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"Slain ye Shall be": Eschatological Morality and the House of Feanor in Tolkien's The Silmarillion

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“Slain ye shall be”: Eschatological Morality and the House of Fëanor in
Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion*

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HONORS PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis expands on existing research and analysis of the eschatology of J. R. R. Tolkien's invented mythology, with a critical analysis of how it relates to morality and the overarching exploration of good and evil, primarily in *The Silmarillion*. By analyzing Tolkien's medieval and spiritual influences, as well as Tolkien's unfinished works published posthumously by Christopher Tolkien, it explores the effect of the relationship between morality and mortality on the emotional core of Tolkien's work. It offers new insights into the text by engaging especially with the often overlooked story of the sons of Fëanor, and how this story functions as the primary vehicle through which Tolkien explores concepts of good and evil and death and immortality, as they complicate the morals in the process of death and afterlife, often employed by the narrative as a reward for heroism or a punishment for evil. It is because of this complication or complexity that *The Silmarillion* is able to communicate its central emotional thrust, the fatalistic hope or faith against complete adversity and Tolkienian eucatastrophe.

INTRODUCTION

Since their publications, a great deal of scholarship has been done on Tolkien's Middle-earth texts and recent years have seen a continued devotion to Tolkien Studies by academics and independent scholars keen on investigating the literary merit of Tolkien's work. The posthumous publication of *The Silmarillion* in 1977, and the continued curation and publication of his father's writing by the late Christopher Tolkien, opened a massive door to Tolkien scholarship beyond *The Lord of the Rings*. Scholars have been particularly interested in death and immortality as it functions in Tolkien's works, although a vast majority of the literature on the subject, as well as a vast majority of work on Tolkien in general, focuses primarily on *The Lord of the Rings*, with textual analysis of *The Silmarillion* serving primarily as anecdotal evidence to support arguments made about *The Lord of the Rings*. Of course, this is not to say that there is no significant research or writing on *The Silmarillion*. However, given *The Silmarillion*'s importance to Tolkien's Middle-earth's narrative mythology, structure, and creation, and given that *The Silmarillion* was the work of his life, it is clear that careful and continued analysis and criticism is necessary to uncover the full meaning and power of Tolkien's stories.

Tolkien himself was uncomfortable with the reduction of his stories into simple thematic binaries like good and evil, power and dominion, creation and destruction, etc. However, in a letter from 1957, Tolkien writes that, "if asked," he would say that his works were "about Death and the desire for deathlessness" (262 Letter 203). In another letter, he writes again that for him, the real theme of his story is not War, but "something much more permanent and difficult: Death and Immortality." He goes on to elaborate that by Death and Immortality, he means "the mystery of the love of the world in the hearts of a race 'doomed' to leave and seemingly lose it; the anguish in the hearts of a race 'doomed' not to leave it, until its whole evil-aroused story is

complete” (246/Letter 186). That is, Tolkien’s interest is in the emotive responses of mortal and immortal beings to the experiences of death and immortality. A cursory reading of *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Silmarillion* and any reader may see the truth in Tolkien’s assertions—deaths litter both books, especially *The Silmarillion*, in staggering numbers, and many of these serve important narrative functions: serving as catalysts for major plot movements, or conclusions for the endings of tales within tales. And it is evident that on-page character death is just the surface of its importance to Tolkien’s narratives—related concepts, like the immortality of the Elves and the mortality of humans, the physical and emotional destruction of war, and the long effects of aging and time pervade the narrative as a whole.

It follows that subjects relating to death in Tolkien’s writing have long been of academic interest. Many critics have argued that Tolkien’s views of death and immortality mirror Christian or Catholic ideologies while others maintain that his stories are much closer to those in Norse mythology and that his use of death is Nordic in tone. Charles Nelson explores these arguments, and the scenes on which they are predicated, in his 1998 work, *The Halls of Waiting: Death and Afterlife in Middle-earth*, and argues, finally, that Tolkien’s “world concept is clearly Christian, but without the external trappings of Christianity,” and that Tolkien, by giving “few specific details” of his descriptions of afterlives, succeeds in separating his work from any established religious reference, but maintains therein a sense of spirituality (210). Marjorie Burns, in her work *J. R. R. Tolkien: The British and the Norse in Tension*, argues that Tolkien’s stories draw on elements of both and bring together mythologies historically at odds with one another. She ultimately determines that “for all his emphasis on Nordic freedom,” Tolkien always returns to “an English view of things” (58). Despite its final inclination towards one side, her work exemplifies how more value can perhaps be found in looking at the tension, blending, or

multiplicity of ideals, than in searching for which ideal wins out against others. T.A. Shippey echoes the importance of this tension in his book, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, where he writes that “Tolkien wanted all his life to bring together the Christian religion in which he devoutly believed, and the relics of the pre-Christian beliefs of his ancestors embedded in the literature which he had spent his professional life studying” (259). His work, long credited as a work to create a mythology for England, was to create a mythology in which the warring ideologies of Paganism and Christianity, both central to Tolkien’s conception of his own English heritage, could coexist.

With this in mind, drawing comparisons between Tolkien’s treatment of death in his works with the treatment of death in his influences becomes useful only insofar as they may show how Tolkien came to understand death himself, with the influence of his religion and his scholarly interests. Whittingham comes to this conclusion in her analysis in *The Evolution of Tolkien’s Mythology*, and concisely writes “Tolkien endeavored to make Middle-earth believable and true, reflecting his understanding of the primary world, which included the Christian faith that was central to his life” (169). That is, it may not be particularly useful to compare Tolkien’s influences on a binary line between Norse or Medieval and Christianity, as for Tolkien, the former was decidedly fictional, while the latter was part of the truth of life itself. And, as Shippey writes, Tolkien’s work “becomes less a mythology for England and more one for its own time, for the twentieth century: a myth re-told, with proper respect for what in myth is unchanging, because myths always need retelling” (Shippey 260-1). These myths appear in all of Tolkien’s work, but most prominently in the works that were published by his son after his death.

Tolkien studies, as a discipline, owes a lot to Christopher Tolkien, without whom Tolkien fans and scholars alike would be painfully ignorant of the bulk of Tolkien’s work, passion, and

legacy. With his posthumous organization, editing, and publishing of his father's works, in various states of completion, and his assistance in the publication of Tolkien's personal letters by Humphrey Carpenter, nearly every piece of intact writing concerning Tolkien's life's work is easily available to anyone interested. This access and influx of information spurred scholarship, providing ample locations for research and analysis. It also created a certain degree of textual instability—a casual reader of *The Silmarillion* may appreciate it as a self-contained, if dense and even unpleasant, “prequel” of sorts to *The Lord of the Rings*, and leave it at that. But others will dig deeper and discover, for example, in one of the thirteen volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*, another version of the same tale—written earlier, later, or concurrently with what they've just read in *The Silmarillion*, but with enough differences to affect its meaning. Or, they may sift through Tolkien's *Letters* and find Tolkien's own personal opinion of how his work ought to—ought not to—be interpreted. What is known, then, about the mythology and history of Tolkien's Middle-earth, and of the Elves, is gathered from scattered texts, multiple different tales in different volumes, essays, and Letters, written and re-written over the course of Tolkien's life. Christopher Tolkien's work in *The History of Middle-earth* to track his father's revisions gives the tales a multiplicity they wouldn't have had otherwise, or, at least, makes this multiplicity accessible to readers.

The Evolution of Tolkien's Mythology, Elizabeth A. Whittingham's recent study of *The History of Middle-earth*, explores many of the common themes associated with Tolkien's works in the context of this multiplicity, exploring how those themes and influences appear in Tolkien's earlier writings, and how they came to be in what Christopher Tolkien cultivated as the published *Silmarillion*. She dedicates a chapter to exploring the evolution of death and immortality in Tolkien's works, and to his writings concerning the metaphysical and philosophical aspects of

his mythology. Because these topics were, as she argues, difficult for Tolkien to resolve for himself, “detecting any pattern in all these changes—meaning both the evolution of the texts and the exceptions to nature—is difficult” (167). However, and perhaps most importantly, she finds that while many earlier elements of Tolkien’s metaphysical worldbuilding fall away in his later works, “his focus on Death and Immortality” remains unchanged throughout (167). Such a discovery proves how central these themes are to Tolkien’s understanding of his mythology, having been consciously and meticulously incorporated even from its earliest stages, and surviving multiple revisions.

This is all a helpful backboard for understanding death and immortality as they appear in the published *Silmarillion*—clearly Tolkien’s notes and revisions are helpful in gaining a greater depth of understanding the motives, thought processes, and ideas that underlie the words on the page. But authorial intent is not the only force at play in the shaping of a text, and, as fans and scholars of Tolkien historically tend to idolize the author, it is important to work to understand the text more wholly. Likewise, analysis based solely in the search for evidence of Tolkien’s influences, medieval, Christian, or otherwise, is only helpful insofar as it may help readers better understand or grasp Tolkien’s mythology and how it relates to existing mythologies. These kinds of analyses, that is, can be useful in elucidating the meaning of the text as it stands on the page, however, the meaning of the text shouldn’t come exclusively from authorial intent. It is important, therefore, to consider the full body of knowledge accumulated around Tolkien’s works, as well as to holistically approach the text itself as it stands, in order to fully appreciate the thematic qualities at play.

Some contemporary readers of *The Lord of the Rings* complained that the story wasn’t any good because of its apparently simplistic understanding of its themes, particularly good and

evil, as evidenced by Tolkien's response to their criticisms in his letters. On *Lord of the Rings*, he writes that "some reviewers have called the whole thing simple-minded, just a plain fight between Good and Evil, with all the good just good, and the bad just bad. Pardonable, perhaps [...] without the earlier written but unpublished Elvish histories" (197 Letter 154). It is notable first that such criticisms of *Lord of the Rings* miss a significant amount of complexity present in those books, but more importantly that here, Tolkien himself points to the importance of his earlier Elvish histories to the development and exploration of morality in his universe. It is in these unpublished Elvish histories, which constitute what is now the published *The Silmarillion*, that readers may find a greater understanding of the morality of the Elves and of the Middle-earth narrative as a whole, including *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*.

Tolkien writes, "the Elves are *not* wholly good or in the right," as some readers of *The Lord of the Rings* may have thought, but that they were, at times, flawed, evil, or in the wrong (197 Letter 154). This was, Tolkien writes, "not so much because they had flirted with Sauron," that is—moral ambiguity in the Elves did not come from their interaction with Sauron or the forces of evil in the work, although such influence does predicate the corruption of Fëanor and the fall of the Noldor, but rather is something inherent to the Elves on their own, which influence may affect. They were "embalmers," Tolkien wrote, who wanted "to live in the mortal historical Middle-earth because they had become fond of it (and perhaps because they there had the advantages of a superior caste), and so tried to stop its change and history, stop its growth, keep it as a pleasure, even largely a desert, where they could be 'artists'—and they were overburdened with sadness and nostalgic regret" (197 Letter 154). Even Tolkien's heroic Elves, who don't engage in any of the more obvious evil behaviors, like murder, have this creative/subcreative desire that leads them to act in morally complex ways—seeking to control

the growth and change of Middle-earth, and being unwilling to relinquish this control despite their exhaustion.

This negative impulse to “embalm” is intrinsically tied to Elvish immortality. It is exemplified best in the Elves that survive the First Age—those who feature in *The Lord of the Rings*, like Elrond and Galadriel, who use their rings of power to preserve Rivendell and Lothlórien, respectively. Perhaps it is because they have lived the longest—the other Elves in *The Lord of the Rings* are ostensibly much younger, having been born in the Second or Third Ages—and thus their desire to preserve and stop time and change is greater. But questions of good and evil, corruption and control are still bound up in the stories of the Elves of the First Age who do not survive, and the relationship between death and immortality and morality becomes clearly inextricable.

A critical engagement with the text of the published *Silmarillion*, with an understanding of and appreciation for the importance of the preceding work done on Tolkien’s influences and intentions, will elucidate an even deeper understanding of the text itself and the function of the themes at work within it, and especially its main theme, death and immortality, and its relationship to morality. To explore how death functions in Tolkien’s works, but especially in *The Silmarillion*, looking at where it is employed and how—both narratively (when, how, and to whom) and tonally (is the reader to mourn, celebrate, or something else)—and taking into consideration Tolkien’s explicit thoughts on the subject as well as his literary influences, is to understand how death is central not only to *The Silmarillion* but to Tolkien’s Middle-earth narrative as a whole.

Tolkien’s exploration of good/evil and his exploration of death/immortality are inextricably woven—in order to understand how either theme presents, a reader must look to

understand both, and an engagement with *The Silmarillion*, especially its primary narrative, which is constituted of the fall of the Elves following the rebellion of Fëanor and his followers, and the subsequent war against the Enemy waged by Fëanor's sons, offers great insights. This narrative serves as the catalyst and backdrop for all of the tales contained in the *Quenta Silmarillion*, including Tolkien's "Great Tales," the story of Beren and Lúthien, the Children of Húrin, and the Fall of Gondolin, and serves as the primary narrative through which Tolkien's greatest themes—mortality and morality—are explored and challenged. In complicating the morality of death and immortality, especially through the story of the downfall of Fëanor and his sons, Tolkien creates a sense of hope in tragedy that constitutes the emotional core of *The Silmarillion*, and, by extension, his entire literary universe.

CHAPTER 1: ON TOLKIEN'S MORAL ESCHATOLOGICAL WORLDBUILDING

In his essay “On Fairy-stories,” Tolkien writes that one of the most important functions of a fairy story is to explore the human relationship with death. He writes of “the oldest and deepest desire [...] the Great Escape: the Escape from Death” (85). But, he writes, “fairy-stories are made by men not by fairies. The Human-stories of the elves are doubtless full of the Escape from Deathlessness” (85). Tolkien conceived of Elves as desiring death, if only because it would be the opposite of what they know. But the Elves are not so simple—the binary categories of “dead” and “alive” are not sufficient to understand the eschatology of the Elves or the implications of this eschatology on the narrative of Middle-earth. Because death is not guaranteed for Elves, those who die or are killed—whether by misdeed, battle, execution, or suicide—become especially tragic. *The Silmarillion* is littered with such deaths, but the focus on these events is only evidence that such events are, for Elves, extraordinary. In order to dig deeper into the narrative function of Tolkien’s invented eschatological myths, it’s important to understand and analyze the myths on their own, with a focus on the Elves, with whom the narrative of *The Silmarillion* is primarily concerned. Tolkien’s invented eschatology exists in two places—the first, in Tolkien’s description of his own worldbuilding, and the second in the practical text of *The Silmarillion* proper. In each of these places, it is clear that the relationship between morality and mortality in Tolkien’s work is inextricable.

In the essay “Laws and Customs Among the Eldar,” published by Christopher Tolkien in *Morgoth’s Ring*, Tolkien describes in detail the metaphysical relationship between the bodies and spirits of the Elves, and sheds some light into the process of afterlife and rebirth, alluded to but never fully realized in *The Silmarillion*. The essay is written in a fictional narrative style, though, as Christopher Tolkien notes in his introduction to the text, it is difficult to discern from

what precise fictional perspective it was composed. However, as he writes, “the observation about the variety of the names borne by the Eldar, ‘which [...] may to us seem bewildering’” points very clearly to the work being of a Man, and not one of the Eldar (208). However, some of the parts of the text, particularly those touching on death and immortality, are complicated—denoted in the text separate, and subject to manuscript edits which Christopher Tolkien writes suggest that Tolkien “had not fully planned its structure when he began” (208), and thus it is difficult to assign any distinct fictional perspective to the text as a whole.

The essay elaborates on the reality of Elvish immortality. Elves are not truly immortal, that is, they are bound by time: “the limit of their lives is the life of Arda, which though long by the reckoning of Men is not endless” (212). But so long as Arda, the world, exists, they are immortal, though their bodies may be destroyed. Tolkien writes at length about the relationship between spirit (*fëa*) and body (*hröa*)—though they are coherent, “the *fëa* cannot be broken or disintegrated by any violence from without” while “the *hröa* can be hurt and may be utterly destroyed” (218). Prior to their journey to Aman, the earliest Elves are noted to have “believed, or guessed, that they ‘entered into Nothing’, and ended like other living things that they knew, even as a tree that was felled and burned” or that perhaps “they passed into ‘the Realm of Night’ and into the power of the ‘Lord of Night’” (219). The desire to redress these primitive beliefs was apparently one of the chief reasons the Valar “desired to bring them to the light of Aman” (219). The Elves learn of the relationship between *fëa* and *hröa* from Manwë, the chief of the Gods, directly—“in Aman they learned of Manwë that each *fëa* was imperishable within the life of Arda, and that its fate was to inhabit Arda to its end” (219). This fate is absolute: “the *fëa* of the Elves were destined to dwell in Arda for all the life of Arda, and the death of the flesh did not abrogate that destiny” (218). Therefore, Elves that experience “destruction of the *hröa*, causing

death or the unhousing of the fëa” (218) do not cease to exist—rather the houseless fëa is summoned the Halls of Waiting, where “different opportunities lay before them” (219). The most obvious of these opportunities is to be re-born.

To be re-born, a process designed to redress of the hurt and grief of unnatural death, is markedly ideal: “The happiest fortune, they deemed, was after the Waiting to be re-born, for so the evil and grief that they had suffered in the curtailment of their natural course might be redressed” (219). This fortune denotes a conscious desire on the part of the re-born to continue their life, as a re-born Elf would come through childbirth, and live a natural second childhood before regaining the memories of their former life in adulthood, at which point the new life would “become one ordered history and identity” (221). This desire signifies a spirit which has come to terms with its trauma, has gone through the long work, time, and suffering associated with healing.

However, rebirth is not ultimately accessible to all: not all Elves are re-born, and damage to the spirit poses a problem. Elves that accept the summons find shelter in the Halls of Waiting: “in which, howsoever they had died, they were corrected, instructed, strengthened, or comforted, according to their needs or deserts” (222). But Tolkien emphasizes that this is not an easy process, first by adding the caveat “*if they would consent to this*” and then by explaining that the fëa “is obdurate, and remains long in the bondage of its memory and old purposes (especially if these were evil)” (222). Tolkien writes,

“those among the Eldar who were darkened in spirit did unnatural deeds, and were capable of hatred and malice. Not all who died suffered innocently. Moreover, some fëar in grief or weariness gave up hope, and turning away from life relinquished their bodies, even though these might have been healed or were indeed unhurt. Few of these latter

desired to be re-born, not at least until they had been long in ‘waiting’; some never returned. Of the others, the wrong-doers, many were held long in ‘waiting’, and some were not permitted to take up their lives again” (222).

Later, on the phenomenon of Elves choosing to relinquish their bodies, Tolkien writes that “though the griefs might be great and wholly unmerited, and death [...] might be, therefore, understandable and innocent, it was held that the refusal to return to life, after repose in Mandos, was a fault, showing a weakness or lack of courage in the fëa” (222). It is significant to note that it is not the act of suicide itself that is condemnable—choosing to relinquish the body in the face of great suffering or grief is apparently not particularly stigmatized. It is the refusal of rebirth—that is, a more permanent “death,” which is looked down upon. This points to the idea of permanent death, the refusal of rebirth or the permanent separation of a fëa from the Living is typically employed as punishment, reserved for “wrong-doers.” It is clear in the passage above that morality is central to the process of rebirth. Namo, the judge of the Valar and the Lord of Mandos, typically referred to as Mandos in the text, is directly responsible for determining the length of time a fëa spends in Waiting, a duration assigned after they are “judged with regard to innocence or guilt, in the matter of their death and in all other deeds and purposes of their lives in the body” as Mandos is “the judge of right and wrong, and of innocence or guilt (and all the degrees and mingling of these) in the mischances and misdeeds that come to pass in Arda” (235). However, it is noted, he is not unforgiving: “even the most guilty are long tested, whether they may be healed or corrected, before any final doom is given (such as never to return again among the Living)” (235). In *The Silmarillion* proper, Mandos is described in the *Valaquenta* as “the keeper of the Houses of the Dead, and the summoner of the spirits of the slain,” and “the

Doomsman of the Valar” (28). Here, again, morality becomes inextricable from Tolkien’s conceptions of death and the afterlife.

While all of the specific information presented in “Laws and Customs” does not appear in *the Silmarillion* proper, it remains important to several of the deaths that occur, and frequent allusions are made to the content that it contains. It is most commonly invoked in the case of heroic deaths. The death of Finrod Felagund is the archetype of these heroic deaths as they present in *The Silmarillion*. He dies in a battle with a wolf of Sauron, in which he fights valiantly, and wins—he kills the wolf, though he himself is mortally wounded. His death fulfills an oath he swore, as he repays a debt to the House of Bëor by saving Beren from death. And Beren, of course, is an important figure—by saving him, Finrod’s death allows Beren to continue his quest. As he lays dying, he says to Beren, “I go now to my long rest in the timeless halls beyond the seas and the Mountains of Aman. It will be long ere I am seen among the Noldor again and it may be that we shall not meet a second time in death or life, for the fates of our kindreds are apart” (174). Later, it is noted that while his body was buried, “Finrod walks with Finarfin his father beneath the trees in Eldamar” (176). Finrod is celebrated by the text for his bravery, heroism, and goodness, and his death and afterlife reflect that—he spends a short time in Waiting and does not deny the possibility of rebirth, although he is not noted to be re-born in the text. Other heroic deaths among the Noldor include the death of Fingolfin, and later of his son Fingon. Fingolfin dies after a heroic battle alone against Morgoth himself. The detail in the text works to create a sense of heroism, describing the terror and power of Morgoth, which “cast a shadow over [Fingolfin] like a stormcloud,” and the way that Fingolfin “gleamed beneath it as a star” (153). He fights valiantly, and before he is killed he manages to wound Morgoth “with seven wounds,” and he, “with his last and desperate stroke [...] hewed [Morgoth’s] foot” (154).

This valor is remembered by the author of the text, who eulogizes him: “Thus died Fingolfin, High King of the Noldor, most proud and valiant of the Elven-kings of old” (145). Finrod is similarly eulogized after his death: “Thus King Finrod Felagund, fairest and most beloved of the house of Finwë, redeemed his oath; but Beren mourned beside him in despair” (174). Fingon is killed in the Fifth Battle, and while he is unsuccessful in defeating the Balrog which kills him, there is still great valor in the description of his final stand, where he “stood alone with his guard dead about him, and he fought” (193).

While Finrod is the only character for whom the text makes explicit description of his return to Aman, these heroic figures are granted another kind of after-death reward—the consecration of their graves. An untouchable memorial or grave is not an uncommon motif in Tolkien’s works—most characters who die are described as having some kind of funerary procession. Fingolfin’s broken body is carried away from Morgoth’s realm to a high mountain, where his son builds a cairn over him, and “no Orc dared ever to pass over the mount of Fingolfin or draw nigh his tomb” (154). Finrod’s tomb is also undisturbed: “the green grave of Finrod Finarfin’s son, fairest of all the princes of the Elves, remained inviolate” (176). Fingon’s body, presumably, is collected at the end of the Fifth Battle and piled by Orcs in the “great mound” of bodies and battle debris, in what the Elves called the “Haudh-en-Nirnaeth, the Hill of Tears” (197). This mass grave, too, is consecrated—“grass came there and grew again long and green upon that hill, alone in all the desert that Morgoth made; and no creature of Morgoth trod thereafter upon the Earth beneath which the swords of the Eldar and the Edain crumbled into rust” (197). It is notable that the sons of Fëanor, despite acting in equally heroic ways throughout their lives, are not granted these kinds of memorials.

While the text does frequently employ death as a means to enhance Elvish heroism, it is also used as a punitive device, both by the Elves and by the text. The most clear example is the death of Eöl in Gondolin, though the sons of Fëanor also receive somewhat punitive deaths, to be explored in the next chapter. Eöl marries Aredhel, the sister of King Turgon of Gondolin, when she meets him in the woods. While the published *Silmarillion* states that she “was [not] wholly unwilling” nor was her life with Eöl “hateful to her for many years” (133), however, earlier drafts did not include this line, and the remaining language is still uncomfortable: Eöl “took her to wife,” after using magic to cause her to become lost and disoriented in his woods. As marriage, for Elves, was achieved in “the act of bodily union” (“Laws” 212), the implication of rape is clear. After the two raise their son, Maeglin, Aredhel attempts to escape with Maeglin back to Gondolin, her home. She succeeds, but Eöl follows, and demands they return to his woods with him. Gondolin, however, is an extremely isolationist kingdom, and laws forbid anyone who has seen the way there to leave it. Eöl refuses to stay, and so chooses death, and attempts to murder his son. Unfortunately, Aredhel protects her son, and takes the hit instead, and dies. Afterwards, Eöl is punished with execution: “they led him forth to the Caragdûr, a precipice of black rock upon the north side of the hill of Gondolin,” then “they cast Eöl over the Caragdûr, and so he ended, and to all in Gondolin it seemed just” (138). Execution is the most direct form of death-as-punishment, however, the idea of a “just” death is not limited to this case. Elves that commit crimes, especially the unjust killing of other Elves, are almost always met with their own death not long after—this is especially the case for the sons of Fëanor.

Other fates exist for Elves as well, beyond permanent residence in the Halls of Waiting or rebirth. If an Elf does not die at all, they continue to live and age with Arda until they fade. This, too, is a kind of death, and in *Author of the Century*, TA Shippey points out that “nearly all

Tolkien's elvish characters choose death in the long term [...] simply by returning to Middle-earth," where, he notes, the circumstances "are almost invariably fatal" (248). And even if they don't die in the traditional sense, in Middle-earth all of the Firstborn are doomed to fade.

"Fading," Tolkien writes in *Laws and Customs*, is the process by which "the body becomes at last, as it were, a mere memory held by the fëa" (219). So long life, without a return to Aman either physical, as through the parting of the Elves from the Grey Havens in *The Lord of the Rings*, or spiritual, as through the destruction or abandonment of the hröa, is a kind of long suffering punishment, too.

Finally, there is the fate of Elves who die but refuse the summon of Mandos. The refusal of the summon was "less frequent [...] in ancient days," that is, the days of *The Silmarillion*, because of the power of Morgoth over Arda at the time, which would cause houseless fëa to "flee in terror [...] to any refuge" (223). Still, though, some refused the summons, either because they "had become corrupted" and "were already committed to the Darkness," or because they were simply too attached to the world to leave it. These fëa would "wander houseless in the world, unwilling to leave it and unable to inhabit it" (223). This fate is cognate with the fate of those who fade, and it rejects the process of "natural" Elvish death.

With this system of death and morality in mind, the deaths that fill *The Silmarillion* take on even greater meaning. Some, like the heroic deaths above, are given a loftier sense of heroism, and their deaths and subsequent afterlives serve to solidify their position as heroic figures, and others, like the punitive deaths above, serve as a narrative punishment or condemnation of characters as evil. Frequently, good characters are rewarded with heroic deaths, and the promise of re-embodiment in Valinor or later rebirth in Middle-earth. Conversely, criminal characters are punished not only by death, but by the denial of afterlife or rebirth. These

deaths, like the deaths of the sons of Fëanor, are more complicated—though even the deaths listed above aren't nearly as easy as they may seem. In a text like *The Silmarillion* which uses death as a reward and as a punishment, the deaths that aren't befitting for either category become particularly interesting.

CHAPTER 2: ON THE THEMATIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOUSE OF FËANOR

The Silmarillion is not a traditional narrative—it is stylistically a history, not a novel, and its incomplete/draft nature makes it even harder to assign a typical narrative structure. Still, however, thanks to Christopher Tolkien’s efforts to, as he writes in the Foreword, “work out a single text, selecting and arranging in such a way as seemed to me to produce the most coherent and internally self-consistent narrative” (viii), the essential narrative shines through. While *The Silmarillion* is a collection of tales, and while the later independently published and so-identified “Great Tales” of *Beren & Lúthien*, *The Children of Húrin*, and *The Fall of Gondolin* are certainly the most developed, the main narrative arc of *The Silmarillion* is the story of the House of Fëanor, from Fëanor’s rebellion in Valinor to the end of the First Age. Nearly everything that happens in *The Silmarillion* can be traced directly to the actions of Fëanor and his sons, and it is their actions that drive the course of the book. Most importantly, they blur the binary lines between good and evil and between death and immortality and are used by Tolkien to complicate those themes/are central to understanding the function of those themes in *The Silmarillion*.

Tolkien, of course, understood the significance of the House of Fëanor to the story, writing that “it receives its name because the events are all threaded upon the fate and significance of the Silmarilli” / “By the making of gems the sub-creative function of the Elves is chiefly symbolized” and that “the fall of the Elves comes about through the possessive attitude of Fëanor and his seven sons to these gems” (148/Letter 131). It is no surprise, then, that they are the site of great exploration of morality and of death and immortality. They are, after all, the catalyst for the Doom of the Noldor, the curse placed on the exiled Elves by the Gods for their rebellion, which consequently effects all the action following in the rest of the narrative. Following the rebellion of Fëanor against the Valar and the subsequent massacre of Elves at

Alqualondë to steal their ships, a herald of Mandos, or perhaps Mandos himself, appears before the Noldor as they ready to depart Aman and declares:

"Tears unnumbered ye shall shed; and the Valar will fence Valinor against you, and shut you out, so that not even the echo of your lamentation shall pass over the mountains. On the house of Fëanor the wrath of the Valar lieth from the West unto the uttermost East, and upon all that will follow them it shall be laid also. Their Oath shall drive them, and yet betray them, and ever snatch away the very treasures that they have sworn to pursue. To evil end shall all things turn that they begin well; and by treason of kin unto kin, and the fëar of treason, shall this come to pass. The Dispossessed shall they be for ever. Ye have spilled the blood of your kindred unrighteously and have stained the land of Aman. For blood ye shall render blood, and beyond Aman ye shall dwell in Death's shadow. For though Eru appointed to you to die not in Ea, and no sickness may assail you, yet slain ye may be, and slain ye shall be: by weapon and by torment and by grief; and your houseless spirits shall come then to Mandos. There long shall ye abide and year for your bodies and find little pity though all whom ye have slain should entreat for you. And those that endure in Middle-earth and come not to Mandos shall grow weary of the world as with a great burden, and shall wane, and become as shadows of regret before the younger race that cometh after" (88)

This doom, which comes extremely early in the narrative, is a summary of the rest of the book—everything Mandos speaks of comes to pass, in one way or another, and so the entire narrative is tinged with a sense of regret or guilt.

The House of Fëanor, then, become highly sympathetic, though they remain morally ambiguous, often villainous figures. When the sons of Fëanor come to Middle-earth, Thingol,

King of the existing kingdom of Doriath, protected by Melian the Maia from outside interference, discusses with Melian and Galadriel the deeds of Fëanor and his sons in the flight from Valinor. Melian warns her husband: “Beware of the sons of Fëanor! [...] Their swords and their counsels shall have two edges,” and Thingol says of the sons of Fëanor that he has heard “little to my pleasure, yet they are likely to prove the deadliest foes of our foe” (128). This duality is expressed, too, by the text itself—following Fëanor’s death, the author writes “thus ended the mightiest of the Noldor, of whose deeds came both their greatest renown and their most grievous woe” (107). This duality is key to every event that follows, and central not only to the narrative of *The Silmarillion* and Tolkien’s greater cosmology but to its emotional core and thematic impact, as well.

This duality is central to the character of the sons of Fëanor. They are first introduced only in a passing description of the princes of the Noldor. Here, notably, they are described in positive terms: Maglor is a “mighty singer, whose voice was heard far over land and sea,” the twins Amrod and Amras “in later days [...] were great hunters in the woods of Middle-earth,” and Celegorm “in Valinor was a friend of Orome” (60). However, they are undeniably problematic at best, completely villainous at worst. Celegorm and Curufin conspire to kill Finrod, when it becomes clear to them that Finrod plans on assisting Beren in his quest to claim a Silmaril, and begin “thinking to send forth Felagund alone to his death, and to usurp, it might be, the throne of Nargothrond” (170). But the text blames these “dark thoughts” on “the curse of Mandos,” absolving, as it were, a bit of their responsibility, or at least inspiring in the reader a sense of understanding or pity.

Despite their villainy, however, they are not altogether evil. Maedhros, the eldest of the sons, is a particularly interesting case—while he does lead his brothers in the kinslayings, he also

notably waives his right to kingship following the death of Fëanor, waiving it to Fingolfin, Fëanor's brother, in an act of diplomacy that doubled as redress for the hurt caused by Fëanor's desertion of the host of Fingolfin at the burning of the ships at Losgar (111). When the Noldor begin to settle in Middle-earth, Maedhros chooses to establish his kingdom in the North, at a vulnerable point in the mountains that separate the realm of Morgoth from Beleriand, "because he was very willing that the chief peril of assault should fall upon himself" (112). At several points, he is noted to have fought valiantly against the servants of Morgoth, including in the fourth battle, Dagor Bragollach, the Battle of Sudden Flame, where he is noted to have "done deeds of surpassing valour" (152). Maedhros is not the only son to fight—Maglor, Caranthir, Amrod, and Amras are also described as participants (153). Caranthir, despite being described as "the harshest of the brothers and quickest to anger" (112) offers his assistance to the Men who settle in his lands. Maedhros is also notably responsible for devising the Union of Maedhros, a united front against Morgoth surpassing any devised before or after him, in what would wind up the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, the Battle of Unnumbered Tears. However, before the betrayal and subsequent defeat from which the battle takes its name, it was quite hopeful, perhaps the nearest to victory the Noldor had yet achieved: "Some have said that even then the Eldar might have won that day, had all their hosts proved faithful" (192). And so even the actions of the sons of Fëanor that come from good intentions are still constrained by their oath and their doom, and they remain wholly responsible for the atrocities committed at the three kinslayings.

The House of Fëanor's story is woven with death from the very beginning. The first deaths among the Elves afflict the House of Fëanor. Elizabeth A Whittingham shrewdly identifies Míriel, the mother of Fëanor, as "the first Elf to die and the first spirit to reside in the Halls of Waiting" (153), and counts Míriel along with Lúthien, who, through her marriage to the

mortal man Beren, becomes mortal as he is, in the number of Elves who successfully “escaped Deathlessness.” However, Míriel’s refusal of rebirth is not permanent, and according to text in “Laws and Customs” she later returns to her body and resides still in the Halls of Vaire (250). Still, though, she does effectually die—it is written in *The Silmarillion* that she “yearned for release from the labour of living” and, subsequently “her spirit indeed departed from her body and passed in silence to the halls of Mandos” (63-4). And Fëanor’s father, Finwë, is the “first of all the Eldar in Aman” to be slain as he is killed by Morgoth in his pursuit of the Silmarils, “spilled the first blood in the Blessed Realm” (78-9).

Fëanor dies, too, almost immediately upon the Noldor’s arrival in Middle-earth, “smitten to the ground by Gothmog, Lord of Balrogs” (107). The separation of fëa and hröa is traumatic: “for so fiery was his spirit that as it sped his body fell to ash, and was borne away like smoke; and his likeness has never again appeared in Arda, neither has his spirit left the halls of Mandos” (107). Notably, Fëanor is granted access to the Halls of Waiting, but denied the opportunity for rebirth—his deeds and his corruption by Morgoth having been judged, evidently, quite harshly by Mandos. An earlier allusion in the text foretells that Fëanor will stay in the Halls of Mandos until the “End,” a reference to the Ragnarok-like apocalypse towards which Arda slowly crawls (67). But the denial of afterlife goes even further for the sons of Fëanor—beyond the threat of the denial of rebirth, a more terrifying threat arises: a voidlike concept referred to as the Everlasting Dark or Darkness.

Charles Nelson points to the recurring imagery of nothingness or a void as a type of punitive afterlife that frequently appears in Tolkien’s writings, such as in Gandalf’s words to the Chief of the Nazgul at the gates of Gondor: “Go back to the abyss prepared for you. . . Fall into the nothingness that awaits you and your Master” (RK, 125). Nelson writes that “these words

confirm that Sauron and his servants,” that is, the most clearly evil forces in *The Lord of the Rings*, “are condemned to a nothingness and an emptiness reminiscent of the early Christian idea that evil is the absence of good and that the worst torment of those suffering in hell is the absence of and separation from the holy” (201)

While Nelson’s essay focuses exclusively on this imagery as it presents in *The Lord of the Rings*, the concept of a punitive void is important in *The Silmarillion*, too. The most obvious instance is in the punishment of Morgoth, which serves as a precedent for the punishment of Sauron and his servants in *The Lord of the Rings*. At the very end of *The Silmarillion*, following the complete destruction of the land as a result of their war, Morgoth is finally, apparently, defeated: “Morgoth himself the Valar thrust through the Door of Night beyond the Walls of the World, into the Timeless Void, and a guard is set for ever on those walls” (255).

The only other reference to the idea of the void is as it presents in as an important concept in the Oath of Fëanor, as Fëanor and his sons establish it as punishment should they fail to fulfil their oath: “They swore an oath which none shall break, and none should take, by the name even of Iluvatar, calling the Everlasting Dark upon them if they kept it not” (83). The full text of the Oath of Fëanor is given in *The Lays of Beleriand*, one of the thirteen volumes of *The History of Middle Earth*, compiled, edited, and published by Christopher Tolkien. It ends with a call for the infliction of punishment should the Oath go unfulfilled: “To the everlasting Darkness doom us if our deed faileth” (42). It is the fëar of this darkness that drives the sons of Fëanor to hold fast to their Oath, even to the bitter end. In the final chapter of *The Silmarillion*, Maedhros, the eldest son of Fëanor, argues with Maglor, his last remaining brother, who wishes to submit to the Valar. “by Illuvatar we swore in our madness, and called the Everlasting Darkness upon us, if we kept not our word. Who shall release us?” to which Maglor responds, “If none can release us, then

indeed the Everlasting Darkness shall be our lot, whether we keep our oath or break it; but less evil shall we do in the breaking” (253). Maglor’s interest in taking the less evil action once again reminds the reader that the brothers are not, or at least were not originally, evil. At the end of it all, the last remaining brothers have a sense of clarity about their situation—their regret is palpable even in the fragments of dialogue they are given, but the fëar of being banished to some kind of void is terrifying enough to drive them onward.

Almost immediately after the Oath is sworn, the Noldor make to depart from Aman, and a herald comes from the Valar to warn them to turn back. The herald tells Fëanor that he is, “by [his] oath [...] exiled” and that the Oath was “sworn in vain, for none of the Valar canst thou overcome now or ever,” including Morgoth, whose defeat is essential to the fulfillment of the Oath (85). From the beginning, then, Fëanor and his sons, as well as the reader, know that their plight is vain, and that they will be constrained by their Oath to their ends. Fëanor’s response is powerful: “if Fëanor cannot overthrow Morgoth,” he says, “at least he delays not to assail him, and sits not idle in grief” (85). Likewise, when he dies, Fëanor again insists his sons “hold their oath,” despite knowing “with the foreknowledge of death that no power of the Noldor would ever overthrow [Morgoth]” (107). This insistence on trying, hope against futility and value placed in bravery in the face of insurmountable odds is central to the emotional core of *The Silmarillion* and Tolkien’s Middle-earth narrative as a whole, and, in *The Silmarillion* it is expressed most strongly in the story of Fëanor and his sons.

The Oath becomes an almost sentient thing which actively constrains the sons of Fëanor. Finrod says, “the Silmarils are cursed with an oath of hatred, and he that even names them in desire moves a great power from slumber; and the sons of Fëanor would lay all the Elf-kingdoms in ruin rather than suffer any other than themselves to win or possess a Silmaril, for the Oath

drives them” (169). The importance placed on the Oath as the active party, which controls the decisions of the sons of Fëanor, is significant. The use of “slumber” is one of many times the Oath is referred to as sleeping or awakening. And so the sons of Fëanor suffer a double doom—one, the Doom of Mandos that afflicts all of the Noldor in exile, and two the curse of their own Oath.

The vanity of the Oath is apparent, too, in the final successful acquisition of the Silmarils themselves. When they are created, they are hallowed by Varda, “so that thereafter no mortal flesh, nor hands unclean, nor anything of evil will might touch them, but it was scorched and withered” and Mandos foretells that “the fates of Arda, earth, sea, and air, lay locked within them” (67). It is through the sons of Fëanor’s struggle to fulfil their oath that this comes to pass, and the three gems wind up one in the sky, one in the earth, and one in the sea. When, at the end of *The Silmarillion*, the remaining brothers Maedhros and Maglor finally acquire the remaining Silmarils (one having been taken into the sky by Eärendil and thus unattainable), they are told by Eonwe, a herald of Manwë that “the right to the work of their father, which the sons of Fëanor formerly possessed, had now perished, because of their many and merciless deeds” (253). This is proven shortly after, when the brothers attempt to take the Silmarils in hand., as “the jewel burned the hand of Maedhros in pain unbearable; and he perceived that it was as Eonwe had said, and that his right thereto had become void, and that the oath was vain,” and Maglor “could not endure the pain with which the Silmaril tormented him” (254). In this moment, the fate of the Silmarils is sealed, as Mandos foretold—Maedhros, “being in anguish and despair [...] cast himself into a gaping chasm filled with fire, and so ended; and the Silmaril that he bore was taken into the bosom of the Earth” and Maglor “cast [the Silmaril] at last into the Sea, and thereafter he wandered ever upon the shores, singing in pain and regret beside the waves” (254).

Vain or not, however, the sons of Fëanor struggle to fulfil their Oath, and to defeat Morgoth, their Enemy, whose undefeatable status is the source of the Oath's unredeemable status. Their actions drive the plot of *The Silmarillion* forward, from the rebellion in Valinor, to the constant war waged against Morgoth, to the political upheavals which thread upon the fate of the Silmarils, calling the brothers once again to the forefront of the narrative. And the narrative ends with the death and the loss of the last remaining brothers, whose end is tragic in many ways, not the least of which because of its inevitability. The first five brothers are killed in the second and third kinslayings, three of them in a single sentence: "There fell Celegorm by Dior's hand, and there fell Curufin, and dark Caranthir" (236), seemingly just deaths delivered to those who attack other Elves unjustly. But Maedhros and Maglor are more complicated. Maedhros destroys his body, hröa, in an act of suicide, while Maglor is denied death at all, and wanders endlessly, likely to the eventual fate of "fading," though this is not specified. All of the sons of Fëanor, being bound by their Oath and its invocation of banishment to the Void are, in a sense, denied an afterlife, though since it is known that Fëanor, being also constrained by the oath, was permitted and waits in the Halls of Waiting, it may be assumed that his sons would be granted the same, but the ambiguity is not accidental. The denial, or threat of denial, of afterlife is just as punitive as death itself, especially "just" death without burial or textual eulogy, but for the sons of Fëanor (unlike, for example, Eöl), these deaths, no matter how just, still evoke a sense of pity, regret, or sympathy in the reader, and thus *The Silmarillion* uses the story of the House of Fëanor to challenge and complicate morality and mortality.

CHAPTER 3: EUCATASTROPHE IN *THE SILMARILLION*

In “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien writes that “all complete fairy-stories must have [...] the Consolation of the Happy Ending,” which he calls “Eucatastrophe” (85). This phenomenon, he writes, “does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance” rather, “it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief” (86). Many scholars have pointed out instances of eucatastrophe in *The Lord of the Rings*, pointing to the final stretch of Frodo and Sam’s journey as the ultimate example of Tolkienian eucatastrophe, but less attention has been given to the idea in the context of *The Silmarillion*.

Perhaps this is because *The Silmarillion*’s worldview is undeniably pessimistic. The world is flawed from the start. *The Silmarillion* begins with a separate work, the *Ainulindale*, the Music of the Ainur, which is a story of the creation of the world. It begins biblically: “There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Illuvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made” (15). The physical world is created through a great musicmaking—the Ainur declares a theme, on which the Ainur expand, “and the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void” (16). But one of the Ainur, Melkor, who would later be named Morgoth, “sought [...] to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself” and “to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Illuvatar” (16). The discord of Melkor and the corruption of the Great Music is the source of evil in Tolkien’s universe. In a letter, Tolkien writes:

I suppose a difference between this Myth and what may be perhaps called Christian mythology is this. In the latter the Fall of Man is subsequent to and a consequence (though not a necessary consequence) of the 'Fall of the Angels': a rebellion of created free-will at a higher level than Man; but it is not clearly held (and in many versions is not held at all) that this affected the 'World' in its nature: evil was brought in from outside, by Satan. In this Myth the rebellion of created free-will precedes creation of the World (Eä); and Eä has in it, subcreatively introduced, evil, rebellions, discordant elements of its own nature already when the Let it Be was spoken. The Fall or corruption, therefore, of all things in it and all inhabitants of it, was a possibility if not inevitable. (Letter 212)

Iluvatar's response to the discord of Melkor is to drown it out with new themes of his own, the final and most powerful of these described as "wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came" (17). This idea of beauty in sorrow permeates *The Silmarillion* and is chiefly expressed in the story of the House of Fëanor.

The Silmarillion is, at its core, an incredibly sorrowful book, with a trajectory that seems always to be speeding towards universal final defeat. While it tells the tale of the valiant fight of the Noldor against Morgoth, from the very beginning of the tale, it is clear that the fight will not be a victorious one. This is because of the actions of the House of Fëanor, and consequently the Doom of the Noldor, which, as has been described above, creates a sense of futility throughout the narrative, constantly thwarting all attempts of the Noldor to do good or succeed in their war against the Enemy. The sorrow and sense of foreboding affect more than just the narrative's main characters, permeating even the world itself. Throughout *The Silmarillion*, readers are constantly reminded that the world is moving invariably towards apocalypse, with frequent

allusions to the breaking of the world, when “the land was changed and broken, and foundered under destroying seas” (176).

This pessimism is distinctly Tolkienian, too, drawn, perhaps, from his medieval influences, especially the Old English poems he researched and taught, particularly *The Battle of Maldon*. Tolkien was, of course, a scholar in addition to an author, with great interest in Old English poetry. Scholars have long found the influence of the texts that Tolkien studied, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, *Beowulf*, and others, in his Middle-earth works, though as with much existing scholarship on other themes, much of it tends to focus on *The Lord of the Rings*. A lot of brilliant analysis, for example, particularly in TA Shippey’s *The Road to Middle Earth*, has been done comparing Tolkien’s Middle-earth Men, especially the Rohirrim in *The Lord of the Rings* to pre-Norman/early English cultures¹.

Stuart D. Lee, a professor at the University of Oxford, in his article “J.R.R Tolkien and *The Wanderer*: From Edition to Application,” traces Tolkien’s long engagement with the poem. Lee identifies *The Wanderer* as being concentrated on “the plight and personal loss of a single human being, who dreams of the past and contrasts it with the harsh present” rather than any “great theological debate” and thus “to many readers it also offers consolation” (190). This, Lee connects to Tolkien’s eucatastrophe in that if “all things fade, so too will evil men” and dark times (206). If good times are transient, so too are evil times. Like *The Wanderer*, *The Silmarillion* is a work not of direct philosophical debate, but of poetic mood—its philosophical explorations are the means by which it communicates its mood. Lee mentions the work of Leslie A. Donovan, a professor at the University of New Mexico, who noted that “the poem has themes also recalling the Noldor Elves’ exile in Middle-earth” (202).

¹ I choose to avoid using inaccurate and problematic term Anglo-Saxon to denote early English cultures. For more on the term, see Dr. Mary Rambaran-Olm’s “Misnaming the Medieval: Rejecting ‘Anglo-Saxon’ Studies.”

Verlyn Flieger's book *Splintered Light: Tolkien's World* is a seminal piece of Tolkien scholarship, and one of the first to fully appreciate *The Silmarillion* as central to Tolkien's mythology. In the preface to the second edition, she writes that, if asked why anyone should read Tolkien, she would answer: "For refreshment and entertainment and, even more important, for a deeper understanding of the ambiguities of good and evil and of ethical and moral dilemmas of a world constantly embroiled in wars with itself" (14). She points out that all of Tolkien's work "is built on contrasts—between hope and despair, between good and evil, between enlightenment and ignorance—and these contrasts are embodied in the polarities of light and dark" (24). Flieger's work focuses on Tolkien's personal philosophy in order to understand his work which is, as noted above, only helpful insofar as it may give readers an understanding of his intentions, but the meaning of the text itself is independent. Additionally, her analysis of *The Silmarillion* focuses most heavily on its use of light and dark, and the interplay of these and other motifs to demonstrate that philosophy. But the contrasts she describes can also be found, perhaps most clearly to the reader, in the story of the exile of the Noldor and the House of Fëanor, and their futile fight against Morgoth.

Over the course of *The Silmarillion*, six great battles are described, all of which end in failure of one kind or another. Perhaps the most powerful of these failures is the defeat described in "Of the Fifth Battle: Nirnaeth Arnoediad," precisely because of its constant allusions to hope and its proximity to eucatastrophe. The chapter begins with military unification under Maedhros, son of Fëanor, who, hearing of the success of Beren and Lúthien, "lifted up his heart, perceiving that Morgoth was not unassailable" and set to "make new league and common council" (188). At several points throughout the battle there are moments of restored vigor, references to the return or renewal of hope. Dialogue, a relatively rare occurrence in *The Silmarillion* as a whole, makes

this hope tangible to the reader. When Turgon, King of Gondolin, surprises the standing armies by bringing an army of his own from his hidden city, his brother Fingon, current High King of the Noldor, cries out “*Utúlie'n aurë! Aiya Eldalië ar Atanatári, utúlie'n aurë!* The day has come! Behold, people of the Eldar and Fathers of Men, the day has come!” To which his army responds, “*Auta i lóme!* The night is passing!” (190). However, it is in this battle that Fingon himself is killed, in one of the most violent passages in the text: “they beat him into the dust with their maces, and his banner, blue and silver, they trod into the mire of his blood” (194). Later, during Húrin’s stand against the balrog Gothmog, he cries with each desperate attack, “*Aurë entuluva!* Day shall come again!” though he is, ultimately, defeated (195). These constant illusions to hope, and to character who cling to hope despite all odds, and the hope placed in the battle’s significance, make its tragic outcome all the more devastating—the tantalizing prospect of victory remains, for the doomed Noldor, just out of reach.

This pattern repeats throughout *The Silmarillion*: hope builds, the seemingly impossible appears to become possible, but the final victory is constantly deferred. In Fingolfin’s fight against Morgoth, he wounds him, but is himself ultimately killed. Beren and Lúthien successfully retrieve a Silmaril from Morgoth’s crown, but its curse results in the destruction of the kingdom of Doriath. Over and over again, the characters feel hopeful, achieve small and great victories, but no battle is won forever, and before long, sometimes immediately, their victories are reversed, crushed, or diminished.

For a world in which suffering and pain are intrinsically woven into the fate and makeup of the physical world and its trajectory, some comfort can be taken in tragedies, and the evils of the sons of Fëanor ultimately lead to good. In the middle of the Fifth Battle, Turgon speaks with Huor, a man, who tells him that even though he fears the impending fall of Gondolin, “out of

your house shall come the hope of Elves and Men” and “from you and from me a new star shall arise” (194). This prophecy refers to Eärendil, the son of Turgon’s daughter and Huor’s son, who later bears a Silmaril into the sky—a direct consequence of the actions taken by the sons of Fëanor in pursuit of their Oath, once again tying the sons of Fëanor to the fate of Arda. As Tolkien writes, in an attempt to prove to prospective publishers that *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* were interdependent, Tolkien wrote in a letter to Milton Waldman of Collins a summary of *The Silmarillion*, in which he writes: “But the curse still works, and Eärendil’s home is destroyed by the sons of Fëanor. But this provides the solution: Elwing casting herself into the Sea to save the Jewel comes to Eärendil, and with the power of the great Gem they pass at least to Valinor, and accomplish their errand,” that is, to persuade the Gods to assist in the war against the Enemy. (150/Letters 131). *The Silmarillion* is full of moments like this, when the actions of the sons of Fëanor, while cursed and evil, lead ultimately to good, or are instrumental in the greater triumph of good over evil. It is Curufin’s knife Angrist, which is strong enough to cut iron, that Beren uses to cut a Silmaril from Morgoth’s iron crown—this knife he acquired only after Curufin and Celegorm attack him (181).

And there is power to be found in their hopeless struggle. Before their exile, Fëanor boldly commands a herald of Manwë to say to him that, “if Fëanor cannot overthrow Morgoth, at least he delays not to assail him, and sits not idle in grief,” and he persuades his followers to come with him by promising that in leaving Aman they will come “through sorrow to find joy; or freedom, at the least” (85). These sentiments—fighting even if victory is unattainable, working to find joy even if it isn’t promised—are central to the character of Fëanor and his sons, who embody the hopelessness that powers the emotional thrust of *The Silmarillion*. It is important, too, to note that the Fifth Battle, the greatest and most organized assault on the enemy

was coordinated and led by the firstborn son of Fëanor, and, while it does end in defeat, the failure is never blamed on the Fëanorians by the characters involved or by the narrative itself. The battle ultimately fails because of the betrayal of men led by Uldor the accursed, who acted as a spy to inform Morgoth of the battle plans and whose army turned in the middle of the war. Notably, it is Maglor, son of Fëanor, who “slew Uldor the accursed, the leader in treason” (193). Of the fifth battle, Tolkien writes: “Some have said that even then the Eldar might have won the day, had all their hosts proved faithful; for the Orcs wavered, and their onslaught was stayed, and already some were turning to flight,” and “yet neither by wolf, nor by Balrog, nor by Dragon, would Morgoth have achieved his end, but for the treachery of Men” (192). The fifth battle is the clearest instance of the sons of Fëanor not as villains but as protagonists—the most impressive battle fought against the Enemy was waged first by the Fëanorians, and, while some of the Eldar are noted to have refused the summon out of hatred or distrust, the vast majority of the Eldar in Middle-earth willingly aligned with them to pursue their common goal. The Oath of Fëanor, while focused on the retrieval of the Silmarils for personal gain, was not wholly self-serving—the sons of Fëanor, moreso than any other characters, are focused constantly on the defeat of Morgoth, enemy to all.

The constant allusions to the apocalyptic end of the world, too, are tempered with hopeful allusions to the Second Prophecy of Mandos, which does not appear in *The Silmarillion* proper, or in full in any given text. While it ultimately appears to have been abandoned, or, at least, never fully integrated, parts of it linger in the published *Silmarillion*—enough to give readers a hint of something beyond even the final destruction awaiting them at the end of the book. It is perhaps the same Christian faith Tolkien was apparently drawn to in *The Wanderer*. In the *Ainulindale* it is noted that “it has been said that a greater [music] shall be made before Illuvatar

by the choirs of the Ainur and the Children of Illuvatar after the end of days,” and that in this new music all the themes of Illuvatar will be played aright, and set into Being (15-6). In “Of Aule and Yavanna,” the second chapter of *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien writes that the dwarves will “aid [Aule] in the remaking of Arda after the Last Battle” (44). The allusion is made, too, when the Silmarils are made, and Fëanor is prophesied to return: “not until the End, [...] not until the Sun passes and the Moon falls, shall it be known of what substance they were made” (67). *The Silmarillion* ends, however, inconclusively: “Here ends the SILMARILLION. If it has passed from the high and the beautiful to darkness and ruin, that was of old the fate of Arda Marred; and if any change shall come and the Marring be amended, Manwë and Varda may know; but they have not revealed it, and it is not declared in the dooms of Mandos” (255). This is clearly from the hand of the fictional scribe who wrote it, and therefore is imbued with a sense of humility, though the allusions to a final eschatological prophecy remain. It is important to note the importance of Fëanor and the Silmarils to this prophecy, and one may recall Mandos’ premonition that the fate of Arda lie locked within Fëanor’s gems.

Thus the House of Fëanor functions as the tool by which Tolkien navigates eucatastrophe in *The Silmarillion*—not, that is, the final triumph of good over evil, or a happy ending, but the denial of universal final defeat, the capacity of even evil deeds to be turned, in time, to good ends, and an indistinguishable sense of hope, or faith, in the face of total adversity. The story of the House of Fëanor is, finally, a tragedy, from their fatal mistake in the swearing of their vain Oath to their violence against their kindred to their final tragic demises. But through their tragedy the world comes to light, some victories are obtained, and all of the heroic actions of *The Silmarillion* are undertaken. They are doomed from the start but continue to fight anyway—the fight, no matter the outcome, is heroic and inspires a sense of fatalistic hope, this hope which lies

at the core of Tolkien's work, and which he calls *Estel*. Through the story of these characters who are, at times, morally reprehensible, but whose fight, often for good, against all odds inspires sympathy, so that even their apparently just and punitive deaths feel tragic, *The Silmarillion* challenges preconceived, simple notions of good/evil and death in Tolkien's works, and through their tragedy the readers come away with a sense of cathartic hope and are forced, at least, to think about the relationship between morality and mortality.

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that *The Silmarillion* is a book full of sorrow and futility, deliberately so, but despite the constant deferral of victory or peace, and despite evil and tragedy being written into the fabric of Arda itself, *The Silmarillion*, and by extension all of Tolkien's Middle-earth works, which refer to *The Silmarillion* in allusions to old legends, are inherently, although bleakly, hopeful. It is, in fact, specifically because of the futility of the fight, the sheer number of deaths, and the height of the stakes, that through corruption, death, and destruction, is this hope achieved. And it is clear, too, that the story of Fëanor and his sons, and their hopeless Oath which drives them to great violence, despair, and death, is the primary vehicle through which this fatalistic sense of hope is communicated.

With its emphasis and interest in death, morality, and hope, *The Silmarillion*, then, is undeniably as Christopher Tolkien identifies it: "the vehicle and depository of [Tolkien's] profoundest reflections" (vii). Here, Tolkien is able to explore his vast eschatological worldbuilding, and put to use the mythologic processes of death and afterlife he created. His medieval, scholarly influences as well as his personal religious and philosophical worldviews come together to create a compelling, powerful narrative. This narrative, although difficult to pin down to any given structure, being more a compilation of tales, each with its own set of textual editing, layering, or instability, follows the rebellion and exile of the Noldor, the actions of Fëanor and his sons, and in exile their seemingly unending war against Morgoth, despite its futility.

This hope is central, too, to *The Lord of the Rings*, and the influence of the House of Fëanor continues well into the Third Age. The light of Eärendil, which allows Frodo to escape the monster Shelob and continue on his quest to destroy the ring, is the light of a Silmaril, taken

into the sky due to the actions of the sons of Fëanor. It is Celebrimbor, son of Curufin and grandson of Fëanor, who is manipulated by Sauron in the forging of the Rings of Power, over which the One Ring has command. Key figures in *The Lord of the Rings*, particularly Elrond and Galadriel, were personal acquaintances or family of the House of Fëanor, and so the story continues to have relevance in the personal lives of those surviving even until the Third Age of Middle-earth.

But readers of *The Lord of the Rings* only undoubtedly lack the depth granted by knowledge of the narrative of the First Age. Those reading for entertainment and those reading for scholarly engagement alike will find themselves faced with a seemingly unending stream of allusions, references, and influences to bygone times, an unspoken collective history over which the events of *The Lord of the Rings* take place and out of which the characters of *The Lord of the Rings* originate. Access to *The Silmarillion* shows that these are much more than just allusions, and while on their own they give the text an illusion of depth, the illusion is only an illusion insofar as the history is not printed in *The Lord of the Rings*. Rather, they are a physical connection to Tolkien's greater work—greater in scope and, it may be, in scholastic value. That is, *The Lord of the Rings*, already an incredibly meaningful text, is made even more meaningful by its relationship with *The Silmarillion*, or the stories contained therein. Already, scholars have begun to give greater, much deserved attention to *The Silmarillion*, and the body of knowledge and academic work done on Tolkien and his works continues to grow.

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Whittingham, Elizabeth A. *The Evolution of Tolkien's Mythology: A Study of the History of Middle-earth*. McFarland & Company, 2008.

Appendix A: Proposal

I. Research Questions

It is abundantly clear that morality plays a central role in Tolkien's Middle-Earth texts, namely *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and in those texts published posthumously by his son Christopher Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, as well as the multitude of drafts collected in subsequent publications. It is also evident that themes and questions of death, immortality, and the afterlife feature in the texts in ways that are just as, if not more, central than morality. With Tolkien himself weighing in on these interpretations after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, readers and fans have debated vigorously the true meaning and function of the presence of such themes. Readers of *The Silmarillion* are immediately confronted with these questions, and, as Tolkien's true magnum opus, the meaning of *The Silmarillion* seems unequivocally central to the meaning of Tolkien's body of work as a whole, the key, as it were, to his universe. How, then, do these themes and questions play out in *The Silmarillion*? If *The Silmarillion*, or, more broadly, Tolkien's overarching mythology, point inevitably towards apocalypse, and often feature characters who struggle with the apparent futility of the fight against evil, how do we understand the morality of *The Silmarillion*, particularly given the complexity of its arguable protagonists, the Feanorians?

II. Literature Review

While scholars have been doing academic research and analysis on Tolkien's works since they were published, Tolkien studies, as a discipline, has taken off exponentially only in the last 20 or 30 years, following the death of the author. A recent interest in science fiction and fantasy literature as "academic-worthy" texts has brought a fresh interest in Tolkien scholarship. Despite this renewed and growing interest, the overall body of knowledge remains relatively small.

Scholars like T.A. Shippey and Humphrey Carpenter are responsible for instigating the field, with seminal works like Humphrey's *Tolkien: A Biography* (1977) and Shippey's *The Road to Middle-Earth* (1982). The field has proliferated since then, with the formation of The Tolkien Society and the annual Tolkien Studies journal, as well as the more general Mythopoeic Society and the Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts. In a lot of this work, the questions of immortality, death, the afterlife, apocalypse, and morality have come up time and time again. However, the bulk of this scholarship focuses only on *The Lord of the Rings* and, sometimes, *The Hobbit*-- academic work on *The Silmarillion* is sparse.

III. Proposed Activity

In order to begin to fill this void and to participate in the ongoing conversation about the morality, death, the afterlife, and immortality presented in Tolkien's works, and, more broadly, in related ideologies in mythopoeic fantasy and in literature generally, I will be writing an academic paper exploring the morality of *The Silmarillion* with reference to its relationship with apocalypse, death, afterlife, and immortality. Through multidisciplinary research in the related fields of English literature, mythology, history, and others, alongside my own close-reading and interpretation of the primary text itself, I hope to develop and argue for a greater understanding of the function of these themes in Tolkien's works, especially in those underrepresented in current Tolkien scholarship, with an interdisciplinary approach to understanding Tolkien's mythology as it relates to existing mythologies. An oral defense of the project will follow. The technical specifications of the paper will be cogent for a significant academic work-- a minimum of 25-30 pages, with notes and an appended annotated bibliography. The paper will follow MLA standards for formatting and citation.

IV. Methodology

To begin to investigate my guiding research questions, I will begin by thoroughly researching and reading the aforementioned existing and developing scholarship on Tolkien, with an eye for work on mythopoeic fantasy, mythology, Tolkien's influences (ie, Medieval), Christianity, and any other relevant literary criticism. Since the topic is too complex to be answered by analysis of the primary text on its own, secondary sources will be utilized to develop a nuanced understanding of the larger thematic issues at play in the text. Works in religion, mythology, history, and authorial studies will be consulted. I will utilize the MLA Database and search engines like JSTOR to aid in my research, as well as relevant academic books. Primary sources will be investigated, of course. I will analyze not only *The Silmarillion*, the main text, but all of the posthumously published works pertaining to its mythopoeisis-- that is, Christopher Tolkien's *History of Middle Earth* series and others, as well as, when necessary, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Outside sources will be evaluated based on time and context of publication and on quality of argument-- that is, the most recent scholarship will be considered as well as older works, with an understanding of the larger conversation out of which it emerges, as will seminal works in Tolkien scholarship. Because I am concerned with the concept of "morality," especially in a Christian sense, the bias of the scholars responsible for arguments about the morality of the texts will be considered, with regards to the time of publication and to the author's interests. General sources and knowledge from different disciplines will be synthesized to develop a greater framework in which to understand Tolkien's works.

V. Expected Results

As my research questions lend themselves to a particular interpretation or understanding of the text, my project will serve to complicate current understandings and contribute new ideas to the ongoing academic conversation about morality, death, immortality, the afterlife, and related

issues in Tolkien's expansive mythology, while also expanding the body of knowledge around *The Silmarillion* and other parts of Tolkien's legendarium less represented in the current body of Tolkien scholarship. Beyond *The Silmarillion*, the project will add to a growing body of research and analysis on the works of Tolkien more generally, carrying on the movement to validate and solidify Tolkien Studies as an academic discipline for future scholars. Finally, the exploration of the themes of morality, death, the afterlife, and immortality in a popular text, as with any project in the arts and humanities, serve to broaden our understanding of humanity through our creations.

Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography

Brawley, Chris. "The Fading of the World: Tolkien's Ecology and Loss in 'The Lord of the Rings.'" *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 18, no. 3 (71), 2007, pp. 292–307. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24351004.

Dr. Chris Brawley is a professor at Central Piedmont Community College in North Carolina, and has written extensively on the numinous in mythopoeic fantasy. In this article, Brawley uses *The Lord of the Rings* to argue that mythopoeic fantasy, by reflecting the numinous, can aid in the reshaping of the human relationship with the natural world in an ecocritical sense. He uses Tolkien's theory of recovery presented in "On Fairy Stories" and Rudolf Otto's work *The Idea of the Holy* to supply the context for his analysis of the natural world in *The Lord of the Rings*, arguing that by instilling a sense of wonder reflecting the numinous, Tolkien subverts normative human relationships with nature by presenting it as spiritual and by condemning deforestation and human-centric thinking. There is an attempt to connect Tom Bombadil, who represents the thesis, to the despair that underscores Tolkien's works, however, nothing substantial is drawn from this connection. He points out that in Lothlorien, the despair and sense of loss is communicated through Galadriel, which is interesting given her connection to the Silmarillion.

Burns, Marjorie. "J. R. R. Tolkien: The British and the Norse in Tension." *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 25, no. 1/2, 1990, pp. 49–59. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1316804.

Marjorie Burns shows the prevalence of both Nordic influence and English tradition in Tolkien's works, exemplified through the character Beorn in *The Hobbit*. She draws on Tolkien's influences, particularly his medievalist interests, and compares his "loner" figures to figures like Bertilak from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Beowulf from *Beowulf*. She

finds that Beorn is representative of a significant theme in Tolkien's work which draws on elements of English and Nordic ideals, which have historically been at odds with one another in works of English literature.

Callahan, Patrick J. "Tolkien, Beowulf, and the Barrow-Wights." *Notre Dame English Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1972, pp. 4–13. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40066567.

In an early piece of Tolkien scholarship, Patrick Callahan seeks to draw connections between Tolkien's Barrow-wights and the dragon from *Beowulf*. Callahan seeks to explain the purpose of the Barrow-wight encounter in *The Lord of the Rings* within the larger narrative. He finds, through his comparison of the fight against the Barrow-wights and Beowulf's fight against the dragon, that the Barrow-wight episode serves to further *The Lord of the Rings* as a narrative which values the Christianized moral ideal of having the courage to choose good over evil, exemplified by Beowulf and by Frodo. It's an interesting article, although not particularly persuasive-- the comparison between the dragon and the Barrow-wights is transient at times.

Evans, Jonathan. "Medieval Dragon-Lore in Middle-Earth." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 9, no. 3 (35), 1998, pp. 175–191. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43308355.

In his article, Jonathan Evans analyzes Tolkien's medieval influences to ascertain the mythopoesis of dragons in Middle-Earth. Evans traces the influences for each of Tolkien's major dragons and for his conception of dragons in Middle-Earth more generally to show how and where Tolkien recreated existing myth and where he created his own. The article purports that Tolkien, in imaginatively selecting existing dragonlore and motifs from medieval sources, reconstructed in his own world a definitive dragon mythology cognate with that which we see in real life. The article is very well researched and useful, although very specific and small in scope. He does, however, give considerable attention to Glaurung and Ancalagon, the main

dragons in *The Silmarillion*, whose role as cataclysmic forces is integral to Tolkien's apocalyptic narrative.

Flieger, Verlyn. *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*. Kent State University Press, 2017.

In one of the first full length analyses of Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, scholar Verlyn Flieger argues that Tolkien's works are all pulled in two directions, or that they exist within two extreme poles, one of hope and eucatastrophe and the other of ultimate final defeat and pessimism.

Keenan, Hugh T. "The Appeal of The Lord of the Rings: A Struggle for Life." *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, edited by Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo, University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, pp. 62-80.

In this essay, Hugh Keenan argues that the central movement in *The Lord of the Rings* is the struggle between life and death. The presence of this struggle and of the flight from death is the pivotal driving force for the characters in the trilogy, but, as Keenan points out, the theme runs deeper than that, and offers an analysis of small moments and symbolism in landscape and in character in the trilogy to point to the significance of the struggle for life in the narrative. The essay is housed in an anthology of essays on Tolkien in 1968, and serves as one of the first pieces of academic work done on the subject, and thus will be integral to my research and to my project.

Nelson, Charles W. "'The Halls of Waiting': Death and Afterlife in Middle-Earth." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 9, no. 3 (35), 1998, pp. 200–211. *JSTOR*,

www.jstor.org/stable/43308357.

Charles Nelson, in this article, seeks to expand upon Tolkien's claim that the main theme of *The Lord of the Rings* is death and the afterlife. First, he offers a thorough synthesis of existing work on the topic, including Keenan's essay (cited above). Next, analysis of Tolkien's influences in the development of his eschatology is offered, those being the Norse and Christian in tension. Nelson then goes on to elucidate the relationship between Tolkien's different beings and their respective afterlife mythologies, however, ultimately no new argument seems apparent. Nonetheless, the essay serves as a very conclusive literature review and survey of the many instances in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* where death and the afterlife feature. It uses existing scholarship to place these instances in the context of Tolkien's influences.

Newman, J.K. "J.R.R. Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings': A Classical Perspective." *Illinois*

Classical Studies, vol. 30, 2005, pp. 229–247. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23065305.

J.K. Newman, a Classicist, analyzes the literary merit in *The Lord of the Rings* as a classical epic. Newman presents analogous moments in classic texts to bits of Tolkien's works in order to illuminate how *The Lord of the Rings* does and does not fit the category, and fills the article with a discussion of Tolkien's epic poetic language. The article digs at the relationship between epic and myth, using *The Lord of the Rings*, and Tolkien's legendarium more generally, in order to shine light back on its classical influences. While somewhat useful, much of the article seems simply to parallel the texts without much analysis, and the clear audience for the article is one already intimately familiar with the other texts, myths, etc referred to within-- the constant barrage of references and the language of the article make it somewhat inaccessible and obscure its arguments nearly to the point of incomprehension.

Purtill, Richard L. *J. R. R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion*. Ignatius Press, 2003.

Richard Purtill, an established scholar with a significant body of work dedicated to Tolkien, explores the role of myth, morality, and religion in Tolkien's works. Significantly, a decent portion of the book is dedicated to *The Silmarillion*, and *The Silmarillion* is referenced throughout for a nuanced understanding of the way these ideas present themselves in the whole of Tolkien's literature. He argues that Tolkien's works have resounded with so many readers because of their ability to touch readers' morality through a potent but concealed religious undertones.

Shippey, T. A. *The Road to Middle-Earth: How Tolkien Created A New Mythology*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.

T. A. Shippey is and has been a leading scholar in Tolkien studies, and *The Road to Middle-Earth* is perhaps his greatest, and certainly his most read, work. The book takes an intimate look at the influence of Tolkien's philology on his creative project, from the perspective of Shippey, who taught with Tolkien at the University of Oxford. The 2003 edition of the book includes added commentary following Christopher Tolkien's publication of *The History of Middle-Earth*. The book discusses others of Tolkien's influences in creating his mythology and in writing his works (including *The Silmarillion*), though the bulk of the text focuses on the creation of language and on Tolkien's philological influence.

Shippey, T. A. *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Mariner Books, 2002.

T. A. Shippey's most recent book published on Tolkien offers a culmination of his work. The main goal of the book is to establish Tolkien's literary merit and to argue for the relevance of Tolkien today. Here, he focuses mainly on *The Lord of the Rings* as a response to the meaning of myth. Significantly, Shippey spends a considerable amount of time investigating *The Silmarillion*, and, through his illumination of Tolkien's interest in death, ultimate defeat, and

complicated eucatastrophe, argues for the importance and centrality of *The Silmarillion* to understanding the greater whole of Tolkien's mythology and work.

Tolkien, J. R. R. "On Fairy Stories." *The Tolkien Reader*. Ballantine Books, 1988, pp. 33-99.

Tolkien's own critical analysis of the value and function of fantasy literature, "On Fairy Stories" is important because it gives Tolkien's own explanation of his understanding of mythopoetic fantasy. Tolkien suggests that fairy stories create the means by which readers can view their own world reflexively from a different one-- a process he calls "recovery." He also argues for the importance of the escapist function of fairy stories. Finally, he argues that fairy stories, with their happy endings, can provide emotional comfort and closure, which he calls "eucatastrophe." The essay is important for understanding Tolkien's own view of works like his own, and serves as the backbone for much of the current academic discourse on "fairy stories" today.

Whittingham, Elizabeth A. *The Evolution of Tolkien's Mythology: A Study of the History of Middle-earth*. McFarland & Company, 2008.

Elizabeth Whittingham's book is important because it is one of the first pieces of Tolkien scholarship which focuses greatly on the *History of Middle-earth* series. As many have before her, Whittingham analyzes the influences in Tolkien's life which are clear in his invented mythology-- Greek, Roman, Norse, Classical, Biblical, etc, but in her analysis Whittingham offers new insights into the way Tolkien's legendarium evolved as it was being written, supported by the *History of Middle-earth* series. The concluding chapters of the book focus on death and immortality and on "The Final Defeat," and deal greatly with topics of interest including death, afterlife, and apocalypse.

Young, Helen. "Diversity and Difference: Cosmopolitanism and 'The Lord of the Rings.'"

Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts, vol. 21, no. 3 (80), 2010, pp. 351–365. *JSTOR*,

www.jstor.org/stable/24352268.

Helen Young is a professor at Deakin University whose work has primarily been concerned with race, medievalism, and fantasy. In this article, Young explores the resonances between racial and cultural diversity in Middle Earth in *The Lord of the Rings* and modern sociological theories on cosmopolitanism. Her article is a defense of *The Lord of the Rings* against critics who argue that it is disinterested in positively representing difference or that its Eurocentrism is equivalent to supremacist ideology. A significant portion of the article functions as a literature review of scholarship and thought done about race and culture in science fiction and fantasy, and thus is a useful survey for an important topic in any analysis in the genre, which has a fraught history with representation.