Hell in Beowulf and The Lord of the Rings

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Hell in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*

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Introduction

Hell as a place/space exists, with various modifications, in almost every known mythology or religion.[1] It seems to be the natural and the instinctual way of juxtaposing evil forces to ones that are constructed as just and righteous. Whether these spaces are labeled as heaven and hell or the nomenclature varies, the basic point of differentiation between the two is that hell represents a fallen version of heaven. In a literal sense, this fall is often marked by placing heaven into the skies and burying hell somewhere in the depths of the Earth. However, this fall from heaven is also often metaphorical in the sense that these locations are not always perceived as factual, but mere ideas and concepts that seek to reward the just ones and punish the ones who have broken some sort of social or moral code of behavior.

It is without a doubt that the biblical, Christian version of hell has been the most dominant force in the creation of imagery of evil across the Western culture. This motif was only strengthened by various canonical works that further spread the influence of biblical connotations. Perhaps the most notable ones are Dante's *Divine Comedy* with its allegorical *katabasis* and a subsequent ascension to heaven, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* which deals with the theme of an open conflict between the forces of heaven and hell. With that in mind, the biblical imagination and imagery of hell will be one of the focal points for the analysis of hell-akin spaces, beings, and motifs present in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* (hereinafter as *LotR).*

The reason behind the comparative analysis of these two works is two-fold. First and foremost, J. R. R. Tolkien, the author of *LotR*, has written both a translation of *Beowulf* as well as a number of significant essays that deal with *Beowulf* directly. Tolkien was not only a scholar

[1] That is not to say that it is labeled as hell or that it agrees with the Christian conception of hell. This claim merely states that something akin to Christian hell/devil/monsters etc. can be found across cultures, regardless of the influence of Christianity. Therefore, hell here has a broader meaning and is perhaps more equivalent to "evil".

of *Beowulf*, but an Anglo-Saxon scholar. Therefore, he had a vast knowledge of that tradition and its folklore as well as its mythologies. This is of importance because it stands to reason that Tolkien was inspired by *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon tradition from which he borrowed when creating his fantasy world. An overview of hell in *Beowulf* will surely have a result that can help with the analysis of hell in *LotR*. The second reason stems from the first and is to be expected considering the fact that the paper deals with the theme of hell. Both the epic and the novel explore the marvelous category according to Todorov's division, however, their approach differs. The epic poem is set in a transitory world in which one can witness the decay of pagan beliefs and the rise of Christianity: any marvelous/fantastic elements stem from a merger of these belief systems. On the flip side, *LotR* belongs to an entirely fictional world: it is an epic fantasy in every regard and while it draws inspiration from Anglo-Saxon and Christian tradition, it is a unique world that follows its own lore and rules. The discrepancy between the times of creation of these stories offers a ground to observe the developments that have occurred in the depiction and the understanding of the theme of hell/evil. Therefore, this paper will present various manifestations of hell (or hell-like) spaces, beings, and motifs in both works and will offer a comparison between the two in hopes of exploring the means and the outcome of Tolkien's conscious appropriation of Beowulfian and Anglo-Saxon motifs.

1. Conceptions of hell

When speaking of hell, one does not necessarily refer to a space that is outside of access for all those who are not eternally damned to live in it. The conception of hell in this paper is broader and includes landscapes that bear the markings of a hell-like area. These areas are commonly shrouded in darkness or, if they are perceivable, they are foul to the senses of a human who enters them. However, before going into the specifics for each of the two works, a distinction must be made between the two main influences on the imagery of hell (or imagery in general) present in *Beowulf* and *LotR*.

As a work that stems from pagan tradition, *Beowulf* shows clear traces of pagan beliefs and practices. The second large influence on *Beowulf* comes from Christian teachings and beliefs that are woven very tightly into the fabric of the story as a whole. With that in mind, one must analyze the presence of both of these traditions in order to ascertain the true nature of hell in *Beowulf*. It is reasonable to assume that *LotR* as an epic fantasy written by a man who not only studied *Beowulf*, but also translated it without a doubt exemplifies a similar amalgamation of traditions.

1.1. Pagan conception of hell

The pagan tradition that *Beowulf* draws from can generally be labeled as Germanic mythology which is a term that encompasses German, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon tradition (Leeming 147-148). While none of these traditions mentions hell in the Christian sense of the word, their basis still lies in the conflict of good and evil (which is also the case for every other mythology). This mythical evil that seeks to destroy the world is, in a sense, a conception that personifies evil to the point where it cannot be expressed in any other way but via monstrous figures. The Nordic mythology speaks of Niflheim, the resting place of the dead which is ruled by Hel. This entity that watches over the underworld is described as a "half-dead monster offspring of the Norse trickster, Loki" (Leeming 174). Hel, a being that rules the underworld, is not an ephemeral, indescribable force. It is (or she is) very much physical and its monstrosity is a large part of its evil nature.

Tolkien makes a claim that in Norse mythology "the gods are within Time, doomed with their allies to death. Their battle is with the monsters and the outer darkness" ("*Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics" 25). This idea of the never-ending struggle against the forces of darkness is at the very core of Nordic mythology. Yet, this battle against darkness is doomed to failure because of a mythical event - Ragnarök. This apocalyptical occurrence is described as a unification of forces of evil that the gods were not able to quell and it is entirely inevitable.

While the myth of Ragnarök does promise a new tomorrow, it is a tomorrow where the gods and their heroes have already been defeated. It promises a new world (or universe, new Yggdrasil) in which new beings will be born and live. However, it is not an event controlled by the gods and in it the failure of gods to protect the realm of men (as well as every other realm) is exemplified. The inability of gods to be the ultimate guardians exemplifies the roots of Anglo-Saxon perception of fate. Generally, fate is seen as a good force, as something that ensures a positive outcome should one stick to one's own fate. However, the Anglo-Saxon world's perception of fate is closer to that of doom than of hope. This idea is deeply engraved into Norse mythology as a whole: Ragnarök is their fate, their inevitable end, their doom. Fate/wyrd, as a pivotal element of Anglo-Saxon society, will be explored in more detail at a later point because of the significance it carries as the centerpiece of pagan/mythological belief of the North.

Hell, as a product of Christian thought, is necessarily bound to it, but not impervious to outside influences. The Anglo-Saxon society that was in turmoil, in a transitory period between gods and God, produced an image of hell that was intertwined with pagan belief. Historical documents that originate from 6th to the middle of 11th century reveal that evocations of hell were often used at the end of speeches or legal documents as a means of ensuring that one abides by the spoken/written word. Thus one can find mentions of "everlasting hell" (Whitelock 438), "black hell" (Whitelock 338), as well as mentions of "the devil (thrusting a) sinful soul into hell" (Whitelock 285). The imagery presented here is predominantly Christian, but it does retain some qualities of pagan belief such as the blackness or darkness that is so dominant in pagan imagination of evil spaces. Significantly more pagan conceptions of hell and beings of hell can be found in illuminated manuscripts. One such manuscript is the Harley Psalter,[2], where one can see "the very birth of a new demonology" (Tselos 139). Several animalistic features

[2] The imagery of this Psalter is largely influenced by the imagery of the Utrecht Psalter. For more details on the parallels and similarities see Semple and Tselos.

are added onto demonic entities such as claws, elephant trunks, genitalia. Tselos goes on to say that "there is something tentative about these transformations which suggests that the illustrator's imagination was fired by the drama of the underworld" (139). It is as if anthropomorphic demons were not capable of truly capturing the horrors of the mythical underworld and they had to be further pushed over the border of monstrosity. These illustrations portray the monstrous amalgamations created by merging pagan monsters and Christian spiritual evil of which Tolkien wrote about in his essay "*Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics" (35-36).

Evil as such is monstrous, it is hidden, it resides in places that are difficult to access and that are shrouded in darkness. Imagery of hellish landscape in the Harley Psalter includes "small rocky openings and earth-covered pits containing single figures or small figurative groups (of sinners)" (Semple 236). There are several "dark marks" which represent places of open earth when one can descend into hell thus creating "a feeling of multiple access points to hell, emphasizing the concept that hell and torment were literally immediately below one's feet" (236). Precisely this idea of hell being a physical space that is in such proximity to humanity that one can wander into it is pivotal to the understanding of hell on Earth that is present both in pagan society of the time and in *Beowulf.*

The examples above provide insight into pagan conception of hell at a time when there was no doubt that Christianity would ultimately prevail. However, it must not be understated that the pagan, mythological belief gives evil power that can even trample the might of gods, thus enveloping the entire pagan culture in fear of such undefeatable evil. Therefore, it can be said that the pagan conception hell/evil is a combination of darkness and fear – the darkness does not allow a man to see his enemy, to realize the nature of his enemy. The natural cause of events is to fear that which you do not know or cannot even begin to understand. This darkness existed everywhere in the pagan world, for much of the land was not explored or mapped which

creates the aforementioned idea of hell/evil being just around the corner. Hell is, therefore, not displaced somewhere deep underground or in some mythical, unreachable plain that one only visits upon death – hell, in the pagan sense, is on Earth and its monsters are lurking in the shadows of meres, forests, mountains and every other area that is difficult to access.

1.2. Christian conception of hell

The Christian conception of hell is the most dominant conception of evil and the most readily recognizable space of punishment for sinful doings in the Western World. Whether it is depicted as a space of eternal flame or a space in which everything is encapsulated in eternal frost, it is by no means an area that is meant to be inhabited by humans. Yet, Christian ideology clearly states that the punishment for the ones who do not repent for their sins is hell. Therefore, in very simplified terms, it can be said that Christian hell is the materialization of humankind's deviation from God. The corruption of hell or the Devil, however, does not come in the form of monsters that are described in ancient mythologies. The Christian idea of evil is one that is much more personal (yet universal for all mankind); it is one that corrupts people from within. This is, of course, exemplified through sin(s). The Seven Deadly Sins are the signifiers for the majority (if not all) the evil that exists on Earth and are a representation of the evil that mankind must fight against in order to earn their eternal afterlife. Whereas the pagan conception of evil focused on the physical, the Christian conception focuses on the spiritual. The totality of this spiritual evil is embodied in the figure of the Devil, a malign entity that corrupts humanity via the allure of sin. Hell is under his domain and those human beings/souls that fail to repent are doomed to forever exist inside that realm of eternal punishment. However, when one speaks of Christianity, two things must be kept in mind. The first is the fact that Christianity subsumes different Churches the beliefs of which vary. Thus, for example, Catholics allow for the existence of a purgatory as a means of cleansing souls of the corruption of sin which would eventually lead to ascension to heaven. However, despite the differences between the Churches,

there exist common shared beliefs between them. One such belief is the perceived unity of love and God: God is love and it is precisely because of his being love that God wishes for each and every soul to repent and ultimately enjoy eternity of bliss.

Alan Bernstein writes on the development of hell and the different ways in which it was thought of over the centuries. He claims that "Christianity, as it matured after the first few centuries A.D., achieved a complex synthesis of Roman, Greek, and Hebrew thought, a synthesis peculiarly reflected in the evolving conception of Hell" (83). Thus hell in Christianity evolved from a place of torment and eternal flame and became something more: the farthest point from the love of God. Hell became, or is, a place where souls are entirely separated from the love of their Creator. The question of eternity as it pertains to hell is a problematic one because the many torments of hell (lack of God's love being chief among them) are in conflict with the central idea of God being love.[3] However, for the purposes of this paper, Christian hell can be described as a space of torment, a space where souls feel the coldness caused by the separation from God, a space over which an entirely malign entity presides and it is precisely that entity that corrupts humans and leads them to hell in the first place. The concept of free will is of utter-most importance here because God, an omnipotent being, allows for the existence of the Devil: God could destroy him (else he is not omnipotent), but chooses not to and thus allows human to choose which path to follow. Bernstein makes an observation that "for the barbarian Germans, no Hell exists because neither kings nor gods are powerful enough to confine evil to a single place" (85) which correlates with the inevitable doom of an event such as Ragnarök. Christian God possess power above all: hope of eternal bliss exists regardless of the horrors one must live through on Earth.

[3] Could or would an entity that is love itself allow for its creations to suffer eternally? If it would, is it truly good? Or does it, perhaps, go beyond human conception of goodness and is something else entirely?

However, despite the fact that Christian evil is mostly spiritual in its conception, it produced plethora of visual motifs. The imagery of Dante's *katabasis*, Bosch's depiction of sins, Milton's battle of heavenly and hellish forces (among many others) is not something that can be ignored. Therefore, as a concluding remark on the Christian conception of hell, it has to be underlined yet again that the core Christian principle of hell is, first and foremost, spiritual and that the greatest enemy comes in the form of the Devil and the seeds of sin that he plants in human hearts. Yet, these very sins can be and have been personified and turned into physical entities (monsters), which evokes the idea of Christian hell/evil being paganized. This interplay of Christian and pagan (and the influence of the two on one another) can be illustrated quite clearly in both *Beowulf* and in *LotR*.

2. Hell in *Beowulf*

Beowulf can be structurally split into two parts each of which is dominated by particular monstrous figures that have descended from "Cain's clan" (Heaney 106). In the first part there exist two such figures: Grendel and his mother. They are placed within the same category because they fulfil the same narrative function – they are both enemies Beowulf must defeat before he becomes king. The second part is centered around the dragon, an enemy that ultimately takes the hero's life. The dragon figures as an enemy quite different from the first two both in its physicality and its place of habitat. Yet, all three of them share the trait of being creatures marked and sullied by sin. Before exploring the way the creatures are represented in *Beowulf*, one must observe the landscapes they inhabit. The hellish nature of the landscapes reflects on the cursed existence of the creatures and creates an aura of fear and malignity around them, further strengthening their image of creatures from the underworld/hell.

2.1. Landscapes of hell in *Beowulf*

When the poet first introduces Grendel, he says that the monster is “haunting the marches, marauding round the heath / and the desolate fens” (Heaney 103-104). Although brief, the description of Grendel’s habitat offers several bits of information that are crucial for the construction of landscapes of hell in the poem as a whole. It is immediately apparent that the monster was given a habitat that is difficult to access for humans, an area of land that is not suited for human settlement. Grendel, the being “who lurked and swooped in the long nights / on the misty moors” (Heaney 161-162) is marked by the very darkness that he inhabits. Paul S. Lagneslag writes on this topic and remarks that “the poet associates his monsters with their habitats to such a degree that landscape becomes part of their very identities” (120). Therefore, Grendel is not merely a creature that inhabits the swamplands – he is a swamp-creature, he is a monster that sleeps under a dark lake, but is also a dark lake monster. This delineation is important because it uncovers the specifics of the pagan understanding of space. A great many lines in *Beowulf* are attributed to the description of the golden beacon that is Heorot. Yet, those descriptions do not only speak of the hall, but also of all the space around it. If the hall is a beacon of light, that surely must mean that the space around it is without said light. Darkness exists in all places not inhabited by men and from that darkness, from those uncharted and unmapped mists the monsters emerge. Any journey out of the hall involves many dangers: “rocky slopes, headlands and mountain groves, are all situated on the horizon of the human experience” (Langeslag 121). The difficulty of exploring and understanding the land that the monsters stem from is, in part, due to the very nature of the land. While it is obvious that mountains and caves are both difficult and dangerous places to explore even without the presence of monsters, a single feature of monstrous landscapes is always present in *Beowulf.*

When Beowulf takes it upon himself to correct Unferth’s erroneous story, he speaks of an adventure under the sea that he took part in as a competition against Breca. This story, which is retold in lines 520-581, exemplifies Beowulf’s ability by introducing the idea of him being

able to function underwater as if he himself was a being naturally prone to that habitat. The landscape of the ocean is mysterious even in the modern world: there is something to the darkness and the depth of the ocean that makes human imagination tick. Oceans and bodies of water are places which cannot be explored by sight alone: they have to be ventured into, a risk must be taken (caves function similarly). It is this idea of risk-taking and a moment of fate that marks all such areas. As mentioned previously, difficulty of accessing certain landscapes exists even without monsters – lives can be lost in the ocean, lakes, mountains purely because of the natural harshness of those places. Yet Beowulf, as a man who believes himself to be the chosen one whom fate will guide to victory, relishes in taking risks and delving into such areas.

Imagining the world as divided into landscapes that are home to mankind and into those that harbor monsters is a belief that dominated pagan societies (most readily exemplified by the beliefs expressed in mythologies). However, the hellish nature of bodies of water is a myth that got amplified by the emergence and growing dominance of Christianity. Langeslag notices that the description of the great biblical flood omits naval beings from the list of those that were destroyed (125-126). A flood, even if caused by divine powers and large enough to submerge the whole world, would not harm beings that are used to living under the sea: the evil that the flood sought to destroy survived in the depths of the oceans, lakes and other watery areas. Therefore, the frequent mentions of sea-monsters in *Beowulf* are something that, quite naturally, emerges from a merger of Christian and pagan beliefs. Those monsters are not represented as some great beasts because Beowulf himself slays many of them. In the story he tells of his competition against Breca, he speaks of having slayed nine of those beasts without much trouble. In his journey toward the lake where Grendel's mother lives the poet says that Beowulf and his company had to walk "up fells and screes, along narrow footpaths / and ways where they were forced into single file, / ledges on cliffs above lairs of water-monsters" (Heaney 1409-1411). The existence of such monsters is not something that characters marvel at: it is a known

fact of their world and as long as the monsters stay in their place of residence, they are not seen as a threat.

In his text about Grendel and the monster's connection with the Christian figure of the Devil, Lars Malmberg mentions that the imagery of hell present in the epic poem resembles the description provided in the seventeenth text of the *Blickling Homiles*.[4] Malmberg goes on to say that "the reason why the poet went to such a source for his picture of Grendel's mere and the scenery surrounding it must be that he wanted to impart hell-like features to his descriptions in order to place it firmly within a Christian framework" (243). With this in mind, it would be fitting to take a closer look at the seventeenth homily and to see just how many overt parallels exist in the imagination of landscape. The core of the description can be found at the very end of the homily where St. Paul can be seen observing the earth. It is said that he was watching the "northern region of the earth" and there he saw:

> dark mists; and under the stone was the dwelling place of monsters and execrable creatures. And he saw hanging on the cliff on the icy woods many black souls with their hands bound; and the devils in likeness of monsters were seizing them like greedy wolves; and the water under the cliff beneath was black … These were the souls of those who in this world wickedly sinned and would not cease from it before their life's end (Morris 105).

This paragraph once again confirms the imagination of hell as being bound to deep, dark, and unperceivable landscapes. It also places emphasis on the blackness of soul and sin which are motifs that are crucial for the construction of monstrous characters in *Beowulf*.

[4] He himself notes that the parallel has been established before him and mentions Frederick J. Klaeber as the person who suggested the connectedness of the accounts of hell in the two works. As Josephine Bloomfield points out in her 1999 article, "among the editions of *Beowulf*, Frederick Klaeber's remains the most important" (130). His edition of *Beowulf* revolutionized the field of Beowulfian studies and he retains his position as the most influential Beowulfian scholar to date.
The *Homilies* are a 10th century collection of sermons written in Old English; for more on its history and relation with other collections, see Scragg. For an insight into the (intended) audience of the *Homilies*, see Gatch.

However, before exploring the meaning of those terms as they pertain to the monsters, another feature of hellish landscapes present in *Beowulf* must be illustrated. This feature is also hinted at in the seventeenth homily where it is written that "the mountain … was overtaken with horror and dread; and a fierce storm arose from the mountain, and the summit of the mountain was all overhung with a dark mist" (Morris 101). This sentence repeats the imagery of mist and darkness (and the terror that the two cause), but it also creates a link between a storm and the rising darkness. In a sense, the emergence of a storm serves as an indicator of evil that is about to make itself known. Furthermore, a rising storm, much like darkness, implies the notion of invisibility or impaired sight – such a condition is cause for concern in and of itself because it leaves one unprepared for whatever dangers may lurk in the spaces that escape perception.

Similar to the homily, lines 1373-1376 in *Beowulf* give information of "stormy weather" that "makes clouds scud and the skies weep." This can be read as a warning to those who venture into the mountains. However, taking the pagan conception of the world into account, landscapes that do not conform to man (that are not overtly suitable to human settlement) are seen as areas from which evil stems. Storms create such areas wherever they appear, but this is especially true when they are combined with mountainous and marshy landscape. It is not unreasonable to think that storms that occurred at inopportune times were seen as either acts of fate or as anger of a malign entity – in a metaphorical sense, the storms themselves become synonymous with evil.[5]

All of the described areas and features of the land ultimately serve a single purpose: they are difficult enough to explore and perceive that they themselves create fear of the unknown. However, in a text like *Beowulf* where the existence of monsters is taken as fact, landscapes

[5] Hell is often perceived as place of eternal fire, but the influence of Dante's *Inferno* on the contemporary imagery of hell must not be understated: he incorporated the ideas of eternal frost as well as raging storms that act as punishment for the denizens of hell. However, even without Dante's work, there exists an underlying sense of danger and fear that one could correlate with storms, especially when one considers the fact that pagan societies of old did not know the cause of storms.

help reveal certain aspects of those monsters. However, let us fist take a look at those aspects of their monstrosity that are overtly presented.

2.2. Beings of hell in *Beowulf*

Many studies have been written on *Beowulf* since Tolkien's pivotal essay and almost all of them have agreed with his central premise: special attention must be paid to the monsters. When Grendel is first introduced, the poet marks him as "a powerful demon, a prowler through the dark" (86) which presents the reader with several bits of information. The most readily apparent one is the evil nature of Grendel: he is a demon, not an ill-willed human. The classifying trait for a being to be seen as hellish or devil-like is for it to be distinctly divided from the virtuousness of humanity. As an example of this, one can look to the beginning of the poem where Shield Sheafson is introduced and described as the "scourge of many tribes, / a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes" (4-5). The poet even links the word "terror" with Shield and his men, but any moral judgement of Shield is omitted, clearly showing that man is allowed to sin and not be seen as monstrous: there still exist avenues of repentance.

Therefore, Grendel (and the other monsters) are clearly held to a different standard than humans (or vice versa). The scop seemingly elaborates his immediate condemnation of the monsters by linking them to "Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed / and condemned as outcasts" (106-107). In a sense, they are inherently and unavoidably evil – it is clear that no change of their alignment will occur throughout the text/story. Yet, there exists a note of pity in the way that the poet writes/speaks about Grendel. Robert L. Chapman claims that the pity stems from the remnants of the pagan concept of self-reliance and thus the poet pities the fact that "Grendel could not alter his lot; he was going to suffer eternal damnation because of his nature, not of his will" (336). This reveals the origins of the apologetic notions: lack of free will is something to be pitied because the evil deeds of Cainites are mere extensions of an ancient evil, of the first sin and all sins committed thereafter by their Cainite brethren.

Perhaps that lack of free will is the single point that differentiates monsters from humans the most. When Tolkien writes on the nature of monsters, he sees them as a "parody of human form" that "becomes symbolical, explicitly, of sin" ("*Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics" 34). Their physicality being a symbol of sin or even personification of sin opens avenues of analysis that necessarily lead to attempts of delineating which monster corresponds to which sin. With this in mind, it would be prudent to introduce the category of degree as it pertains to evil and sinful beings. Line 86 presents Grendel as a "powerful demon"[6] and opens wide the possibility for the existence of both more and less powerful demonic entities within the world of *Beowulf*. Yet, the poet offers no apparent tools to the reader/listener who wishes to ascertain what makes Grendel a powerful member of his kin as opposed to others. Despite the lack of clear information, however, one could argue that the degree of power among malign entities is often measured against the degree of sin that is represented in their thoughts and actions. The notion of degree as it pertains to sin is a difficult one to manage because every conclusion, in this case, hinges on some sort of simplification of an inherently complex matter. In his introduction to *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Bishop Kallistos Ware offers a brief overview of how pride became regarded as the chief sin in Western culture and he dates it back to the late 6th century and St. Gregory the Great (61-63). Pride is regarded as a sin that is at the root of all others; in a sense, it is the progenitorial evil that drives the Devil himself. This dominance and prevalence of pride is something that can be traced throughout *Beowulf*: it exists on both sides of the coin. For example, Beowulf decides to embark on his liberating quest in part because his own pride makes him hungry for glory; yet, Beowulf is given other motivation by the poet, thus making his pride a character flaw, something that he struggles with, but not something that entirely explains him. The same can be said of the great hall of Heorot which, to some extent, is a prideful symbol of the king's might, but, on the other hand, it is also built in service of the

[6] In Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*, Grendel is labeled as a "fierce spirit" (70) which also implies the notion of degree.

people: it offers them a safe space for their community to develop and its very size could dissuade many an enemy from attacking. Grendel's motivation for attacking the hall is vague; one cannot come to a clear logical conclusion as to why he decided to bring down his wrath onto Heorot. As a Cainite monster, however, it is implied that he is forever marked by sin. Therefore, his relentless assaults against the great hall and its people can be seen as driven by a deep-seeded sense of pride, one that controls his being and one that he cannot quell or push aside. A similar notion exists even when the dragon becomes the central enemy – even though the dragon is a mythical embodiment of greed, it is not his avarice that causes him to become a threat, but an insult to his pride.

With this in mind, the question of degree of monstrosity can be transformed into a matter of degree of sin. What makes the pride of Shield or Beowulf excusable, when the pride of Grendel and the dragon marks them as beings of hell? In his book *Mere Christianity,* C.S. Lewis makes a claim that "it was through Pride that the Devil became the Devil: Pride leads to every other vice" (122). In a sense, prolonged exposure to malignant effects of pride causes corruption. It is said that Grendel "had dwelt for a time / in misery among the banished monsters" (Heaney 104-105), among "Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed / and condemned as outcasts" (105-106) and "out of the curse of his exile there sprang / ogres and elves and evil phantoms / and the giants too who strove with God" (111-113). The entire lineage is born from and within sin, and they are all inseparable from it. Humans tread every now and again in sinful waters, but they are given a chance for repentance; humans can make amends. Yet, the idea of degree of sin does not necessarily mean that there exist degrees of evil: evil in itself evades gradation. The phrases "powerful demon" and "fierce spirit" do not pertain to the quantity of evil within Grendel – evil is an absolute category (less powerful monsters are still evil monsters). The powers of Grendel are shown in his destruction and ravenous revelry. The

amount of sin within Grendel is what makes him "powerful" – pride, greed, malice, avarice that guide him are present in such amounts that he has no option but to bring ruin to Heorot.

Throughout the poem, Grendel is given many new descriptions which are mainly symbolic – that is to say that the descriptors are vague as it pertains to his actual physical traits. Phrases such as "dark death-shadow" (160), "corpse-maker" (276), and "the bane of the race of men" (712) create visceral imagery in the minds of readers/listeners. A shadow marks an entity that has no true distinctive features, and the title of a "corpse-maker" implies a bodily construction that is adapted to hunting prey. The image created is that of a merger of human and animal features which function in unison to create a uniquely capable predatory specimen. The last of the three mentioned phrases gives mythical proportion to Grendel and his evil: in that line, he is truly presented as powerful and unstoppable. He not only threatens Heorot, but the entirety of mankind and as such is a worthy opponent for Beowulf.

Yet, Grendel is but one of the three monsters that Beowulf faces. It is to be expected that the second enemy would be a larger threat to both the people of Heorot, but also to Beowulf himself. Grendel's mother is, without a doubt, a step ahead of her son. Whereas it seems rather easy to explain Grendel and the dragon as embodiments of sin and as destructive forces of hell, such a description would miss the mark were it to be ascribed to Grendel's mother. This is not to say that Grendel and the dragon are without referent in the way that they are constructed: a parody of common human characters is present in both of them. Thus in Hrothgar's speech in lines 1700-1784, he speaks a warning to Beowulf and all would-be rulers via a tale on the downfall of king Heremod. Jane Chance writes on this episode and says that within it, three sins are present. These three sins are then embodied in the monsters: "Grendel personifies envy, like Heremod, because he killed the Danish retainers; the dragon personifies avarice, like the hall-ruler he mocks when he stands guard over a treasure" (107). The third sin is that of pride, and while pride moves the two male enemies, it is not as nuanced as it is in the character of

Grendel's mother. "Throughout the epic *Beowulf*, Grendel's mother, rather oddly, is described in human and social terms, and through words like *wīf* and *ides* normally reserved for human women" (Chance 95). Those do not simply represent her as a female being, but also imply "a high social rank" (95). However, Grendel's mother breaks away from the mold of Anglo-Saxon queens: she is constructed in juxtaposition with Hilderburh and Wealhtheow, the two mothers/members of high society who abide by the laws and customs of the hall, their rank, and their gender. Jane Chance uses the terms "peacemakers", "peace-weavers", and "cup-passer" to describe the role of an Anglo-Saxon woman in a great hall such as Heorot. In short, they are supposed to bring together hosts and guests, they are supposed to be the forces whose sole purpose is to be used in the formation of alliances and in preservation of peace. By implying that Grendel's mother is at all related to such women, the poet clearly contrasts the two sides. In this particular case, Tolkien's commentary on the monsters of *Beowulf* being parodies of human form rings true: Grendel's mother is just that. This, however, does not make her a simple character. Her complexity lies in the fact that she is a merger of man and woman and of a monster and a human: she is both and neither, she is a monster who reserves the right to act like a thane would. In line 1260, the poet uses the masculine pronoun *sē* when referring to her; Jane Chance points out that Grendel's mother is also titled a warrior, a destroyer, and a guardian (95) which are all words charged with masculinity and implication of masculine traits. Twice she is shown to be given the right of a high ranking male figure: her avenging her son's death is presented as something understandable, something that she is entitled to (which is in clear contrast to the passivity and peace-keeping of usual Anglo-Saxon female figures). The second instance is represented in the elaborate description of her defense of her own hall – the underwater lair. Combat between Beowulf and her is akin to intercourse (Chance 103); it is described in great detail which brings about the sense of her being allowed the right to defend her home much like any thane would be. Her amalgamative status places her outside of both

natural and societal laws; however, she still acts in accordance with the latter when she avenges and when she defends.

While the question of her being evil or not seems mute, the poet does allow for some leniency in her description. In much the same way as he claimed that the deeds of Grendel are due to his inescapable, Cainite nature, the poet also introduces the malicious acts of Grendel's mother as necessities. There is no course of action for her other than to take vengeance for her son's death: to protect her pride, she retaliates; when her home is attacked, she defends it – as monstrous as she is, her actions are no different from those of Anglo-Saxon kings. An additional layer of complexity regarding Grendel's mother is brought about the very fact that she remains unnamed. Her carrying no name of her own, but being a singular entity, implies an ancient origin to her: the roots of her existence go so deep into the past that no living human remembers her or her name.[7] Her ancient origin does not only come with mystery, but also provides her with wisdom which she is able to utilize during her assault on Heorot. While her son sought to destroy as much as possible, there is a method to her madness: she attacks and takes the life of Hrothgar's "highest-placed adviser, / his dearest companion" (1308-1309). This advisor, named Aeschere, is referred to as "rūn-wita" and "ræd-bora" (1325), terms which signify his knowledge of runes (literacy) and that laud him as a man of wisdom. Hrothgar laments over this death which does not come as a surprise considering that Aeschere was his "right-hand man" (1326) and, quite possibly, the only literate man in Heorot. Therefore, the attack by Grendel's mother shows intelligence and strategy, for she causes more damage with a single murder than her son ever did in all his ravenous rampages. Yet, Aeschere is not the only hand she takes: she also reclaims Grendel's arm that Beowulf had taken for a trophy as another means of regathering the dignity that was lost when her son fell.

[7] Other unnamed monsters are always referred to in plural; there are many sea-monsters that are more or less the same, yet there is only one Grendel's mother. The dragon himself carries no personal name, but he is not described via another's name: him being a dragon is enough to paint a picture of what he is.

As already mentioned, human features are, more or less, retained when it comes to the descriptions of Grendel and his mother. This is perhaps best exemplified in an inserted folk story that occurs in lines 1345-1361 where is said that one creature "looks like a woman" while the other is "in the shape of a man". Deviations from humans are mostly related to their Cainite descent (because of which they are demons/malign spirits), but Grendel's monstrosity is also exemplified by him being "bigger than any man" (1353). Likewise, they are described as "fatherless" which implies they were not born by natural means. A unique trait is the "baleful light, / flame more than light, [that] flared from [Grendel's] eyes" (Heaney 726 – 727) which is an extremely common motif nowadays, but it is certainly evocative when one imagines a pair of glowing red eyes staring out of the impenetrable darkness of the pagan world. Both Grendel and his mother possess strength beyond that of an ordinary man and, being demons of hell, they possess a trait of imperviousness to weapons. In fact, Beowulf murders Grendel (or causes a deadly injury) with nothing but his own might, while the mother is slain with a sword that is "an ancient heirloom / from the days of the giants" (1558-1559). Therefore, the only weapon capable of destroying such creatures is either a weapon used by their own Cainite kind[8] or a fate-driven weapon in the shape of an extraordinary human such as Beowulf (only such a human could have even wielded a weapon as large as the sword used to end Grendel's mother). Another physical trait given to Grendel's mother is her poisonous blood that causes destruction of the blade used to kill her (lines 1615-1616).

The last enemy Beowulf faces is a dragon whose corpse near the end of the poem is described as a "serpent" (3039) which immediately evokes the imagery of Jörmungandr, the World Serpent, the monstrous offspring of Norse god Loki. It is the action of this great serpent that sets Ragnarök (apocalypse in Nordic mythos) in motion: it is said that its poison will fill

[8] Earlier in the text, giants, ogres, and elves were mentioned as beings who were also exiled and cursed by God (see Heaney 112-114).

the air and water of Earth. It is one of the greatest monsters in Nordic mythology and the final enemy of Thor who ultimately dies because of a wound sustained in combat against Jörmungandr. It is thus fitting that the dragon is also the last enemy of Beowulf and that he also manages to slay the dragon before he himself departs from the living. The serpentine nature of the dragon must also be considered for its relation to the serpent in the Garden of Eden which serves as a deceitful shape the Devil takes. The links between the Devil and the dragon go further still as in Book of Revelation he (the Devil) appears as "a huge red dragon which had seven heads and ten horns" (12:3) that causes a war in heaven, ultimately leading to his expulsion from it. The dragon serves as the final enemy, as the enemy against which Beowulf needs to utilize all of the strength he can muster. Yet, symbolically, Beowulf falls in that final battle and in doing so gives an apt conclusion to the epic. The dragon is defeated, but it is not the only form of evil present on Earth. Thus Beowulf dies, but evil persists which again echoes the pagan conception of eternal, indestructible evil. The demise of the hero necessarily leads to the demise of his heroic lineage. Without his lineage, Beowulf's kingdom is sure to fall; the end of the Anglo-Saxon world becomes inevitable.

The encounter with the dragon offers a change of pace and a change of scenery. David E. Jones writes about dragons and the reason behind their existence in almost every known culture. He sees them as a unique product of the "primate-predator complex" (36), where the dragon is seen as an amalgamation of the three types of predators that prey(ed) on primates: raptors, snakes and cats. The idea of the dragon being the ultimate predator in turn leads to many of its characteristics: thus, its "noxious, hot, fiery, smoky, and/or poisonous" breath is a direct result of a predator's breath being "hot and reeking of putrid animal meet" (90). Similarly, dragons are often seen as living near water, because predators used the opportunity of attacking unsuspecting prey whose head was lowered in order to drink at water holes (90). The latter point is, to an extent, maintained in *Beowulf* via various water monsters that are described as

"reptiles" (Heaney 1426), "writhing sea-dragons" (1426) and "serpents" (1428). While these monsters are dangerous in their own right, they are indivisible from their waterscape. Yet, the reverse is also true. The waterscape in *Beowulf* cannot be separated from those monsters and it functions as truly terrifying not only because it is difficult to know and navigate, but because folk tales keep linking such terrible "sea-brutes" (421) to seas and lakes. However, while dangerous, they are not the ultimate predators. The sea monsters pose no real threat to Beowulf: when he boasts of having defeated them when correcting Unferth's erroneous story, it is taken as matter-of-fact. It is an indubitably impressive deed for a human to achieve, but it does not possess sufficient grandeur to bear the weight of an entire epic poem. Those monsters are not vile enough, sinful enough to attempt to conquer the land of men – they are simply lesser than Grendel, his mother, and the dragon.

Jones speaks of a "world-dragon" (19) and of a "brain-dragon" (60) as figures that have grown in primate/human consciousness to symbolize an enemy greater than any natural predator could ever be. Earlier it was mentioned that Grendel and his mother possess some animalistic traits that shift them from being human to being monstrous, but that also allows them to hunt and feed on their human prey. A dragon is entirely constructed of various animalistic traits. Besides the origin of its breath, every aspect of its body can be likened to that of an animal. The face is constructed in such a way to resemble an incoming predator (Jones 75), scales come from ancient reptiles (76-77), large size retains the size proportions of primates against predators (78-79), roaring instills terror as is the case with animals who roar (80), and its feet resemble those of raptors or birds, making them quite apt at assaulting prey (80-81). Jones goes on to link the figure of a dragon with certain terrifying items of modernity such as atomic/nuclear weaponry or potential destructive alien visitors. Jones concludes that "in the European Middle Ages, the dragon was the greatest danger that could be imagined" (107). Thus,

it is fitting for it to be the final enemy that Beowulf faces: it is the ultimate test for a hero who spent his life fighting off forces of hell.

The monster awakens after Beowulf has already spent a number of years as king. He is wiser and older than he was when he faced Grendel and his mother, yet it seems that the foolishness of pride only grew within him as he aged. Therefore, he decides to combat the gargantuan beast alone. The dragon's greatest weapon is "molten venom / in the fire he breathes" (2522-2523) which clearly evokes imagery of Jörmungandr. Another trait that distinguishes him from the other two monsters is his winged form: he is able to traverse space that is unreachable for any other character in the story. Verticality figures as important in human imagination of power evidenced both by the depictions of various hierarchies and by the placement of heaven somewhere beyond the sky. Whereas evil usually lurks beneath the ground (at the opposite pole of verticality), the dragon is a mythical figure that cannot be bound to a single space: there is no region or place on Earth that is unreachable for a dragon. Elden Stuart writes on symbolism of place in *Beowulf* and notes that the dragon's geographical location is quite different from that of Grendel and his mother: the dragon's is primarily land-bound which correlates to the tradition of giant worms/snakes that dragons stem from. The burial mound that he inhabits "is both above the earth – soil heaped over bodies and treasures – and below the newly created surface" (453). Strange is the leap that the poem takes from humanoid monsters to a being as terrifying and as destructive as the dragon. One would expect it to cause more mayhem than the first two ever could, yet the dragon takes nothing but Beowulf. While it could be argued that now the world of men is left defenseless, it was, after all, Beowulf's fate to fight and defeat the dragon, losing his own life in the process.

William Reynolds writes on the importance of dragons as mythical figures and states that "Germanic heroic tradition within which the poet operates portrays a dragon-battle as a climactic event in the lives of the greatest heroes, and Christian tradition has long represented

the devils of hell as fire-breathing dragons" (36). Dragon and the Devil seemingly share the common trait of being the evil, malicious apexes of their respective worlds: a dragon terrorizes the physical realm, while the Devil acts in much more mysterious and devious ways. Yet, the destruction they both cause is great and calls for a hero. This hero must navigate the treacherous darkness of the world and ease the fears of his fellow men and women.

2.3. Combating hell in *Beowulf*

Heroes are given a unique position in every story: their heroism often stems either from a lack of fear or from a strength of will and conviction that allows them to conquer any potential fear. Beowulf fits into that mold for he truly fears no evil. As is tradition with epic poems, Beowulf as the protagonist is the primary (and, quite possibly, the only) means of combating evil/forces of hell. As earlier mentioned, the dragon figures as the final and the most powerful enemy. Yet, when Beowulf goes to confront him, he chooses to go alone: "the prince of rings was too proud / to line up with a large army / against the sky-plague. He had scant regard / for the dragon as a threat, no dread at all / of its courage or strength" (Heaney 2345-2349). This fearless warrior is the embodiment of forces of good in *Beowulf* and he selflessly chooses to confront the monsters and save Heorot (which is not even his territory). On his journey, he is guided by fate/wyrd. This concept follows the pagan tradition of doom, but in *Beowulf* it is merged with Christian hope. Thus, the reader/listener is confronted by a unique strand of fate, one that leads to demise of the beloved hero, but one that still promises a better tomorrow.

However, before exploring the abstract concept of fate/wyrd, it would be prudent to consider means of combating hell that are overtly presented. Of the various equipment that Beowulf had throughout the story, three pieces stand out. The first is "his mighty, hand-forged, fine-webbed mail" (Heaney 1443), forged so masterfully that "no enemy's clasp could crush him in it, / no vicious armlock choke his life out (1446-1447). Even though the poet speaks of great deeds of strength and endurance performed by Beowulf, there is still need for him to be

equipped with gear that surpasses that of an ordinary warrior. To accompany this sturdy chainmail, Unferth presents a gift to Beowulf:

> a rare and ancient sword named Hrunting.
>
> The iron blade with it ill-boding patterns
>
> had been tempered in blood. It had never failed
>
> the hand of anyone who hefted it in battle,
>
> anyone who had fought and faced the worst
>
> in the gap of danger. This was not the first time
>
> it had been called to perform heroic feats (1458-1464).

The idea that the sword itself had been called upon when there was need of heroic deeds assigns a particular mysticism to the blade itself. A forged blade is in and of itself a work of art; decoration of blade and hilt pushes that notion further and the sword ultimately "collects" stories as it is being wielded by generations of warriors. Stories often ascribe uncanny properties to legendary weaponry, and Hrunting is no different: much like the chainmail possesses uncanny sturdiness, the sword seemingly alters the outcome of battles in which it is used (beyond the effects that any other well-made sword would have). Here the concept of fate/wyrd must be reintroduced because it permeates the entire story and every single deed of Beowulf. In a world driven by fate, it is to be expected that people who inhabit it would begin to weave tales of marvelous events. Thus, a blade that many heroes used to defeat many foes receives a legendary status. Beowulf, a legend in his own right, equipped with legendary items goes to defeat Grendel's mother. He invokes fate that guides him and he plunges into the dark lake. However, the evil is so great that he cannot defeat it with any legendary items that he prepared. What he uses is "an ancient heirloom / from the days of the giants" (1558-1559), a sword no ordinary man could wield: armed with a weapon of evil, he murders the monster and emerges

victorious. The poet writes about a world where no human effort can lead to the defeat of evil. Only an extraordinary human guided by fate/wyrd can achieve it. This guidance necessarily implies the notion of freedom of will (wyrd does not force one to act). The quality of "being all-powerful is having the power to not exercise your power—to leave your creatures free to act on their own initiative" (Weil 103). Thus, no matter what entity or force set fate/providence in motion, mankind is free to act as they please – it is precisely because of this common denominator of freedom that one can read wyrd as both pagan fate and Christian providence. The transitory nature of the society in which *Beowulf* was created is perfectly encapsulated in wyrd. It is, in equal parts, both doom and hope: it brings about doom of evil, but it also brings about the doom of the hero because the hero himself is layered and flawed, ever-battling against sin that ultimately brings about his end. But it also introduces hope. It shows that evil can be defeated, it shows that there is a proverbial light at the end of a tunnel – the construction of wyrd in *Beowulf* serves as the last echo of hopeless pagan struggle against darkness and it introduces the markings of a new age, of a new faith, of a hopeful world that is to come.

3. Hell in The Lord of the Rings

In a letter from 1956, Tolkien wrote on the intention behind his fantasy, claiming that his goal was "to restore to the English an epic tradition and present them with a mythology of their own" (*Letters* 250). To construct a new mythology one must have a vast knowledge of existing ones – it goes without saying that Tolkien was well-versed in both the makings of a myth and of an epic tale. Still, the claim that he has successfully created a mythology of his own (or mythology of the English) is a contentious one, [9] but regardless of the label one places on his works, Tolkien has succeeded in creating an evocative world the influence of which can be felt even in contemporary fantasy circles. A key element of his world building is a layered

[9] For more on this, see Hunter.

construction of evil: it is featured in the landscapes; it is both horrifying to the senses as well as the mind. Evil permeates every aspect of Middle-earth – it is a fact of its existence, but, more importantly, it is a fact that sets the story of the One Ring into motion. In an effort to explore the makings of evil/hell in *LotR*, it is perhaps most prudent to retrace the steps of the Fellowship and to investigate different areas they were fated to pass through. Once the areas are sufficiently analyzed, the focus must be shifted to hellish beings which might prove to be as pivotal to *LotR* as the monsters are to *Beowulf*.

3.1. Landscapes of hell in *LotR*

At the onset of the first book of the trilogy, the narrator offers a description of a divided world. The reader learns of the Shire, a land of peace and happiness whose denizens are unburdened by the toils and troubles of Middle-earth as if they are entirely displaced from it. It is soon revealed that they are allowed to live in such ignorance due to the Bounders, people who made certain that "strange persons and creatures" (*Fellowship* 10) remained outside of the Shire's borders. For the denizens of the Shire, the world beyond their sheltered community is largely an unknown. What little knowledge they do have comes in the form of legends and stories – an example of that is Daddy Twofoot's claim about the Old Forest: "That's a dark bad place, if half the tales be true" (*Fellowship* 22). Evil of the Old Forest is given no name; it is a simplified perception of evil forces that are, for the time being, outside of their concern.

Indications of evil beyond the borders are very quickly given a name and a body with the introduction of the Black Riders. However, even the space of the forest that Merry, Pippin, Sam, and Frodo are forced to venture through proves to contain within itself certain malign entities. These entities, unlike the Riders, are bound to the space they inhabit: their power stems from the land. Old Man Willow is the first "enemy" that the four hobbits encounter and it defeats them rather easily. Same is the case with the Barrow-wight, an entity that arrived from a foreign land, but that corrupts its new home and creates a landscape marked by cold,

impenetrable darkness. A tone is set from the onset of the story that Middle-earth has many secrets in its vast lands: most of those secrets care not for the lives of the four lost hobbits.

After the formation of the Fellowship, the party ventures toward Caradhras, a treacherous mountain range. As soon as they begin their ascent, a snowstorm picks up and soon it is clear that there is no chance that they can defeat it. A similar motif exists in *Beowulf*; however, there the storm is a mere hurdle that Beowulf and his company easily evade. In *LotR*, the storm is much graver and it is difficult to truly ascertain its cause. Boromir states that "the Enemy … can govern the storms in the Mountains of Shadow that stand upon the borders of Mordor" (*Fellowship* 288). However, it seems that the storm on Caradhras is not a conscious deed of Sauron: a sense is created that the very mountain itself acted in order to delay and possibly ruin the quest of the Fellowship. "Caradhras had defeated them" (*Fellowship* 294), the narrator concludes, providing the final personifying touch to the hellish mountain.

Unable to cross over one treacherous terrain, the Company are forced to travel through another. Moria, the fallen kingdom of dwarfs, is the place where they dug the deepest. In doing so, they uncover the most beautiful jewels, but have in turn awoken a great ancient evil that led to the ruin of the once-revered Moria. As argued earlier, *Beowulf* places special emphasis on pride as the greatest among the Seven Sins. Moria symbolizes a space where the full gravity of ruin that pride brings about can be seen. Once a great a kingdom, Moria is now shrouded in darkness and death – the tomb that the Fellowship venture into can be said to be a representation of Moria as a whole. The entire kingdom became a tomb or an underworld, a space where evil forces gather and live, a space through which no being is allowed free passage. This *katabasis*-like part of the Fellowship's journey is a pivotal one and it allows for Gandalf to ascend in his wizard rank: the space of Moria allows him to defeat death and sin itself. Therefore, Moria is perhaps the single most hell-like landscape in the entire trilogy. James Obertino writes on the parallels between Moria and Hades as it is described in *The Aeneid.* Prior to the *katabasis,* "the

mood of the hero" is "depressed or empty" (153) while "the bleak approaches to the underworld symbolically mirror the desolation each hero feels" (154). He further discovers a similarity between Gandalf who corresponds to the guiding figure of the Sibyl (158) as well as a similarity between the Balrog and Tisiphone (162), further establishing the idea that Moria is truly akin to the land of the dead.

A large part of the monstrosity of Moria as a space stems from its ruined architecture. A lack of light combined with time-bitten stonework makes Moria's terrain treacherous and perilous. It is precisely this motif of ruin that can be observed as pivotal to Tolkien's world building. Heide Estes writes on the importance of ruins in Anglo-Saxon perception of the world and she makes a claim that "their focus on ruins gives us a view into a culture that sees itself as built on the remains, literary and physical, metaphorical and literal, of previous cultures" (61). Tolkien built his world on Anglo-Saxon tradition and in his attempt to build an English mythology he surely appropriated certain traits of societies of old. Thus, ruins in *LotR* can be seen as unique elements of the landscape which reveal complexities of Tolkien's world building. They allow the reader to experience the age of the world, they show that there was something before the Fellowship's quest and that there will likely be something new once the members of the Fellowship are long gone. Yet, ruins in Tolkien's world are not romanticized: the narrator never ascribes them particular beauty or serenity. They are always introduced with a careful tone, a tone that implies a fear before the forces of evil that brought about the ruin. When Aragorn and the four hobbits begin to make their way toward Weathertop, he speaks of a great tower that Men of the West built upon that hill. However, "it was burned and broken, and nothing remains of it now but a tumbled ring, like a rough crown on the old hill's head" (*Fellowship* 186). Aragorn's tale seemingly binds the ruin to its landscape: Weathertop is now recognizable not only as a hill, but a place of ruin. This is important because it speaks on the transformative power of hell. The destruction caused by evil, hellish forces alters the

environment[10] to an extent where it can no longer be seen as separate from it. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Tolkien uses such a landscape as the setting for an encounter with the Black Riders in which Frodo suffers a terrible wound.

Transformation of landscape as one of the main tools of hellish forces appears at least three more times in the novel and each time it is linked with the character of Saruman. He took residence in Isengard, a city or fortress of sorts that is dominated by Orthanc, a majestic tower that stands in the middle of it: "A strong place and wonderful was Isengard, and long it had been beautiful … But Saruman had slowly shaped it to his shifting purposes and made it better, as he thought, being deceived" (*Towers* 555). This idea of supposed amelioration of Isengard "came … from Mordor" and it resulted in Saruman creating "a little copy, a child's model or a slave's flatter, of the vast fortress, armoury, prison, furnace of great power" (555). The narrator mocks Saruman's fall as well as his sense of pride: the creation that he claimed to be his own was, all along, a deed of the one true Enemy. Yet, Saruman does not only transform the city where Orthanc stands: his corruption also latched onto Minas Ithil which he transformed "into an evil place, Minas Morgul" (*Towers* 598). Even after the fall of the Enemy, Saruman cannot let go of the pride of his evil ways: he attempts to corrupt the place from which Frodo and the hobbits set off on their journey. Even then, Frodo says that the corruption of the Shire came from Mordor – Saruman and every other agent of Sauron were mere puppets who were unaware of the hold that the Enemy had over them.

Ruins and other transformed spaces are, by their very nature, liminal. They are distinctly marked by a duality of their past and their present. However, another form of liminality is crucial for the landscapes of hell: that of water and land which is so prominent in *Beowulf*. At

[10] The tower that was constructed by the Men of the West also changed the landscape. However, the presence of such a structure that Aragorn describes as "tall and fair" (*Fellowship* 186) ameliorates the perception of space: it becomes a positively charged landmark. On the other hand, Weathertop with its ruinous crown evokes imagery of malign entities lurking in the darkness and plays perfectly into the legends and tales woven by pagan Anglo-Saxon people or by the denizens of the Shire.

the entrance to Moria, a dark lake exists and from that lake "a long sinuous tentacle had crawled; it was pale-green and luminous and wet" (*Fellowship* 308). That tentacle, or that being, latches onto Frodo and threatens to pull him into its dark depths. The lake is introduced as ominous as soon as the Company come near it; this place of still water is home to "The Watcher in the Water" (*Fellowship* 323), a being or entity from the ancient days of Middle-earth. Land-water liminality can also be seen when Frodo, Sam and Gollum venture into the Dead Marshes. "There are dead things, dead faces in the water" (*Towers* 630), Sam ascertains after he trips and falls while moving through the Marshes. It is a place where water and land merge, yes, but another element is added to that amalgamation: corpses. Corpses become an integral part of the landscape, giving it both an aura of horror and an additional layer of mystery. The uniqueness of the Marshes as a landscape of hell lay in the fact that they represent a combination of two previously mentioned ones: ruins and wetlands. They show fallen societies and they draw their power from the fear of the unknown; they show triumph of the enemy, yet the true horror stems from something else entirely. The Marshes are a landscape that gives a glimpse of a possible future to Frodo and Sam: it shows endless piles of corpses to two hobbits who are on a journey the failure of which would certainly result in many more similar heaps of bodies. In a sense, that swampland preserves a display of the power of evil, of corruption: it embodies hell, it is so deeply drenched in sin and sinful deeds that the swamp itself becomes a partly living entity. Gollum attests to this when he says that "the Marshes have grown … swallowed up the graves; always creeping, creeping" (*Towers* 630).

Soon, the two hobbits and Gollum find themselves at the precipice of Mordor itself. As the main stronghold of the enemy, it is to be expected that Mordor's landscape represents ultimate evil: it is as far removed (spatially and figuratively) from the Shire as any place could be. Yet, the Shire is not heaven and a direct opposition to it would, therefore, not be hell. But Mordor is much more than a space juxtaposed to the Shire – the land of the hobbits is, after all,

inconsequential to the plans of Sauron. It was mentioned earlier that Moria is the most hell-like space in terms of landscape itself. However, Moria contains no entity within itself that would assume the role of the Devil. The Balrog is monstrous, sinful, and a force of destruction unlike any other, but he is a monster, an ancient evil that was begotten by some other evil more ancient than itself. Like the monsters in *Beowulf*, the Balrog falls under some sort of Cainite descendancy to which the Devil does not belong – there would have been no Cain had the Devil not existed before him. Thus, the landscape of Mordor becomes a true hell-scape because there is a central figure of evil that rules over it and from which corruption spreads all over the world. Following the etymology of Tolkien's languages, one can ascertain that Mordor means Black Land (Allan 12-13). Whether Black Land is read to mean a literal black landscape or if certain symbolical value is attributed to it, that name fits perfectly into the idea of spreading corruption: one can clearly visualize blackness/darkness crawling out of Mordor and slowly encapsulating the lands and minds of the Free People of Middle-Earth.

Frodo, Sam and Gollum venture ever closer to the Black Land and they discover "wounds made by the Orcs and other foul servants of the Dark Lord: a pit of uncovered filth and refuse; trees hewn down wantonly and left to die, with evil runes or the fell sign of the Eye cut in rude strokes on their bark" (*Towers* 653). The mysticism of evil that exists in other parts of Middle-earth grows lesser as they near Mordor: there the evil is overt, the signs are clearly shown, the corruption is no longer an invisible force. It becomes a visible destruction of nature and everything that is fair in Middle-earth.[11] But the horror of Mordor is not felt only visually: "Earth, air and water all seem accursed" (*Towers* 713), Frodo says and in doing so presents an environment entirely different from any other in Middle-earth. While Moria is corrupt and

[11] The reason behind this mindless destruction is given in Tolkien's *Silmarillion*: briefly, Sauron's goal is not to rule over the people of Middle-earth, but to destroy Middle-earth entirely, leaving it in an eternal shroud of darkness. It is a quest that he inherits from Melkor, a figure that is Tolkien's overt parallel to the Devil and his embodiment of the fall from the grace of God (or Ilúvatar).

ruined, it was still at one point a natural system of caves and it retained its natural properties. The long darkness of Moria is attributed to its evil aura, but it is also a fact of its existence: every cavern is destined to be dark forever, hence why such spaces evoke imagery of terrors unknown. The darkness of the open spaces of Mordor, however, is brought about by the tireless Mount Doom, a volcano that functions as both the heart of the land of Mordor and of Sauron himself. The plumes of ash and dust that Mount Doom endlessly emits cover the skies with a thick layer of dark smog, making the surrounding area a miserable place for anything living. There are no plants in Mordor: the only things that live there are the armies of Sauron who are forced to be there for fear of him and his retribution, and the lonely Shelob, an evil older than Sauron himself, an entity that relishes and thrives in the darkness caused by Mount Doom.

Thus, Mordor is hell on (Middle) Earth: it represents everything the hell as a space is while retaining crucial elements of pagan conceptions of evil. Mordor functions as a perfect merger of the two traditions, taking from each its most terrible aspects in order to construct a space of the Enemy. The signified of that capitalized signifier changes: in the pagan world, the Enemy was the great unknown darkness or perhaps some horrible monstrosity that not even gods could quell. Christian tradition brings about the Devil and his corruption to which *LotR* perfectly responds with Sauron and the horrors that he brings to Middle-earth. However, despite every and any description of Mordor present in the text of *LotR*, it cannot be considered akin to hell (or to be hell on Middle-earth) until the very moment when the One Ring is destroyed. While the evil of Moria is combated and defeated by the angelic figure of Gandalf, no one could defeat Mordor or Sauron. Frodo stumbles in the end and he would have become a minion of the Enemy: Sam was brought to his knees and could no longer help his master. It is ultimately the act of fate that brings about the end of the One Ring and Sauron (of the ultimate sin and the Devil, of the enemy the Valar could not end). No human/elven/dwarven act could have defeated Sauron, much like no Christian can defeat the Devil, nor can any human defeat the pagan gods

of yore. Fate is shown to be the pivotal aspect of *Beowulf* and it retains that significance even in *LotR*; it ultimately gives Mordor the right to be seen as hell on Earth, because it takes an act of providence/wyrd to bring about the end of the Enemy of the Free People of Middle-earth.

3.2. Beings of hell in *LotR*

While one can speak of evil present in beings such as Old Man Willow and the Barrow-wight, they are, as previously stated, extension of an ancient landscape. They are, for all intents and purposes, unable to conquer new territory. As is the case with "sea-brutes" in *Beowulf*, beings of hell that are incapable of leaving their area of residence are not seen as a threat worth dealing with. This state of mind is perhaps best shown with the way the residents of the Shire think: their not seeing evil means that no evil exists. It is not until the Black Riders come along that the reality of the Enemy begins to sink in: they are the entities that drive *LotR,* because their movement forces the movement of Frodo and his hobbit friends. These entities are seen riding "a black horse", while they themselves resemble "a large man … wrapped in a great black cloak and hood … his face was shadowed and invisible" (*Fellowship* 75). After a close encounter with one such being, Merry says that it forced him to have "an ugly dream" which Aragorn explains to be the effect of "The Black Breath" (*Fellowship* 175) which those entities use to instill terror in their victims. Furthering the mysticism of the Riders, Gandalf gives an account of them where he says that "they themselves do not see the world of light as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds, which only the noon sun destroys" (*Fellowship* 191). They are displaced from the material world, yet they reserve the ability to affect it. These entities were sent out by Sauron to hunt the One Ring, an ancient artifact of power the possession of which would give Sauron dominion over Middle-earth. The Riders, quite literally, exist in a world of mist; their physicality is hidden by cloaks, but their true essence is not bound to the physical realm. Here the horror of the unknown is literal: no member of the Fellowship

has the ability to ascertain who any of the Riders truly are.[12] The reader is allowed a brief excursion into their realm whenever Frodo (or Sam) puts the Ring on his finger. Frodo was able to perceive the Riders as beings with "white faces", "keen and merciless eyes"; "upon their grey hairs were helms of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel" (*Fellowship* 196). Their description evokes imagery of undead entities; the paleness of their face is reminiscent of the corpses that are forever floating in the Dead Marshes. Thus, the forces of evil in *LotR* (as well as landscapes) are uniquely tethered to death. While the monsters in *Beowulf* bring about death, they are, as far as the reader knows, living entities – the Riders, however, are undead creatures or specters. As warriors of death (or undead warriors), the Riders are the perfect servants of hell, of the Enemy who seeks a weapon that would help him tear down Middle-earth into ruin.

The Enemy, Sauron, rules with fear. In a study of Orcs in Tolkien's fantasy, David Tneh remarks that Orcs "were manipulated by the Dark Lord for his own purposes" (41). This seemingly straightforward comment reveals much about the Orcs that differentiates them both from Beowulfian monsters, but also other monstrous beings in *LotR*. They are coerced, they act out Sauron's will for fear of him. They themselves are not embodiments of evil: they are mere soldiers of an entity much grander than they themselves could ever be.

Entities such as the Watcher in the Lake in front of Moria, the Balrog that rises from the depths of Middle-earth, and Shelob who is an offspring of Ungoliant herself[13] are all ancient evils. If classification were to be given to them, they could be said to correspond to the three Beowulfian monsters; they, for all intents and purposes, share that same Cainite descendancy that makes them unavoidably and unapologetically evil. The Watcher is given no bodily description, implying an origin so deeply rooted into the history of Middle-earth that not even Gandalf knows (or dares share) the terror of its being. The Balrog, on the other hand, is an

[12] Gandalf is a library of information in his own right, but his knowledge stems from experience and reading: he is also unable to perceive them.
[13] Briefly, Ungoliant is a primordial evil that embodies eternal, insatiable hunger.

enemy that Gandalf combats directly. He is described as "a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it" (*Fellowship* 330). Again, impaired visibility and knowability of the entity give it an aura of horror which is further strengthened when flames gather around it. The Balrog wields "a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left it held a whip of many thongs" (330) – such a description makes it seem like it has mastery over fire, while the motif of the whip brings about imagery of punishment and of desire for subjugation. Considering the Christian imagery of hell as a place of eternal flame, the Balrog truly seems akin to what one would expect to find in a such a space: it is as if the Balrog is a minion of the Devil whose job is to torture the denizens of hell. He is an evil so great that even malign entities fear it: "The ranks of the orcs had opened, and they crowded away, as if they themselves were afraid" (*Fellowship* 329). This same notion is preserved when speaking of Shelob, a spider-like entity that resides within the mountains of Mordor. Of her age it is said that she "was there before Sauron"; of her allegiances, the narrator says that "she served none but herself"; of her ways, the reader comes to know her as an entity to whom "all living things were … food"; of her foulness no words speak better than "her vomit" being "darkness" (*Towers* 725). This type of description is common in *LotR* when great evils are spoken of: instead of giving a tale of physical appearance, Tolkien seems to favor a slow build up that weaves an aura of mysticism and terror around his monsters. However, as is the case with the Balrog, the hero faces Shelob in open combat which allows for more information on her physicality:

> Most like a spider she was, but huger than the great hunting beasts, and more terrible than they because of the evil purpose in her remorseless eyes … Great horns she had … the belly underneath was pale and luminous and gave off a stench … Her legs were bent, with great knobbed joints high above her back, and hairs that stuck out like steel spines, and at each leg's end there was a claw (*Towers* 727).

It becomes clear from this description that she is very much a perceivable entity: one can clearly visualize how she looks. The same is the case with the Balrog, and even the Watcher in the Lake with its tentacles can be understood in its physicality. The Riders, on the other hand, exist in-between the physical and the immaterial/spiritual: the cloaks give them a shape, the horses allow them to experience the surroundings, but the true terror lies in their ghost-like features. Despite that, however, once cannot speak of them as some unseen horrors: they still, first and foremost, instill fear by the very fact of their appearance. As if their horse-riding form is not terrifying enough, they are given a new companion:

> a winged creature: if a bird, then greater than all other birds, and it was naked, and neither quill nor feather did it bear … and it stank … A creature of an older world maybe it was … And the Dark Lord took it, and nursed it with fell meats … and he gave it to his servant to be his steed (*Return* 840).

The Nazgûl as they are named, and their appearance is not too far removed from that of a dragon. While they are given no treasure to safeguard, they become an extension of their Riders. As is the case with dragons, the Nazgûl and their Riders are given the benefit of verticality, symbolizing a great enemy.

As argued earlier, the monsters/beings of hell in *LotR* could be as important to the trilogy as the three monsters are to *Beowulf*. Such a comment is, simultaneously, truthful and misleading – monsters are pivotal to Tolkien's world building, because much of his inspiration is derived from Nordic myths in which malign creatures are the ones who set the world in motion. Tolkien's Ragnarök is equivalent to Sauron's hand being adorned with the One Ring. The struggles and efforts of the Fellowship and all of the Free People of Middle-earth who come to their aid directly deal with events that could bring about the end of the world. Nordic myth speaks of the triumph of evil and the apocalyptic Ragnarök being fulfilled; *Beowulf* is a tale where evil both wins and is defeated, a tale that speaks of a new tomorrow: life is not reset,

but a change must occur, pagan doom is offset by Christian hopefulness. *LotR* seemingly goes a step further: in it, the absolute defeat of Sauron occurs. The Ring and he are destroyed which, in turn, prevents the destruction of Middle-earth. Doom is reserved for the Enemy: the "good guys" are given a just and satisfying conclusion. Tolkien allows himself almost a hundred pages to wrap things up: he makes sure that the reader is aware of how each plotline ends. No major character is left without a reward or punishment – here the scales are entirely tipped in favor of hope.

3.3. Combating hell in *LotR*

Beowulf has wyrd on his side: it leads him through life, it is the force that brings about both his triumphs and his doom. Wyrd/fate exists in *LotR* as well, but there it guides quite a number of characters.[14] Very early on, in the prologue, the narrator comments on Bilbo's initial discovery of the One Ring by saying that finding it "seemed then like mere luck" (*Fellowship* 11). This luck can be read as a positively charged act of fate; a similar instance of luck exists in *Beowulf* when the protagonist finds a giant's sword capable of killing his enemy at the most opportune time. Some fifty pages later, Gandalf speaks a sort of an apology of Gollum and makes a claim that "he is bound up with the fate of the Ring" (*Fellowship* 60). Not much has been said about the Ring in the previous parts of the paper: it is neither a landscape nor a being. The Ring is something else entirely for it does no evil if it is left unused. Tom Shippey writes on the origin of Tolkien's story and he notes the possible influence of Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung,* an opera that came into being as a merger of five distinct yet connected stories on the Nibelung and the ring(s) (97-99). However, Tolkien's Ring remains distinct from all others: while it offers ultimate power, much like Wagner's does, Tolkien's characters fear the power within. "Wagner understands and sympathises with the desire for power, if it could be

[14] This is not to say that wyrd only applies to Beowulf in *Beowulf*; the implication is merely that it is the most interesting interaction to observe.

acquired without paying the price for it" (113). The One Ring stems from a tradition that lauded such an object as one that brings about great wealth and power: however, the act of using it has its consequences. Free will allows any and every character in *LotR* to use the Ring, but all of them refuse for fear of its corruption – their strength of will forces the Ring to remain passive and to never reveal its true malignant potential. Perhaps such a negatively charged object can be read as doom, a version of fate/wyrd that is juxtaposed to hope/grace/luck. One of Gandalf's greatest fears is expressed when Frodo asks him to take the burden of the Ring – Gandalf adamantly rejects, insinuating that he himself is terrified of the destruction he could cause with such a weapon. However, the Ring is not merely a weapon: the Ring is a symbol of unyielding forces of evil. No force exists that can destroy it; no force other than the fire of the volcano in which it was forged.

In the meeting of the Fellowship, during the council of Elrond, the elf-king and the grey-bearded wizard go over several ideas of what to do with the Ring. The conclusion is that no other option exists but to destroy it – every other path would lead to an eventual demise of the Free People of Middle-earth. The claim here is not that the Ring is only doom; the claim is rather that it can be best understood as such. An object so powerful cannot be explained in rational terms. The little of its might that the reader can experience throughout the book(s) shows magical, fantastical effects that only the Ring can produce. Yet, those pale in comparison with the actual fully realized power of that object. If doom is realized through the Ring, then an opposite force, hope, is realized through a combination of characters – the Fellowship. It is important to note that the Ring necessarily subsumes all other forms of evil in Middle-earth because it is the progenitorial evil – in its perilous nature, it even exceeds the might of Sauron himself and he, even though he forged it, becomes a servant of the Ring's might. The Fellowship, then, function as the exact opposite of the Ring: they are forces of good, forces that maintain hope in a crumbling world. A poetic comment on fate is given in one of Frodo's

recollection of Bilbo's words: "He used often to say there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs were at every doorstep, and every path was its tributary" (*Fellowship* 74). This implies that the world of *LotR* can be seen as one that is following a single route: the events are fated, the characters merely fulfill a role in an already orchestrated and devised plan. An understanding of fate that Bilbo passes onto Frodo is a calming one for it leaves a promise of tomorrow: the quality of that day after does not quite matter. That belief that actions are guided by a mysterious force is the central way that forces of hell are combated in both *LotR* and *Beowulf*: without fate/wyrd the entire motivational and causal structure of those two worlds crumbles. There exists a mythical undertone to the concept of fate: it drove the events of Nordic mythology where it led to Ragnarök/doom. However, fate of a more hopeful kind drives Christian belief as well, for it promises God's plan that leads to a place of eternal bliss. It is precisely this hopeful fate that is the main means of combating hell in *LotR* – its main purpose is to lead the Fellowship to a time and space where doom is averted.

While these ideas are at the core of *LotR*, many of the evils in it are presented as physical and destructive: something else equally physical must confront them. Tolkien maintains a balance of evil vs. good, so much so that every enemy is attributed an entity that returns scales of power into a balanced position. This is perhaps most easily noticeable when one thinks of the Nazgûl and the Eagles: both are flying entities and both exceed properties of natural beings. As much sense of doom as the Nazgûl inflict, the same amount (if not more) hope is brought about by the Eagles who intervene as helpers on multiple occasions as *deus ex machina* would. Next to the Eagles, the largest force of hope comes in the form of the various guide figures. Charles W. Nelson writes about guides in *LotR* and he claims that Gandalf, Aragorn, Elrond, Galadriel, Bombadil, and Gollum all fulfill that role at various points in the story (51-52). Without going into too many details for each of them, it would suffice to say that they aid the Fellowship as a whole (and later on the divided parts of it) to combat evil forces, be it landscapes

or beings. Passage through many treacherous landscapes would be impossible without the likes of Gandalf, Aragorn or Gollum (Moria, road to Rivendell, the Dead Marshes/Mordor respectively). The latter is, in and of himself, not a force of good. Yet, he proves to be pivotal for the destruction of the One Ring for without his guidance Frodo and Sam would not have gotten anywhere near Mount Doom. Forces of hell are also held at bay by legendary equipment, such as Frodo's mithril or Aragorn's reforged blade. Additionally, Galadriel provides her Phial which proves pivotal for Frodo and Sam when they encounter Shelob. These function more or less the same as similar objects in *Beowulf* do – their mysticism is first implied, then it is shown to be an actuality in combat where they help a character become triumphant in whatever challenge he/she faces.

Chad Chisholm writes about the "two transcendent themes" in *LotR* being "the *diabolical* and *grace*" (20). These terms are not far removed from the previously mentioned doom and hope – the interplay of these forces weaves an intricate and interesting web of interactions, motivations, and goals. On this basis, as Tolkien has shown, an entire world can be built. At some points in time doom triumphs and it leaves its ruinous marks; other times, hope prevails and times of peace, prosperity and kingdom-building ensue. *LotR* leaves its readers with an image of Frodo and Gandalf leaving to a place *beyond* – they have successfully rid the world of the doom of their times and allowed hope to prosper for a while. Yet, fate is tricky and impossible to fully understand – no one truly knows what lies ahead.

4. Is there a heaven in either?

The division of the world into one inhabited by light and men as opposed to one where darkness and monsters rule is at the core of *Beowulf's* imagery of space. Heorot figures as a safe haven, a place of rest and security, a space that brings together the Anglo-Saxon world that struggles against the onslaught of mythological darkness. Carefully maintaining a sense of majesty and mystery of his world, Tolkien achieves a similar division of space. There we can

follow the travels of the Fellowship from one safe haven to another: these offer a respite after a long journey, but a sense of peril lurking around the corner is always maintained. Both landscape and beings of the Enemy are so clearly twisted and monstrous (in both works) that one can easily understand the label of Hell on (Middle) Earth. "A light that shines in the dark, / a light that darkness could not overpower" (John 1:5): this single biblical verse perfectly illustrates the nature of space in *Beowulf* and in *LotR*. Think of circles of light painted on a cloth of utter darkness; think of clusters of white flowers in a field of black roses – in Nordic mythology, the light circles eventually fade and the white flowers are destined to wither. The biblical message offers a promise: if darkness has not overcome the light up until this point, then it never will. Rivendell is described as "the Last Homely House east of the Sea … Merely to be there was a cure for weariness, fear and sadness" (*Fellowship* 225); Lothlórien is presented as "an island amid many perils" (*Fellowship* 348), a space where one felt as if "*inside* a song … in a timeless land that did not change or fall into forgetfulness" (*Fellowship* 351). These spaces, much like Heorot, represent joy, revelry, community, safety – but none of them are heaven. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise when Elrond says that Rivendell cannot forever withstand the onslaught of the Enemy. Lothlórien, Gondor, Rohan – all will eventually fall, all will succumb to the forces of hell because such is the nature of Nordic evil that brings about Ragnarök.

Hell can easily conquer the world of men: the only thing that hell cannot overcome is heaven itself. Therefore, one must seek out an element present in both stories that escapes hell, that is portrayed as superior to hell itself - this comes in the form of wyrd/fate. On the origin of the word, Susanne Weil writes that in its Old English roots it bears the meaning "to shape" (94). And shape it does: it is a delicate silk thread woven through countless pearls that creates a unique necklace of life. Fate touches the life of every individual and of every being in both tales. Yet, this fate is not a self-working miracle of existence: it does not shape life with whip

and chain either, but offers a freedom of choice. Self-individuality was of utter most importance in the Anglo-Saxon world, for it offered one the opportunity to achieve glory in life. “It would be a good fate, indeed the best, to die gloriously in the protection of your people as Beowulf does—an ignoble fate to live after deserting your lord, as Beowulf’s cowardly retainers do at the end of the poem” (Weil 96). A similar concept of free-will is at the very crux of Christianity as well: mankind is given freedom to act as they wish. They can follow either the path of God or the path of the Devil – each one has its consequence at the end of the road.

To answer the titular question of this part of the paper: no, there is no heaven in either. Even the Grey Havens to which Frodo, Gandalf and the elves depart at the end of the novel are not entirely heavenly. What does exist in both tales, however, is a force of life, a force of heaven that is encapsulated within wyrd/fate/luck/grace/hope/doom – some of these words carry malignant undertones, while others are either neutral or positively charged. And such is fate: sometimes it is evil and dark, sometimes it is good and light-bound – but all the time, it allows every living being a freedom of choice. Those choices ultimately decide the color of one’s fate.

Conclusion

Both works contain rich imagery of hellish landscapes and beings that exemplify a unique and interesting merger of Christian and pagan belief systems. Throughout the paper, it has been shown that many of the notions of hell-like spaces that occur in *Beowulf* can be found in *LotR*. Same is the case with the beings, but there the differentiating factor becomes the One Ring. It both is and is not a being, but it is most definitely marked by hellish intent. The dominance of dark, unknown landscape that encircles various safe havens portrays worlds that are on the brink of falling. A pivotal segment of both tales can be found in the concept of wyrd/fate that shapes the story and guides the characters. Yet, both worlds allow for their characters to make their own choice and it is precisely this freedom of choice that makes them heroic. Beowulf and every member of the Fellowship chooses to go on their respective quest

and they do not yield until they have given every last atom of their power. Along the way, they make a concentrated effort to remain just and virtuous which, in the end, ensures their triumph.

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Abstract

Among the many forces that shaped the Western world Christianity holds a unique position as one that has existed and that has exerted its influence for over two millennia. The concept of hell as such is a uniquely Christian one – it is a place ruled by the Devil from which (and from whom) evil originates, but it also symbolizes God's ability to contain and exert his will over evil. Despite the fact that hell is an invention of Christianity, the idea of eternally malign entities has existed for much longer. Thus, one can find tales of various mythological evils that have, as legends tell, corrupted both Earth and men, trying to bring about some sort of destruction and chaos. Nordic mythology, for example, weaves a story of Ragnarök, an inevitable event by their accounts that marks the ultimate victory of forces of chaos. This apocalyptical occurrence, among other things, signifies the final defeat of Nordic gods, displaying their failure of defending mankind from evil forces. These two seemingly juxtaposed views of evil, one that is under God's control and the other that completely escapes the control of an entire council of gods, came into contact when Christianity began to spread onto British Isles. From that merger of traditions, *Beowulf* was born: it exemplifies the monstrous terrors of the old world that are combated by the values of a world that is yet to come. This tale of the waning Anglo-Saxon world has had a large influence one author in particular. J. R. R. Tolkien wrote his *The Lord of the Rings* inspired by both Nordic mythology and by *Beowulf* itself. A Christian author, Tolkien does not shy away from also incorporating certain beliefs of his own religion, and in doing so creates an ideological amalgam akin to *Beowulf*. Thus, an analysis of *Beowulf* reveals much about *LotR*: if one were to ascertain how hellish landscape and beings are created and constructed in the epic poem, one would have an excellent foundation from which to begin an analysis of hell in Tolkien's epic fantasy. Therefore, the paper's end goal is to discuss the varied imagery of hell in both works, while simultaneously offering an insight into how (and if) those malign forces of hell are kept at bay.

Key words: hell, *Beowulf*, *LotR*, fate/wyrd, Christianity, paganism, heroism