since already he has taken my authority. For here I renounce both lordship and people” (*UT* 170), thus confirming his subordination. Before the arrival of Túrin, Brandir’s leadership was not questioned, but held against the bold and able-bodied young man, his social collapse seems inevitable.

In addition to questions of masculinity and social role, medieval notions of integrity mattered greatly when it came to rule and kingship. As explained by Beth Tovey, in early medieval

England, for a king who is supposed to protect his people, “moral and physical integrity are of crucial importance in characterizing his fitness to rule” (141). She adds: “The need for a ruler to maintain physical strength is obvious in a culture which still prized the might of figures like Beowulf alongside the very different endurance of saints such as Guthlac” (Tovey 143). This is why Aragorn could not have been maimed in any way in order to become king. And in this case, Túrin thus makes a better candidate for lordship than Brandir, despite his rash behaviour and tragic ending. A similar case occurs in the story of Maedhros, who after his amputation and rescuing by Fëanor, relinquishes the kingship over all the Noldor Elves to his saviour (*S* 125). If his impairment is not the reason behind this gesture, the immediate succession of both events imply that Maedhros’ position as a rescued victim and the loss of his physical integrity prevents him from claiming the role of king anyway. The only way for Maedhros to remain relevant and admired in spite of his impairment is to compensate his disability and avoid further role failure: even though he is no longer king, he must continue to be a warrior at all costs to escape from total social collapse—and as we have seen, he does.

### *Tolkien’s WWI Experience*

When talking about disability and war in Middle-earth, one cannot ignore the part played by Tolkien’s own experience: his participation in the First World War, his witnessing and the participation of his son in the Second. Tolkien was only twenty-two when the war began in 1914. He finished his degree at Oxford, was enlisted in 1915, and after a year of military training he set off for the war in June of 1916. Even though he handled communications, Tolkien was on the front line and saw the war from up close: notably the horrors of the battle of the Somme, the dead and the wounded scattered in the trenches. After a few months, trench fever saved him from suffering the same fate as many of his fallen comrades, he was sent back to England and spent the rest of the war in hospital<sup>25</sup> and on leave, where the first tales of legendarium took life. He wrote in “On Fairy-stories”: “A real taste for fairy-stories was awakened by philology on the threshold to manhood, and quickened to full life by war” (*OFS* 56). If the war pushed Tolkien to subcreate his own Faërie, there is no question that, like all war veterans, the sights of the battlefield must have marked him deeply. A description of the battlefield in *The Hobbit* gives an idea of the visions he had to face and the omnipresence of death:

Once again the goblins [orcs] were stricken in the valley; and they were piled in heaps till Dale was dark and hideous with their corpses... Among the goblins dead lay many men and

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<sup>25</sup> For an account of Tolkien’s time in the war, the fate of his friends, and the influence it had on his work, see Garth, John. *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*. 2003. HarperCollinsPublishers, 2016.

many dwarves, and many fair elves that should have lived yet long ages merrily in the wood (H 259).

Even though, as usual, Tolkien avoids too visually graphic descriptions, the insistence on the multitude of corpses from all sides reflects the grim reality of war. It implies to the reader that war cannot be reduced to epic scenes of fighting involving brave knights or soldier and ending with complete victory on one side and defeat on the other. Rather, Tolkien aims to show that war necessarily implies terrible destruction and loss on both sides, as he wrote to his son: “wars are always lost” (*Letters* 116), leaving to the survivors a spectacle of death and decay both unbearable and impossible to forget. Whether on the front line, during his time of convalescence in the hospital, or in the years that followed, Tolkien certainly witnessed the breadth and seriousness of the trauma—both physical and psychological—caused by the war. According to Wodzack:

Tolkien could not have been unaware of the disabling cost of war. British amputees alone numbered 250,000, and that number doesn’t include soldiers disabled by shell shock, trench fever, or the much-prized *blighty*, a wound severe enough to send a soldier back to England, but not so severe that it threatened his survival or long term physical health (113).

Shell-shock, today known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), was a common aftereffect of the war. Soldiers would come back so shocked by what they had seen that serious psychological symptoms emerged. John Garth notes that some relieved soldiers “suffered from something worse than feverish delirium: they trembled or twitched uncontrollably and had an otherworldly look” (205). In “The Shell-shocked Hobbit: The First World War and Tolkien's Trauma of the Ring,” Michael Livingstone argues that the character of Frodo checks all the boxes of PTSD and proposes that “Tolkien, it seems, relates himself more closely with the shell-shocked Frodo than he does with the resilient Sam: for him, the scars of the Somme have cut too deeply to heal fully” (90). The sights of death and mutilation left an indelible mark on the minds of the soldiers, and the ‘disabling cost of war’ was to be paid again less than two decades later. World War I was not the end of it for Tolkien: The Second World War soon precipitated Europe in another period of violence and Tolkien, this time on the safe side, was nonetheless plunged in fear and worry for his son Michael, and in despair at the world and its leaders who were sending once again people to their death. In addition, at the great consternation of Tolkien and his abhorrence of machinery, warfare had become much more technological and now extended to aircrafts, submarines and the dreaded atomic bomb. Tolkien deplored this industry of death as he told his son Christopher in 1945: “Well the first War of the Machines seems to be drawing to its final inconclusive chapter—leaving, alas, everyone the poorer, many bereaved or maimed and millions dead, and only one thing triumphant: the Machines” (*Letters* 111). But whether with swords, axes, bayonets, guns,



or shells, war always implies death on a grand scale, and maiming, mutilation, and impairment in even greater numbers.

And yet, for all this carnage, it has been established above that the descriptions of war casualties in Tolkien's work remain understated, unlike the rather gore medieval accounts of battles, or World War I accounts painting more crudely the reality of the trenches. This might be a question of reserve on Tolkien's part, and due to his intention to focus on "the ennoblement of the humble" (*Letters* 237). One can imagine why he would gloss over bloody descriptions and be reticent to reuse for his tale gruesome details that must have shocked him profoundly; and he might have considered it both untasteful and disrespectful to his fallen comrades. Nonetheless, death is a central theme of the *Lord of The Rings* and of all of his tales, and both death and maiming happen, although in a rather softened way. As noted by Anna Smol: "The frequent occurrence of dismemberment in Tolkien's work seems to be a constant feature of his imagination, quite possibly a reflection of the reality of injuries caused by shelling in the trenches" (43). While I agree that it might partially reflect actual dismemberments that Tolkien witnessed, I would not say that dismemberment is frequent nor a constant feature of his imagination. The few amputations of Middle-earth's characters never occur in the midst of chaotic battle: they are isolated incidents, with limbs either cut by sword or bitten off, and with a precise narrative aim. Actual casualties during battles are not described, or are reduced to unspecified suffering. There are no accounts of haemorrhages, no open wounds, no skulls bashed in, or limbs crushed by the gigantic Oliphaunts—the disabling cost of war is far from being paid in full. The 'clean' dismemberments of Beren, Maedhros, Gwindor, or Frodo, do not even begin to represent the actual butchery that takes place on any battlefield, and it far less reflects the damages caused by shelling during the Great War.

One of the most horrific examples of how damaging shells could be was the *gueules cassées*, soldiers who had suffered extreme wounding to the face. The ones who survived had to go through several more or less successful surgeries and often remained completely unrecognisable. These disfigured men were so difficult to look at that they were stigmatised, pushed to hide themselves:

Les expressions d'autrui contribuaient ainsi à élever des barrières infranchissables : « Nous avons peur de nous montrer », avouait l'un d'eux. Un autre blessé de la face écrivait dans un bulletin de l'association : « Le défiguré de guerre cherche toujours instinctivement à passer inaperçu. Il lui est pénible, il est presque insupportable d'attirer l'attention sur lui, sur ses blessures, sur ses cicatrices... » La gêne, la honte et surtout un sentiment d'insécurité s'emparaient du blessé de la face, dont le handicap ne se limitait pas à un « handicap d'apparence » (Delaporte 119).

We have seen in the third part Tolkien's tendency to hide deviant bodies. For the *gueules cassées*, the same mechanism took place: they were parked together in dedicated wards where mirrors were banned and voluntary nurses fled crying at the first sight of a bare face. The soldiers themselves sometimes even refused to go on leave, so hurt were they of their families' reactions (Delaporte 117). The deviant bodies of the war were too much to handle for civilians who would never grasp the reality of the trenches; they amounted to a level of mutilation never seen before that laid bare the inhumane violence of war. These soldiers were heroes turned into monsters, their marred faces producing a destabilising impact, in line with Mittman's definition of the monstrous, which is equivalent to a "sense of vertigo, that which call into question our (their, anyone's) epistemological worldview" and reveals the "failure of our system of categorization" (8). And indeed, faced with their mutilated and unrecognisable loved ones, people's instinctive reaction was one of recoil, of shock, as they were destabilised by faces they could no longer call human. This othering gaze triggered the aforementioned stigmatisation of the *gueules cassées*, their expulsion from society as they were shamed into hiding, and confirmed their newly-acquired status of monsters. In real life then, war produces monsters. Yet in Middle-earth no such monsters can be encountered. The casualties of war are glossed over and sanitised. The only monsters on the battlefield are the Orcs: another product of war, although of a different nature. In a letter, Tolkien explained that Orcs, in real life, were not a distinct tribe:

Yes, I think the orcs as real a creation as anything in 'realistic' fiction... only in real life they are on both sides, of course. For 'romance' has grown out of 'allegory', and its wars are still derived from the 'inner war' of allegory in which good is on one side and various modes on badness of the other. In real (exterior) life men are on both sides: which means a motley alliance of orcs, beasts, demons, plain naturally honest men, and angels (*Letters* 82).

Here, Tolkien talked about the cruelty and vileness that could manifest in men. But one cannot ignore their outward appearance: Orcs were made by Morgoth specifically for the purpose of war, their repulsive exterior, besides the racist biases they reveal, could be interpreted as the physical representation of the horrors of war. Like the *gueules cassées* whose appearance reveal the unbearable reality of war, Orcs might very well have been designed by Tolkien to embody the ugliness of war, its violence and what it does to men: how extremely it can change them, both morally and physically, both inside and outside.

## ***Conclusion***

This final part reveals that Tolkien, despite his knowledge of the Middle Ages and the medieval literary influence upon his work, was a man of the twentieth century who was not

impervious to modern ideas about disability. If his use of disability as narrative prosthesis is clear in the most obvious occurrences of impairment, other less evident representations of disability, like the Dwarves and Hobbits, reveal unconscious forms of ableism. The ableist attitudes identified sometimes have roots in medieval culture, but their use by Tolkien often points to more recent evolutions, affected by modern ideologies which frame disability either in a miserabilist perspective, or an inspirational one. War also played an important part, and the traumatic experience Tolkien went through clearly affected his vision to the point of downplaying the reality of war and its disabling consequences, censoring the crudest and most difficult aspects.

## Conclusion

Disability is not a feature that stands out in literature, yet it is almost always present, in one way or another. If the rise of disability activism and studies has shed a new light on the reality of living with a disability, along with social and representational issues, it has taken a long time to start the conversation. Disability has been largely ignored, or shoved under the rug, sometimes tied to other problematics but rarely considered a subject in its own right—much like disabled people themselves—despite being there, before our very eyes, whether we encounter it in real of life, or stumble upon it in literary representations. Disability is unappealing, it is uncomfortable, and it questions our definitions of normality, health, and even humanity. Why then, would someone creating an imaginary world want to include disability in it? Why would an author even think about it when making up his list of characters, if not for a very specific purpose in which the impairment would be endowed with a certain meaning? In most cases, disability has a role to play, it might be changing nowadays with contemporary incentives to inclusion, but in most literature, disability is not put there randomly, it has something to say, something to suggest, something to reveal. It has become clear through this research that Tolkien understood this to some extent, but passed on many opportunities to represent disability when his tales were more than appropriate settings for its display.

Writing in the twentieth century, Tolkien meant to endow his world with a medieval quality. He was inspired by medieval literature and culture and many aspects are accurately portrayed, but Middle-earth being a medievalist world and not a medieval one, he did leave some things out. Studies of impairment in the Middle-ages reveal that the medieval world was far from being as segregationist as our modern societies are when it comes to disability, and medieval literature was bloody and graphic. Impairment and wounding were not only common—they were treated but rarely corrected and thus visible—but they were written about and described, whether in tales, sagas, religious and medical texts, codes of law, and especially in battle chronicles. If there often was discrepancy between reality and literary representation, the latter had the merit to exist. But in Middle-earth, impairment is infrequent to say the least. Despite scenes of war, attacks, dangerous situations and hostile environments, the occurrences of impairment amount to less than ten throughout all of Tolkien's colossal work. The characters are in fact surprisingly strong and resistant, and with little harm done to the characters, healing is another part that remains largely under-developed.

Yet Tolkien spent all his life subcreating a complex secondary world, and for all its complexity, he did not give much thought to disability. However, he did give a lot of thought to

the rules governing his secondary world, painstakingly thinking out every little detail of his mythology—cosmogony, linguistics, history, calendars, epistemology, mores, conflicts, migrations, immortality and death, and even biological aspects such as periods of gestation and ageing; and all that, for almost each of the races populating Middle-earth. How, then, do disability and impairment, and more generally physical deviance, fit into this intricate web? The beginning of an answer lies in the fact that this ultra-developed imaginary world is also governed by recognisable Christian principles, notably Thomistic notions of good and evil with great importance given to physical integrity reflected even in Elvish linguistics and leaving little room for a realistic or positive use and portrayal of disability.

The foundations on which Tolkien built Middle-earth tell a story that clearly puts disability and bodily deviance as inherently negative, as an evil suffered, an unplanned corruption of the natural perfection of form as designed by the One God Ilúvatar. It cannot be merely a fact of life, a random variation of humanity, rather it goes against nature as the initial creation is altered, especially when its main function is compromised. Impairment is an evil, but disability is even more regrettable. Actual impairments—when they are not disguised as racial traits such as the short stature of Dwarves and Hobbit—are never there from birth, but acquired in the course of life. In any case, the impaired are victims, either deservedly as punishment, or unfairly from a stroke of bad luck. This means a world sanitised from the start, where impairment is an add-on, a defect that comes to taint creation as when Morgoth mars Arda, and with it every living thing inside it. This act of corruption, like the Fall of Man but triggered by the Satanic figure, signs the end of the eugenicist utopia initially planned by Ilúvatar and the introduction of illness, decrepitude, gruesome death and disability. Nonetheless, it does not go much further than an introduction.

Imaginary worlds, fantasy ones especially, offer myriad of ways to signify difference and Otherness without necessarily resorting to disability: corporeal deviance can be expressed through the invention of completely imaginary beings with improbable attributes—often identified as monsters, but not always. Tolkien does this with many of his characters, the Dwarves, the Hobbits, the Orcs, Gollum, so many beings that deviate from human bodily norms in one way or another, some peculiar looking, but still familiar, meant to trigger our sympathy, and others, on the contrary, taking on unsettling or monstrous shapes to destabilise us, and sometimes scare us. Yet, even when the link with disability is far from obvious, bodily deviance, whatever its expression, by going against physical and aesthetical norms, imitates processes of disablement and often reveals ableist biases. Because disability is such a wide notion that more or less encapsulates any mental or physical abnormality, the line between the fantastical and the disabled is a fine one.

Looking at the bodies populating Middle-earth then, from the most beautiful to the most repulsive, a hierarchy has been unearthed, supported by medieval notions but also reflecting modern racist and ableist biases. The Elves are constructed as the normates of Middle-earth, the epitomes of beauty, physical ability and health, against which is held every other race, who are deemed less noble, sometimes even depicted as savages embodying racist and orientalist stereotypes. This hierarchy which links physical appearance to morality necessarily leads to the rejection of impairment and deformity and generates different processes of disablement. Those too far removed from the normates to even be considered 'humane,' like the Orcs or Gollum, are turned into monsters, better destroyed or hidden away, their monstrosity justifying their annihilation and the impossibility of their redemption. On the other hand, those considered humane go through a more modern and insidious type of disablement: they have relatively minor impairments, so that their initial form is not *too* altered, but they are victims of ableist behaviours. Such characters are either discredited and pitied, or elevated as heroes, reproducing the modern binary through which disability is apprehended: either in a miserabilist way or as inspirational life lessons. In these cases, disability becomes merely a narrative tool of characterisation or a metaphor, a 'narrative prosthesis' used as marker of heroism or of role failure, with no in-between. Such depictions reveal that beyond the use of medieval notions of physical integrity and honour, Tolkien was influenced to a greater extent by much more recent and modern biases tied to capitalist productivity, liberal individualism and medical discourse. His traumatic experience of the First World War must also have dictated his retelling of war scenes and their disabling consequences, further justifying his restraint on bloody depictions and resulting in a polished representation of impairment and disability, where they are downplayed and sanitised.

Even if some aspects of disability representation take root in medieval Western culture and literature, it is far from being representative of medieval reality and is much closer to contemporary biases. It is the modern medical model and its pathologisation of difference that seem to underlie Tolkien's approach, but even for our time, the representation of disability is still far from being realistic due to its greatly minimised presence, the dismissal of systemic limitations, and a limited and undeveloped medical system. Tolkien thus provides his readers with a world where perfection of form is not only meant to be the default setting, but is also tightly intertwined with goodness and nobleness. By associating impairment to evil, even metaphorically, disability is presented as a terrible injustice, an affront to god's creation, and accordingly, it must be avoided and evacuated at all costs, either through the marginalisation of its embodiments, or by overcoming it. This obsession with bodily perfection has strong ties with racial theories as much as with ableist standards, both being visible stigmas immediately identifiable and triggering Othering processes. In some occurrences Tolkien voluntarily puts biases in the mouth of his characters, only to later debunk them, or to imitate a medieval state of mind. However, this does

not justify the whole theological and aesthetical foundations of Middle-earth. Even if Tolkien's racist and ableist biases were most likely unconscious, they cannot be glossed over as they uphold strict Western constructions of beauty, ability, and normality and more generally define who is allowed to be considered human and who is not.

The issue of race has been extensively treated, notably by the already quoted Dimitra Fimi, but also by Jane Chance and Helen Young,<sup>26</sup> even though it came rather late to 'Tolkien studies' compared to other fields. However, disability and ableism have taken much more time to be considered of interest and generate scholarship—a sign of the contemporary marginalisation of the disabled and the difficulty, whether it concerns activism, access to education, or representation, to have their voice heard. In the past few years, disability studies have gained in popularity, and as mentioned throughout this thesis, some academics have addressed the issue relating to Tolkien's work, but they have, for now, limited their analyses to certain very specific aspects, or to certain characters, while a more general and extensive research on disability in fantasy literature has yet to be conducted.

My humble goal for this thesis was then to cast a wider net, to look not only at disability but at everything that surrounds it, to try and understand how disability is framed within the overall ideology underlying Tolkien's secondary world. Because disability is never just disability. It is not just an isolated problem, an individual issue, a medical condition, a narrative tool, a role failure, a punishment, a sacrifice, a symbol, or even a proof of heroism. It is an aspect of humanity that informs us on how we construct the world and the norms governing it; it informs us on our place within this world and the ideals we hold. Understanding and valuing disability means valuing life unconditionally. It means making room for difference, daring to defy conformity and uniformity, and making sure we do not slide down the slippery slopes of eugenics and transhumanism. It means thinking and building a new world, more accessible, more inclusive, kinder, and beneficial not just to the disabled, but to everyone. Because disability is a universal human experience, one we are all at risk to go through, whether temporarily or permanently. Impairment has always existed, and as we have seen, it has not always been a source of rejection and discrimination. Archaeological findings show that impaired people have been taken care of by their communities since the beginning of times.<sup>27</sup> This is why studying the history of disability is important, looking at our medieval past we can realise that our biases have not always existed and that other modes of being in the world are possible and not necessarily progressist utopias.

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<sup>26</sup> See Chance, Jane, editor. *Tolkien the Medievalist*. Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture, Routledge, 2003. And Young, Helen. *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness*. Routledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Literature, Routledge, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> See the excellent book by French archeo-anthropologist Valérie Delattre, *Handicap: quand l'archéologie nous éclaire*. Collection "Le Collège," Le Pommier, 2018.

To impulse change and counter this lack of consideration, there is a crucial need for deeper, more complex and genuine representation which has to go beyond mere symbolism and lazy characterisation. But there is also a need to continue to identify these short-cuts packed with ableist tropes and stereotypes—which we have all internalised—in order to stop resorting to them. A possible prolongation of this thesis would be to explore other fantasy works, perhaps more recent ones such as *A Song of Ice and Fire*, or *Harry Potter*, and try and reveal how the perception of disability has evolved from Tolkien's time to ours, or if, maybe, it has on the contrary regressed. Besides fantasy, medieval disability still requires some digging. Most of the works evoked here focus on the Western High Middle-ages, but looking beyond Europe, or further in the past if the sources allow it, would unearth interesting and certainly unpredictable findings. A transdisciplinary approach to such research is also decisive, looking towards archaeology, anthropology, history and sociology can only help us make sense of literary texts that should not be isolated but historicised, to understand them in all their complexity and properly apprehend the complex socio-cultural phenomena surrounding bodily deviance. Either way, disability touches on so many more issues than we might first think of: medicine and health, old age, war, religion, architecture and urbanism, transportation, assistive technology and prostheses, sport and competition, morals and ethics, selective birth and assisted death, communal care, education, trans- and posthumanism, aesthetic norms, fashion, and all modes of representation. Disability transcends every aspect of life and once we start looking at the world through its prism, we cannot help but see how omnipresent it is, and at the same time how utterly it is overlooked.



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## ***Disability***

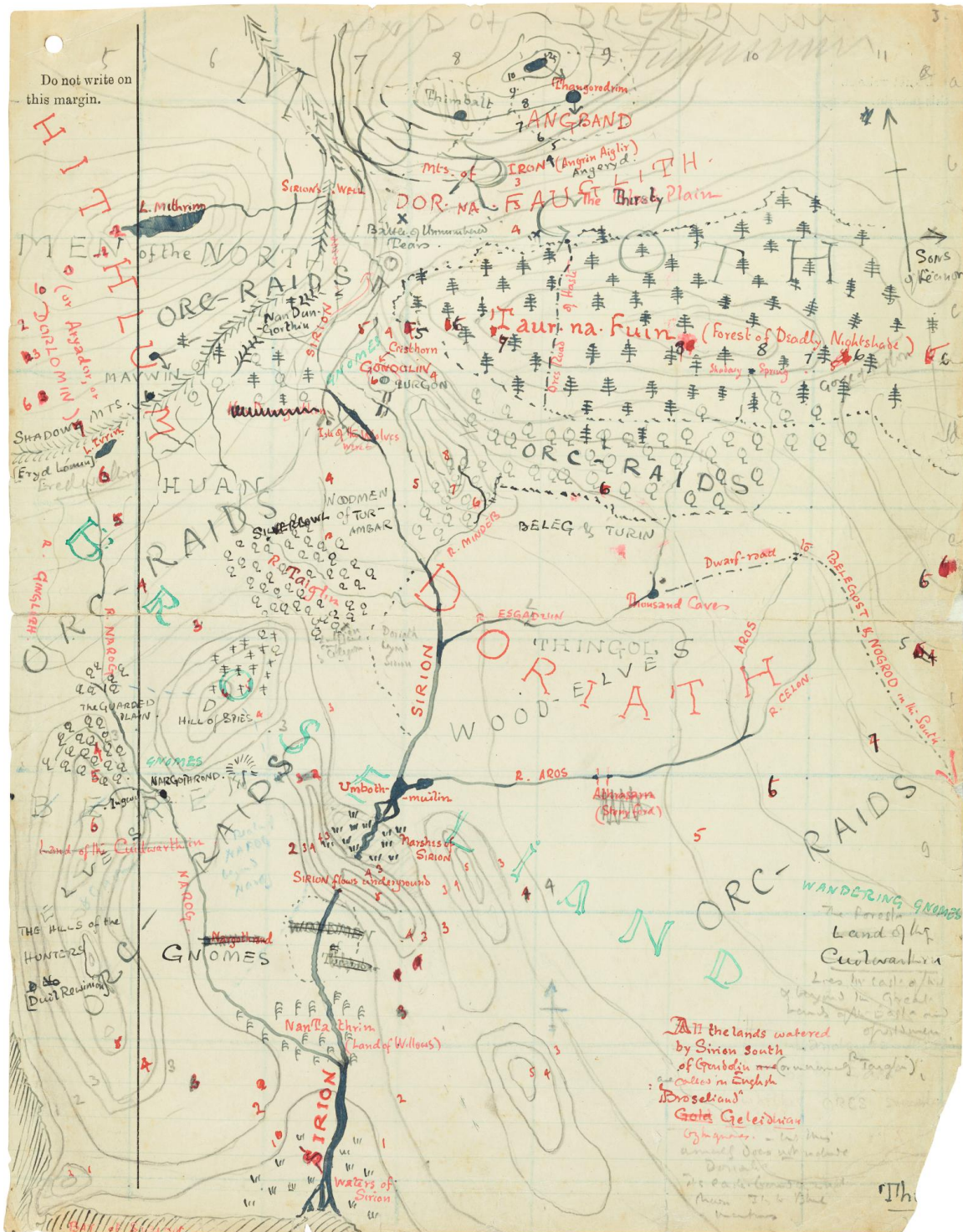
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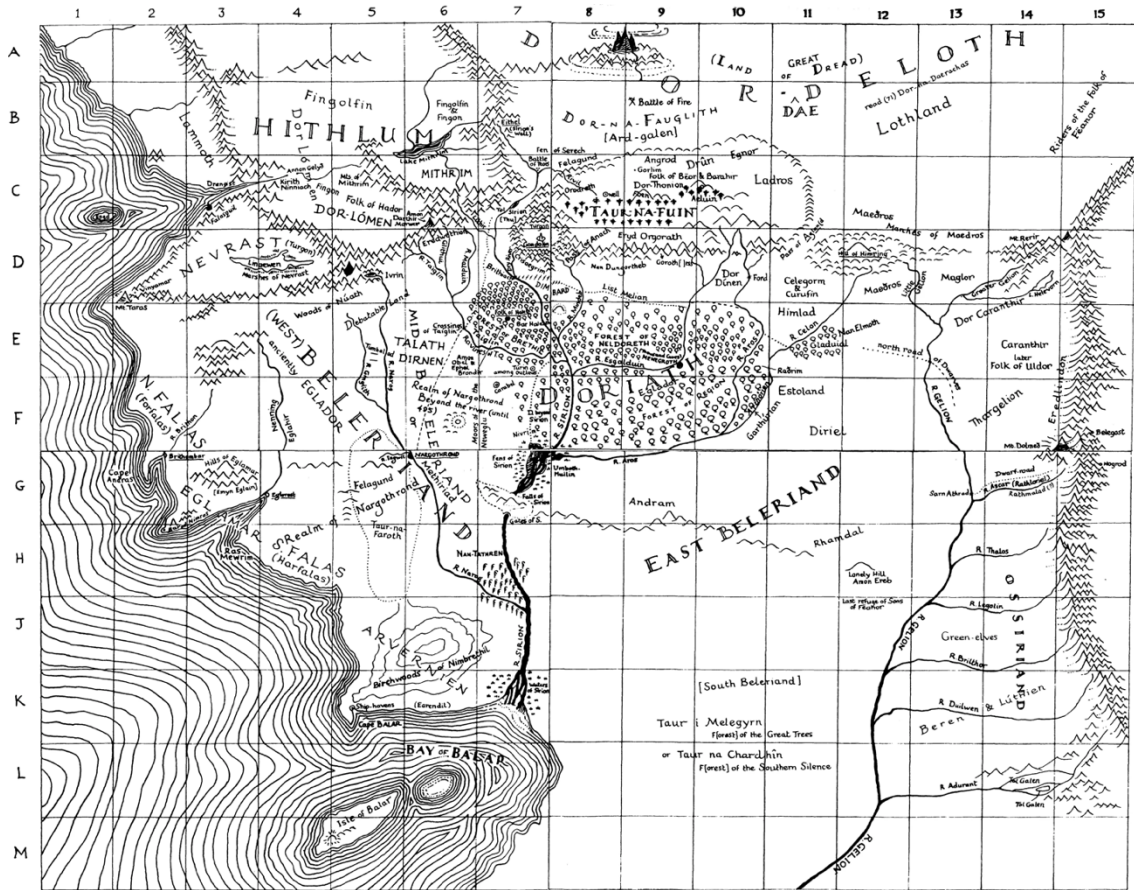
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# Appendices



Appendix 1. Tolkien, J.R.R. First Silmarillion map, ca. 1926-1930. ©Tolkien Estate. Angband is clearly visible in the North, and the region is labelled "Land of Dread."





Appendix 2. Tolkien, Christopher. *Second Silmarillion* map, ca. 1930. ©Tolkien Estate. Angband, the dark fortress, is visible but not marked. The far North region is now named “Great Land of Dread.”



Appendix 3. Tolkien, Christopher. ‘Official’ *Silmarillion* map, 1977. ©Tolkien Estate. The region is no longer visible on the map, removed even further North.