Stoking the Flame Imperishable: Spiritual Redemption in Tolkien's
The Silmarillion

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J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973), English scholar, twice professor at Oxford University, former lieutenant in the British Army, devout Roman Catholic and novelist, is dearly loved by millions of readers all over the world (Doughan par. 1). In 1997, he topped three British polls among reading enthusiasts asked to vote for the best book written in the 20th century. He has written a number of stories, the most famous of which are those pertaining to Middle-earth. Many readers are familiar with Tolkien's invented world from reading works like *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), both of which describe events at the end of the Third Age. However, *The Silmarillion* (1977) describes the First Age of the World, otherwise known as the Elder Days, through a collection of "legends deriving from a much deeper past, when Morgoth, the first Dark Lord, dwelt in Middle-earth, and the High Elves made war upon him for the recovery of the Silmarils" (J. Tolkien vii).

The Silmarillion not only narrates events of a much older history of Middle-earth but also is itself the much older work of literature in comparison to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Despite its publication date, the main stories that make up the mythology can still be found in old notebooks which date back to 1917 (J. Tolkien vii). Though it was not published until four years after Tolkien's death, "he never abandoned it, nor ceased even in his last years to work on it" (J. Tolkien vii). As a result of his father devoting so much of his life to developing the mythology, Christopher Tolkien, believes "the old legends . . . became the vehicle and depository of his profoundest reflections" (J. Tolkien vii). Some of Tolkien's philosophies, formed possibly in part by his lived experience in World War I and his Roman Catholic faith, may have subconsciously influenced his work. Tolkien himself admitted "An author cannot of course remain wholly unaffected by his experience [. . .]. One has indeed personally to come under the shadow of war to feel fully its oppression" (Livingston 78). For those reasons, some

readers might be inclined to make connections between the literature and concepts like psychoanalysis, spirituality, and redemption.

Though these connections may seem to be inspired by actual details regarding Tolkien's life, it is important to note that *The Silmarillion* is still an example of myth and not allegory. The most important reason for this distinction is to recognize the many ways in which a reader might interpret a historical story and then apply that to their life rather than limit Tolkien's work by claiming that he intended it to reflect one specific event or concept. The second reason is to honor Tolkien's own feelings about allegory, which become especially clear after reading some of what Tolkien wrote in the foreword of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954):

> I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history - true or feigned - with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse applicability with allegory, but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author. (J. Tolkien vi)

For these reasons, I would like to make it abundantly clear that the following research reflects my own thought process, and in no way do I mean to argue that my claims correlate to the author's intention. I only mean to argue that Tolkien's work, specifically *The Silmarillion*, might be read in a way that encourages individuals to think critically about what it means to be a spiritual being.

Before going any further, let's quickly go over some names and terms from *The Silmarillion* which might aid your understanding of the research. First, *Arda* is the name of the World in which Middle-earth is set. Second, *Eru Iluvatar* is the creator. He is the omnipotent god

who first creates the Ainur, and through them, he creates Arda. Though he does not play a lead role in the goings on of Middle-earth, he has a master plan for it which no one knows but himself. Third, the *Ainur* are divine entities, but not as powerful as Eru Iluvatar. They're more like second tier gods and are responsible for the physical construction of Arda. Some are male, some are female, and each has dominion over a particular element or idea. The male Ainur are: Manwe, Ulmo, Tulkas, Orome, Mandos, and Lorien. The female Ainur are: Varda, Yavanna, Nienna, Este, Vaire, Vanna, and Nessa. The Ainur care a great deal for what happens in Middle-earth but allow the children of Iluvatar, Elves and Men, to make their own decisions and do not interfere with their abilities to exercise free will. The Ainur are admired more than worshipped, and more so by Elves than Men. Fourth, *Morgoth* is the first Dark Lord of Arda. He used to be one of the Ainur, and according to the text, was actually the favorite of Iluvatar: "To Melkor among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren" (J. Tolkien 4). However, Morgoth selfishly obsesses over power and destruction which finally turns him to evil actions. Fifth, *Quendi* means Elves. Finally, *Aman* is where most of the Ainur live. Its primary city is called Valinor. Though Aman was once connected to the physical lands of western Middle-earth, it is no longer. Certain groups of very early Elves live there, like the Noldor, with whom *The Silmarillion* is primarily concerned.

This specific kind of textual analysis is interested in exploring the gray area between morality and corruption. Imagine, if you will, a "Spiritual Spectrum." From left to right, the spectrum goes from the most moral of beings to the most corrupt of beings—Iluvatar and Morgoth, respectively. In between these two extremes, we have Elves, Humans, and Orcs, and again, the order reflects the moral capacity of each race. Orcs are corruptions of Elves and later Humans, but at what point do corrupted beings become irredeemable (C. Tolkien 414)? Are they

able to be saved at all? This project argues that this spectrum *is*, indeed, fluid, and corrupted beings *can* be saved. *How* they can be saved is explained by examining how far to either the left or right the tortured being is on the spectrum. If one is further right than the line which defines one as an Orc, then they are spiritually corrupted; the flame imperishable has been extinguished. Their soul has left their body and there remains nothing left to be saved. Their body remains as a puppet to be used by Morgoth. If one's soul, or the flame imperishable, still burns within them, then they have suffered worldly trauma—but not enough worldly trauma to spiritually corrupt them. They can be redeemed by examining how the three parts of one's psyche (the id, ego, and superego) affect their morality.

A perfect example of what I mean by worldly trauma is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. PTSD is "a psychological reaction occurring after experiencing a highly stressing event (such as wartime combat, physical violence, a natural disaster, or torture) that is usually characterized by depression, anxiety, flashbacks, recurrent nightmares, and avoidance of reminders of the event" (Merriam-Webster). Based on this definition, PTSD symptoms occur after the "stressor," and according to Michael Livingston, "[the stressor] must meet two basic requirements: the situation must have mortal consequences, and the person's reaction to the situation must have been one of 'intense fear, helplessness, or horror'" (83).

Torture *links* wordly trauma and spiritual corruption. In Kathleen McCullough-Zander and Sharyn Larson's article, "'The Fear Is Still in Me': Caring for Survivors of Torture," *torture* is defined by the World Medical Association as "the deliberate, systematic, or wanton infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons acting alone or on the orders of any authority, to force another person to yield information, to make a confession, or for any other reason" (56). This definition supports the previous claim of a relationship between worldly

trauma and spiritual corruption by confirming that suffering occurs both physically and mentally. Interestingly enough, the word *mortal* plays well with the aforementioned modifiers *worldly*, as in worldly trauma, and *spiritual*, as in spiritual corruption, in that it can mean either causing physical death or depriving a soul or souls from divine grace, respectively. Therefore, that which connects worldly trauma and spiritual corruption is what causes strain or tension--the torture itself.

On the other hand, *corruption* means "a departure from the original or from what is pure or correct" (Merriam-Webster). If the reader interprets the word *pure* in a virtuous sense, then the term *corrupt*, at least for the purposes of this project in reading *The Silmarillion*, suggests the victim undergoes more of a spiritual change through moral deprivation rather than a worldly change, as distinguished by PTSD symptoms. Also, the modifier *departure* speaks to the spiritual definition of *mortal* when the reader considers Morgoth deviates some of the Quendi by capturing and then taking them back to his fortress, Utumno.

> Yet this is held true by the wise of Eressea, that all those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes. (J. Tolkien, 47)

That Melkor cannot create anything either with life or even the semblance of life but yet can create a distinct race from tortured Elves and Men suggests Orcs are souls deprived of divine grace of the Ainur's fellowship via spiritual corruption. "This is may be was the vilest deed of Melkor, and the most hateful to Iluvatar" (J. Tolkien 47).

This project is important for a number of reasons. One reason is that this research attempts to help fill a "gap" in Tolkien scholarship. Dr. Daniel Timmons, a very well-known and respected professor and Tolkien scholar, addresses this in his article, "The Monstrous in the Mirror." He writes of *The Silmarillion* (and the 12 volumes of Tolkien's manuscripts, *The History of Middle-earth* series, by which much of this research is aided): "in-depth textual analyses of these materials are severely lacking" (236). Part of what I hope this project accomplishes is an original, fresh perspective which contributes to the Tolkien discourse community. Another reason is that, when considering the *means* by which a spiritual being is transformed into a corrupted one (extreme trauma like physical or mental torture, for example), questions are raised that allow readers to better understand those diagnosed with mental health illnesses, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. An estimated 13 million people in America alone are diagnosed with PTSD. For reference, that's about 1 in every 13 people (Sidran 1). The more someone knows about the symptoms, effects, and treatment options of PTSD, the better equipped they'll be to help their friends and family redeem themselves by overcoming feelings of helplessness, grief, and despair (Robinson and Smith 2).

This kind of reading may also be seen as a way in which myth serves as a coping mechanism for much of Tolkien's audience. Tolkien scholar Don Akers writes, "Tolkien knew the importance of mythology to language and culture. He believed that people needed myths to link them with the past, thus helping them cope with the uncertainties of the present and giving them hope for the future" (par. 5). Asking questions regarding one's purpose in life and what happens after death is something all of humanity holds in common. These questions are often abstract and difficult to answer, wrestled with by many. An example you've probably heard

might be, "If there's a God, why would he let terrible things happen to good people?" Tolkien's mythology offers readers a way in which they might more easily understand such concepts.

Toward the beginning of *The Silmarillion*, readers learn that Elves, unlike Men, are bound to Arda. In other words, when Elves "die," though in a different sense than Men do, "they are gathered to the halls of Mandos in Valinor, whence they may in time return" (J. Tolkien 36). Spirits of Men, on the other hand, leave the world entirely when they die and do not return. In the same section of the text, readers discover that Elves can die not just by being slain but also by "[wasting] in grief" (J. Tolkien 36). This passage encourages readers to analyze what the narrator means by the word "grief" and forces one to wonder if the torment forced upon the Elves by Morgoth doesn't qualify as such. According to scholar Judith F. Koeppl, "Grief is a . . . response to loss or change in our lives. It is a process of healing or reconciling . . . [that] leads us through various phases of recovery to a restored sense of wholeness and equilibrium" (50). Two chapters later, one reads that "of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved . . ." (J. Tolkien 47). *Slow arts of cruelty* implies that these unfortunate souls were tortured, and Koeppl's scholarship confirms that the Elves captured by Morgoth experienced grief.

However, the narrator of *The Silmarillion* never states how much grief is enough to die from. If the reader determines that the tormented Elf has indeed been killed from grief, then their still functional body remains to be used as a sort of puppet by Morgoth (since Morgoth couldn't *create* spirits or souls, only corrupt existing ones). That would mean their soul has departed for the halls of Mandos, from which it will eventually return to the world in a new body. In this way, their soul is saved if not quite redeemed. However, those considered Orcs but which only act as puppets "would simply cease to move or 'live' at all, when not set in motion by the direct will of

their maker" (C. Tolkien 422). Being "filled (only at a distance) with their maker's mind and will," these puppets cannot be redeemed because there is no soul within them to be saved (*Letters* no. 153). That still leaves the question of the Orc's offspring, though. The narrator of *The Silmarillion* says "For the Orcs had life and multiplied after the manner of the Children of Iluvatar . . ." (J. Tolkien 47). Do offspring of the "puppets" have souls? If so, why would Iluvatar allow this, since he's the only one able to give life? Christopher Tolkien offers a possible answer in his collection of essays, *Myths Transformed*, found in *Morgoth's Ring*: "Eru would not sanction the work of Melkor so as to allow the independence of the Orcs. (Not unless Orcs were ultimately remediable, or could be amended and 'saved'?)" (409).

On the other hand, what if the reader determines that the imprisoned Elf has not quite died from grief but is in constant torment? Recall that Koeppl's definition of *grief* mentions a "restored sense of wholeness." If one relates *wholeness* to Freud's idea that the human psyche is made up of the id, ego, and superego, then one might assume that Morgoth's torture makes one *less* than whole by compromising one's id, or instincts, by influencing their ego, or reality (McLeod 1). According to Saul McLeod, "The ego is 'that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world,'" and "is the decision-making component of personality" (2). Social psychologist Johnathan Haidt uses a horse and buggy metaphor when lecturing on Freud, "in which the driver (the ego) struggles frantically to control a hungry, lustful, and disobedient horse (the id) while the driver's father (the superego) sits in the back seat lecturing the driver on what he is doing wrong" (3). In this case, whereas the driver in Haidt's example "struggles" to control the horse, Morgoth renders the driver completely unable to control the horse by taking away the driver's hands, thus rendering the driver unable to handle the reigns. Without handling the reigns, which, figuratively, serve as the ability to make logical

decisions, or the concept of free will, the driver is left entirely helpless and at the mercy of the unchecked and unbalanced part of their psyche which is impulsive and responds directly and immediately to the instincts. This includes the instinctive drives for sex and death. This relates to an example I point at in my essay in which, ironically, Maedhros loses a hand.

To paraphrase the example, Maedhros and his embassy were ambushed by Morgoth and Morgoth's embassy. Morgoth's embassy killed all except Maedhros, who was taken hostage. Morgoth then hung Maedhros from a tall cliff by a steel band attached to his right wrist. I propose that Maedhros displays symptoms of PTSD based on textual evidence. On page 126, the narrator tells us: "[Maedhros's] body recovered from his torment and became hale, but the shadow of his pain was in his heart . . ." The "shadow of his pain" may very well refer to a symptom of PTSD known as survivor's guilt. Recall that one discovers on page 123 ". . . all [Maedhros's] company were slain; but he himself was taken alive by the command of Morgoth, and brought to [Morgoth's fortress]" (J. Tolkien). So, Maedhros was the lone survivor of the battle which ensued after he and his embassy were ambushed. According to an article written by Sandra Huppenbauer titled "A Portrait of the Problem:"

> . . . just having survived when friends did not may produce "survivor's guilt,"
> illustrated by a veteran who tearfully described how, 13 years ago, a large
> proportion of the men in his unit were killed. When asked what could have been
> done to change the situation, he replied, "Nothing, but at least I could have died
> with them (1702).

This sounds strangely reminiscent of Maedhros's reactions to Fingon (who was not part of Maedhros's embassy) being unable, at first, to rescue him. On page 125, the narrator explains: "Maedhros therefore, being in anguish without hope, begged Fingon to shoot him with his bow .

. .” Here is an instance in which Maedhros shows grief and despair in suggesting he’d rather die than go on living in torment. Shortly after, we read: “Again therefore in his pain Maedhros begged that [Fingon] would slay him . . .” (J. Tolkien 126). This is further evidence which suggests Maedhros feels guilt for the deaths of his friends.

This example encourages readers to consider what Maedhros needs to do in order to overcome the “shadow of his pain.” Going back to the horse and buggy metaphor, if Morgoth has rendered the driver, in this case Maedhros’s ego, unable to handle the reigns, then someone else has to do it instead. I argue that the driver’s father, or Maedhros’s superego, has to take action rather than lecture the driver on what he’s doing wrong. This metamorphosis from lecturing to taking action is reflective of Freud’s tenet that liberation from the effects of the unconscious is achieved by bringing this material into the conscious mind through therapeutic intervention. In other words, by bringing the unconscious superego into the conscious, Maedhros can regain control of the reigns, therefore redeeming himself from the effects of Morgoth’s torment.

The *Secret Fire*, otherwise known as the *Flame Imperishable*, should, in the context of this essay, be viewed as equivalent to one’s spirit, which includes one’s will. To better understand this, one might look to page 3 of *The Silmarillion*; after creating the Ainur, Eru Iluvatar says to them, “And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will” (J. Tolkien). This quote implies that the “Flame Imperishable” is what allows or enables free will. If this is true, then it adds another layer of meaning to something written on page 126: “There Maedhros in time was healed; for the fire of life was hot within him . . .” (J. Tolkien). So, Maedhros was rescued from the precipice from which he hung, and because the fire of life still

burned within him, was able to recover. If one equates the fire of life to Eru Iluvatar's "Flame Imperishable," then one might conclude that Morgoth caused psychological damage to Maedhros but failed to corrupt his spirit, as evident of Maedhros's *choice* to make peace with Fingolfin.

Another symptom of PTSD which Maedhros displays is changes in his personality. Adrian Grounds writes in his essay, "Understanding the Effects of Wrongful Imprisonment," "The clinical findings . . . indicated prevalent and often severe mental health and adjustment problems. After release, most men were described . . . as changed in personality, and features of post-traumatic stress disorder and additional depressive disorders were common" (2). Before Maedhros's capture and imprisonment, there was a feud between the houses of Fingolfin and Feanor. After Fingon rescues him, "Maedhros begged forgiveness for the desertion in Araman; and he waived his claim to kingship over all the Noldor . . ." therefore mitigating the feud (Tolkien 126). Here one observes that before his traumatic experience, Maedhros, being the eldest son of Feanor, *himself* laid claim to kingship over all the Noldor. According to the article, "What is Personality?" ". . . personality is not a thing but a bundle of things" (Valentine 238). Valentine goes on to state that two of the many "things" that make up the "bundle" of personality are: "temperamental characteristics" and "tendencies of ascendancy and submission" (238). Based on the example, it is obvious that Maedhros displays changes to both of these characteristics. Where he once sought a position of dominant power, he is now humble and seeks peace.

Though it might seem contradictory that Maedhros's personality should seemingly change for the *better* or that something beneficial would come out of his wrongful imprisonment, this may be at least partially explained by an article written by Frazier, Gavian, Park, Tashiro, Tennen, and Tomich titled "Does Self-Reported Posttraumatic Growth Reflect Genuine Positive

Change?" This article reflects on one of two controversies surrounding Posttraumatic Growth, or PTG, and that is, whether or not PTG reflects *genuine* positive changes. One of the ideas is that genuine positive changes might be confused with "a motivated positive allusion, or a coping process" (912). Indeed, McFarland and Alvaro presented evidence supporting the motivated-illusion theory (912). According to the article, "individuals who reported growth following a trauma did so not because they actually changed in positive ways following the trauma, but because they derogated their preevent selves" (Frazier et al. 912). However, on the next page the article goes on to state that "these and other studies have not directly demonstrated that the growth reported by individuals facing adversity reflects something other than actual changes in priorities, life appreciation, or relationships with other people" (913). So, one might conclude that while the personality change undergone by Maedhros which, in turn, eased the feud between the two lines of Finwe is a *positive* outcome of Maedhros's intensely traumatic experience, it still came at too high a cost: part of what made Maedhros himself. Yes, Maedhros may have detracted his self from before the experience, but not for the right reasons. Yet, still, like Tolkien wrote that the thought and experience of readers will vary, the reader might interpret Maedhros's change in personality as him exercising his free will to choose a more righteous path in life.

To believe that Maedhros exercises his free will and chooses to alleviate the feud for the *right* reasons (i.e. actual changes in priorities, life appreciation, or relationships with other people) suggests that one also believes that Maedhros's imprisonment traumatized him in a worldly sense but did not corrupt him, or affect him in a spiritual sense. In this way, the concepts of free will and spiritual corruption are connected. That one maintains their ability to exercise free will affirms, in the context of this essay, they are not spiritually corrupted, but certainly, if one's ability to exercise free will is *taken* from them, then they are. To elaborate on the first

point, one may willingly *choose* evil over righteousness (e.g. Morgoth), but in such a case, one might describe their spirit as *damned* rather than *corrupted*.

If Maedhros suffers from PTSD, then the torture he endured caused him psychological damage. That Tolkien never makes mention of Maedhros recovering mentally from his trauma is the very "gap" in the text which encourages readers to think about how mental illness can or should be treated. Worldwide, about 25 million people suffer from serious mental illness (Gittelman 10). Martin Gittelman suggests in his article, "The Neglected Disaster: Homelessness and Mental Illness," that annual deaths which result from mental illness are similar to those which result from HIV/AIDS: around 2 million lives each year (10). This is especially among the homeless with mental illness and for a number of reasons--one of which is people with severe mental illness are less likely to ask for food or money from the public. Usually they possess less finely tuned survival skills than homeless persons who aren't mentally ill, therefore being less likely to survive. Indeed, homeless people diagnosed with schizophrenia, on average, die 20 years earlier (Gittelman 10). That mental illness and homelessness, in unison, is a problem is without question. Yet, it is still worth recalling an example found in Chapter 12 of Leon Anderson's book, *Deviance: Social Constructions and Blurred Boundaries* in order to better humanize the problem:

> Jorge Herrera was a well-recognized figure on the streets near the University of Texas. He was a small man, but he often frightened those who came near him when his body shook in violent spasms and he shouted a string of words that no one understood. Jorge's dirty clothes often reeked, and his long, scraggly black hair and beard were often as covered with grime as his clothes . . . He was in bad shape: his body twisted in periodic spasms and mucus covered his long mustache.

He told the researcher that he had been very sick from eating bad food, but that he

did not need to go to the hospital. As he muttered, he kept nodding off in the hot

sun, then waking to scratch his ankles, which were covered with sores. (348)

Researchers later found out that Jorge was first diagnosed with psychiatric problems at 23 years

of age and had been living on and off the streets for over 20 years (Anderson 348). As of 2018 in

Asheville alone, there were an estimated 554 homeless persons, any one of which might be

suffering from severe mental illness like Jorge (ashevillenc.gov).

Another example in which a character shows symptoms of PTSD due to excessive

worldly trauma is that of Miriel, Feanor's mother. Before giving birth to Feanor, Miriel was

shown to be happy and strong. The narrator of *The Silmarillion* tells us: "The love of Finwë and

Míriel was great and glad, for it began in the Blessed Realm in the Days of Bliss" (J. Tolkien

64). However, after an exceptionally difficult, childbirth, she begins showing signs of PTSD.

"But in the bearing of her son Miriel was consumed in spirit and body; and after his birth she

yearned for release from the labour of living" (J. Tolkien 65). Here, *release from the labour of*

living, like the Maedhros example, suggests Miriel prefers death to living her life out in pain, due

to the extreme trauma she suffered in giving birth. In an article written by Schwab, Marth, and

Bergant titled "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Post Partum," we read:

Both traumatically experienced childbirth and stressful events in the individual

life story of a woman can result in significant psychological impairments post

partum. Depending on objective and subjective factors, childbirth can act as a

significant stressor and trigger for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mental

illness which affects a disproportionately high number of women in childbearing

age. (par. 1)

This supports the notion that Miriel also suffers from PTSD and helps explain why that may be. On page 65, the reader learns "She went then to the gardens of Lorien and lay down to sleep; but though she seemed to sleep, her spirit indeed departed from her body, and passed in silence to the halls of Mandos" (J. Tolkien). Like the spirits of the Elves which departed from the bodies which Morgoth now uses as puppets, Miriel's spirit is saved more than it is redeemed.

That Miriel was consumed in *spirit* as well as body suggests in giving birth, the Secret Fire which burned within her has been transferred to her son. Also, that Miriel is Maedhros's grandmother offers an explanation as to how Maedhros was able to survive such intense trauma for so long. The narrator says of Maedhros: ". . . for the fire of life was hot within him, and his strength was of the ancient world . . ." (J. Tolkien 126). Here, that we learn that his strength *was of the ancient world* suggests it was passed down from an earlier time, probably genetically. This supports that Miriel's spirit was transferred to Maedhros's father, Feanor. However, this challenges the previous notion that spirit and the Flame Imperishable are one in the same. Earlier, the text clearly states that Miriel's spirit departed for the halls of Mandos. If spirit *is* the Flame Imperishable, then it could not have been passed down to Feanor and then Maedhros if Miriel's spirit is waiting with Mandos. This observation suggests that the Flame Imperishable represents the strength of one's will, and the will is *part* of what makes the spirit; the hotter the fire burns, the more strong willed the individual. As the flame wanes, however, one can assume that the will of the individual is compromised from external forces.

There still remains an unanswered question, though. What of the offspring of the Elves that were initially captured by Morgoth and perverted into Orcs? If Orcs multiply in the same manner as the children of Iluvatar, then even if the spirits of the parents had departed for Mandos, the offspring would surely have spirits. So, what of them? How do they redeem

themselves? The answer, I think, has to do with the conception of ego death. If the ego is a separate sense of self than one's *true* self, then the ego can be compared to one's Orcish nature. By "killing" the ego and replacing it with god's consciousness, or the superego, one is able to transform themselves into a more moral and spiritual being, therefore redeeming themselves. This sort of mystical union has been common in Catholicism since St. Teresa spoke about it in her last treatise. One of the three elements of the treatise is:

> a transformation of the higher faculties in respect to their mode of operation:
> hence the name "transforming union"; it is the essential note of the state.
> The soul is conscious that in its supernatural acts of intellect and of will, it
> participates in the Divine life and the analogous acts in God.

By separating one's self from their own ego via engaging their superego, or the part of a person's mind that acts as a self-critical conscience, they can then also separate themselves from their id. For Herman Nunberg writes in his article, "Ego Strength and Ego Weakness," the ego is fed by energies coming from the instincts of the id" (25). In this way, those orcs that were simply "born into it" are also able to redeem their spirits.

Don Akers writes in an article found in *Novels for Students*: "[Tolkien] noted that in a world filled with wars, poverty, and disease, people turned to fantasy for comfort (par. 5). In a similar way, I hope this psychoanalytic reading of *The Silmarillion* not only offers a new perspective from which to study Tolkien's literature but also helps people with lived experience of intensely traumatic events recover from the occurrence. PTSD affects tens of millions of people around the globe every single day. The National Center for PTSD was created in 1989 to address the needs of veterans and others who have been diagnosed, but the mental illness itself still needs further research to be better understood, assessed, and treated (U.S. Department of

Veteran Affairs). That is the intended result of my research: to offer a unique perspective which simultaneously engages existing scholarship, introduces unfamiliar readers to Tolkien's world, and ultimately makes the world a better place.

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