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Good and Evil in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Legendarium*:  
Concerning Dichotomy between Visible and Invisible

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*Abstract: I discuss the Creation in The Silmarillion, which is at first supposedly good, but later becomes “marred” because of Melkor, who is at the beginning greatest of the angelic beings of Ainur, but later becomes the enemy and the symbol of pride and evil. From the cosmological view, the visible and invisible dichotomy is relevant. In Tolkien’s legendarium, the physical appearance is the key to the creation of “two levels”: the visible and the invisible world. In the Silmarillion, for example, the Ainur can “change form”, or, “walk unclad” without physical form, but those among them who turn evil, such as Melkor, lose this power.*

*For Tolkien, a word to describe Good is light, whereas Evil is described as dark or black. Where Ainur are beings of light, evil forces are often described as shadows: Mordor, for example, is “Black-Land”, “where shadows lie”. In addition to this, Aragorn reports the assumed death of Gandalf by saying that he “fell into Shadow”. Gandalf says that if his side loses, “many lands will pass under the shadow”. As concrete examples of this juxtaposition from The Lord of the Rings, I discuss the beings of Balrog and Nazgûls, but also the Great Ring, the Elves, and characters of Tom Bombadil and Gandalf.*

*Keywords: Tolkien, Tolkien's legendarium, Good and Evil, Visible and Invisible, Mortal and Immortal*

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This article discusses good and evil forces in J. R. R. Tolkien’s (1892–1973) *legendarium*,<sup>1</sup> focusing mainly on the beginning of evil and on the aspects of juxtaposing physical with spiritual, mortal with immortal and visible with invisible.

The fundamental basis of Tolkien’s *legendarium* is formed on three separate works: *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55, six books, originally published in three parts) and *The Silmarillion* (1977). *The Hobbit* is a fantasy book and a children’s book, basically about an episodic adventure,<sup>2</sup> written in a fairy-tale mode. *The Lord of the Rings*, on the other hand, is highly popular – one could say the most popular – quest-tale,<sup>3</sup> an epic fantasy of

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, a *legendarium* is a book or series of books comprising collection of legends. I use the word to describe all Tolkien’s texts that deal with Middle-earth although I do know that sometimes in Tolkien studies *legendarium* is used to denote especially Tolkien’s “Elvish legends” and *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are not considered a part of it. For me, all Tolkien’s texts concerning both the legends of Elves (e.g. *The Silmarillion*) and fictive history of Hobbits (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*) form a complete and coherent *legendarium*.

<sup>2</sup> In some parts written in the spirit of medieval *roman d’aventures*. Not so much an epic quest, but a lighter *adventure*.

<sup>3</sup> In some parts resembling medieval *chansons de geste*, epics about heroic deeds. Compared with *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* is more a quest than an adventure.

the 20<sup>th</sup> century addressing grand themes such as world domination, apocalyptic visions, the battle between Good and Evil (and the poor individuals in the middle of this battle), heroism, and both success and failure. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the basic task and quest is to destroy the “One Ring” which in wrong hands can bring about the destruction of all Middle-earth. Then again, posthumously published *The Silmarillion* is a collection of Tolkien’s mythopoeic works edited by his son Christopher Tolkien. The mythologically oriented stories of *The Silmarillion* form the backbone of cosmogony and cosmology in Tolkien’s *legendarium*’s. All of these books form different angles and modes of the *legendarium*.

## The Beginning (and the End) of Evil

At first, the Creation in Tolkien’s *legendarium* is supposedly “good”. The first expression of “evil” in the *legendarium* is in a way curiosity. Melkor, the greatest of the angelic beings of Ainur, becomes curious and impatient. At the beginning, the Creator Eru Ilúvatar places “the Flame Imperishable” at the heart of the World and declares: “And I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 9). The power of creation is within the flame. In an episode which could be seen as the first sign of Melkor’s forthcoming “rebellion” against Eru Ilúvatar, Melkor begins the search for the Flame in order to create something new. Melkor cannot find the Flame since it is “with Ilúvatar”:

He [Melkor] had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of its own, and it seemed to him that Ilúvatar took no thought for the Void, and he was impatient of its emptiness. Yet he found not the Fire, for it is with Ilúvatar. But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren. (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 9.)

This first sign of Melkor’s thoughts of his own” could also be seen as individualism. In the cosmogonical Music which creates the World, Melkor creates discords, which forces Eru to interrupt the Great Music at times. Tolkien writes that this first opposition against Eru’s thoughts as expressed by Melkor, and that some of the Ainur follow him on this “musical opposition”.

Some of these thoughts he [Melkor] now wove into his music, and straightway discord arose about him, and many that sang nigh him grew despondent, and their thought was disturbed and their music faltered; but some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first. (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 4.)

Later in *The Silmarillion* Melkor becomes The Great Enemy, Morgoth. Tolkien writes that “Melkor is the *supreme* spirit of Pride and Revolt, *not* just the chief Vala of the Earth, who has turned to evil” (*The Book of Lost Tales* 375). In *The Silmarillion*, Melkor symbolizes pride and evil.

Tolkien emphasizes that since the Music of Ainur, the world is “marred”. One of the motifs of Tolkien’s *legendarium* is that the life in the changeable world of Middle-earth can be describes as “the long defeat”. This can be seen in *The Lord of the Rings* when Galadriel, ruler of the Elves of Lórien, discusses both her and her husband Celeborn’s past in Middle-earth. Galadriel sees her life as “the long defeat” saying: “He [Celeborn] has dwelt in the West since the days of dawn, and I have dwelt with him years uncounted; for ere the fall of Nargothrond or Gondolin I passed over the mountains, and together through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat” (Tolkien, *The*

*Lord of the Rings* 348). This vision is shared by Elrond, another Elf-character.<sup>4</sup> In the chapter “The Council of Elrond”, Elrond melancholically reminisces the history of Elves and Men as “many defeats and many fruitless victories” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 236–237).

One might suggest that this motif of “loss” is a Christian and a Catholic one. One of the basic beliefs of Christian faith is that true mercy, salvation and happiness can only be found in afterlife. Alister McGrath discusses this eschatological vision in his *Christian Theology*, since for the Christian belief, it is characteristic that time is linear, not cyclical. McGrath writes that “[h]istory had a beginning; it will one day come to an end” (444–445).

Tolkien writes about the eschatological ending of the *legendarium* in a quite apocalyptic way although this ending has something to do also with the Scandinavian myth of Ragnarök.<sup>5</sup> Tolkien writes that eventually the evil will come to final end and the world Men shall be “avenged”:

Then shall the last battle be gathered on the fields of Valinor. In that day Tulkas shall strive with Melko[r], and on his right shall stand Fionwë and on his left Túrin Turambar, son of Húrin, Conqueror of Fate, coming from the halls of Mandos; and it shall be the black sword of Túrin that deals unto Melko[r] his death and final end; and so shall the children of Húrin and all Men be avenged. (Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring* 76.)

Elizabeth Whittingham has stated that although originally in *The Silmarillion* there is darkness and hopelessness, there later is an alignment with Tolkien's Christian worldview, which is founded on hope (9). Despite the view of “long defeat”, especially in the apocalyptic visions of both Last Battle and Arda Healed there is the ultimate hope underlying the *legendarium*. Whittingham also states that the stories of despair and defeat throughout *The Silmarillion* include a reason for hope and for the possibility of “ultimate victory” (9).

## Visibility and Invisibility

In Tolkien's *legendarium* the physical appearance is relevant to the cosmology of “Two Levels”: the levels of the visible and the invisible world. In *The Silmarillion*, the immortal beings Valar and Maiar are able to take a physical form if they want to, but otherwise they are purely spiritual creatures. As for the Maiar, Tolkien writes that they were seldom “visible to Elves and Men” (*The Silmarillion* 21) and that the Valar could “change form”, or, “walk unclad” (*The Silmarillion* 78) without physical form. On the other hand, and quite interestingly, those of the Ainur who turn evil inevitably lose their power to change form or “unclad” themselves.<sup>6</sup>

For Tolkien, the word to describe good is light and the words to describe evil are dark, black, or shadow. Valar are beings of light, whereas evil forces, such as Sauron, are described as shadows. Tom Shippey discusses this as an important feature. Shippey goes on to ask whether the shadows exist. Shadows are the absence of light and therefore they do not exist,

4 Elrond is referred to as “Half-Elf”, or “Half-elven”, but this “halfness” is in no way a indicator of hierarchical “inferiority” in Tolkien's *legendarium*, since Elrond – although half human and half elven – has a divine background. His foremothers came from the immortal races of Eldar (Elves) and Maiar: “Elros and Elrond his brother were descended from the Three Houses of the Edain [Humans], but in part also both from the Eldar and the Maiar; for Idril of Gondolin and Lúthien daughter of Melian were their foremothers” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 312).

5 See also: Whittingham 9 & 131.

6 For Morgoth's loss of this power: Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 78. Sauron lost the power much later: in the beginning of the Second Age, Sauron “put on his fair hue again” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 341), but after the Fall of Númenor – when his physical form was destroyed – Sauron lost his power of shapechanging: “he had wrought for himself a new shape; and it was terrible, for his fair semblance had departed for ever when he was cast into the abyss at the drowning of Númenor. He took up again the great Ring and clothed himself in power; and the malice of the Eye of Sauron few even of the great among Elves and Men could endure” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 351.)

but they are still visible and palpable all the same. Mordor is “Black-Land” “where shadows lie”, or even: “where the shadows are”. Aragorn reports the assumed death of Gandalf to Galadriel by saying that he “fell into Shadow”. Gandalf himself says that if his side loses, “many lands will pass under the shadow”. Shippey also points out that many times in *The Lord of the Rings* “the Shadow” becomes personification of Sauron. (Shippey 146–147.)

Furthermore Balrog, one of the most defamiliar creatures in *The Lord of the Rings*, is also “a shadow”. In the chapter “The Bridge of Khazad-Dûm”, the monstrous Balrog is described with the words of dark and shadow:

Something was coming up behind them. What it was could not be seen: **it was like a great shadow**, in the middle of which was a dark form, a man-shape maybe, yet greater; and power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it. . . .

The Balrog reached the bridge. Gandalf stood in the middle of the span, leaning on his staff in his left hand, but in his other hand Glamdring gleamed, cold and white. His enemy halted again, facing him, and the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings. It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. But Gandalf stood firm.

‘You cannot pass,’ he said. The orcs stood still, and a dead silence fell. ‘I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. **Go back to the Shadow!** You cannot pass.’ . . . (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 321–322.) *Emphasis mine.*

Gandalf orders Balrog, “a great shadow”, to go “back to the Shadow”, to the emptiness. The origin of this terrible creature is described in *The Silmarillion*, where Tolkien writes about the Maiar spirits that fell and joined Melkor’s forces, “the Valaraukar, the scourges of fire, demons of terror” (*The Silmarillion* 23). Of the Valaraukar, Tolkien speculates in *The History of Middle-earth* that “[t]here should not be supposed more than say 3 or at most 7 ever existed” (*Morgoth’s Ring* 80), so Gandalf faces a rare enemy.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the Nazgûl are also described as shadows. Originally, they were nine mortal men, who were given Rings of Power by Sauron and became his slaves and powerful undead forces. Tolkien writes that the Ringwraiths became invisible to mortal eyes, and they “entered the realm of shadows” (*The Silmarillion* 346). In *The Lord of the Rings*, it seems like the Nazgûl do not have physical shapes at all, but they can sense the physical world and affect it. This raises discussion in *The Lord of the Rings*:

‘Can the Riders see?’, asked Merry. ‘I mean, they seem usually to have used their noses rather than their eyes, smelling for us, if smelling is the right word, at least in the daylight. . .

‘They themselves do not see **the world of light** as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds, which only the noon sun destroys; and in the dark they perceive many signs and forms that are hidden from us: then they are most to be feared. And at all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it. Senses, too, there are other than sight and smell. We can feel their presence – it troubles our hearts, as soon as we came here, and before we saw them; they feel ours more keenly. Also,’ he added, and his voice sank to a whisper, ‘the Ring draws them.’ (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 185.) *Emphasis mine.*

Tolkien is addressing a difference between “the world of light” and the world of shadow. Randel Helms sees that the sense of smell that Nazgûl uses in *The Lord of the Rings* is a

reference to Heraclitus' notion, who commented that in Hades, the Greek Underworld, the souls of the dead, being but smoke, know each other only scent (91). The Nazgûl are no longer mortal, or living, since they are "undead". They have moved farther away from the "mortal senses". In Tolkien's *legendarium*, this same dichotomy between visible and invisible, and the effect on senses is evident also with the dichotomy between mortal and immortal.

## Mortality and Immortality, and in-between of Good and Evil

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the One Ring turns its mortal user invisible to other mortal eyes. It "moves" its wielder into the shadow world, where the physical plane becomes blurred and invisible things become visible. When Frodo puts on the One Ring, he becomes invisible to mortal eyes, but visible to the eyes of Nazgûl, and they become visible to Frodo:

Immediately, though everything else remained as before, dim and dark, the shapes [Nazgûl] become terribly clear. He [Frodo] was able to see beneath their black wrappings. There were five tall figures: two standing on the lip of the dell, three advancing. In their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helmets of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel. Their eyes fell on him and pierced him, as they rushed towards him. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 191).

However the Nazgûl are not the only beings in Middle-earth who are able to see the "invisible". The dichotomy between physical and spiritual does not affect the immortal creatures. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the One Ring does not physically affect Tom Bombadil, who undoubtedly is also an immortal creature:

He [Frodo] slipped the Ring on. Merry turned towards him to say something and gave a start, and checked and exclamation. . . . Merry was staring blankly at his chair, and obviously could not see him. He got up and crept quietly away from the fireside towards the outer doo. 'Hey there!', cried Tom, glancing towards him with a most seeing look in his shining eyes. 'Hey! Come Frodo, there! Where be you a-going? Old Tom Bombadil's not as blind as that yet. Take off the golden ring! Your hand's more fair without it. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 191.)

Earlier, when Tom Bombadil put on the One Ring, he did not become invisible: "Tom put the Ring round the end of his little finger and held it up to the candlelight. For a moment the Hobbits noticed something strange about this. . . . There was no sign of Tom disappearing!" (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 191.) Later, during the Council of Elrond, Gandalf describes that Bombadil "is his own master", and "the Ring has no power over him" (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 259), which points out the fact that the Ring affects mortals and that Tom Bombadil is not mortal. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Bombadil is referred to quite prestigious or even divine names: he is called "the Master of wood, water, and hill" (122), and Frodo calls him "Master" almost every time addressing him (123, 124 & 129). When Frodo asks Bombadil's wife Goldberry who Tom Bombadil is, Goldberry answers in a quite Biblical way:

Fair lady! said Frodo again after a while. 'Tell me, if my asking does not seem foolish, who is Tom Bombadil?'  
'He is,' said Goldberry, staying her swift movements and smiling. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 122.)

This expression of Bombadil as “He is” caused Tolkien some trouble with the Catholic readers and clusters because for some, the phrasing “He is” resembles too much the nomination God uses in *The Book of Exodus* 3:14, in Hebrew “ehje ašer ehje”, referring to Yahweh. In 1954, in a letter to Catholic book dealer Peter Hastings, Tolkien defended himself thoroughly and philologically:

As for Tom Bombadil, I really think you are being too serious, besides missing the point. (Again the words used by Goldberry and Tom not me as commentator). . . . But Goldberry and Tom are referring to the mystery of names. . . . You may be able to conceive of your unique relation to the Creator without a name – can you: for in such a relation pronouns become proper nouns? But as soon as you are in a world of other finites with a similar, if each unique and different, relation to Prime Being, who are you? Frodo has asked not ‘what is Tom Bombadil’ but ‘Who is he’. We and he no doubt often laxly confuse the questions. Goldberry gives what I think is the correct answer. We need not go into the sublimates of ‘I am that am’ – which is quite different from he is. (Tolkien, *The Letters* 191–192.)

Despite the answer, there is definitely something “godly” and “divine” in Tom Bombadil. Even in Tom Bombadil’s own answer to Frodo’s later question “Who are you” makes it clear that he is in fact not a *mortal*, referring to the fact that he was in (at least those parts of) Middle-earth before both the Big People (Humans) and little People (Hobbits), or Kings (referring to Númenorean Men), or Dark Lord (meaning Morgoth, the first Enemy, or Sauron):

Eldest, that’s what I am. Mark my words my friends: Tom was here before the river and trees: Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas where bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from Outside. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 129.)

The phrasing that Bombadil was here “before the Dark Lord came from Outside” hints that Bombadil has been in existence since the creation of Middle-earth. He is not an analogy of Christian or Jewish God, but in the cosmology he is a definite “power”, maybe a Spirit of Pacifism as Tolkien alluded in his letter to Naomi Mitchison in 1954, calling Bombadil’s view “a natural pacifist view”:

Tom Bombadil is not an important person – to the narrative. I suppose he has some importance a ‘comment’. . . . he represents something that I feel important, though I would not be prepared to analyze the feeling precisely. I would not, however, have left him in, if he did not have some kind of function. I might put it this way. The story is cast in terms of a good side, and a bad side, beauty against ruthless ugliness, tyranny against kingship, moderated freedom with consent against compulsion that has long lost any object save mere power, and so on; but both sides in some degree, conservative or destructive, want a measure of control. [B]ut if you have, as it were taken ‘a vow of poverty’, renounced control, and take your delight in things for themselves without reference to yourself, watching, observing, and to some extent knowing, then the question of the rights and wrongs of power and control might become utterly meaningless to you, and the means of power quite valueless. **It is a natural pacifist view, which always arises in the mind when there is a war.** (Tolkien, *The Letters* 178–179.) *Emphasis mine.*

Tom Bombadil is written in the level of *myth*: he is a mythic figure of pacifism, an anthropomorphised view of “Peace”, but not a clear allegory of such. Tolkien suggested that

Bombadil shares “a natural pacifist view” which always rises at times of war. He also discussed that *The Lord of the Rings* is basically, as a narrative, a story of good versus evil and both sides are focusing on the concept of “control”. The modes and motifs of the epic are, as Tolkien phrases them above: “beauty against ugliness”, “tyranny against kingship”, and a “conservative or destructive” measure of control.

Another (non-human) character in *The Lord of the Rings* who can be discussed as an example of almost neutral position is the leader of Ents, Treebeard. At first Treebeard does not choose a side in the war although he declares that he is not on the side of Orcs. Treebeard comments on that saying: “I am not altogether on anybody’s *side*, because nobody is altogether on my *side*, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them, not even Elves nowadays” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 461).

In the end, Treebeard does not remain “neutral” in the War of the Rings. In *The Two Towers*, the Ents attack Saruman’s fortress of Isengard and in a dramatic scene Saruman’s power is destroyed by these creatures that symbolize “wild nature”. Simply put, in Tolkien’s mythopoetic vision, Saruman, symbolizing industrialization and mechanized “modernism” is “destroyed” by Ents, symbolizing counterblow of the Nature.

## Physical and Spiritual

In my point of view, in the *legendarium*, the most interesting character relating to the dichotomies between good and evil, mortal and immortal, or physical and spiritual is Gandalf. In fact, in Tolkien’s *legendarium*, the physical and spiritual changes are central to the habitus of Gandalf.

In the second book of *The Silmarillion*, Gandalf is mentioned as a Maiar spirit called Olórin, who is fond of Elves, but rather stays unseen by them, or in disguise: “Wisest of the Maiar was Olórin. . . . he walked among them unseen, or in form as one of them, and they did not know whence came the fair visions or the promptings of wisdom that he put into their hearts.” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 22). Later, Olórin becomes one of the Wizards, the Istari, who came over the Sea from the Undying Lands to help in a war against Sauron. He is described as the Chief of the Istari among with Saruman and “closest in counsel with Elrond and the Elves” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 360).

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf is Sauron’s main enemy, The Champion of Light, sent from the West by the *Valar*. Tolkien even suggested in the posthumously published *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* that Gandalf could have been Manwë, the King of *Valar* himself, disguised as a “regular” angelic being of the race of Maiar and after that taken a mortal shape (Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 540).

When Gandalf battles with the Balrog and falls into a pit, his physical shape dies. Later Gandalf explains to his friends that he was *sent back* to do his work: “Naked I was sent back – for a brief time, until my task is done” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 491). After rising from the “death”, Gandalf emphasises his disparity from the physical world in many occasions. When Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas mistake him for Saruman and try to attack him physically, Gandalf tells them that: “None of you have any weapons that could hurt me” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 484).

The opposing forces of *The Lord of the Rings* are given a different and more tragic ending. Sauron, after the destruction of the One Ring, rises for the last time as a huge shadow and then disappears with the breeze of wind:

[B]lack against the pall of cloud, there rose a huge shape of shadow, impenetrable, lightning-crowned, filling all the sky. Enormous it reared above the world, and stretched out towards them a vast threatening hand, terrible but impotent: for even as it leaned over them, a great wind took it, and it was blown away, and passed; and then a hush fell. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 928.)

Paul Kocher discusses the “deaths” of immortal beings in Tolkien’s *legendarium* and the similarities of the destruction of the Witch King of Angmar, the leader of the Nazgûl in the hands of Éowyn, and the death of Saruman in the hands of Grima. Both of the death scenes focus on perishableness. Kocher sees that Saruman’s death finishes his downward plunge. His spirit rising from the shrunken body is dissipated by a wind from the West and the spirit is dissolved into nothing. Kocher sees that this “nothing” is a repeated knell for the passing of the lords of evil in *The Lord of the Rings*, but that Tolkien is careful never to say anything explicit about that “nothingness” to which they go. (Kocher 79.)

On the other hand, when Frodo is attacked by the Nazgûl and is struck with the Morgul knife (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 191), he is injured and evil magic pulls him into a shadow life. He is “beginning to fade”, as Gandalf later describes (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 213). In the early version of the story, *The Return of the Shadow*, Gandalf says that Frodo would have himself become an undead person, if he would have put on the Ring: “they have made a wraith of you before long – certainly if you had put on the Ring again” (Tolkien, *The Return of the Shadow* 206).

In the story, Frodo is rushed in a hurry to the Elves of Rivendell to be healed. On their way, they encounter Elf-lord Glorfindel, who has ridden in search for them. When Frodo, who is at this point “beginning to fade”, sees Glorfindel, he sees the elf as he “really is”: “To Frodo it appeared that a white light was shining through the form and raiment of the rider, as if through a thin veil” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 204). Frodo sees the inner light of the Elf, the spiritual – and the immortal – power of the character. Frodo is about to be pulled into the “shadow land”, where invisible things become visible, and visible (physical) things invisible.

Later Glorfindel’s real being is again revealed, when almost completely “faded” Frodo is attacked by the Nazgûl in the Ford of Bruinen. Frodo, nearly unconscious at the moment, is rescued by a miraculous uprising of the river by Elrond, which bears the Black Riders into “the rushing flood” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 209). In his last senses, Frodo sees his friends and companions trying to come to his aid: “With the last failing senses Frodo heard cries, and . . . saw, beyond the Riders that hesitated on the shore, a shining figure of white light; and beyond it ran small shadowy forms waving flames, that flared red in the grey mist that was falling over the world” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 209).

Frodo’s mortal companions – three Hobbits Sam, Pippin and Merry, and Aragorn – are the small shadowy forms, the grey mist is the rest of the physical world, and “a shining figure of white light” is Glorfindel. This is later revealed when Frodo asks Gandalf of the incident:

‘I thought that I saw a white figure that shone and did not grow dim like the others. Was that Glorfindel then?’

‘Yes, you saw him for a moment as he is upon the other side: one of the mighty of the Firstborn. He is an Elf-lord of a house of princes. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 217.)

This is an informing passage. Gandalf’s words confirm Frodo’s vision to be a real one, as his words usually refer to a real knowledge of the cosmology in *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo saw Glorfindel for a moment as he is “upon the other side”. Frodo was moving into a chthonic, demonic underworld, a plane for the shadows and undead. However at the same time, as his



vision of the physical world was fading, his vision of the things invisible for mortal eyes was evolving.

Nazgûl's evil powers, but also the power of the One Ring, have a "magical" capability to transfer their subject to "a shadow world", which is a plane of existence between, or perhaps even under,<sup>7</sup> the physical "middle world" and spiritual "upper world". Tolkien describes that high Elves, those of the people of Eldar who have lived both in the Undying Lands of Valinor, and in Middle-earth, live in "both sides" – in the physical, and in the spiritual world (Tolkien, *The Return of the Shadow* 212).

In *The History of Middle-earth* Tolkien discusses this more thoroughly, when Gandalf describes Frodo why the Elves do not fear the Nazgûl: "They fear no Ring-wraiths, for they live at once in both worlds, and each world has only half power over them, while they have double power over both" (Tolkien, *The Return of the Shadow* 212). Basically, the Elves live in "two worlds": the physical and the unphysical.

This view for the dead, or undead, is shared in *The Lord of the Rings* by Legolas, who is an Elf of The Woodland Realm and son of Thranduil, King of Northern Mirkwood. Even though he is not one of the High Elves, Legolas says he "do not fear the Dead" when travelling with Aragorn to the Paths of the Dead, which is occupied by undead creatures (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 764). For the immortal Elves, whose souls never leave the world, there is no need to fear the undead.

One can say that Tolkien's elves, as immortal creatures, are at the same time "physical" and "spiritual". In *Morgoth's Ring*, Tolkien even discusses how the Eldar, the High Elves, will eventually become completely invisible to mortal eyes. Their spiritual side will "consume" their physical side:

As the weight of the years, which all their changes of desire and thought, gathers upon the spirit of the Eldar, so do the impulses and moods of their bodies change. This the Eldar mean when they speak of their spirits consuming them; and they say that ere Arda ends all the Eldalië on earth will have become spirits invisible to mortal eyes, unless they will to be seen by some among Men into whose minds they may enter directly. (Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring* 212.)

In Tolkien's *legendarium*, the Good and the Evil are opposing forces, but there are powers also between them: forces that are trying to remain neutral. Still, there are other opposing dichotomies, too. There are the dichotomies between spiritual and physical and between visible and invisible. These can be seen also as the great division: the dichotomy between mortal and immortal. Tolkien's *legendarium* unites these elements in a coherent cosmological vision.

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<sup>7</sup> This could be the case if one compares this with the planes of existence (or "worlds") in Ancient Greek, Scandinavian or Finnish cosmologies, for example. In the Norse cosmology, the Underworld Hel and Niflheim are the places of the dead and in the *Kalevala*, the old Finnish underworld is described as Tuonela, the realm of dead. In the Greek mythology, the underworld is usually Hades. The world that humans and mortals inhabit is usually, both in Finnish and in Scandinavian mythology, called "middle-earth", Midgard in *Eddas*.

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