HELL AND BACK AGAIN: TRAVERSING HELLMOUTH-INSPIRED SETTINGS IN MIDDLE-EARTH

by

KRISTINA RUST

(Under the Direction of Jonathan Evans)

ABSTRACT

J.R.R. Tolkien – whether consciously or not – updated the Hellmouth narrative from pagan and Christian *mythos* to negotiate his removal of the afterlife in his legendarium. Four physical underworld locations – the Black Gate, Minas Morgul, Moria, and Dwimorberg – function as landscapes of transformation for Christological figures and conform to the Hellmouth pattern: a king descends into the underworld, delivers his people, transforms into an enhanced version of himself, and resurfaces, ready to lead his people. After the Reformation, the Hellmouth became secularized in contemporary literature; as a result, Tolkien benefitted from this secularization and appears to incorporate the Hellmouth motif in *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien assigns oral imagery to his four underworlds, which suggests the Hellmouth motif inspired him. To update the Harrowing of Hell narrative, Tolkien associates these locations with Frodo, Gandalf, and Aragorn, who fulfill the three offices of Christ: priest, prophet, and king.

INDEX WORDS: *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien, Hellmouth, Harrowing of Hell, *katabasis*, *munus triplex*, Moria, Minas Morgul, Mordor, Oathbreakers, Books of Hours, *Aeneid*, *Beowulf*, *Dr. Faustus*, *Paradise Lost*

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DEDICATION

For my husband, Jonathan, forever and always. For my parents, Todd and Lovyst, and my sister, Gabrielle, for always keeping me going. For my grandfather, Tom, for passing on to me his love of stories and magic.

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO THE HELLMOUTH

Settings, such as natural caves and manmade towers and gates, in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* swallow characters who dare to enter the desecrated spaces they contain. Introduced in *The Two Towers*, Mordor's two entrances – the Black Gate and the Stairs by Minas Morgul – guard the hellish realm of Sauron himself. One of the most iconic settings in *The Fellowship of the Ring,* the bridge of Khazad-dûm in Moria, sees the (seemingly) tragic death of Gandalf the Grey and contains a demon-like servant of darkness, a Balrog. *The Return of the King*'s Haunted Mountain, Dwimorberg, houses the Men of the Mountains, the spirits of men who break their oath to aid Isildur in his fight against Sauron. In and after the wars against Sauron during the Second Age, these landscapes succumb to the aftermath of the dark events that occur upon and around them. They transform into the entrances of hellscapes, which characters in the Third Age subsequently encounter.

Tolkien associates these entrances with language related to mouths and teeth, creating a sentient place that devours its victims. His correlation between oral imagery and jagged structures is the result of his engagement with and exposure to depictions of early English, Greco-Roman, and Norse underworlds during his medieval studies. The specific image of caves and gates with teeth stems from Christian textual and artistic depictions of the Hellmouth, which itself blends motifs from classical and Norse mythology. During the Early English period, the medieval Church used the Hellmouth as a means to instill fear in its followers, and the Hellmouth appears in illuminations of Christ's Harrowing of Hell and alongside prayers in the Office of the Dead, a Catholic prayer which reduced a soul's time in Purgatory. Purgatory, a

setting of punishment, differs from Hell proper in that it is not a soul's permanent destination after death; souls can escape Purgatory, as depicted in the Harrowing of Hell, but not hell, which is a place of eternal damnation and suffering. For the early English, Purgatory functioned in a gray space, where the living could intercede on behalf of the dead, but once the Reformation occurred in England, Purgatory's existence as a means of contact between the living and the dead was severed. After the Reformation, the Hellmouth and its association with the Catholic notion of Purgatory disappeared from the official prayerbooks of Protestant England. Instead, Post-Reformation plays and epic poems such as Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (c. 1600) and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) adopt the idea of the Hellmouth as a literary element, which removes its significance as a symbol for hell. Because of Post-Reformation literature, the Hellmouth transforms from a real, threatening destination after death to a fictional, but still horrifying, setting of punishment.

Several centuries later, Tolkien benefitted from the precedent set by these Post-Reformation authors when he created the landscape of Middle-earth. The goal of this thesis is two-fold. The first sub-goal is to trace the Hellmouth, its influence on medieval English Church parishioners, and its transformation during the Reformation period, a change which removes overtly Catholic ties to the Hellmouth motif and which appears to last into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; this genealogical undertaking of the Hellmouth necessitates the second purpose of this thesis: a source study of the Hellmouth and how its influence from the Post-Reformation period potentially informed Tolkien's incorporation of Hellmouth-like settings in *The Lord of the Rings*. This two-fold approach aims to discover how, if at all, the medieval Hellmouth appears in Middle-earth and why Tolkien's potential exposure to Hellmouth-like

settings, from his studies of ancient sources, inspired his frequent compounding of stones and teeth imagery.

The medieval scholar borrows and uses the setting-as-punishment concept in his hellscapes, and he – perhaps consciously – creates four prominent settings reminiscent of the medieval Hellmouth. In association with these Hellmouth-inspired settings, Frodo, Gandalf, and Aragorn fulfill the Christological offices of priest, prophet, and king respectively, which engages with the Harrowing of Hell narrative. From their earliest drafts to their final published forms, the settings of Minas Morgul, the Black Gate, and Moria contain overt oral imagery – words pertaining to teeth, tongues, or mouths – which functions linguistically as a descriptive undercurrent. Dwimorberg, in the meantime, encompasses overt oral imagery and a prophesied descent that mimics Christ's Harrowing of Hell. Tolkien's continuous compounding of oral imagery with deep and dark places suggests that the a Hellmouth-like concept fascinated Tolkien and that, by writing several examples of natural and manmade hellscapes, he slowly perfected a setting like the Hellmouth as he wrote. As the most faithful representation of a Hellmouth, Dwimorberg combines the Messianic tradition of a prophesized king coming into his kingdom with a harrowing of the hellscape, and the combination of these two Christian motifs indicates that Dwimorberg most closely resembles the medieval Hellmouth.

CHAPTER 1

TOLKIEN AND ANCIENT PREDATORS FROM MYTHOLOGY

The ancient myths Tolkien studied contain underworld settings that inspired the Hellmouth-like settings of *The Lord of the Rings*. For the Hellmouth concept and Tolkien's settings later, several potential influential stories include the Ragnarök myth in *The Prose Edda*, the *Aeneid*'s underworld entrance and space in Book VI, the description of Grendel's mere in the *Beowulf* manuscript, and the Bible, the last three of which Tolkien certainly encountered during his lifetime as a medieval scholar and a Roman Catholic. These myths provide textual material concerning mouths and subterranean journeys that later gave rise to or paralleled the creation of the Hellmouth.

The Hellmouth's origin borrows elements from several ancient sources that the early English Church incorporated into its own *mythos*. Art historian Meyer Schapiro suggests that the jaw imagery depicted in Christian art and architecture may stem from the Norse myth of Ragnarök, as told by Snorri Sturluson in *The Prose Edda*[1] (Schapiro 210-211; Lindow 113-114). During Ragnarök, Odin battles the wolf Fenrir, who devours him; as vengeance for Odin's death, his son, Vídar, violently slays Fenrir: "Vidar will stride forward and thrust one foot into the lower jaw of the wolf… he takes hold of the wolf's upper jaw and rips apart its mouth, and this will be the wolf's death" (Sturluson 73). *The Prose Edda* engages with a primal fear, that of being devoured or swallowed whole by animals (Trout 21). The Norse influence on medieval England potentially exposed the early English to a terrifying story: a wolf swallows *the king of the gods*. Early Christians, who were exposed to the Ragnarök myth, perhaps questioned their

[1] Jesse L. Byock, the editor of this edition of *The Prose Edda*, states that both *Eddas* were written in thirteenth-century Iceland, between 800-1100 CE (x).

own vulnerability to animals and incorporated the concept into their stories; the death-bringer Fenrir then anticipates the Hellmouth's bestial form. In his study of pre-twelfth century art and church architecture, Shapiro provides explanation for hell's depiction as animal forms when he observes, "The beast-head with open jaws is often isolated on archivolts, corbels, capitals, initials, and borders in early medieval art, especially in England… The animal jaw is the most powerful sign of violence and destructiveness" (Schapiro 211). The Hellmouth's purposeful isolation in medieval church architecture and art draws attention to it, and depictions of its animalistic "violence and destructiveness" in Books of Hours and other medieval artwork reminded early English Christians of their mortality and potential damnation. The Hellmouth capitalized on the human fear of bestial devouring (Lima 14-15).

Although it is not possible to know if Tolkien studied Books of Hours[2] or saw early churches that contain Hellmouths, he was aware of the Ragnarök myth, and his fascination with hellish settings and wolves is present in the content of his stories. In one of his letters to Milton Waldman, Tolkien indicated enough awareness of the myth to compare events in *The Silmarillion* to "the Norse vision of Ragnarök" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* [*LJRRT*] 149). The impact of Fenrir in this myth perhaps had a powerful enough effect on Tolkien for him to incorporate wolves into his stories because they also appear in *The Hobbit* and *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Associated with death and destruction, wolves have "a powerful presence in the human psyche" (Trout 41), so their reoccurrence in Tolkien's legendarium suggests that he admired their power. A comment from Sam Gamgee in *The Fellowship of the Ring* also suggests

[2] In his studies of Old English and Middle English, Tolkien read and transcribed manuscripts at Corpus Christi College, London's British Library, and the Bodleian Library. These manuscripts included Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 34; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 402; and potentially London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.x, which contains *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. He also had contact with facsimiles of the *Beowulf* manuscript (Drout 404).

Tolkien's awareness of Fenrir. Sam tells Pippin upon the wolf attack near Moria, "Whatever may be in store for old Gandalf, I'll wager it isn't a wolf's belly" (*Fellowship of the Ring* [*FotR*] 311). Sam's remark about the "wolf's belly" recalls Fenrir's swallowing of Odin, whether or not the connection between the texts was intentional on Tolkien's part. Gandalf, as an Istari, appears nearly indestructible, like Odin, so his death seems improbable.

Sam's words create an atmosphere of uncertainty concerning Gandalf's fate, especially because the Fellowship enters the dark, subterranean, and dead realm of Moria in the following chapter. Their journey into Moria mimics the *katabasis* of ancient heroes, a physical descent into the underworld which occurs in epics such as *Beowulf,* the *Aeneid,* and the *Odyssey*. As a text "founded on earlier matter which is put to new uses – like Homer, or Beowulf, or Virgil, or Greek or Shakespearean tragedy!" (*LJRRT* 201), *The Lord of the Rings* and its reoccurring replications of heroic *katabasis* suggests Tolkien's acute awareness of these epics and their profound impact on his own writing. Tolkien's incorporation of the *katabasis* motif occurs frequently in his work, and these underground journeys usually contain pivotal moments in a character's story arc, just like in Aeneas's, Beowulf's, and Odysseus's stories. Middle-earth's *katabases* seem to purposefully recall ancient epics to incorporate a heroic-like quality around characters like Aragorn, Gandalf, and Frodo.

The ancient and Tolkienian hero's *kabatasis* usually occurs within a cave-like setting or a watery space, and mouth metaphors often accompany descriptions of these physical entrances into the underworlds. These underworlds function as gloomy, hellish realms full of shades and monsters because, according to Sophus Bugge, "Hell and the lower world were connected to some extent in the popular imagination with deep or boundless morasses" (qtd. in Haber 94). Greco-Roman locations, such as Lake Avernus in the *Aeneid* and the river Acheron in various

classical sources, have real-world counterparts, which ancient peoples considered to be entrances to hell. Called *loci horridi* due to their roles as "menacing mythological setting[s]" which parallel "real geograph[ies] by no means inferior in dangers" (Ştefan 102), these locations display the imagination's creativity when explaining seemingly unnatural occurrences. As a *locus horridus*, Grendel's mere is a mythological location based on real meres, but the poet's addition of sea serpents and other supernatural monsters (most notably the man-eating Grendel and his mother) reflected the culture's fear of deep water.

Beowulf, a text well known to Tolkien, also contains a watery *katabasis* that muddles the boundary between super- and natural worlds. Tolkien studied a facsimile of *Beowulf* and went as far as to translate it, which indicates just how well he knew the epic's contents. In 2014, Christopher Tolkien posthumously published his father's translation, entitled *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary*. In response to a question of whether *Beowulf* inspired the origins of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien wrote, "*Beowulf* is among my most valued sources; though it was not consciously present to the mind in the process of writing" (*LJRRT* 30). Tolkien's letter, written to *The Observer* in February 1938, predates the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* by about sixteen years, but by this time, the epic poem's motifs, such as descent and heroism, found their way into Tolkien's formation of his saga.

One of *Beowulf*'s key battles, between Beowulf and Grendel's mother, occurs after Beowulf descends into Grendel's mere. Before Beowulf descends into the water, he and his men view the mere for the first time and discover the surface of the water to be full of serpents, monsters, and dragon-like water snakes. The Old English of lines 1422-1432a, depicting the mere's bloody water and Beowulf's men sitting on the side of the lake, reads as follows:

Old English Text	Translation
Flōd blōde wēol – folc tō sǣgon –	The water with blood seethed – the folk thereto saw –
hatan heolfre. Horn stundum song	with hot gore. A horn time and again sang
fūsliċ (fyrd)leoð. Fēþa eal ġesæt.	a ready war-cry. The band on foot all sat down.
Ġesāwon ðā æfter wætere wyrmcynnes fela,	They saw then among the water many of breeds of serpents,
selliċe sǣdracan sund cunnian,	strange sea-snakes exploring the water,
swylċe on næshleoðum nicras licgean,	also on the slope of the headland water-monsters lying down,
ðā on undernmæl oft bewitiġað	then in the third hour they often attend to
sorhfulne sið on seġlrāde,	the dismal trek along the lake,
wyrmas ond wildēor. Hīe on weġ hruron,	serpents and wild things. They rushed on the way
bitere ond ġebolgne; bearhtm onġēaton,	furious and enraged; they heard the noise,
gūðhorn galan.	the war-horn to sound.

(*Beowulf* 1422-1432a)

This passage contains several distinct nouns that capture the snakelike qualities of the mere's monsters: *wyrmcynnes fela* ("breeds of serpents"), *selliċe sǣdracan* ("strange sea-snakes"), *nicras* ("water-monsters"), and *wyrmas ond wildēor* ("serpents and wild things"). The text's emphasis on the monsters and their watery realm indicates that the mere itself functions as a kind of hellscape. In contrast to the human residents of Heorot, the peoples of the mere are actual animals, which indicates the wild disorderliness of the space. The snake-y characteristics of these monsters reflect early misconceptions that snakes pose a significant threat to humans (Trout 46-47), a threat that the *Beowulf* poet potentially borrows from the Book of Genesis and adapts to the Christian undertones of the epic.

Tolkien interprets the word *nicras* differently than I translate in mine, and as a result, his translation more closely reflects the hellish nature of this waterscape. For Tolkien, the nominative plural noun means "demons of the deep" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1189), which is a more

liberal translation of the word. The word "demons" has connotations that engage more with the Christian Hell than describe a monster-infested mere, and the alliteration of the "d" sound also makes the focus of this particular line the word "demons," which indicates Tolkien's awareness of his word choice and suggests that he purposely uses alliteration as a literary technique. This technique encourages his audience to draw the connection between depths, devils, and hell, perhaps a subconscious influence from his Roman Catholic faith. Tolkien's phrasing also reveals his comprehension that ancient "popular imagination" connects deep, dark waters with monsters and Hell (qtd. in Haber 94; Rambaran-Olm 31), and his choice of "demons" emphasizes that the surface of Grendel's mere is a watery entrance to the underworld.

When Beowulf enters the mere, Tolkien followed the Old English subject-object relationship of the line and translated it to empower the mere as a sentient waterscape. As Beowulf dives in, he is not the subject of the line; rather the sea takes command. Tolkien's translation of the line *brimwylm onfēng / hilderinċe* is "The surging seas engulfed that warrior bold" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1247). In the subject-object relationship of both the original Old English text and Tolkien's translation, the phrase the "surging seas" (*brimwylm*) governs the line as the subject while "that warrior bold" (*hilderinċe*) functions as the object, which lends the *brimwylm* the power in the text. "Surging" makes the water threatening while "engulfed," in the sense of swallowing, suggests that the water has some kind of orifice with which to consume Beowulf. Because the *brimwylm* can and does swallow the hero, the water's surface acts as the gateway to the underworld.

In terms of influences, *Beowulf*'s relationship with Christianity is unique because *Beowulf* is an epic that contains a "narrative action… set in the pagan past of the Germanic peoples" as well as "expressions pertaining to Christian belief" (Klaeber lxviii). The mere's

sentient malice and Beowulf's subsequent descent parallels the events in Christ's Harrowing of Hell, in which Christ enters Hell during the time between his death and Resurrection, rescues the righteous souls of those who died before his Crucifixion, and leads them out of Purgatory and into Heaven (Rambaran-Olm 40). *Beowulf*'s descent motif mimics some of the elements found in Christ's Harrowing of Hell, namely a king's descent and deliverance of a people (although the people are not in Grendel's mere, they still feel the wrath of the monsters and the threat of Grendel taking them to his home as supper). The Hellmouth, a place of devourment, possesses teeth and a mouth, and Hellmouth illuminations in Books of Hours depict these oral features, which I discuss below.

In addition to the Harrowing of Hell, another potential source for the *Beowulf* poet (and thus Tolkien's later) is the *Aeneid*'s underworld entrance in Book VI. Similarities between descriptions of Grendel's mere and the *Aeneid*'s *lacū nigrō* ("black lake") (Virgil VI.238) suggests that the *Aeneid* inspired the *Beowulf*'s mere (Andersson 154-155; Haber 95; Klaeber 200). Despite its capability to engulf the hero, *Beowulf*'s mere differs from Hellmouths because the location itself does not devour people. Grendel, a being who walks to and from the mere, functions as the mouth in its stead, but his close association with the mere suggests the location is the source of devourment, as it is Grendel's home. Like the mere, the *Aeneid*'s cave is a more structured, stationary entrance to the underworld. The *Aeneid*'s underworld entrance also aligns more closely with Tolkien's stationary Hellmouth-like caves, which suggests that Tolkien took inspiration from Virgil.

Unlike his experiences with directly translating *Beowulf*, Tolkien did not translate *Aeneid*. Tolkien alluded to the *Aeneid* in his letters (he revised a line to incorporate hobbits: *sic hobbitur ad astra*) (*LJRRT* 24, 435), indicating that he was aware of Virgil's epic and knew it

well. Tolkien also heard his friend and fellow Inkling, C.S. Lewis, recite his translations at Inkling meetings. Tolkien mentioned in a 1944 letter to his son, Christopher, that "besides some pleasant talk, such as [he had] not enjoyed for moons, [he and the other Inklings] heard… an article of CSL, and a long specimen of his translation of Vergil" (*LJRRT* 93). Our awareness of Tolkien's knowledge of the *Aeneid*'s Latin and his allusions the epic comes from letters dated before *The Lord of the Rings*' publication, which suggests that Aeneas's journey into the underworld inspired Tolkien to incorporate elements of this particular *katabasis* into his work. From Virgil's imagery, the cave's mouthlike descriptions follow as thus:

Original Latin Text		Translation
Spēlunca alta fuit vastōque immānis hiātū		The monstrous, yawning cave was deep and enormous,
scrūpea, tūta lacū nigrō nemorumque tenebrīs,		rugged, protected by a black lake and a shadowed grove,
quam super haud ūllae poterant impūne volantēs		not at all were any birds able to go safely over it
tendere iter pennīs: tālis sēsē hālitus ātrīs	240	with their wings: such deadly breaths were pouring
faucibus effundēns supera ad convexa ferēbat.		from its jaws to the vaults of heaven.

(Virgil VI.237-241)

The ablative noun *hiātū* ("yawning" as in "yawning mouth") in the phrase *Spēlunca alta… vastōque immānis hiātū* ("The monstrous, yawning cave was deep and cavernous") and the ablative of separation *faucibus* ("jaws") from *sēsē hālitus ātrīs / faucibus* ("deadly breaths / from its jaws") not only indicates that the entrance to the cave is mouthlike, but that the natural formation lives and breathes. The emphasis on *hiātū* and *faucibus* reinforces the image of the cave's bestial face and suggests that the cave's jaws have the capacity to open and close, which indicates that caves function as dangerous, sentient gateways to the underworld. The cave serves as the threshold between the upperworld and underworld, which is the setting of a crucial step both in Aeneas's journey to establish the Roman people and in the creation of the Hellmouth

narrative. By acting as the connecting point between the upper- and underworlds, the entrance to Hell functions as a liminal space between life and death, and this liminality, in turn, blends the supernatural and natural realms, culminating in the association with Hell as a physical, penetrable space.

After the Roman Empire fell, Northern European Christianity adopted the descent motif of these classical and Norse epics, and this borrowing aided in the Hellmouth's creation. Once Christianity became more popular, early Christians "superimposed… beliefs on the pagan traditions of the Continent" by "[b]uilding on Greek ideas of the underworld," which eventually led to the Hellmouth (Lima 14). Lima's attribution to just "Greek ideas of the underworld," however, ignores the other ancient sources that contribute to the Hellmouth's creation. The *Aeneid*, as the nationalistic epic of Augustus' Roman Empire, drew heavily from Greek mythology, but Virgil's underworld and even *Beowulf*'s mere explore their respective hellscapes beyond that of Odysseus's brief *katabasis* to the edge of the underworld; because of this fact, Lima's statement ought to attribute the Hellmouth's creation to Greco-Roman and Norse sources because of Virgil's and the *Beowulf* poet's thoroughly descriptive hellish imagery and Snorri Sturluson's relation of Ragnarök, a myth that predates Christian influence in some Norse and Germanic populations.

Another source that Lima fails to recognize is the Christian tradition itself. The medieval church, while drawing from Norse and classical myths, also had its own literary tradition in the Bible to explain the correlation between devils, animals, and the Hellmouth. Language in the New King James Version of the New Testament directly equates Satan to animals and in turn ties the figure of Satan to animal violence and bestial devouring of humans. In Revelations, Satan is a "dragon [which] stood before the woman… to devour her Child as soon as it was born,"

(Revelation 12:3-5). This dragon vision presents a story comparable to some elements of Ragnarök. In both myths, a divine entity comes close to the jaws of a monster, but in Revelations, the Christ Child escapes. Satan's description as a dragon in Revelations and association with the snake in Genesis may stem from humans' fear of snakes; snakes are particularly terrifying to humans because of their ability to unhinge their jaws for swallowing, which allows for humans to view a frightening spectacle of a small mammal being swallowed whole (Trout 46-47).

Because snakes are a real animal, they may have inspired creation of the dragon, a larger, more powerful, and capable-of-flight serpent.[3] With its larger body, the dragon also possesses a mouth capable of swallowing humans, which the verse from Revelations realizes. Serpents and dragons also were "considered to be evil beasts in patristic Christianity… [because they] were symbols associated with 'false gods' or were gods themselves in many pagan systems of belief… [or] had become absorbed into the Christian conception of evil personified, the Devil" (Lima 19-20). As a religion attempting to establish itself after the fall of the Roman Empire, Christianity demonizes "pagan systems of belief" by personifying their gods as the anti-God and purposely mythologizing the old religious system; Christianity renders polytheistic religions irrelevant, but dangerous.

The New Testament's connection between animal, the devil, and devouring combines to form the Hellmouth concept, which also appears to directly influence medieval artistic depictions of jaws on early Christian church architecture (Schapiro 211). The devil-as-animal also has sentience, just like Fenrir and Grendel, in its ability to seek victims. Satan's, Fenrir's, and

[3] The dragon and drake, of course, are mythological creatures that play integral roles in Tolkien's own works, most notably Glaurung in *The Silmarillion* and Smaug in *The Hobbit*. Like Christianity, Tolkien may be associating the dragon with a devilish figure like Satan.

Grendel's sentience seems to stem from the same primal fear of being swallowed. The monstrous intelligence of these mythical beings creates a hunter/hunted scenario, and in its creation of myths, the human brain seems to reverse the roles, perhaps out of hunter's guilt but certainly because of survival instinct, especially in a time when animals hunted humans as prey[4] (Trout 25). The Hellmouth itself first appeared in illuminations around 1000 CE, but the first time it looks like an animal head occurs in an early English Gospel book from northern France (Lima 27). Early English adoption of Hellmouth imagery builds from the Norse legends, classical myths, and Christian tradition, which appear in Books of Hours as well. Books became the perfect medium for conveying the concept of eternal damnation to church followers.

Books, both handmade and printed, focused heavily on religious teachings and content. Medieval Books of Hours were prayerbooks that played an important role for Christians while later on the first printed books in England were made and circulated by churchmen, the patrons of the first presses, in the fifteenth century (Gasquet 277). Whether printed or handmade, Books of Hours contained offices, and the offices reveal key beliefs in the early Christian liturgy. Written primarily in Latin or French, Books of Hours were used by the literate and increased in popularity in the fourteenth century as primary devotional material (Mursell 167-168). The Book of Hours was a popular genre of prayerbooks that "provide[d] men and women with a means by which they could participate for themselves in the daily round of prayer and worship that typified the lives of monks and priests" (Graham and Clements 208). An important feature of Books of Hours is their beautiful illuminations. These images often depict religious material, but some could be quite outlandish and "lavish" (Grahams and Clements 208). For the Hellmouth,

[4] According to Trout, this specific time is called the Pleistocene period, which occurred between two million and ten thousand years ago when there were more carnivores. The influence of this time period and fear of predators, he argues, "played a significant role in the evolution of storytelling" (24-25).

medieval illuminators identified the combination of pagan and Christian myths when illustrating Hellmouth illuminations in Books of Hours, and snake-y or lionlike heads often appear as the beast's face.

Standard offices, which were major prayer sections in a Book, include the Hours of the Spirit, the Hours of the Passion, and the Office of the Dead, but users chose which offices they wished to include (Mursell 168). Books of Hours were highly personalized depending on the user, and some even incorporated elaborate illuminations depending on the commissioners' wealth, status, and biblical literacy (the level of familiarity with biblical scholarship) (Going et al.). When a wealthy commissioner received their Book of Hours, they often flouted the Book as an indicator of their wealth, so the actual faith of the user is debatable in some cases. One office, however, expresses the seriousness of the afterlife and the pressure of familial charity in a pre/postmortem dynamic.

The Office of the Dead most clearly expresses Christian anxiety about the afterlife and the potential for damnation. The Office often includes a reference to Christ's Harrowing of Hell, as seen in British Library, Add. MS 18850, also known as the Bedford Hours. Produced for the use of Paris c. 1420, the Bedford Hours came into the hands of John, duke of Bedford between 1423-1430, and its Harrowing of Hell illumination on fol. 157r contains an elaborate Hellmouth with fishy, draconian qualities, as seen in Fig. 1 below (British Library, Add. MS 18850). The duke of Bedford's acquisition of the manuscript indicates the ongoing English interest in Books of Hours just a century before the Reformation.

Fig. 1. Cropped Image of British Library, Add. MS 18850.

The Hellmouth illumination opens the Office of the Dead for this manuscript, which is a noteworthy place for the illumination to occur. The Office of the Dead was essentially a section in which the user prayed for souls in Purgatory, and medieval people believed these prayers sped up the purgation process; speeding up purgation meant that souls entered Heaven sooner (Swanson 20; Clemens and Graham 217-218; Rust). The Office was a long section of the Book, and illuminations depicted in the Office could concern the Last Judgment, which is a story in Christianity that involves God's final decision of a soul's destination into Heaven or Hell (Clemens and Graham 218). The Last Judgment often depicts the Hellmouth or the Harrowing of Hell. Preceding the Requiem (i.e. burial Masses), late medieval laity chanted the Office of the Dead for the departed soul's entrance into heaven (Wieck 125).

The Bedford Hours' Harrowing of Hell is present in the Office of the Dead and shows the angry, menacing Hellmouth emerging from the ground while angels and demons fight for the embodied souls around it, which clearly reveals its late medieval users' "fear of and fascination with death" and the afterlife (Wieck 124). The illumination depicts the Hellmouth from its side so that people who see the image do not see down its throat. This illuminator also placed the mouth in the *bas-en-page* with its face and maw aiming upwards to suggest that the ground has the capacity to open and swallow people. By connecting the physical to the supernatural, the illuminator distributed the early English Church's damnation tactic, which encouraged followers to remain faithful and Catholic. The illumination's orientation also makes the Hellmouth look more like a cave, which engages with previous pagan mythology such as *Aeneid*'s underworld and anticipates the cave settings in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Similar to the Bedford Hours, the British Library's Yates Thompson MS 13 depicts the Hellmouth from its side in the *bas-en-page* of the folio. This manuscript was made for the use of Sarum (near Salisbury, England) in the second quarter of the fourteenth century and shows an actual medieval English depiction of the Hellmouth. Although this manuscript predates the Bedford Hours, it differs from the other Book because its Hellmouth on fol. 142r occurs at the very end of the Gradual Psalms, not the Office of the Dead (British Library, Yates Thompson MS 13). Despite its placement in the Gradual Psalms, the Hellmouth still engages with the medieval fear of death. Placing the Hellmouth in the *bas-en-page* with its maw points upwards seems to be a popular positioning of the Hellmouth, which again keeps viewers from seeing down the throat. Because the imagination can come up with far more painful, individualized punishments than the illuminator, users found themselves envisioning their own worst nightmares and applying them to the inside of the beast (Rust). The illuminators clearly were

capable of depicting images from their imagination because they designed the demon grotesques, the illuminated initials, the marginalia around the text, and the Hellmouths' sides. They, however, refrain from giving viewers details of the Hellmouth's insides, suggesting that they leave that torture up to the viewers' interpretation.

Fig 2. Yates Thompson MS 13.

Yates Thompson MS 13's Hellmouth looks even more like a lion than the Bedford Hours' due to its reddish coloring, rounded ears, and sharp canines. The illumination recalls a verse from 1 Peter, in which "the devil walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). This verse associates Satan with yet another animal, doubling down on the devil's animalistic nature. Notably absent from this Hellmouth illumination is Christ, and the sole focus of this illumination is damnation rather than purgation due to Christ's absence. The amount of detail added to each demon – their feet, heads, and bodies all differ from one another and include body parts from various animals – forces viewers to consider what monstrosities

they might encounter in Hell without Christ's intervention, and the demons' sharp talons gripping and pushing the souls represents bestial violence (Schapiro 211). The bottom jaw of the Hellmouth is smooth and toothless, which makes the lower half of the monster appear similar to the mouth of a cave. The top jaw parallels the edge of the leaf and border around the text, and this nearly vertical orientation of the upper jaw suggests that the entrance to Hell is a kind of archway. The teeth on the upper jaw, and those of MS 18850's Hellmouth, perhaps replicate stalactites and stalagmites, which perhaps reminded people of teeth.

While the Office of the Dead was popular during the Middle Ages in England, it possessed the same indulgence-like quality as the Requiem and prayer for the dead, which were lavish, popular, and provided monasteries with great incomes. The Requiem and prayer for the dead functioned similarly to the Office of the Dead by speeding souls to Heaven (Mursell 199). Similarly, the *Book of the Craft of the Undying*[5] in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries "became dependent on the prayers of those left behind to ensure a speedy release from Purgatory, and on God's mercy to gain assured admittance to Heaven" (Swanson 19-20). The popularity of these interventive measures in England indicates that the medieval English engaged in multifaceted approaches to the question of Purgatory and the afterlife and turned to prayers as a solution to this question. In relation to the Hellmouth, any kind of that prayer that "ensure[s] a speedy release from Purgatory," whether from Books of Hours or another method of intercession, allows souls to escape from the jaws of Hell in the Catholic tradition. Because these methods offered a kind of exchange, prayers for release of souls, human intercessions became less culturally and socially acceptable during the Reformation period.

[5] Swanson also notes that the *Book of the Undying* was a continental manual that eventually was translated into English and came to England in the fifteenth century (19).

Before moving on to the second chapter, I must clarify an important point regarding Purgatory in Pre- and Post-Reformation England. In Catholic tradition, the Harrowing of Hell occurs because Purgatory exists, and "the prominence of hell in preaching and art" increased after the eleventh century in England because the medieval Church "had to find some means of concentrating the minds of its faithful" when early English people did not necessarily need the Church's guarantee of eternal life; as a result of this fear, Purgatory became "a place of purification prior to admission to heaven" and prayer for the dead increased (Mursell 113). When Protestantism became England's official religion during the Reformation, Purgatory was eliminated as a doctrine in the Church of England. Outside of England, Purgatory continues to exist in Catholic tradition as a kind of middle ground, or a "neutral underworld," between Heaven and Hell (Bernstein 114), but modern Catholic doctrine does not seem to indicate that souls first must enter Purgatory before admission into Heaven.

Hellmouth illuminations engage with the idea of the neutral underworld by creating a kind of in-betweenness for the physical souls. These illuminations bring the super- and natural worlds together in the cave setting. This method draws on fears of dark places and then emphasizes the sinister element of the caves themselves, which works in a cyclical manner to generate fear of the Hellmouth. As entrances to underworld settings, caves function as the ideal settings for dead or hellish realms, a motif that Post-Reformation and, later, twentieth-century authors recognized and adopted into the own *mythos*. Pre-Reformation Books of Hours and other art and architecture had to concretely represent something immaterial and ethereal and navigated this issue by drawing on classical *katabasis* and creating physical settings of punishment and devourment, tied together with the idea of eternal damnation. The Hellmouth setting in mythology and its depictions in illuminations establishes a distinct pattern for what constitutes a

Hellmouth and its narrative. The hero of the story, oftentimes a (future) king coming into his kingdom,[6] descends into Hell with the intent to deliver a people, and he passes into this underworld through a physical gateway, oftentimes a cave, an arched gate, or the surface of a watery mere that appears to swallow the hero. In the Hellmouth itself, the hero undergoes a transformation, in which he fully embraces his role as a savior figure, and finally emerges from the underground prepared to rule as a king and lead his people.

As this setting-as-punishment motif became a popular concept in the Middle Ages, the Hellmouth buried itself into the subconscious framework of religious doctrine and early English thought, and ultimately, the concept appeared impossible to eradicate from the popular imagination. Despite Protestant attempts to remove Purgatory and elaborate illuminations from official doctrine, the Hellmouth lived. Before analyzing Tolkien's process of drafting his own Hellmouths in *The Lord of the Rings*, I must very briefly discuss the Hellmouth's transformation during the Reformation, the *Book Common of Prayer*, and its subsequent liturgical influence leading up to the publication of Post-Reformation literature like Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. After discussing the prayerbooks and literature of this period, I will explain how Tolkien, as an author of a fictional *mythos*, benefits from Post-Reformation authors transforming the Hellmouth into a more concealed space.

[6] In the cases of Aeneas, Beowulf, and Jesus Christ, all three heroes dive into the Hellmouth as a not-yet-established ruler. Aeneas has not yet seen the vision of the Roman people, which Anchises shows him a few hours later; Beowulf is a Geatish prince still out to prove himself after the death of Grendel; and Christ has not returned to heaven victorious and ascended.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HELLMOUTH IN POST-REFORMATION PLAYS AND EPIC POEMS

Medieval Books of Hours established the Hellmouth in a textual tradition, but the Reformation revised the content in official prayerbooks and removed medieval illuminations from its official doctrine. As images, medieval illuminations violated the line between imagery and idolatry for Protestants, and reformers discouraged any further creation of images by destroying statues and paintings as "proof that people were evidently badly instructed in the nature of religious worship" (Gasquet 254). The *Book of Common Prayer*, first officially conceived by the church of Edward VI in 1549 under the Act of Uniformity of the same year, created "the *only* legal liturgy in England" and set forth a standard prayerbook that everyone in the Church of England had to follow (Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Very Short Introduction* 2). Besides a large front treatise page, a digitized copy of a 1549 the *Book of Common Prayer* manuscript contains no full-page illuminations. Instead, the *Book* is text-heavy, and minuscule illuminated initials and pen flourishes are the only lingering medieval artwork. The *Book*'s organization and contents sends the message that elaborate illuminations are idolatrous and should not be included in the liturgy.

After 1549, the *Book of Common Prayer* received two subsequent editions in 1559 and 1662 and a revision in 1979. The *Book* lasted until 2000, when it was replaced by the *Common Worship* (Cummings, *Short Introduction* 1). The content of each edition had a section on burial, and the 1549 version actually includes Communion and the Office of the Dead as part of the burial ritual, a "lingering farewell" to the medieval liturgy of the dead; the drastic cuts in the 1559 edition removes the Office of the Dead, instead letting God judge souls (Cummings, *The*

Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662, 717, 742). The Office and its illuminations, some of which included the Hellmouth, disappeared from official liturgy in the Church of England. Its removal signified the separation of the living and the dead because the living no longer affected the dead and vice versa. Prayer for the dead and similar prayer methods, like the Office of the Dead, however, were "not expressly banned, [but] declined rapidly once bequests for mass endowments or chantries could no longer be assured of enactment [of the afterlife]" (Mursell 294). People simply lost faith in the Office of the Dead, which medieval doctrine of purgation worked so hard to establish as a means to keep its faithful. Instead, early modern Protestants shifted their attention to God's power and direct textual evidence from the Bible to support the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The Reformation's consolidation and subsequent dissemination of principle Protestant Christian doctrine in mass prayerbooks proved to be the cause for the medieval illuminated Hellmouth's decline and elimination from the official liturgy, but the textual Hellmouth continued to survive on the page and circumvent official state liturgy in a new genre. John Milton and Christopher Marlowe picked up on the Hellmouth's cultural impact through their understanding of how it affected medieval and contemporary audiences, and as a result, both authors decided to incorporate mouth, jaw, and belching descriptions into their respective epic works. An overt inclusion of the Hellmouth in Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Dr. Faustus* and descriptive language in Milton's epic *Paradise Lost* indicates that the influence of medieval Catholic beliefs regarding Purgatory, the Harrowing of Hell, and the Hellmouth itself lived on in literature. As plays and texts that succeed the Reformation, *Dr. Faustus* and *Paradise Lost* reflect lingering Catholic values in a more religiously stabilized Post-Reformation England. While the *Book Common Prayer* received more criticism and revision,

Marlowe's play borrowed from medieval Hellmouth props and brought the Hellmouth to the seventeenth-century English stage, and Milton's poem probed deep questions about the nature of a Protestant Hell and turned to hero's journey models to explain what Hell might look like in sixteenth-century England.

While Marlowe's play is perhaps the most iconic depiction of a Hellmouth in the stage tradition, his incorporation of the Hellmouth concept derives from medieval religious plays, the first being a French miracle play entitled *Sponsus* (written c. 1096-1099). A stage direction in this play indicates that the demons must cast themselves into a Hellmouth after Christ condemns them. The actual framework of the Hellmouth, however, seems to vary from play to play, and for *Sponsus*, the stage directions do not give any indication as to whether the Hellmouth is more like a decorated archway or a pit. The Hellmouth stage tradition continued to grow in popularity, with plays such as the Cornish *Saint Meriasek* (1504) and *Tobias* (1564) occurring well into the sixteenth century (Lima 29-35). To create the Hellmouth, stage designers in the later Middle Ages built sets to replicate a monster's head, into and out of which the actors would come and go at need (Meredith and Tailby 90). Just as medieval illuminations depicted the Hellmouth as a physical space, most often as a cave or a pit, to compensate for souls being indiscernible, these sets function to show the audience the consequences of living a sinful life by displaying the torture of the body.

Compiling various plays from fifteenth-century France, Peter Meredith and John Tailby discovered just how prominent the Hellmouth was as a set piece. A Metz play produced in 1437 called for a "gateway and mouth of Hell," which "by a device… opened and closed of its own accord"; the Hellmouth itself looked like a "great head" with "two great steel eyes which glittered wonderfully." Another play, performed in Montferrand in 1477, decorated its hellscape

with “a bundle of rings (faysse de cercles) to make the Hell’s mouth,” the decorations for which cost “5s 3d T for… a cartload of thorns which was purchased to put round the scaffold of Hell” (Meredith and Tailby 90). From these descriptions, we glean that these Hellmouths were probably constructed from building material such as wood or stone, which could be erected at some part of the stage and face the audience. Another play (*Paris Resurrection* in 1419), however, sees the use of an elaborate two-sectioned pit; Christ could “cast devils” into one section while the other produced “flaming sulphur, cannon-fire, thunder, and other fearful sounds (tempestes) until Satan and the others shall all be cast in” (Meredith and Tailby 90); the stage direction does not specify if the pit itself looks like a head, but the concept of physically entering Hell remains the same.

The effect of these Hellmouth faces and pits upon audiences, of course, was tremendous. Christian audiences, especially when the Pre-Reformation Church sought to impress the concept of eternal damnation on its followers, were “awed by witnessing the materialization of the greatest of its fears: a devouring hell, with its everlasting punishment,” and the spectacle of the “visual and auditory lesson… had a greater impact than the most imposing ‘fire and brimstone’ sermon” (Lima 31). After the Hellmouth disappeared from official Reformation prayerbooks, literature moved away from the genre of religious plays to a more horror-based fictionalization of the Hellmouth concept.

On the medieval stage, the Hellmouth functioned both as a setting and a Catholic reminder of eternal punishment, but the Reformation separated setting from religious doctrine in the Hellmouth motif. Stemming from mystery and miracle plays – plays which borrow material directly from the Bible and are thus grounded strictly in biblical content – in the Middle Ages, the Hellmouth’s stage tradition anticipates Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* (Lima 37). Marlowe, while

engaging with the same motif, removes the religious context of stories like the Harrowing of Hell and instead secularizes the play, actions which parallel and are a result of the Reformation movement. Written at the end of the sixteenth century, *Dr. Faustus* capitalizes on the fear that audiences experience when they consider Hell and the afterlife, but the fear became more of an effect of the horror genre. In the first act, the audience learns of Faustus's motives to "live in all voluptuousness, / Having [Mephistopheles] ever to attend on [him]" for twenty-four years, at which point he should surrender his soul to Lucifer (Marlowe 1.3.91-92).[7] Despite the protagonist's pride and greed, he sometimes causes funny incidents or, importantly for an antipapal audience, creates a sense of English pride by challenging the pope in Act III (B. Foster 179). The audience sympathizes with him, forgets about his fate during his antics, and grows to feel pity for him because "Marlowe tempts us into sympathy with his black magician" due to Faustus's "admirable aspects" (Anderson 95). Faustus challenges members of the audience to see themselves in him largely because Marlowe strips any overt ties to the Bible, such as stories and verses, from his play and, in keeping with his German source material, sets *Dr. Faustus* in Wittenberg, a place that some of members of the audience perhaps visited.

Marlowe incorporates a Hellmouth on the stage in *Dr. Faustus*' final scene, which pushes back against the Reformation's ban on Catholic images in Protestant prayerbooks. Upon the agreed-upon night of the contract's end, devils – including Lucifer and Mephistopheles – drag Faustus from the stage because the "jaws of hell are open to receive [him]," prompting the titular character to scream, "Adders and serpents, let me breathe a while! / Ugly hell, gape not. Come not, Lucifer!" (Marlowe 5.2.118, 5.3.186-187). The phrase "jaws of hell" mostly closely aligns

[7] From "Text B" of the play, published in 1616.

with the “mouth of Hell” (which is how Milton phrases his references to the Hellmouth) or the explicit “Hellmouth” name, demonstrating that Marlowe uses the motif as a warning for sinners. The Hellmouth still operates in a religious scope as Faustus’s soul pendulates between Heaven and hell; as more of a medieval morality play, *Dr. Faustus* differs from mystery and miracle plays, however, because it sets itself outside of Bible stories and instead opts to create a fictional plotline, set in a time contemporary to a Protestant, anti-papal seventeenth-century audience (B. Foster 179). The importance of this literary move results in a more terrifying Hellmouth than ones in the early English Church. Purgatory no longer exists in the Church of England, so souls swallowed by the Hellmouth have no chance for escape via prayers for the dead. Removing any direct biblical references from his play, Marlowe incorporates the Hellmouth as a physical space that threatens ambitious people – not just blasphemous sinners – with eternal damnation.

The final scene, in which the devils drag Faustus to hell, shows audiences the consequences of ambition, which is why staging of the scene is critical. The staging of the Hellmouth itself does not indicate if the demons drag Faustus into a pit or a kind of archway. Rather, the Hellmouth “is discovered” after the Good Angel mentions the “jaws of hell” line (Marlowe 183), which implies that the stage designers must create a Hellmouth that seems to appear from nowhere. The Hellmouth, then, freely emerges wherever it pleases, and Faustus’s cry for Hell to “gape not” conveys hell’s sentience because Faustus desperately makes the request as if the Hellmouth can understand it. These factors indicate that designers used a concealed device, maybe a trap-door or a hidden wall, for this particular scene. As Alan Dessen points out:

> Conceivably, at this point [after the Bad Angel describes damned souls twisting in pain within hell] an Elizabethan spectator might have seen such

> damned souls in torment (with burning forks, bodies broiling on the coals, and other nightmare visions out of Hieronymus Bosch), for the "Hell" that is "discovered" could have been a tapestry. Yet it is also possible that, though Faustus may share the Bad Angel's vision, the viewer may see only a trap door (with or without flames) or a hellmouth visible through a stage door.
>
> (Dessen 60)

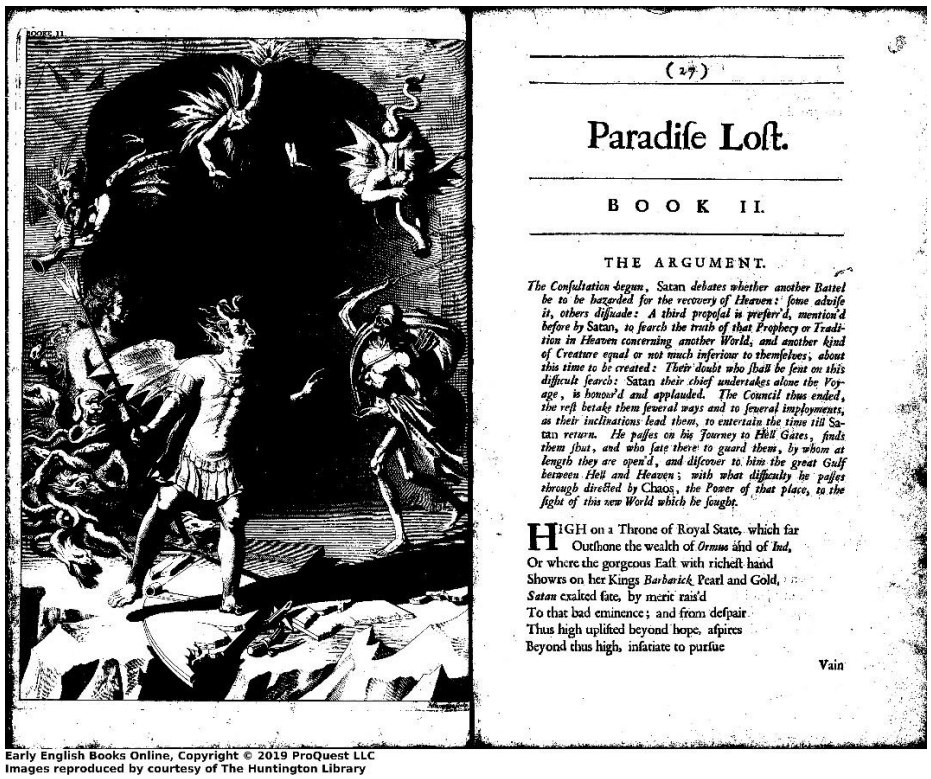
The staging of the Hellmouth, depending on what message the director wishes to convey to the audience, has the potential to escalate from a tapestry to a trap-door. The decorations of a tapestry, as Dessen describes, perhaps contained horrific, Hieronymus Bosch-stylized images, which provides a more passive, two-dimensional interaction with hell, while a pit with flames gives a more active, three-dimensional participation to the scene. Audiences feel the heat, see and smell the smoke, and imagine the horrors of hell. A tapestry, such as in two-dimensional animation, allows for the representation of more supernatural and less harmful (for the actors) elements in the scene than a stage production can provide; the tapestry thus creates a more psychologically-based scene for the audience to see, especially if it hangs for the entirety of the play. The trap-door or stage door, however, is an interactive experience that adds mystery to Hell because the audience cannot see the inside of it, a technique which employs similar staging to *bas-en-page* Hellmouth illuminations. While Marlowe's Hellmouth uses a horror-based atmosphere similar to medieval Books of Hours, its removal from biblical stories sets a precedent for secularizing the Hellmouth (i.e. the Hellmouth no longer exclusively appeared in miracle and mystery plays).

Marlowe's language surrounding the "jaws of hell" never explicitly calls hell's entrance a "Hellmouth," but the phrase and the subsequent repetition of "gape" certainly engages with the

textual Hellmouth tradition. Combining both medieval illuminations and Reformation doctrine, Marlowe edges the Hellmouth into a setting-as-punishment framework without the overt Catholic connections, a transformation with which John Milton also engages and undertakes in *Paradise Lost* a few decades later. Published in 1667, *Paradise Lost* respects the biblical story of creation by using the events of Genesis for its plot, but the epic poem adds more content to the story beyond what the Bible gives us. By situating Satan as the anti-hero, Milton lets his audience explore a hellscape not recorded in the Book of Genesis: the Hellmouth.

The traversable route between Hell and Earth, which Sin and Death build in Book X, suggests Milton's borrowing of the *katabasis* motif seen before in the *Aeneid*, *Beowulf*, and the Bible. Marlowe, for his part, does not use *katabasis* as a means to explore hell, instead letting the Bad Angel explain what Hell is like from the earth's surface (Marlowe 5.2.119-130). Several books in *Paradise Lost*, by contrast, describe Hell in detail because the demons – and thus readers – are in hell. One of these descriptions in Book II borrows directly from Virgil's description of the classical underworld, even going so far as to name the underworld's five rivers (Milton II.570-628). By using *katabasis* that follows in the footsteps of the classical tradition, Milton's text "necessitates not only a guiding figure but," as Agarwal describes it, "an 'intertextual *parcours*' or route… that seamlessly sojourns between the literary past and present, a journey that is akin to the descent voyage" (Agarwal 136). This "literary past and present" is also applicable to the Hellmouth's textual tradition, which culminates in *Paradise Lost*'s creation. By combining the classical and Catholic English pasts with his Protestant present, Milton disguised the concept of the Hellmouth while encouraging his audience to explore a Christian version of the underworld.

To understand the landscape of hell, both on the inside and outside, Milton employs *katabasis* as a means to provide his audience with that guiding figure, Satan, and places this anti-hero on a journey that slowly reveals the presence of the Hellmouth. In an effort to retain a sense of comfort for his audience in such a potentially controversial and frightening text, he engages with familiar myths and stories, like the *Aeneid* and the Harrowing of Hell, and updates the format to fit the Protestant environment of his time; his borrowing from the Hellmouth idea in conjunction with mythological models suggests both its influence and passing significance as a Christian motif. Milton's methodology allows for his audience to identify and sympathize with Satan because they know the hero archetype and story while creating a classical hellish environment that mimics and disguises the Hellmouth concept.



(27)

Paradiſe Loſt.

BOOK II.

THE ARGUMENT.

The Conſultation begun, Satan debates whether another Battel be to be hazarded for the recovery of Heaven: ſome adviſe it, others diſſuade: A third propoſal is preferr'd, mention'd before by Satan, to ſearch the truth of that Prophecy or Tradition in Heaven concerning another World, and another kind of Creature equal or not much inferiour to themſelves; about this time to be created: Their doubt who ſhall be ſent on this difficult ſearch: Satan their chief undertakes alone the Voyage, is honour'd and applauded. The Council thus ended, the reſt betake them ſeveral ways and to ſeveral imployments, as their inclinations lead them, to entertain the time till Satan return. He paſſes on his Journey to Hell Gates, finds them ſhut, and who ſate there to guard them, by whom at length they are open'd, and diſcover to him the great Gulf between Hell and Heaven; with what difficulty he paſſes through directed by Chaos, the Power of that place, to the ſight of this new World which he ſought.

HIGH on a Throne of Royal State, which far
Outſhone the wealth of *Ormus* and of *Ind*,
Or where the gorgeous Eaſt with richeſt hand
Showrs on her Kings *Barbarick* Pearl and Gold,
Satan exalted ſate, by merit rais'd
To that bad eminence; and from deſpair
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aſpires
Beyond thus high, inſatiate to purſue

Vain

Fig. 3 *Paradise Lost* 1688 Edition's Book II Engraving.

To design the disguised Hellmouth, Milton describes the inside and outside of Hell with two primary running lingual themes: consumptive and animalistic. In Book II, Milton introduces his audience to hell's architectural innerworkings when Satan arrives at hell's exit. He includes details about the "gates of hell" and personified Death and Sin, who guard the exit. Fig. 4 displays an interpretation of hell's gates, which was drawn by Jean Baptist Medina and engraved by Michael Burgese; this engraving comes from the second edition of *Paradise Lost*, published in 1688 after Milton's death in 1674.

In the engraving, the archway does not have much detail, and its simple, rounded shape looks like the inside of a cave, the disguising of the Hellmouth in the natural hellscape. When considering the metaphoric "mouth" description which occurs later in *Paradise Lost*, the engraving suggests the exit from Hell is a kind of anatomical opening, such as that of a throat. Combined with the textual descriptions of the gate's guards, the exit from Hell seems to be looking up the throat of a beast. Once the text looks back towards the entrance to Hell from the outside, the language shifts from consumptive descriptions to jaw terminology, and the engraving from Book II starts to look more like a throat in Book X.

With the presentation of Death and Sin at the gates comes even more consumption imagery, especially in the skeletal figure of Death. Surrounding the gates of Hell and their guards with a theme of starvation and barrenness, especially because Hell has not yet been connected to Earth, suggests a hunger to consume by both the inhabitants and the landscape. The text states that Death is barely a shape, that he starves, and that he "Grinned… to hear / His famine should be filled [by humans souls] and blest his maw / Destined to that good hour" (Milton II.666-672, II.845-848). The devouring of human souls, of course, is reminiscent of the Hellmouth as well as the Ragnarök myth and *Beowulf*; it also recalls Death illuminations from Books of Hours, in

which a skeletal Death hangs around the bedside of a dying person (Wieck 124). Death, a mobile and sentient being, hunts souls to consume them like Fenrir the wolf swallows Odin or Grendel devours men in Heorot, and Death's mobility revitalizes the medieval fear of death in Post-Reformation literature. When Death and Sin build the bridge between Hell and Earth in Book X, Death's mobility reaches its full extent while the Hellmouth revealed, awaiting a feast of souls, remains stationary behind them, differing from Marlowe's Hellmouth which appears when necessary.

Book X introduces the most evident support to a disguised Hellmouth reading of *Paradise Lost* as Milton explicitly uses the phrase "the mouth of Hell" three times after the bridge is built and once viewers, ready to descend again on Satan's return, look back to hell's entrance (Milton X.285-288, X.629-640, XII.38-47). Although Milton keeps returning to this phrase, he does not use it as much as other descriptions for hell, which makes the Hellmouth imagery easier to miss. He purposely waits to relate this phrase until the bridge is built, proved by his extensive use and borrowing of other comparisons (i.e. classical *katabasis*, the Ragnarök myth, furnace and cauldron imagery, and bodily descriptions). *Katabasis* also does not allow readers to look back at hell's entrance until Sin and Death build the bridge. At this textual point, the Hellmouth appears in the language, and the disguise falls off the monster's jaws for one final, lasting image of hell's entrance.[8] Milton's previous exposure to the Hellmouth, whether in artwork, medieval Books of Hours, or lingering Catholic influence via Purgatory, suggests that the early English motif was a textual plot point and setting for his epic.

[8] While I will not have space in this paper to make this point, I believe that there is correlation between Satan's disguising himself as a serpent and the Hellmouth's final reveal by Milton.

The bridge, in the meantime, adds to the setting and functions as the physical pathway for the *katabasis* to occur upon, and the "two distinct spheres, Hell and Earth, beg[in] bleeding into each other" (Agarwal 151). Because the bridge does not move, its positioning suggests that the Hellmouth does not move either, so Death becomes the Hellmouth's mobile emissary and conducts human souls to the unsatiated mouth. Although Milton initially separates Heaven, hell, and Earth from one another, he sends Death, Sin, Satan, and the angels to Earth, which breaks the distinctiveness of the realms, and the *katabatic* bridge allows for the "bleeding" together of these "two distinct spheres," which recalls Elizabeth's diagram. Just like Books of Hours and other artwork depicts souls as physical bodies, *Paradise Lost* paints the bridge and the Hellmouth between Earth and Hell as actual structures.

One of the "mouth of Hell" quotes in Book X occurs in the Miltonic God's prophecy of the Final Judgment. This quote clearly displays hell's monstrous, sentient nature and engages directly with the medieval Hellmouth and its depictions. As in Books of Hours, the Hellmouth occurs alongside the Last Judgment, but this time on the textual level. God tells His angels, "Both Sin and Death and yawning grave at last / Through chaos hurled obstruct the mouth of Hell / For ever and seal up his ravenous jaws" (Milton X.635-637). By describing the Hellmouth in terms of "*his* ravenous jaws," the text suggests that the entrance to Hell is a living entity, not just a cave entrance. The "ravenous jaws" again plays with the idea of an unsatiated, starving entity that Marlowe also illustrates with the "jaws of hell" in the Good Angel's monologue (Marlowe 5.2.118). Milton displays an awareness of the Final Judgment, the Office of the Dead, and other medieval prayer methods like the Requiem because he associates "Sin and Death and *yawning* grave," again applying a mouth to the burial process and implied afterlife.

Marlowe and Milton, two Post-Reformation authors who reached back to medieval concepts, revolutionized the Hellmouth motif by combining the horror elements of the hellscape with contemporary Protestant doctrine. They benefited from the removal of elaborate Hellmouth illuminations in the standardized the *Book of Common Prayer* and from the 1549 Act of Uniformity, which enforced the removal of these elaborate images in Protestant England. By designing their Hellmouths like the mouths of caves, Milton and Marlowe ensure the Hellmouth's survival in a more subtle form, especially without societal pressures of conforming to Catholicism. After these Post-Reformation authors transformed the Hellmouth motif into a more fictionalized, setting-as-punishment concept, they set a precedent for future English authors to use the Hellmouth pattern – a protagonist's descent into an underworld, transformation, and emergence as a prepared leader – in caves, gates, mines, and towers.

CHAPTER THREE

TOLKIEN'S PROCESS OF DRAFTING THE HELLMOUTH

Using a combination of ancient myths and benefiting from the Post-Reformation transformation of the Hellmouth, Tolkien borrows elements from the Hellmouth tradition and updates the narrative to fit in his own cosmological mythology. In Arda, there is no afterlife location like Heaven and hell, and the closest afterlife realm that exists in Tolkien's legendarium is the Halls of Mandos, or the Halls of Awaiting. Avoiding giving details of the physical space, Tolkien says the Halls are "beyond the mansions of the West upon the confines of the world" and that the souls of the Eldalië (the Elves/Eldar) "sit in the shadow of their thought" until they are reborn (*Silmarillion* [*Sil*.] 186). In *Beren and Lúthien*, he details that Lúthien "followed [Beren] swiftly down those dark way that all must go" and that the Eldar "waited in the darkness, dreaming of their past deeds" (*Beren and Lúthien* [*BL*] 226-227). The repetition of darkness and Lúthien's descent recall Greco-Roman myths, specifically that of Orpheus and Euridice, and indicates that the Halls of Mandos appear to be physical spaces. The darkness itself functions to obscure any discernable attributes of the Halls. To create a sense of repercussion for errors made in life, Tolkien turns to the Hellmouth to engage with the setting-as-punishment motif.

In order to build a familiar world that his audience recognizes and perhaps more importantly to explain what may happen to moral/redeemable mortal characters who encounter evil physical spaces, Tolkien relies on stories like the *Aeneid* and the Harrowing of Hell for his settings: Moria, Mordor and Minas Morgul, and Dwimorberg. *The Lord of the Rings* and the legendarium of Arda combine the complex themes of temptation, good versus evil, free will versus fate, and mythology to make the world seem realer (Dubs 41), and the Hellmouth and the

Christian Fall appear to play a critical role in Tolkien's realization of his unique cosmology. In his letters, Tolkien contemplates how Christianity plays a role in stories, even his own legendarium in the *Silmarillion*. He admits:

> I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear. There cannot be any story without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall – at least not for human minds as we know them and have them.
>
> (*LJRRT* 147)

Tolkien's use of the Fall necessitates the setting-as-punishment concept, which a concept like the Hellmouth has to potential to fulfill. Because Tolkien creates a unique cosmology without incorporating the presence of a prominent internal religion for Arda, he resorts to the familiar "truths and modes" and allows them to "reappear" in *The Lord of the Rings*. Although Tolkien never uses the term "Hellmouth" in his works, he seems to incorporate and update the Hellmouth and Fall narratives as "truths" to explain what happens to the souls of Men after death, especially because Men receive death as a gift. Men's souls, therefore, do not await revival in the Halls of Mandos but receive a kind of blissful escape from Time in Tolkien's *mythos* (*LJRRT* 205).[9] Hell-like settings in Middle-earth, then, do not stem from the Christian notion of death resulting from original sin; instead, they serve as places of transformation for the living, just like the ancient Hellmouths function in the transformations of Aeneas, Beowulf, and

[9] Beren, a Man, seems to be the exception to this rule as Lúthien's soul follows him to the Halls of Mandos (*BL* 226). His role in the retrieval of a Silmaril and his commitment to and love for Lúthien, an Elf-maiden, perhaps explains why Beren receives the chance to come back to life.

Christ as political and/or religious leaders. To explore these transformations, Tolkien situates his characters in trying, dark settings that serve as places to test them.

Middle-earth's four Hellmouth-inspired landscapes – Mordor's two entrances, Moria, and Dwimorberg – correspond with and serve as the settings for the transformations of three heroes, who are key to the triumph over Sauron in their own individual ways: Frodo, Gandalf, and Aragorn. According to Philip Ryken and Peter Kreeft, the reasoning behind the trifold transfigurations of these three characters is that they fulfill the tripartite offices, or the *munus triplex*, of Christ: priest, prophet, and king respectively (Ryken 3-4). The analysis of these three characters in relation to Christological imaging is not new, and many scholars apply different aspects of Jesus to Frodo, Gandalf, and Aragorn, namely Christ's humanlike qualities, his wisdom, and his kingliness (Padley and Padley 71). Because of the importance of the Harrowing of Hell to the Hellmouth motif, I use Christological imaging to explain why settings in Tolkien's intricate mapping of Middle-earth echo the Hellmouth. Frodo[10], Gandalf, and Aragorn each undertake a *katabasis* in an underground space, undergo some kind of transformation, deliver a people, and emerge from the underworld in a fulfilled, triumphant mode, steps which all fulfill the Hellmouth narrative pattern that ancient myths define.

FRODO

When Tolkien describes setting with oral imagery, he subconsciously creates an extended metaphor by equating mountains, caves, and manmade towers with teeth and mouths. Hellmouth imagery stems from "body as landscape" metaphors, in which we map the earth as a human body (Porteous 2). At a critical turning point in *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo considers whether the

[10] Frodo's imitation of Christ, however, is not complete, so not all of the Hellmouth pattern fit his narrative.

Company should continue to Mordor or take the road to Minas Tirith. At this point, Gandalf is not present, and his wisdom is gone from the party; Aragorn tells Frodo, "You are the Bearer appointed by the Council. Your own way you alone can choose. In this matter I cannot advise you" (*FotR* 412). While the rest of the Fellowship have the option to leave the quest, Frodo cannot, and the others defer to his choice, resulting in Frodo becoming the *de facto* leader. He decides to leave the others behind to keep them safe, with Sam being the only one capable of understanding Frodo's motives (*FotR* 421-422). At this moment, Frodo defies Boromir's accusations of not thinking for himself (*FotR* 414) and evolves into a leader figure once he realizes how far Boromir has fallen to temptation. He himself avoids temptation of going to Minas Tirith, the "easy route west," and maintains his course (Padley and Padley 83-84). Frodo's selfless decision to prevent his friends from entering Mordor alongside him is an act of sacrifice,[11] but because he only considers the immediate action of leaving, Frodo does not yet consider the larger implications for saving all of Middle-earth. As Frodo grows to understand his journey, Tolkien considered several storylines for Frodo and Sam's final leg of the quest.

As Frodo, Sam, and Gollum reach Mordor, they discover the Black Land's first Hellmouth-inspired entrance. They see "High cliffs lowered upon either side [of the pass], and thrust forward from its mouth were two sheer hills, black-boned and bare. Upon them stood the Teeth of Mordor, two towers strong and tall" (*TT* 244). The Teeth of Mordor, Narchost and Carchost, are Sindarin names that may be translated as "fire-tooth" and "fang-citadel" respectively (R. Foster 80, 354), so these names emphasize the toothy appearance of the Black Gate and reveal Tolkien's fascination with comparing teeth and stone. Narchost's translation is

[11] Tolkien relates that Frodo's motives not political, but "humane," in that he thinks of the quest as a "liberation from an evil tyranny of all the 'humane'" (*LJRRT* 240-241).

of particular interest as it encompasses both teeth and fire, doubling down on a description that resembles the Hellmouth. These Teeth of Mordor are made to seem sentient, as "None could pass the Teeth of Mordor and not feel their bite" (*TT* 244). Although the towers do not move their jaws like Hellmouths from miracle and mystery plays, they create a swallowing effect because they look like teeth and thus line a mouth. The description of the pass also mentions "mouth" as an aspect of the landscape, suggesting Tolkien's awareness and inclusion of a motif like the Hellmouth.

The hobbits and Gollum decide to bypass the Teeth and enter Mordor another way, which brings readers to Mordor's second Hellmouth-inspired entrance. In the *History of Middle-earth: Part Two,* Tolkien's unpublished drafts of Minas Morgul serve as supplemental texts that reveal echoes of the Hellmouth concept. His association between teeth imagery and gates comes to the forefront in his notes for and illustration of the setting. In Tolkien's earlier drafts, Orcs capture Frodo and bring him to the Tower of Sorcery (*History of Middle-earth* [*HoMe*] 332), which differs from final publication because in the drafts Minas Morgul is located where the Cirith Ungol ultimately stands at the top of the Stairs (*The Two Towers* [*TT*] 351-352). In the published text, Minas Morgul is at the foot of the Stairs in the Morgul Vale on the edge of the Mountains of Shadow, which border Mordor. In the published novel, Sam and Frodo do not enter Minas Morgul, but because they are two hobbits, Tolkien may have considered incorporating a brief adventure for Merry and Pippin, in place of Frodo and Sam, within the dreaded city (*HoMe* 339).

In Tolkien's draft, he carefully considered the feel of the setting and resorted to include architectural structures that resemble the Hellmouth, all in an effort to make Minas Morgul more dreadful. He seemed to chastise himself, writing "Minas Morgul must be made more horrible. The usual 'goblin' stuff is not good enough here" (*HoMe* 340). To avoid the "usual 'goblin'

stuff," Tolkien created a terrifying gate for Minas Morgul, a city built by the Men of Númenor and called Minas Ithil before Sauron's forces took it (*Sil*. 301-303). Another manmade structure, the Morgul Gate itself has a terrible reputation, as the last king of Gondor Eärnur "was taken alive into the city of torment" when he rode out to fight the Morgul-lord in single combat and "no living man saw him ever again" (*Sil.* 307). Tolkien eventually settled on a "Gate shaped like a gaping mouth with teeth and a window like an eye on each side" (*HoMe* 340). Just as in his description for the Teeth of Mordor, it appears that Tolkien subconsciously uses the Hellmouth as inspiration. Accompanying these words, Tolkien's illustration looks remarkably like medieval illuminations that feature the Hellmouth, suggesting that Tolkien reached back to ancient myths to incorporate an easily identifiable afterlife concept to his afterlife-less world. The parallels between Hellmouth illuminations and Tolkien's drawing are uncanny, and they illustrate how much the author is aware of his mental conflation of mouths, teeth, and stone.

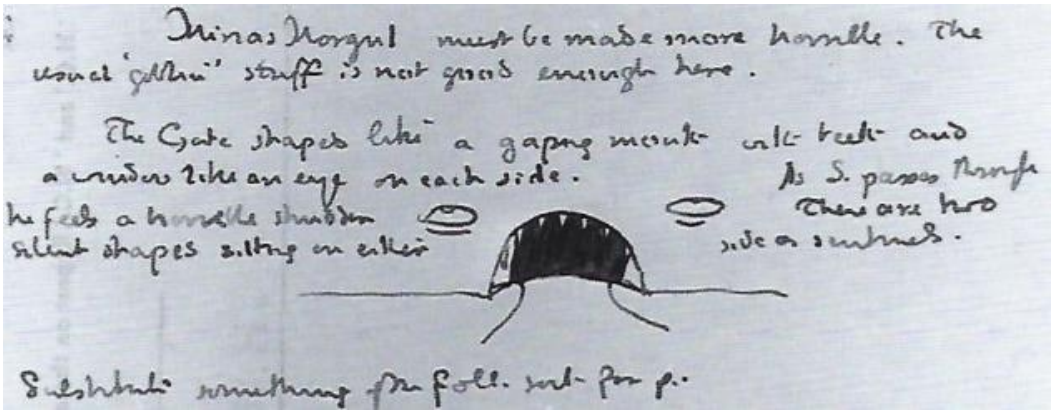


Fig. 4 "170 *Untitled (Minas Morgul Gate)* Black ink."

The published version of the Minas Morgul stays true to the "gaping mouth" of Tolkien's vision from his drafts. When Sam and Frodo catch a glimpse of the Morgul army and the city itself, they see a frightening image:

> The earth groaned; and out of the city there came a cry… As the terrible cry ended, falling back through a long sickening wail to silence, Frodo slowly raised his head. Across the narrow valley, now almost on a level with his eyes, the walls of the evil city stood, and its cavernous gate, shaped like an open mouth with gleaming teeth, was gaping wide. And out of the gate an army came.
>
> (*TT* 315)

Details about the groaning earth, the "cavernous gate," and most notably the "open mouth with gleaming teeth" suggests that the army issues from the mouth of the earth itself, which lends the creepiness factor to Minas Morgul. Tolkien repeats the word "gaping," which he also uses in his draft, and his repetition indicates the transference of his ideas to the published edition of *The Two Towers*. He does not, however, take Frodo and Sam's scene in Minas Morgul and apply it into the novel, instead choosing Cirith Ungol as the alternative setting for Frodo's torture and rescue because of its proximity to Mordor (*RotK* 186-187).

Despite its lack of teeth or mouth descriptors, Cirith Ungol is the site where Frodo noticeably begins to deteriorate in health and becomes more obsessed with and defensive of possessing the Ring, like Gollum and Bilbo: "He panted, staring at Sam with eyes wide with fear and enmity. Then suddenly, clasping the Ring in one clenched fist, he stood aghast. A mist seemed to clear from his eyes, and he passed a hand over his aching brow" (*RotK* 188). Frodo becomes weak in mind and body, which marks the start of a negative transformation. A reason why Tolkien chooses Cirith Ungol over Minas Morgul as the place for Frodo's transformation is, perhaps, to reinforce the mystery and seriousness of Minas Morgul because some silliness of their drafted escape, such as tricking the guards or a flashy escape from the Ringwraiths (*HoMe* 341, 343), contradicts the "horrible" tone Tolkien wishes to convey. As a result, the hobbits

bypass Minas Morgul, an action which maintains the city's evil atmosphere, and do not enter this hellish citadel, which deviates from the Hellmouth pattern because despite its parallels to Hellmouth illuminations, Minas Morgul does not serve as a place for transformation.

Although Frodo and Sam do not enter Minas Morgul, the city still marks the entrance into a fiery, hostile environment in which the chief enemy of *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron, dwells with his evil minions. Once they leave Cirith Ungol, they enter a hellscape, which reveals the importance of both Cirith Ungol and Minas Morgul as they function together – a place for transformation and a toothy archway. Mordor's descriptions indicate that Cirith Ungol and Minas Morgul are symbolic entrances to hell. As the landscape grows more barren, the body as landscape metaphor assigns disease language to the inside of Mordor, implying that the land is alive but suffering (Porteous 6). Mordor is "a dying land, but it was not yet dead… things still grew, harsh, twisted, bitter, struggling for life," and in the Black Land, "low scrubby trees lurked and clung, coarse grey grass-tussocks fought with the stones, and withered mosses crawled on them" (*RotK* 198). The struggling, unyielding earth, filled with parasitic growths, recalls John Milton's Pandemonium, when the demons see the fruit, try to consume it, and "instead of fruit / Chewed bitter ashes" (Milton 10.565-566). The parallels between Tolkien's and Milton's dying lands reinforces that Mordor is a hellscape because the setting refuses to support the living beings inside it. The landscape further weakens Frodo physically because the hellscape seems to amplify the Ring's control. The closer the Ring gets to Sauron, the more powerfully it exerts its will over the hobbit.

Frodo's narrative arc further departs from the Harrowing of Hell concept when he fails to destroy the Ring, which suggests that Tolkien did not consciously borrow from the Hellmouth tradition; unlike Christ, whose will is unshakeable, Frodo falls to the Ring (Padley and Padley

85). Speaking "with a clear voice… clearer and more powerful than Sam had ever heard him use," Frodo does not appear to struggle when he states, "I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" (*RotK* 223). Giving into the temptation that he manages to avoid thus far, he seems possessed by the Ring. Frodo's imperfections prevent him from being faultless, so his failure warrants some kind of punishment. Despite Frodo's perseverance, he "does not, in fact, sacrifice himself for the redemption of Middle-earth," instead witnessing Gollum fall into Mount Doom, but his perseverance and willingness to give up his life for his friends are acts of "priestly sacrifice" (Ryken 62, 64). Frodo's humanlike faults help readers realize just how monumental his task is, and his desire to save his friends as well as his fall to the Ring are realistic, which makes Frodo someone with whom we can connect. Frodo experiences pain after the Ring's destruction, before he departs for Valinor, as punishment for giving into temptation. He lives a quiet life in the Shire and does not lead a people, instead choosing to write a book telling the story of his journey. As his life progresses, Frodo must atone for his failure to destroy the Ring. To do so, Tolkien writes, "He would eventually have to 'pass away': no mortal could, or can, abide for ever on earth, or within Time. So he went both to a purgatory and to a reward, for a while" (*LJRRT* 328). Despite England's removal of Purgatory from church doctrine, Tolkien keeps the Purgatory concept alive to redeem Frodo. Frodo's remaining days in Middle-earth remind him of his ordeal, but when he departs for Valinor, he finds relief and peace in paradise.

GANDALF

Unlike Frodo's failed Christological imitation, Gandalf's transformative arc fulfills requirements in the Hellmouth pattern that makes him a successful savior figure, specifically that of the prophet. Gandalf's (and later Aragorn's) story show how Tolkien echoes the Hellmouth because he begins to incorporate more elements of the Hellmouth pattern. As Tolkien describes,

one of Gandalf's most invaluable qualities, his wisdom, stems from his origins as an "emissary from the Lords of the West," a being who is not mortal but an "*incarnate* 'angel'." He passes tests of morality, and he, like the other wizards, "were primarily sent for [certain purposes]: train, advise, instruct, arouse the hearts and minds of those threatened by Sauron to a resistance with their own strengths; and not just do the job for them" (*LJRRT* 202; emphasis original). The parameters of Gandalf's wisdom encompass his ability to guide the Fellowship and, to an extent, his foresight; he understands the ramifications of certain prospects, like Gollum's potential to affect the quest, but is not omniscient (Padley and Padley 79). Gandalf's purpose, to advise and not "just do the job for them," supports the reason for Gandalf's fall because it functions as the catalyst for Frodo's development. Frodo's acceptance of his role as leader and decision to leave the Company cannot happen with Gandalf present.

Gandalf's fall occurs in the cave-like Mines of Moria, a setting reminiscent of Hellmouth illuminations. His actions leading up to his encounter with the Balrog are commanding (Ryken 13-14), and he expertly leads the Fellowship until his very last order as Gandalf the Grey: "Fly, you fools!" (*FotR* 345; Bruce 153; Ryken 14). As the Fellowship approaches Moria and Gandalf's time runs short, they find themselves in a hostile landscape, where "Before them the mountains frowned" (*FotR* 314).[12] These mountains contain Moria, so their frowning faces must possess mouths (i.e. the East and West Gates of Moria) to facilitate the Company's passing. Besides the description of the frowning mountains, Tolkien does not describe the Gate of Moria with oral imagery. The frowning mountains outside Moria, however, set the tone for the mines: cold, hostile, dead, and watchful.

[12] Tolkien's "frowned" word choice perhaps conveys the hostility of the Misty Mountains, especially after the events of "The Ring Goes South," in which Caradhras actively pushes the Fellowship off its slopes.

Inside Moria, the Fellowship encounters dead Dwarves, killed by Orcs and the mysterious Durin's Bane; the dead realm recalls both the Barrow-downs and the classical underworld (Sabo 98). The Bridge of Khazad-dûm, where Gandalf falls, experiences a more hellish confrontation with this dead space. The Balrog – one of the "scourges of fire" and "demons of terror" from the First Age (*Sil*. 19) – resembles a "great" and "fiery shadow" (*FotR* 344), and when it appears, three instances of oral imagery accompany Gandalf's encounter with this demon. Like Tolkien's translation of "demons of the deep" in *Beowulf* (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 1189), his term "demons of terror" again engages with and echoes the Christian concept of hell, so combined with fire, this scene replicates Hell in Moria.

Unlike the mouth and teeth imagery Tolkien typically assigns to these hellish settings, the metaphor Tolkien uses for Gandalf and the Balrog's skirmish pertains to the tongue. This internal oral imagery differs from Frodo's and Aragorn's *katabases* because the Fellowship is already in a space that resembles the Hellmouth. As the Fellowship approaches the fire, they see that "close to the feet of two huge pillars a great fissure had opened," from which "now and again flames licked at the brink and curled about the bases of the columns" (*FotR* 343). The flames persistently licking the columns creates an image of unsatisfied hunger, which cannot be satiated by the lifeless pillars. As the Balrog appears in the fire, it holds "[i]n its right hand… a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left… a whip of many thongs" (*FotR* 344). This "stabbing tongue," a rather odd description for a sword, adds to the sense of hunger and violence, which Tolkien emphasizes in relation to the demon. Recalling demons in medieval illuminations, the Balrog's appearance and instruments of torture and Tolkien's language related to the tongue situate elements of the Hellmouth motif in Moria. The Balrog uses his whip to drag Gandalf into

the pit, so the demon acts as Death, Grendel, and Fenrir in that it conducts its victim to the apparent throat of Moria.

Gandalf's decision to face the Balrog, an act of self-sacrifice, places him directly between the demon and the rest of the Fellowship. They stand on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm, a tactically built "slender piece of stone, without kerb or rail, that spanned the chasm with one curving spring of fifty feet" (*FotR* 343). The bridge itself functions as the liminal space between life and death, as it leads towards Moria's East Gate and exit. Gandalf's decision both ensures the Fellowship's survival and forces Durin's Bane into an engagement of "cosmic importance," a skirmish "between wizard and monster as a greater contest between the powers of good and evil," that Tolkien defines with his language (Bruce 151). Light and dark imagery linguistically elevates the fight to the cosmic level, meaning on a level unrelated to religion but vast in its importance, but the underlying themes of sacrifice and the Hellmouth ultimately expresses the Fellowship's deliverance from the "devilry" of Moria (*FotR* 342), suggesting the influence of Christological imaging. Harrowing of Hell illuminations, specifically that in Fig. 1 (the Bedford Hours), depict the "cosmic importance" of the threat of eternal damnation as the demons and angels fight over souls, much like Gandalf and the Balrog fight over the Fellowship's survival. Gandalf's character combines the roles of the angels, as active participants in the battle on Christ's behalf,[13] and the savior figure Jesus, who judges souls' resurrection into Heaven. The Fellowship's escape from Moria, then, demonstrates Gandalf's successful sacrifice.

In a letter to Robert Murray, Tolkien explains his reasoning behind Gandalf's fall as a kind of sacrifice. He uses the word "sacrifice" twice in this letter, once when he states, "For in

[13] Jesus, in illuminations like the Bedford Hours, does not fight the demons himself. He gazes upon the souls and appears to order angels to save certain people.

his condition it was for him a *sacrifice* to perish on the Bridge in defense of his companions" (*LJRRT* 202; emphasis original). Tolkien's italicizing of "sacrifice" draws attention to the word, perhaps indicating his realization of Gandalf's action or his desire that Murray should understand Gandalf's fall to be a sacrifice. He continues to emphasize "sacrifice" when he discusses Gandalf's transformation as "the crisis had become too grave and needed an enhancement of power. So Gandalf sacrificed himself, was accepted, and enhanced, and returned" (*LJRRT* 202). "Sacrifice" implies that the victim's death honors some kind of external cosmological entity, like a god or the perception of fate, but Arda does not contain a central religion celebrating the Valar or Eru Illúvatar. Tolkien's choice of the passive tense, "was accepted" and "[was] returned," indicates the presence of idea.

Because Tolkien's world contains both fate and free will (Dubs 38), Gandalf chooses to die, and as a result, the entity reacts to his sacrifice by allowing his resurrection, showing the interplay between fate and free will. Like Christ, Gandalf must "die" (and does so willingly) to free his companions from a hellscape, so he cracks a part of the bridge with magic, "while the rest remained, poised, quivering like a tongue of rock thrust out into emptiness," before he "slid into the abyss" and "was gone" with the Balrog (*FotR* 345). The combination of "abyss" and "tongue of rock" – yet another strange way to describe the broken bridge – returns to Hellmouth-inspired imagery. Because he stands on the bridge then falls after the Balrog, Gandalf essentially slides down a gullet, completes a "passage through the underworld where his 'old life burned away'" (Ryken 22), and ensures the Company's safety at that immediate moment. The detail of Gandalf's life burning away (*The Return of the King* [*RotK*] 228) is reminiscent of Purgatory, and Gandalf's fight with the Balrog takes him to "dark tunnels," which were "gnawed by nameless things" (*TT* 105). For Gandalf to enter the Hellmouth-like pit and find a new identity,

in which he becomes Gandalf the White, suggests a kind of purification, illustrating the "enhancement" Tolkien addresses and his use of the biblical sacrifice motif.

Gandalf's transformation occurs as a result of his sacrifice, although the details of this transfiguration are not given. He becomes Gandalf the White, which functions as a kind of resurrection where scholars "have found the strongest Christological resonances" (Padley and Padley 82). As character development, Gandalf's transformation functions to "enhance" the wizard and make him a more credible leader, far different than the old, bent man who lights fireworks in the Shire. As a leader and deliverer, Gandalf must seem powerful for the Men of Gondor in their fight against Sauron, and he saves them from the Black Riders as "a flash of white and silver… [that] spread about [the Gate of Gondor] and the heavy shadows gave way before it" (*RotK* 83). Like his battle with the Balrog, Gandalf finds himself fighting the forces of darkness, and light and dark imagery define the scene. This time, however, he does not fall but repels the forces of darkness, the Black Riders, indicating his successful growth from the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*. Unlike his previous encounter with the Black Riders on Weathertop, which he later admits was a skirmish when he "was put to it indeed" (*FotR* 277), Gandalf does not need to escape but easily pushes back the Black Riders and leads the Men of Gondor safely back to the Gate, delivering them from danger. He leads the Men until Aragorn's coming to Gondor, when Gandalf then steps back to advise the king (*RotK* 156). His increase in strength and wisdom indicates his successful character development and overcoming Moria.

Gandalf's narrative arc – his fall, transformation, and role as advisor – mimics Christ's office of the prophet, which then suggest the fiery Bridge of Khazad-dûm resembles the mouth of Hell and a place of transfiguration. Gandalf directly intercedes to save the Fellowship from the Balrog then later saves the Men of Gondor from the very same army that emerges from Minas

Morgul. From a literary viewpoint, Gandalf's development raises the stakes in the fight between good and evil because his enhancement warrants an equal power increase for Sauron's forces, which maintains a stalemated balance until Frodo can upturn that struggle. Gandalf drives the Battle of the Pelennor Fields forward until Aragorn returns. To make that fight between good and evil familiar, Tolkien reaches back to well-known cosmic battles, including the Harrowing of Hell. From his encounter with Moria, Gandalf enters a position of power, but he respects the distinction between the Christological offices of prophet and king.

ARAGORN

As Frodo's story clearly incorporates two Hellmouth-inspired settings and Gandalf's arc echoes the Harrowing of Hell, Aragorn's progression from ranger to ruler encompasses both factors, which makes Dwimorberg the most Hellmouth-like setting in Middle-earth. Aragorn embodies the king component of the Christological offices, which completes the *munus triplex* (Padley and Padley 86; Ryken 90). Hints at Aragorn's true identity are introduced when we first meet him in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (*FotR* 182-183), but "The Passing of the Grey Company" fully introduces the Aragorn's lineage and the Oathbreaker's backstory. The Dead Men of Dunharrow forsook their vow to aid King Isildur during the Second Age, when Aragorn's kingly ancestor fought against Sauron. They worshipped Sauron, so Isildur cursed them to "rest never until [the] vow is fulfilled" (*RotK* 55). The Oathbreakers, rather than "sin," commit a political crime against the king by choosing to ally themselves with Sauron (Sinex 156), thereby placing their fate into the king's hands. Because Tolkien considers death a gift for Men and does not create an afterlife for them, Isildur's curse is equivalent to eternal damnation because the Oathbreakers cannot find peace in death. The Oathbreakers dwell in a "purgatorial wasteland" (Sinex 159) until given the choice to fight again. In terms of the free will versus fate

dynamic of *The Lord of the Rings*, although the Oathbreakers face eternal damnation as their fate because of the curse, their freedom to choose their fulfillment of the oath gives them the chance to rest.

The Oathbreakers house themselves in Dwimorberg, located in the White Mountains, and they await the arrival of Isildur's heir. Prophecy predicts Aragorn's reign, mimicking prophecies in the Old Testament that predict Christ's birth and reign[14] (Ryken 93). Prophecy, a recurring thematic element in *The Lord of the Rings*, functions to connect characters to the "numinous" and creates foreshadowing. Malbeth the Seer's prophecy is "perhaps the longest and most elaborate quotation of prophecy… [that] establishes mood more than it advances the plot" (Tredray 252, 255). Malbeth's prophecy, given approximately one-thousand and fifty years before the War of the Ring (*RotK* 54; R. Foster 31, 313), predicts Aragorn's descent into the Paths of the Dead, which places a heavy burden of responsibility upon Aragorn and creates a sense of urgency surrounding his success when the time does come for him to lead the Oathbreakers out of Dwimorberg. An excerpt of Malbeth's words reveals why it is crucial for Aragorn to free the Men of the Mountains:

> *The Dead awaken;*
>
> *for the hour is come for the oathbreakers:*
>
> *at the Stone of Erech they shall stand again*
>
> *and hear there a horn in the hills ringing.*
>
> *Whose shall the horn be? Who shall call them*
>
> *from the grey twilight, the forgotten people? …*

[14] I use the term "Old Testament" here because these scholars, as well as myself in own research, present this interpretation through the Roman Catholic lens due to Tolkien's Roman Catholic faith and his understanding of Catholicism.

From the North shall he come, need shall drive him:

he shall pass the Door to the Paths of the Dead.

(*RotK* 54; emphasis original)

The characters find validation of Aragorn's identity in Malbeth's words, especially when he is on the cusp of an important transformation in Dwimorberg. Although Aragorn mentions his intentions to take the Paths of the Dead right before he recites the verses (*RotK* 54) and that the prophecy seems to some to be but "a minor detail" in a story that may not need it (Tredray 252-253), Malbeth's prophecy is crucial in defining Aragorn's role. Words, especially in the form of verse, establish Aragorn as Aragorn, as is the case when readers first meet him at the Prancing Pony. Gandalf's letter and Bilbo's verse in that letter – the famous "All that is gold does not glitter" (*FotR* 182) – are what ultimately convince the hobbits to trust the strange Strider; in a sense, Gandalf and Bilbo vouch for him, and Gandalf's role as prophet is pertinent to the hobbits accepting Aragorn. After Strider recalls the verse from memory, he states, "I am Aragorn son of Arathorn" (*FotR* 183), so the verse acts as an indication of this man's transformation from "Strider" to "Aragorn," which indicates the importance of Bilbo's verse for Aragorn's story. Malbeth's prophecy, occurring at a pivotal moment in Aragorn's arc, functions in the exact same way. Aragorn speaks the verse just before he enters the Paths of the Dead then proves his identity when he commands the Oathbreakers.

The verse also explains why, in cosmological terms, Aragorn must take the Paths of the Dead. In the lines "Who shall call them / from the grey twilight," the words "grey" and "twilight" provide liminality: "grey" as the color between black and white and "twilight" as the time between day and night. These liminal words reflect the Oathbreakers' state because they exist in an in-between realm where they cannot find rest because of Isildur's curse. They know

they wronged Isildur but cannot atone for their actions, which places them in that "purgatorial wasteland" (Sinex 159). They dwell in between natural and supernatural, as they roam the landscape around Dunharrow but cannot feel its effects on them (R. Foster 106). Their ability to roam borrows from the *Exercitus mortuorum* tradition (Sinex 159), which works in *The Return of the King* because the Dead Men must fight for Aragorn before they find rest and "justify" his transformation into king (Sinex 156, 166-167; Rust). As an Army of the Dead, they cannot be defeated. Their ghostliness and brutality thus create a terrifying folklore around the Haunted Mountain, and Men learn to avoid Dwimorberg and what lies beneath it.

When he tells Théoden, Éomer, and Éowyn about his intentions to take the Paths of the Dead, Aragorn finds himself bombarded by opposition. The Paths of the Dead elicit strong visceral responses from them, including trembling (*RotK* 52) pale faces (*RotK* 52, 56), expressions of disbelief and grief (*RotK* 52, 57), and desperate attempts to convince him otherwise (*RotK* 56-57). The reactions they have to the Paths of the Dead stem from their cultural understanding of the space, a cultural landscape which is "the physical landscape as it is perceived, used, altered, and understood by human beings through the medium of culture" (Sabo 93). The ghost stories they hear and the grimness of the Path itself build a folklore around Dunharrow, to the point where people realistically and profoundly fear the space (Sabo 106). Their fear is realistic because it mimics the same pagan fear of the afterlife that early English individuals experienced (Sabo 106), which explains why the context of a Hellmouth suits and operate so well here. By applying the Hellmouth setting to the Paths of the Dead and combining it with the long-lost king narrative, Tolkien appears to bring the Harrowing of Hell to Middle-earth.

The teeth and mouth imagery so prominent in descriptions of the Teeth of Mordor and Minas Morgul is not as present in Dunharrow, which allows for the audience to focus on how Tolkien replicates the Harrowing of Hell. When Aragorn and his companions walk along the Path, they feel "a dread [fall] on them" because of the dead's presence and the spookiness of the Hellmouth (*RotK* 59). Before them, they see a "sheer wall of rock, and in the wall the Dark Door gaped before them like the mouth of night… and fear flowed from it like a grey vapour" (*RotK* 59). Several key phrases indicate that the Door of the Dead is a Hellmouth. The "grey vapour" flowing from the cave directly recalls the *Aeneid*'s underworld entrance, from which *tālis sēsē hālitus ātrīs faucibus effundēns supera ad convexa ferēbat* ("such deadly breaths were pouring from its jaws to the vaults of heaven") (Virgil V.240-241). By paralleling the Dark Door to the *Aeneid*'s underworld and engaging with the classical tradition, Tolkien sets up Aragorn's *katabasis* into the underworld space. Dwimorberg is alive and breathes, suggesting a sentience which makes caves terrifying.

The Dark Door gaping "like the mouth of night" is the clearest indicator that Dwimorberg is Hellmouth-inspired. The word "gaped" recalls Faustus's cries for the earth to "gape not" and the "yawning grave" of God's prophecy (Marlowe 5.3.187; Milton X.635). Like these established Hellmouths, the Dark Door's "mouth of night" gives the sense that it can swallow anyone who comes too close (Sabo 105; Sinex 162) and can bring them forever into the hellish domain of the Dead Men of Dunharrow. In the case of Baldor, whose skeleton the Grey Company encounters, the Dead can and will consume the life of those foolish enough to enter Dunharrow (*RotK* 60-61), justifying the folkloric atmosphere surrounding the Mountain's brutality. The Door's description uses the body as landscape metaphor with the simile "like the mouth of night," which incorporates "geographical features… [that] recall the medieval Hell

Mouth" (Sinex 162). Tolkien's simile assumes that a "mouth of night" exists in order to create the comparison, so the gaping mouth and vapors further suggests that "mouth of night" stems from something outside of his cosmology: the Hellmouth.

Inside the cave, Aragorn issues his first command, and the Dead Men's response marks Aragorn's transformation from ranger to king. In the whispering darkness, he tells the Men, "I summon you to the Stone of Erech!", and the Men respond with "an utter silence more dreadful than the whispers before" (*RotK* 61). The atmosphere shifts at this command, which suggests that the Oathbreakers listen closely to his words. Their silence, although seemingly foreboding and disastrous, is what calls Aragorn king, and his transformation occurs in the darkness of Dwimorberg. After Aragorn summons the Oathbreakers to the Stone of Erech, Gimli senses the pursuit "of a groping horror that seemed always just about to seize him." He and the Company hear "a rumour… like the shadow-sound of many feet" as the Dead follow Aragorn out of the Mountain (*RotK* 61). The pursuit of the "groping horror" and uniformity of the "shadow-sound of many feet" indicates just how seriously the Men of the Mountain take Aragorn's offer and how desperately they wish to find rest and escape from Dwimorberg. The Dead justify and validate Aragorn's identity as king because they answer Aragorn's summons, his first command as the king of Gondor (Sinex 166); he prompts their answer at the Stone of Erech by asking them their intentions, to which he hears "a voice… out of the night that answered him, as if from far away: 'To fulfill our oath and have peace'" (*RotK* 63). Aragorn performs a harrowing of Dunharrow that recalls Christ's Harrowing of Hell because he helps these wayward souls find rest in death (Padley and Padley 87), which indicates the successful (and seemingly conscious) combination of the Hellmouth and the Harrowing of Hell in Tolkien's work.

Once he leaves Dunharrow, Aragorn assumes the role of King Elessar Telcontar, the last name he adopts. After Aragorn secures the Dead Men as allies, he comes to Minas Tirith for the first time, echoing Christ's return to Heaven (Luke 23:42). The people of Gondor ironically accept his kingship when they see him ride before the Army of the Dead as they flee before what they think is "the King of the Dead" (*RotK* 63), but his ultimate deliverance of both the Dead and the Living elevates him to king. Fulfilling Malbeth's prophecy, Aragorn frees the Oathbreakers once they fulfill their oath and overcome Sauron's allies, the corsairs of Umbar (*RotK* 150-151), then fully embraces his kingship when he arrives in Minas Tirith and demonstrates healing powers for his wounded, which convinces his people of their long-lost king's return (*RotK* 142; Padley and Padley 88; Ryken 104). His arc takes him from a rejected stranger, Strider, to a "true king… on his rightful throne," which follows Jesus's story as a rejected and despised individual to a king, hidden all along (Ryken 97-98, 101). With Aragorn's elevation to king, he completes the *munus triplex*, and most faithfully imitates the Hellmouth pattern by delivering a people from an underworld setting, undergoing self-transformation, and emerging from the cave as a king ready to lead his people.

CONCLUSION

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

J.R.R. Tolkien's incorporation of the Hellmouth pattern prompts a perhaps unanswerable question: because he worked so diligently to remove real-world religion from his cosmology, why does Tolkien include elements of the Hellmouth so frequently in *The Lord of the Rings*? As we now know, Middle-earth's Hellmouth-inspired settings find their origins in the *mythos* of pagan and Christian sources, and this strange combining of sources indicates that the fear of damnation in the afterlife still exists in the modern world. In his own words, Tolkien desired to make his world seem historical, a kind of "body of more or less connected legend… which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country" that, unlike Arthurian legend, is not "involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion" (*LJRRT* 144). Tolkien, in a well-known confession, admitted his disdain for allegory, but he understood that in creating myth or fairytale "allegorical language" is necessary (*LJRRT* 145). For this reason, his imitation of the Hellmouth motif makes sense; Tolkien uses real-world English history as a timeline, into which he inserts his legendarium as a contribution to his country.

While Tolkien's letters explain his reason for including "allegorical language" like body as landscape metaphors, the question *why specifically* he includes a concept like the Hellmouth remains. For some scholars, caves as gaping mouths and mountains as bodies can be explained simply as we use these metaphors so often that we do not think about them anymore; the metaphors are a part of our vocabulary now (Porteous 7). While this fact may be true for our daily vernacular, Tolkien's careful, thoughtful crafting of his legendarium relies heavily on oral imagery to make his caves and towers seem, metaphorically, terrifyingly sentient, and his

drafting process and Minas Morgul illustration reveal his purposeful fascination with creating Hellmouth-like settings. Simply put, Tolkien knew what he was doing, which brings us back to the "why" question.

Like many others of his time, Tolkien understood death on a personal level because of his first-hand experiences in World War I. When asked if the world wars influenced his stories, Tolkien wrote that he did not think about them for the plot of his stories, but considers that "[p]erhaps in landscape," the Battle of the Somme inspired the pathway up to Mordor's Black Gate and the Dead Marshes (*LJRRT* 226). As discussed earlier in this thesis, one of these settings is Hellmouth-inspired due to the mouth and teeth imagery, which indicates that the war made Tolkien dwell on the afterlife. When his son Michael was a soldier in World War II, Tolkien wrote to him a somber, yet hopeful letter, in which he expressed his concerns for his son's life: "There is a place called 'heaven' where the good here unfinished is completed; and where the stories unwritten, and the hopes unfulfilled, are continued. We may laugh together yet…" (*LJRRT* 55). The wars seemed to traumatize Tolkien because they prompted him to think about what comes after death, and even if there is no Heaven, Tolkien still rationalized that death is rest, a gift (*LJRRT* 205). Although his cosmology does not include an afterlife for Men, it explores the question of Heaven, Purgatory, and hell, especially in the context of the Oathbreakers' story. As part of a generation who lived to see and participated in these wars, Tolkien's replication of the Hellmouth concept perhaps stems from these musings of the afterlife, and he makes Heaven and Hell physical places in Arda.

For Tolkien, including geographical locations that seem evocative of the Hellmouth in *The Lord of the Rings* seems to serve as a reconciliation with the past because he could explore his own thoughts concerning the afterlife, which may explain why he uses oral imagery so

frequently. As a beloved and influential writer, Tolkien revolutionized the fantasy genre, and his conflation of stone and mouths seems to encourage other creators to use the concept as well. Whether consciously or not, he fully removes the Christian ties to the Hellmouth because he designed his own cosmology, which novelists, game developers, and screen writers notice. Tolkien completes the secularization of the Hellmouth concept that Post-Reformation writers started, and for modern-day writers, they do not incorporate this concept with Christianity but instead prefer to present elements of the Hellmouth, such as *katabasis* and the underworld, in their original pagan contexts.

Outside of *The Lord of the Rings*, the Hellmouth pops up, especially in twenty-first century popular culture (Rust), just like it did for the early English. Video games such as *Destiny* (2014) and *Destiny 2* (2017) feature hellscapes into which the hero can descend. *Destiny*'s hellscape, a crater on the Moon in which an enemy called the Hive dwell, is called the "Hellmouth," a setting which plays a crucial role in *Destiny*'s main storyline. The *Destiny* franchise does not contain a central religion, which indicates Bungie (the publishers) did not consider the Hellmouth from a Christian standpoint. *Runescape*, one of the first massively multiplayer online roleplaying games (MMORPGs), released the Archaeology skill in March 2020, and one of the mysteries a player can complete is called "Hell Mouths," in which the player discovers the purpose of a hydra statue in the magma-filled Infernal Source. Incorporating polytheism, *Runescape* contains many distinct gods, but the gods themselves are all sympathetic, even the most demon-like one called Zamorak. In both *Destiny* and *Runescape*, the afterlife does not apply to players because they resurrect upon death. The *Percy Jackson* series has Percy and Annabeth traverse the classical underworld after the ground opens beneath them; the earth swallows these heroes, but at no point does Rick Riordan place Christianity in his series, instead

privileging Greco-Roman mythology. On the screen, Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) contains the most notorious Hellmouth of them all, a demonic domain underneath Sunnydale, California. *Buffy*'s Hellmouth appears like a large cave in the pilot episode "Welcome to the Hellmouth," but it can also spontaneously emerge if a ritual opens it, which occurs in season three's "The Zeppo" and the final episode "Chosen." *Buffy*, a cult classic, brings the Hellmouth to a place of prominence in pop culture because it focuses on daily struggles between different kinds of good and evil, not just Heaven versus Hell.

Although people in Christian Western countries are moving away from organized religion to spirituality (Bellehumeur and Sundaram 232), their fascination with the afterlife, especially hell, is still prominent. Hellmouth imagery survives and thrives in modern contexts – both in and outside of Arda – because it conceptualizes the horrors of damnation in underground settings, a byproduct of primal fears of caves. The Hellmouth captures the imagination because it signals entrances into dark, evil landscapes in a discernable way. Especially in visual platforms or elaborate literary descriptions, the Hellmouth provides the perfect opportunity for pathetic fallacy, which audiences easily comprehend at a glance. Even if there proves to be no afterlife, the threat of eternal damnation looms as a possibility because it has been ingrained in the religious conscience of Christian Western societies.

As someone who understood the relationship between fear and hope, Tolkien created realistically intricate human relationships, a unique mythology, and terrifying settings for *The Lord of the Rings* by borrowing from real-world sources. His Hellmouth-like settings instill fear both in his characters and his audience, some of whom applied the concept to their own work. Tolkien successfully creates suspense by signaling to the audience via threatening landscapes,

but by incorporating a familiar story like the Harrowing of Hell and Christlike figures, he promises an uplifting resolution, a hope to which we cling for our own lives.

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