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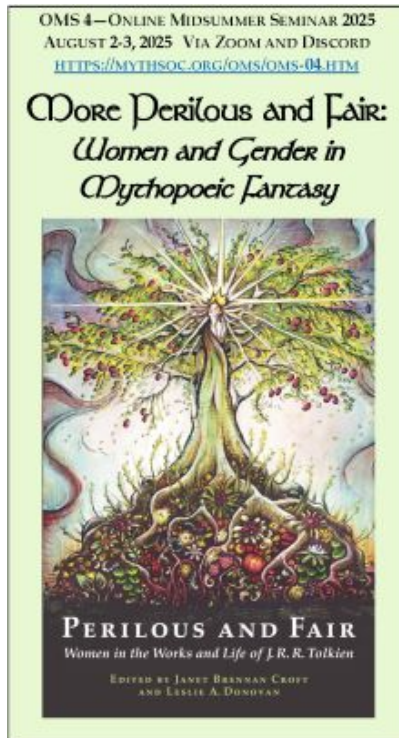Online MidSummer Seminar 2025
More Perilous and Fair: Women and Gender in Mythopoeic Fantasy
August 2-5, 2024

Via Zoom and Discord

https://www.mythsoc.org/oms/oms-04.htm

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Abstract
A number of scholars have commented upon Augustine of Hippo's influence upon J.R.R. Tolkien's portrayal of evil in his legendarium. However, in his seminal work *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Tom Shippey pushes back against this perception, noting that there are some forms of evil in the legendarium that do not adhere to the Augustine's belief that evil is merely a "twisting" of good. This article argues that Ungoliant is one such exception to the Augustinian paradigm because of the uncertainty regarding her origins.This uncertainty complicates the Augustinian view of evil that permeates the legendarium and instead echoes the kind of evil emphasized by one of Tolkien's contemporaries—American horror writer H.P. Lovecraft.

Additional Keywords
H.P. Lovecraft; Saint Augustine of Hippo; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Concept of evil; Good and evil in J.R.R. Tolkien's works; Lovecraft, H.P.—Concept of evil; Augustine, St.—Concept of evil; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Ungoliant

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For many fans of J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium, the setting's level of detail is one of its most appealing elements. Tolkien afficionados revel in the unity of his invented world and find joy in exploring the often multi-layered explanations for the world's details. With an invented world containing an abundance of answers, it seems fitting that some of the ripest topics for conversation come from the figures that leave audiences with questions. One figure that often leaves readers with more questions than answers is the Spider of Night, Ungoliant. While Tolkien gives several possible explanations for Ungoliant's origins in his writings, the author does not present any of these answers as definitive. Moreover, the language that Tolkien uses in these explanations makes it explicitly clear that none of the characters within his sub-creation know for certain the Spider's beginnings. The "unknown" that lies at the core of Ungoliant's character, in turn, leads to an uncertainty regarding the nature of her evil. This uncertainty complicates the Augustinian view of evil that permeates the legendarium and instead echoes the kind of evil emphasized by one of Tolkien's contemporaries—American horror writer H.P. Lovecraft.

A number of scholars have noted that Tolkien's portrayal of evil owes a significant and obvious debt to the works of Augustine of Hippo. In his writings, Augustine asserts that evil is not generated from a force, but rather "that evil is only a privation of a good, even to the point of nonentity" (*Confessions*, 3.7.12, 85). For Augustine, evil is merely the absence of good where good could possibly have existed. Regarding this idea, G.R. Evans clarifies, "[Augustine] would not attribute [natural evils] to God but to man. For him, there is no such thing as a 'natural evil'" (97). Furthermore, in the Augustinian view, there is no external force in opposition to God that creates evil, a concept known as "Manichaeism." Rather, it is humankind's tendency to "twist" its inherent good that causes evil. To refute Manichaeism, Augustine emphasizes that God did not create the world out of an existing substance—after all, to say that God used a pre-existing material would make God reliant on that substance, a form of Manichaeism. Rather, God created the world *ex nihilo*—out of nothing. Augustine clarifies this stance in his reply to Faustus the Manichaean, writing, "the living God, the true God, the Sovereign God […] made heaven and earth

not out of some alien material but out of nothing, not because of some pressing need but because of an overflowing goodness" (Augustine, *Answer to Faustus*, Book *XXII*.69).[1] In the Augustinian view, creation flowed forth out of goodness, with no required material or reason aside from this goodness.

In his exploration of evil in Tolkien's legendarium Tom Shippey posits that Tolkien draws upon, and ultimately portrays, two views of evil. The first view—one that reflects Augustine—strives to portray evil as *privato boni*, or a belief that "there is no such thing as evil. What people identify as evil is only the absence of good" (130). To support this claim, Shippey points to Tolkien's orthodox Catholicism, which shared Augustine's view that evil was not a separate and opposing force from the Christian God, but rather "dreadful twistings and distortions of the good creation" (Wood 86).[2] However, Shippey also contends that, by portraying the One Ring as holding a form of absolute power, Tolkien "creates a conflict between the powers of Good and Evil, equal and opposite" (qtd. in Wood, 87)—the very Manichaeism that Augustine rejects. Regarding this tension, Shippey argues for Tolkien's "running ambivalence" towards evil that is "at once orthodox and questioning to the whole problem of the existence and source of evil" (Shippey 130).[3] In Shippey's view, while Tolkien displays a tendency towards an Augustinian stance on evil, ultimately the author does not fully embrace this approach, and he sometimes also allows for his evil to take a dualistic, Manichaean form.

Ralph Wood pushes back against this facet of Shippey's observation, arguing that "Tolkien is a radical anti-dualist whose Augustinian understanding of evil reveals it to be far more terrifying and dangerous than anything Manichaeism can imagine" (Wood 87). Wood posits that, for Tolkien, Evil has no "self-sustained existence," but rather "takes the form of twisted and distorted good […] there is never any true and compelling reason for the perversion" (89). Rather than existing as dualistic force in opposition to Ilúvatar's manifestation of absolute Good, Wood emphasizes, "evil is nowhere and no-thing," the absence of the absolute Good (89). Finally, when discussing Melkor's attempts to disrupt the music of creation, John Houghton notes "[Augustine] often points

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[1] See also Stilwell.

[2] John Seland also gestures toward Augustine's influence on Tolkien's world, noting: "[an] idea propounded by Augustine was that evil has its origin outside the heart; however, if allowed to enter, it corrupts. Tolkien changes this somewhat, since we see that merely having the Ring is enough to begin the process of corruption, but, basically, he follows Augustine's idea that evil comes from the outside" ([6]).

[3] Jonathan S. McIntosh notes that Shippey's "argument concerning Tolkien's ambivalence towards the traditional Augustinian privation theory of evil parallels the more general critique a number of recent philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek and Jean Luc Nancy have made of the privation theory in light of the 'radical evil' of the twentieth century."

out that as a brief silence gives form to a song or speech, so also the nothingness of evil in fact plays a role in the larger pattern of creation. In the Ainulindale, Iluvatar makes precisely this point in showing Melkor the results of his rebellion" (7). Overall, Wood demonstrates that the majority of the beings associated with evil in Tolkien's legendarium seem to align with Augustine's view of evil as "twisted good."

Yet, there exists a tension between the *privato boni* representation of evil and its origins that Wood champions and the "ambivalence" that Shippey gestures towards. Indeed, while Melkor, Sauron, and even Gollum neatly conform to Augustine's guiding principles, Ungoliant's form of evil seems to complicate matters due to her unclear origins. The idea of "*Ungwë-Tuita*, the Spider of Night, whose webs in the dark *Ruamōre* Earendel once narrowly escaped" was present even in the early mythology that Tolkien began shortly after the Great War (Garth 127). However, Tolkien's early mythmaking does not provide a set origin for the Spider, and even as the history of Middle-earth took shape over the course of Tolkien's life, the author's explanation for Ungoliant's origins fluctuates in its details. Overall, the two most prominent passages that explore Ungoliant's history appear in *The Book of Lost Tales* and *The Silmarillion*:

> [F]or here dwelt the primeval spirit Móru whom even the Valar know not whence or when she came, and the folk of Earth have given her many names. Mayhap she was bred of mists and darkness on the confines of the Shadowy Seas, in that utter dark that came between the overthrow of the Lamps and the kindling of the Trees, but more like she has always been; and she it is who loveth still to dwell in that black place taking the guise of an unlovely spider. (*The Book of Lost Tales I*, VI.151-52)

> [A]nd there in Avathar, secret and unknown, Ungoliant had made her abode. The Eldar knew not whence she came; but some have said that in ages long before she descended from the darkness that lies about Arda, when Melkor first looked down in envy upon the Kingdom of Manwë, and that in the beginning she was one of those that he corrupted to his service. But she had disowned her Master, desiring to be mistress of her own lust. (*The Silmarillion*, *VIII*.73.)

While the details are inconsistent, Tolkien stresses certain elements in both versions of Ungoliant's introduction. Regarding the story's formation, Christopher Tolkien notes that "essential elements [of the story] were present *ab initio*: the doubt as to her origin, her dwelling in the desolate regions in the south of the Outer Lands, her sucking in of light to bring forth webs of darkness" (Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales I*, VI.160). This "doubt as to her origin" takes a prominent place in both of the above accounts of Ungoliant's history; each

version raises the possibility that Ungoliant did not stem from the creation of Arda, but rather came into being from the "darkness" and "mists" of the Shadowy Seas or, more unsettling still, from Avakúma, the Void outside of Arda. Additionally, each introduction makes it known that, even to the wisest beings in Tolkien's setting, Ungoliant's origins are shadowy. However, the presentation of multiple backgrounds for the Spider of Night also implies that each possibility is, to a degree, a plausible answer to the mystery of the being's formation. Moreover, Tolkien's refusal to provide readers with a definitive answer for Ungoliant's creation assigns roughly equal validity to each of the possibilities that the author suggests.

Ungoliant's uncertain origins complicate Tolkien's Augustinian approach to evil in two distinct ways. First, since Ungoliant's origins are obscured and never solidly established, there is no clear "good" that is twisted to form her evil. One potential explanation for Ungoliant's past suggests that she might have been a Maia corrupted to Melkor's service. Yet, this explanation is presented alongside an array of alternate possibilities. Just as prevalent in Ungoliant's possible explanations is the possibility that she was not twisted to evil, but rather spawned *from* the darkness. In short, Tolkien makes the creative decision to actively cloud Ungoliant's beginnings and to present the possibility that she is a being outside the known understanding of the cosmology. This choice makes it impossible to interpret Ungoliant definitively as a form of "twisted good." The reader, after all, cannot discern the "good" from which Ungoliant has deviated, and cannot be fully sure if she was ever anything but the "Spider of Night" seen in the narrative.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, Ungoliant's "unknowable" elements are also reflected in her role within the legendarium. Whether it is the Valar or the Eldar who are unsure of Ungoliant's beginnings, in either case, the implication in this statement is quite clear—if these wise and ancient figures do not know from where Ungoliant comes, no other being in Middle Earth does either. Moreover, the phrases "Some have said" and "Mayhaps" show that there is active speculation within the setting regarding the creature's background. The inhabitants of the world have encountered something beyond their knowledge and have begun to try to assign meaning where none is otherwise found. In sum, not only is Ungoliant's evil not definitively tied to a corrupted good, but for the inhabitants of Tolkien's world, she is unknowable, and the perceptions that they have of her are merely those that they, themselves, have assigned to fill the void they have perceived.

Ungoliant's origins present one final wrinkle in Tolkien's Augustinian metaphysics: the possibility that Ungoliant could have formed in the void that surrounds Arda suggests that Ungoliant may represent a form of creation *ex nihilo*—a being formed, quite literally, from the substance of nothingness. The

distinction between *coming into being* "from" nothing and *being made out of nothing* is beyond the scope of this current study. What is relevant, however, is the possibility that Ungoliant formed in a way that is outside the cosmological paradigm of both the audience and the figures within the setting. If Ungoliant can spring into being—perhaps already ravenous and corrupt—from the non-matter outside Arda, it presents a significant complication to a view of a Creator who creates only from an "overflowing goodness."

Moreover, not only does Ungoliant possibly come into being *ex nihilo*, she wields the very concept of "nothingness" as her tool. Speaking of the unique power over nothingness, Tolkien writes that Ungoliant was able to craft "an Unlight, in which things seemed to be no more, and which eyes could not pierce, for it was void" (*The Silmarillion*, *VIII*.74). Indeed, the Unlight is the primary method through which Richard Angelo Bergen argues that Ungoliant is a privation of the good, rather than a separate form of evil. Writing about this power, Bergen notes, "the Unlight is, in essence, 'void'; it does not have positive existence" (110). Bergen goes on to observe that, after eating light to create her Unlight, "Ungoliant remains famished; her darkness is not self-sufficient or indefinitely renewable" (110).

While Bergen's argument is compelling, it does not address one of the core elements of Ungoliant's power over the void; she is, seemingly, able to not only destroy or corrupt, but to *unmake*. The light of the Trees, once consumed, is not recreated in a lesser form, but is instead removed from the world entirely. While Ungoliant's creation of webs of Unlight is certainly a corruption of the goodness of the light she consumes, the Dark Spider is also able to merely digest this "goodness," removing it from existence. Kristine Larsen notes the horror inherent in this ability, observing that the Unlight "was not merely the absence of light, but more horrific still because it was the very antithesis of light" ("Shadow and Flame," 175). While many evil beings are shown razing, burning, or otherwise defiling Middle-Earth, Ungoliant is the only known being in the legendarium capable of truly erasing an element of Arda. As a being marked by erasure, it makes sense that Ungoliant would remain perpetually famished; her existence is defined by, and perhaps even composed of, the concept of absence. Ultimately, while Bergen is correct that some elements of the Spider's powers adhere to a *privato boni* understanding of evil, Ungoliant's power over the void, her power of unmaking, and her uncertain origins render her all the more difficult to fit neatly into an Augustinian framework.

While Ungoliant complicates an Augustinian understanding of evil, she shares traits with the perception of evil put forth by another author of mythopoeic literature—American horror writer H.P. Lovecraft. Both of these literary figures were heavily invested in the idea of evil. However, Lovecraft's approach to evil was anything but Augustinian. In a 1927 letter to August

Derleth, Lovecraft explains, "all my tales are based upon the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large" (Lovecraft, *Selected Letters II*, 150). In his wide-reaching exploration of the representation of evil in horror, Alex Rieneck comments on these amoral cosmic entities:

> These gods for Lovecraft were not evil, merely alien and self-interested with little concern for man, a species raised by them [as] servants and largely abandoned. Their presence in the first stages of evolution of the race was tempered with such horror that their images form a sort of template for race memory, ineradicable, that causes fear and loathing such that to see them *naturally* causes hysterical horror and, quite often, mental damage to all save those close to them in kind—those who by being in tune with them are 'christened' by normal people—evil. (Rieneck 200)

Rather than flowing from humankind's inability to be perfectly good, Lovecraft's perceptions of evil are intrinsically tied to the unknowable beings at the core of his Mythos. The link between the unknown and fear is, in many ways, the core philosophy of Lovecraft's Mythos; as Lovecraft infamously proclaims in the opening of his 1927 essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature," "the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror* 25). Rather than describing a displaced good, Lovecraftian "evil" describes beings that are beyond the scope of understanding. Because of the fear this fundamental "unknowability" causes in the limited mortal mind, humankind imperfectly applies to them the label of "evil."

As a reflection of this "unknowable" view of evil, Lovecraft wrote entities who existed outside of human understandings of the spatiotemporal world. For example, when describing Azathoth, the central deity of his Mythos, Lovecraft writes:

> [O]utside the ordered universe [is] that last amorphous blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the center of all infinity—the boundless daemon-sultan Azathoth, whose name no lips dare speak aloud, and who gnaws hungrily in inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond time […]. (Lovecraft, "Dream-Quest," 331)

Not only is this "Creator" explicitly defined as dwelling within a timeless void, Lovecraft also dabbles in a form of "creation *ex nihilo*." In a letter to E. Hoffman Price, Lovecraft notes that another one of the Mythos's central entities—Yog-Sothoth—was spawned from the "Nameless Mist" outside the universe (Lovecraft, *Selected Letters IV*, 183). Rather than being formed as part of an

ordered creation *ex nihilo* because of an overflowing abundance of good, Lovecraft's horrors are formed from nothingness without reason through an outpouring of chaos.

The distance between human understanding and the entities that have received the nature of the beings that have been labeled as "evil" makes up a core element of the literary genre of "cosmic horror" (a sub-genre of the type of horror fiction known as "weird fiction"). Defining this genre of literature, Lovecraft himself writes:

> The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror* 28)

Overall, Lovecraft broadly defines "cosmic horror" as writings that point to unknown (and essentially unknowable) forces that threaten not only to cause physical harm, but also rend apart the natural order of the world in some fundamental manner.

Ungoliant embodies many of the traits that codify both Lovecraftian evil and cosmic horror. Compare, for instance, the descriptions of Ungoliant's origins with the above description of Azathoth. Each account lingers on the relationship between the respective entity and the darkness outside of the established cosmological worldspace and, as a result, the scope of our understanding.[4] In each case, the "mystery" of the being is intricately tied to its existence outside the view of the "known" world; Ungoliant's origins are unknown even to the Valar because of her residence within the darkness, and the "unlighted chambers beyond time" that Azathoth calls home are, by their nature, inaccessible and incomprehensible. Additionally, as a being that creeps from the "unplumbed spaces" at the fringes of the world, Ungoliant and her assault on the Trees of Valinor constitutes an unknowable force's direct assault upon the established nature of the world, an act that Jessica Burke argues

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[4] David Day's entry on Ungoliant in *An Encyclopedia of Tolkien* also echoes Lovecraft's description of cosmic horror: "Ungoliant's exact origins in terms of Tolkien's cosmology are left obscure in his writings. We are told that she is from 'before the world,' which only serves to heighten the black vastness of her evil. [...] As the English prefix *un-* we find in her name suggests, Ungoliant is a personification of 'Non-Being'" (394).

"mar[s] the very soul of Arda" (49). When viewed together, these traits and actions firmly root Ungoliant's character and role in the legendarium within the tradition of cosmic horror.

Moreover, the possibility of Ungoliant's "creation *ex nihilo*" echoes the reasonless, chaotic origins of Lovecraft's beings. As Joshua T. Parks notes, throughout the legendarium, "[e]vil characters who appear later in the history of Arda […] exist as offshoots of Melkor's primordial evil" (171). Yet, Tolkien leaves open possibility that the Spider of Night may not be a "twisted good" akin to Melkor or a being twisted by this "primordial evil" like Sauron; rather, her origins might lie outside the scope of what the figures within the setting and us as readers know about the invented world's cosmology. This possibility, by its very presence, injects a degree of "chaos" into the Augustinian construction of the legendarium. This holds true even if Ungoliant did not form from nothingness; from the perception of every being in Arda, Ungoliant is a creature of unknown origin, a "chaos" for which their cosmological paradigm cannot account.

While it is highly unlikely that Tolkien drew directly from the Lovecraft's works, Tolkien did have limited exposure to the American author's writings. Tolkien was, by no means, well-read in the "weird fiction" genre; however, the professor encountered the genre through a copy of the collection *Swords and Sorcery* that he received from L. Sprague de Camp (Ordway 330n6). Included in this collection is Lovecraft's short story, "The Doom that Came to Sarnath." While Tolkien's correspondence makes no mention of his opinion regarding Lovecraft's specific tale, Holly Ordway notes that Tolkien "was distinctly unimpressed" by the works in the collection (330n6), with the author declaring "all the items seem poor in the subsidiary (but to me not unimportant) matters of nomenclature" (qtd. in de Camp 41).[5]

Nonetheless, Tolkien worked out the earliest versions of the story of Melko and Ungwë Lianti between 1916 and 1920, while he did not encounter Lovecraft's work until decades later, in 1964. Though Tolkien continued to revise the story through the multiple forms that have been explored, in part, in this study, Tolkien's late exposure to "The Doom that Came to Sarnath" makes it unlikely that Lovecraft's story directly influenced the legendarium. Additionally, there is no known evidence that Tolkien had any knowledge of or exposure to Lovecraft's works beyond his reading of "The Doom that Came to Sarnath."

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[5] Also included in *Swords and Sorcery* are works by other "weird" authors, including Lovecraft's friends and frequent interlocuters Clark Ashton Smith and Robert Howard, the creator of Conan the Barbarian. See de Camp 41 and Scull & Hammond *Chronology* 655.

Yet, while it was almost certainly not a direct ingredient in Tolkien's writing, "The Doom that Came to Sarnath" does contain fascinating parallels to Ungoliant's assault upon the Trees of Valinor. In Lovecraft's tale, the Great Lizard Bokrug rises to lay waste to Sarnath during the height of a festival. Regarding this celebration, Lovecraft writes,

> Gorgeous beyond thought was the feast of the thousandth year of the destroying of Ib. […] Before the marble walls on the appointed night were pitched the pavilions of princes and the tents of travelers […]. Then, close to the hour of midnight, all the bronze gates of Sarnath burst open and emptied forth a frenzied throng that blackened the plain […]. (Lovecraft, "Doom," 33-34)

This calamity is reminiscent of Ungoliant's assault on the Trees of Valinor in the midst of the great festival to celebrate the gathering of fruits. In both tales, a being from outside the understanding and expectations of the known social order arrives to destroy a great beauty.[6] Of particular note is each story's focus upon the beauty of the celebration and the brightness of its locale. The beauty of the light of the Trees is mentioned time and again in Tolkien's legendarium, and Lovecraft makes the white marble of the city walls a central feature of a feast that is "gorgeous beyond thought." Equally significant is the arrival of "darkness," either in the form of Ungoliant's "Unlight" or the panicked masses fleeing the city of Sarnath, that blots out the light of this beauty.

While it is distinctly unlikely that Tolkien drew directly upon his exposure to Lovecraft when writing Ungoliant, it is more likely that Tolkien created Ungoliant in direct response to some of the same events and human apprehensions that also spawned Lovecraft's horrors. In the case of Bokrug's attack upon Sarnath during the festival celebrating the destruction of the city of Ib and Ungoliant's destruction of the Trees during the great feast, each of these attacks taps into the primal fear that an unknown force will inevitably arrive to drive away celebration and usher in darkness. Certainly, it is not unheard of for Tolkien to include fear as an ingredient in his narratives. Bo Kampmann Walther observes the interplay between "fear and familiarity" in the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*, as well. Walther argues that these sensations often appear as one and the same throughout this narrative, pointing particularly to Frodo's experience with the Mirror of Galadriel as a case study. In these instances, the "unknown rises up against the known" in a single instant, allowing a moment

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[6] Tolkien seemed quite fond of having evil forces arrive suddenly in the nighttime during the course of a celebration; for instance, Tolkien also draws upon this motif during Melkor's final attack on Gondolin. For this assault, see *The Fall of Gondolin*, 72-73.

at once to fall into fear through the introduction of the unknown and back to familiarity through a familiar symbol (132).

On the surface, Ungoliant's attack seems to follow Walther's proposed structure; during the familiarity of the feast in Valinor, the unknown figure of Ungoliant attacks. In an instant, the familiar light of the Trees of Valinor gives way to the fear of the Dark Spider's Unlight. What makes this moment different from the scenes Walther describes is that the arrival of the unknown is not mingled with a familiar image; instead, the unknown supplants and destroys the familiar, and as the events that play out make abundantly evident, the comfort of the Trees is never to return. Moreover, there is no forthcoming clarification regarding Ungoliant's origins; the familiar never again confronts the unknown, and the Valar are never able to gain any retribution or achieve any finality following Ungoliant's actions. Instead, the fear the Spider injects in the world is destined to remain throughout Middle Earth's history.

The complex relationships that both writers share with the scientific and technological advancements of the early twentieth century also helped to shape their representations of the "unknown." While Lovecraft held a range of perceptions regarding the decline of modern civilization, among these beliefs is the notion the scientific advancements of the early twentieth century threw into disarray humankind's understanding of the universe.[7] From an early age, Lovecraft was fascinated with science, and he remained an amateur astronomer for much of his life.[8] Yet, despite this interest, rapid changes in the understanding of physics unsettled the author. Regarding advances in quantum theory, Lovecraft writes:

> All is chance, accident, and ephemeral illusion—a fly may be greater than Arcturus, and Durfee Hill may surpass Mount Everest—assuming them to be removed from the present planet and differently environed in the continuum of space-time. There are no values in all infinity—the least idea that there are is the supreme mockery of all. All the cosmos is a jest, and fit to be treated only as a jest, and one thing is as true as another. I believe everything and nothing—for all is chaos, always has been, and always will be. (Lovecraft, *Selected Letters [I]*, 231)

For Lovecraft, this loss of certainty—the substitution of the unknown where the known had once existed—was deeply unsettling. Tolkien, like Lovecraft, was keenly also interested in science from a young age. Indeed, for Tolkien, science and the search for knowledge were noble pursuits that complemented his own Catholic faith, and advances in science did not, in themselves, trouble the author

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[7] See S.T. Joshi, *H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West*.

[8] For Lovecraft's scientific writings, see his *Collected Essays, Volume 3: Science*.

(Larsen, "Scientific Philologist" 2-3). Yet, he drew a stark line between the pursuit of knowledge and the improper application of this knowledge. Specifically, Tolkien demonstrates an "open disdain for the increasingly destructive technologies of industry and war" (1).[9] Yet, Tolkien also believed that the reckless pursuit of knowledge for the sake of power, particularly technological power, inevitably led to "domination" (4).

For both men, the scientific advancements of their day went hand in hand with the unknown. In Lovecraft's case, these advancements destabilized the writer's worldview and reinforced his own sense that the universe was indifferent, vast, and fundamentally "unknowable." This fear is reflected by Lovecraft's cosmic entities, which are deemed evil, in part, because of their sheer distance from human understanding. For Tolkien, the horrific technological advances that he witnessed during the Great War were a firsthand testament to the terrifying directions that unfettered advances in technology could take. While Tolkien openly denies the links between the villainous figures in his legendarium and his adversaries in the First World War, the introduction of new war technologies certainly contributed to his views on contemporary science (Garth 218-19). Notably, among other newly designed weapons, Tolkien beheld firsthand the barbarity of the flamethrower during his time in military service, and he also bore witness to the rapid rise of industry throughout his country (156). For Tolkien, the unknown that he feared was not in the existential questions that advancement brought to the surface, but rather in the "power" that the unknown could exert over the world (Larsen, "Scientific Philologist," 4). Ungoliant represents the decisive manifestation of this principle: a being that could not possibly be anticipated who, upon arrival, introduces swift and irreversible chaos into the world.

It is Ungoliant's unknowable and unforeseeable nature that most thoroughly complicates the perception that Tolkien's representation of evil is unerringly Augustinian. While Melkor embodies the evil that lies within the distance between the potential for good and what is actually achieved, Ungoliant brings to the surface another form of evil altogether. Within the narrative and in the author's various drafts, Ungoliant's origins are obscured, and both Valar and real-world readers alike cannot be certain that there was any initial "good" in the Spider for her to fail to realize. Rather than representing the divide between potential and actualization, Ungoliant is a crawling, arachnid chaos that reflects the world-changing powers that arrive without warning or reason and leave behind only desolation, a Lovecraftian horror that embodies the unknowns that had become all-to-prevalent at the dawn of the twentieth century.

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[9] See also Hood.

With the character of Ungoliant in mind, the limits of classifying Tolkien's view of evil as purely Augustinian become evident. While it is outside the scope of this study to suggest an alternative philosophical or psychological model for Tolkien's portrayal of evil, it is possible to make some observations. Perhaps evil in Tolkien's writings is more present and tangible than scholarship has previously asserted. Certainly, Augustine provides a foundation for understanding the evils of the legendarium. However, Ungoliant demonstrates that a more diverse range of potential influences, such as Tolkien's views on his contemporary world, were also important ingredients in Tolkien's construction of evil.

Ultimately, when readers encounter characters like Gollum, they are left to ponder, and perhaps mourn, a corruption to evil. When faced with Ungoliant, readers are left instead to puzzle over the entity's alien nature and, to borrow language from Lovecraft himself, to drift endlessly in ignorance upon "the black seas of infinity" (Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," 124).

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