

Tolkien's Inferno: From the Deepest Hell to the Highest Void

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Welcome you all to this guided visit offered by Eriol's Travels. My name is Heorrenda and I will be your guide tonight. Please check that all of you have your welcome packs ready. Please do not open them until I ask you to do so, and remember that pictures are not allowed.

You have chosen the tour *Tolkien's Inferno*, where we will take a brief look along the most hellish places in Tolkien's Middle Earth legendarium. Please remain together, since the insurance you signed some minutes ago does not cover missing people, accidental incineration or tumbling off a cliff.

Since J.R.R. Tolkien, famous author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, was a devout Roman Catholic, it is almost straightforward to compare places, situations and events with those of Christian Hell. However, Tolkien himself dissuades us from doing so. It is true that Tolkien, in his 1953 letter to Robert Murray says that *The Lord of the Rings* is a fundamentally religious and Catholic work, but he also adds, in the same letter, that the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism. About 1951, in his long (very long and very important) letter to Milton Waldman, he revisits his thoughts about Fairy Tales and the realm of Faërie, by stating that myth and fairy stories must reflect and contain elements of moral and religious truth, but not explicitly; he loathed allegory and expressed his firm belief that morals and values were not tied just to a particular faith, but universally created by societies. In 1965 he would write to his friend and former pupil W.H. Auden that he did not feel forced to make his story fit with formalised Christian theology.

Unarguably, as he defended in his essay *On Fairy-Stories*: «The road to fairyland is not the road to Heaven; nor even to Hell, I believe, though some have held that it may lead thither indirectly by the Devil's tithes». We can even find an example of this affirmation being used in relationship with *The Lord of the Rings* also in his letters: asked about the nature and alliances in Middle-Earth of the Old Man Willow, Tolkien answers: «Cannot people imagine things hostile to men and hobbits who prey on them without being in league with the Devil!»

So, what should we do? Should we stick with the notion of Catholic Hell and compare it to Tolkien's writings? Should we look for other Hells or otherworlds apart from the Christian one to compare with Tolkien's works (Jewish *Gehenna*, Scandinavian *Hel*, Greek *Hades*, Mayan *Xibalbá*)? I am sure many other guides will take these paths, and I will be very glad to attend their guided tours.

However, our path will be different. There are so many diverse otherworlds in almost every culture that I would try to make justice for all of them because, unfortunately

for me, I am a perfectionist. So we will reduce the concept of *Hell* to its minimal expression, summing it up into **four phenomena present**, one way or another, in the universal conception of *Hell*. In this tour we will look for fire, darkness, torment and isolation.

Fire, because even some anthropologists state that the discovery of fire by hominids triggered a primal fear that would be tied to Hell forever: not only it hurt when touched, but also made anything disappear into thin air, not to be seen again in this world.

Darkness, because Hell is usually found under the ground, in hidden places accessible only by a subterranean gate or through a cave. Darkness prevents us from knowledge, from looking for each other in search of comfort, condemning us to oblivion and pain.

Torment, because the concept of different hellish places and creatures uses to be that of pain, suffering, torture or unbearable agony. It is not just an underworld or otherworld where people or their souls go when dying, it is also a place of punishment.

Isolation, so we will find ourselves alone with our thoughts, our painful memories, or damned to watch, powerless, the suffering of our beloved ones. Trapped in a forgotten place, to be forgotten ourselves.

I am sure that you are eager to walk with me along all these horrible places, terrible creatures, hideous situations and horrid events. I am no Virgil, though, but I will do my best.

Before we enter...

Before we cross the gates of Hell (be them an arch, a burning hole in the ground, a spooky cave or even another world in a different branch of Yggdrasil) I would like to make a few remarks.

Firstly, I would like to point out that it is true that Tolkien uses in his Middle-Earth writings words related to Hell, such as *Hell*, *hellish*, *devil*, *devilry* or *demon*. Both in *The Lord of the Rings* and in *The Silmarillion* we can find several examples. Is the presence of these words evidence that there was a place called *Hell* in Middle Earth? Does it mean that Sauron is Satan himself? My answer to both questions is no. Tolkien is using terms from our own culture in order to simplify concepts for readers. It is better to use straightforward expressions than to explain, every now and then, the kind of evilness that he is portraying in his characters and his landscape.

In his 1956 letter to W.H. Auden, written as an answer to his review of *The Return of the King*, we find a very interesting affirmation from the Professor: «In my story I do not deal in Absolute Evil. I do not think there is such a thing, since that is Zero. I do

not think that at any rate any 'rational being' is wholly evil. (...) In my story Sauron represents as near an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible. He had gone the way of all tyrants: beginning well, at least on the level that while desiring to order all things according to his own wisdom he still at first considered the (economic) well-being of other inhabitants of the Earth. But he went further than human tyrants in pride and the lust for domination, being in origin an immortal (angelic) spirit».

In this letter, he also points out that Morgoth, his Satan (he uses that expression), fell before the Creation of the world. This is a crucial affirmation, that he reinforces in his 1958 draft of a letter to Rhona Beare: «I suppose a difference between [my] Myth and what may be perhaps called Christian mythology is this. In the latter the Fall of Man is subsequent to and a consequence (though not a necessary consequence) of the 'Fall of the Angels' (...) evil was brought in from outside, by Satan. In [my] Myth the rebellion of created free-will precedes creation of the World (Eä); and Eä has in it, subcreatively introduced, evil, rebellions [and] discordant elements of its own nature already when the *Let it Be* was spoken. The Fall or corruption, therefore, of all things in it and all inhabitants of it, was a possibility if not inevitable. Trees may 'go bad' as in the Old Forest; Elves may turn into Orcs, and if this required the special perverse malice of Morgoth, still Elves themselves could do evil deeds». He also exemplifies this possibility to err in the higher beings: Aulë creates the Dwarves out of his impatience to behold the children of Eru.

We must also take into account that there is no mention at all of an otherworldly place of torment for those who behave badly. We know that Elves go to the Undying Lands or even to the Halls of Mandos when they pass, but no one knows where the mortal peoples go when they die. We only know that Tolkien firstly intended that some historical figures who did not have the best behaviour when they were alive (such as Ar-Phârazon and Túrin) would reappear at the final battle and fight Melkor, and then a second creation song would be sung, with men (and hopefully hobbits too) playing a part on its making.

Finally, we must not forget that the text that reached our hands, hearts and shelves is nothing but a translation: Tolkien translated the Red Book of Westmarch from Westron into English, being, in fact, a transcription itself: the Red Book of Westmarch was lost forever, and Tolkien based his translation in one of the copies made by Findegil the scribe, requested by Peregrin Took's grandson. Do not worry, I am not crazy, I know pretty well that this is an example of the Found Manuscript resource, also called False Document. We know that technique pretty well here in Spain with the greatest Spanish text ever written: *Don Quixote*, translated by Miguel de Cervantes from an arabic text.

The found document technique also supports the main idea that the readers and scholars should not interpret as a 100% straightforward correspondence when finding terms such as *demon*, *devil* or *Hell* when reading Tolkien's works. Let us not forget that *orcs* are called *demons* several times, which is nothing but one of the translations proposed by experts of the Anglosaxon term *orcneas*, from *Beowulf*.

One more step, and we will be inside. Please, remember that taking pictures is not allowed, and *abandon all hope, you who enter*.

FIRE

It is hot in here, isn't it? It is time now that you open your welcome pack, where you will find sunglasses to protect you from the radiance of fire and magma, and a battery-powered fan, since the insurance does not cover picking you up to the exit if you faint.

In Spain, they also call Hell *The cauldrons of Pedro Botero*, where this particular demon boiled and tortured people, and fed fire to gluttons. For fire is what we find in a typical representation of Hell. Fire to hurt, to boil, to scald or to burn down to ashes, making the victim disappear.

Fiery settings are, by definition, wide wastelands: almost no vegetation can resist the heat and dryness of such places, so no food or water is to be found. They do not allow the presence of life, which is also a direct transposition of otherworldly settings of suffering, where all its inhabitants are either supernatural or dead.

There are two main settings that exemplify this fiery landscape in Tolkien's works, but we can also find some other places that are suitable for this definition although they are not quoted so frequently.

The first direction we must follow is North. As Tolkien estates in his 1967 letter to Charlotte and Dennis Plimmer, rejecting the idea that his world was *Nordic*: «The North-west of Europe, where I (and most of my ancestors) have lived, has my affection [but] That it is untrue for my story, a mere reading of the synopses should show. The North was the seat of the fortresses of the Devil».

It is quite curious that Tolkien's primitive evil resides in the North as the ancient Norse people believed. We can find this detail in Snórri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning*, as Hermódr looks for Baldr: «but down and north lieth Hel-way».

In the North, in the ancient times of Middle-Earth, were set the Ered Engrin, the Iron Mountains. They were raised by Melkor in order to protect two of his main fortresses, Utumno and Angband. Around the latter there rose three impregnable peaks, which received the name of Thangorodrim, the Mountains of Oppression. They were so high that only the Great Eagles were able to reach them, and they were made of ash and slag, always blowing poisonous fumes through their mouths «But above this gate, and behind it even to the mountains, he piled the thunderous towers of Thangorodrim, that were made of the ash and slag of his subterranean furnaces, and the vast refuse of his tunnellings. They were black and desolate and exceedingly lofty; and smoke issued from their tops, dark and foul upon the northern sky».

They were also the centre of Morgoth's realm, Dor-na-Daerachas, the Land of the Shadow of Horror. During the Dagor-nuin-Giliath, Fëanor fought there «long undismayed, though he was wrapped in fire and wounded with many wounds». In his search for Maedhros, Fingon «High upon the shoulders of Thangorodrim (...) looked in despair upon the desolation of the land.» From the gates of Angband while its door was open, also «filth and desolation spread southward for many miles over the wide plain of Ard-galen». In this land, a particular kind of demons was bred «their hearts were of fire, but they were cloaked in darkness, and terror went before them; they had whips of flame. Balrogs they were named in Middle-earth in later days». Tolkien repeatedly uses the word *demon* for the balrogs in *The Silmarillion*, «Dreadful among these spirits were the Valaraukar, the scourges of fire that in Middle-earth were called the Balrogs, demons of terror.». At the index, the word *Balrog* has the following definition «'Demon of Might', Sindarin form (Quenya Valarauko) of the name of the demons of fire that served Morgoth».

When the sixth generation of the Second Born (Men) were still children, Thangorodrim suffered a great change due to Morgoth's will, vomiting great rivers of flame that poured all over the plain, and poisoning the air. «Then suddenly Morgoth sent forth great rivers of flame that ran down swifter than Balrogs from Thangorodrim, and poured over all the plain; and the Mountains of Iron belched forth fires of many poisonous hues, and the fume of them stank upon the air, and was deadly».

Ard Galen was destroyed, and it became a burnt waste where life was impossible. The three peaks of Thangorodrim were then revealed as three gigantic active volcanoes, whose consequences changed the name of Ard-Galen to Anfauglith, the Gasping Dust. This eruption gave name to the Dagor Bragollach, the Battle of the Sudden Flame. As Tolkien explains in *The Silmarillion*, «Many charred bones had there their roofless grave; for many of the Noldor perished in that burning, who were caught by the running flame and could not fly to the hills». An actual hellish landscape, indeed, that we will revisit again later in this presentation.

However, the first place that comes to your mind when we think of fiery hellish places is Mordor. It is that land in the East where Sauron takes refuge after the fall of Númenor, where he forges the One Ring, and where he retreats once the One has been cut from his hand. The most relevant place of this land is the plateau of Gorgoroth. Surrounded by the Ephel Dúath (Mountains of Shadow) and the Ered Lithui (Mountains of Ash), it hosts the two most important places of Mordor: the tower of Barad-Dûr (where Sauron lives) and, right in the centre of it the Orodruin, Amon Amarth, Mount Doom.

Gorgoroth is a desolate place, formed by cold embers of lava, rocks and ashes, and it is covered in smokes and venomous fumes, which sprout and twirl from pits in the ground. The tortured land is broken into labyrinths of stone with many holes and cracks. There is almost no vegetation or water sources, apart from scarce hawthorn thickets and foul-smelling spring water.

The Orodruin (which Karen Wynn-Fonstad identified as a stratovolcano) holds the Sammath Naur, the Cracks of Doom, in which furnaces the One Ring was forged. Its fires are so powerful that it is the only place all across Middle-Earth where the One can be melted and destroyed. Its name, Orodruin, has been translated by Tolkien as *burning mountain* and *mountain of the red flame*. It was created in the First Age by Melkor, and we can suppose that Mount Doom dramatically changed the landscape until it was named Mordor (the *dark land*).

Mount Doom covers the land in darkness, both at its feet and in the sky, since it constantly spits smoke and lava from his 4500 ft high cone. Orodruin was called Amon Amarth (Mount Doom) by Gondor subjects, since each violent eruption marks a change in the tides of fate, supposedly due to Sauron's control of the volcano. Some of these dramatic eruptions happened when Sauron was preparing for the Battle of the Last Alliance, when he returned to Mordor after his defeat or when he started his offensive against Minas Tirith, causing the Orodruin to cast a black cloud so powerful that dooms Mordor, Ithilien and the East of Gondor and Rohan to a permanent night.

Sam and Frodo suffered an unbearable agony when crossing Gorgoroth in their path to Mount Doom. For almost ten days under a permanent dusk, they were only able to find a small rain streamlet of oily and bitter drinkable water. Nothing edible was to be found. The land is barren and hostile, and the only living animal they found are midges. They crawled from hollow to hollow, afraid to be discovered so close to their target, sunken in blank despair. At last, the One Ring was destroyed. And the Orodruin exploded in flame, announcing again a turn of destiny, a change in history, bursting and collapsing every artifice made by the great shadow: «Fire belched from its riven summit. The skies burst into thunder seared with lightning. (...) a great smoke and steam belched from the Sammath Naur, and the side of the cone was riven open, and a huge fiery vomit rolled in slow thunderous cascade down the eastern mountain-side. (...) They had reached a low ashen hill piled at the Mountain's foot; but from it there was no more escape. It was an island now, not long to endure, amid the torment of Orodruin. All about it the earth gaped, and from deep rifts and pits smoke and fumes leaped up. Behind them the Mountain was convulsed. Great rents opened on its side. Slow rivers of fire came down the long slopes towards them. Soon they would be engulfed».

We could go on naming hellish fiery places, but we must continue this guided tour. However, before going on, it is worth mentioning the Desolation of the Dragon. Almost every dragon tale written in mediaeval times includes a dragon's lair, the place where the dragon lives and hoards its treasure. The lair is where the brave and noble knight will finally kills him, receiving the treasure as payment for his galant deeds, and perhaps the hand in marriage of a surprised princess. These dragons used to live in caves or castles surrounded by flowery meadows, farms with very frightened farmers and forests bursting with little and big animals. It seems logical: they need food, be it a distracted cow or a petrified deer. However, Smaug lived amongst the Desolation of the Dragon. Once the great beast

from *The Hobbit* reclaimed Erebor as his lair, he spent some time burning and devastating forests, meadows, buildings and farms. He surrounded himself of a barren and hard land, where only scarce bushes grow: «The land about them grew bleak and barren, though once, as Thorin told them, it had been green and fair. There was little grass, and before long there was neither bush nor tree, and only broken and blackened stumps to speak of ones long vanished. They were come to the Desolation of the Dragon».

Was the dragon surrounding itself in a hellish landscape beaten by fire to prevent the fairy tale knight from coming? Was it expressing through all this ruin its disdain for Dwarves? Was it assuming the place of the arrogant tyrant of Hell? Or was it doing all of this at the same time?

Now please, follow me through this side path. Mind the step, since the next place is pitch black.

DARKNESS

Please wear the headlamps you will find in your welcome pack. This will distinguish you from the prisoners of these places, since the insurance does not cover being released from imprisonment or damages caused by torture.

Mordor is, indeed, a dark place (the *Black Land*, it is called). But there are more examples of darkness tied to torment, evil and torture in Middle-Earth.

The fortress of **Utumno** was a place of darkness, evil and fear. It was built (as we have seen) by Melkor in the North of Middle-Earth in the old days: «Green things fell sick and rotted, and rivers were choked with weeds and slime, and fens were made, rank and poisonous, the breeding place of flies; and forests grew dark and perilous, the haunts of fear; and beasts became monsters of horn and ivory and dyed the earth with blood. (...) But in the north Melkor built his strength, and he slept not, but watched, and laboured; and the evil things that he had perverted walked abroad, and the dark and slumbering woods were haunted by monsters and shapes of dread. And in Utumno he gathered his demons about him, those spirits who first adhered to him in the days of his splendour, and became most like him in his corruption. (...) And in that dark time Melkor bred many other monsters of diverse shapes and kinds that long troubled the world; and his realm spread now ever southward over Middle-earth».

Utumno was the first stronghold of Melkor, and its meaning is uncertain. However, we can figure out that it meant *the Underworld*, since the literal translation is *Great Deep Place* and Melkor's humongous weapon, Grond, was called *the Hammer of the Underworld*. It was also called *Udûn*, a name that may sound familiar to the readers since Gandalf, in the bridge of Khazad-dûm, calls the balrog *Flame of Udûn*. Utumno was built as an underground fortress and amongst the Ered Engrin looking

for darkness: it was the closest place to Valinor in Middle-Earth where the light of the Two Trees did not reach. The pits of Utumno were full of countless dungeons and many deep corridors made of ice, obsidian and fire. Every great evil of the world was bred inside this fortress: the first dragons, werewolves, vampires, great spiders, beasts, flying creatures and blood-sucking insects. Its corridors were haunted by cruel spirits, ghosts, apparitions and demons. All of them, concealed by the darkness provided by Melkor, attacked and killed all over the surrounding territories, including the mighty fallen maïar, the balrog, led by their chief Gothmog.

Melkor built another underground fortress in the North that became as known as Utumno, but this time he also held prisoners there to torture and kill them. It was called **Angband**. It was originally created for protecting Utumno, and was set among the three peaks of Thangorodrim: «There he delved anew his vast vaults and dungeons, and above their gates he reared the threefold peaks of Thangorodrim, and a great reek of dark smoke was ever wreathed about them. There countless became the hosts of his beasts and his demons, and the race of the Orcs, bred long before, grew and multiplied in the bowels of the earth. Dark now fell the shadow on Beleriand, as is told hereafter; but in Angband Morgoth forged for himself a great crown of iron, and he called himself King of the World».

Angband, called by Tolkien “The Hells of Iron”, was so big and deep that, in order to reach the Nethermost Hall (where the throne of Melkor was placed) by crossing the Great Gate (and, by great, Tolkien meant a gate almost as tall as the Gondorian city of Minas Tirith), there are sources that say that one must go across more than 130 miles in straight line, and we would have to sum up the winding and labyrinthic passages, dungeons, tunnels and foundries. Because Angband housed gigantic foundries, which poisonous fumes and impregnable darkness were released through the Thangorodrim.

In fact, Angband was originally built to produce smoke and darkness, as it is told in *The Nature of Middle Earth*, in order to conceal and hide the western shores and the location of the fortress. When the Valar first attacked Angband, the fortress was nearly destroyed, and it stopped producing smokes and fumes. But later, when Melkor returned (First Age 1495), darkness came back.

It is in Angband, house of unmentionable horrors, guarded by a hellish wolf (Carcharoth) filled with «the fire and anguish of Hell» and stretching underground for countless miles, where characters such as Gwindor, Maeglin and Húrin found torment, and it was in front of its Great Gate where Fingolfin dared to face Melkor, finding his own death.

Other characters who entered the underground hellish darkness were Beren and Lúthien, but before reaching the fortress, darkness itself had already found Beren.

During the First Age, Finrod built a tower on the island of Tol Sirion in order to guard the Pass of the river. This tower was called **Minas Tirith**, *Tower of Guard*. When the tides turned in the Second Age and Finrod offered himself to help Beren in his search of the silmaril, they were imprisoned in Minas Tirith's dungeons. But it was

not Minas Tirith anymore, it was called **Tol-in-Gaurhoth**, Island of Werewolves, and Sauron was its master: «Then Sauron made it into a watchtower for Morgoth, a stronghold of evil, and a menace; and the fair isle of Tol Sirion became accursed, and it was called Tol-in-Gaurhoth, the Isle of Werewolves. (...) And Morgoth held now the western pass, and his terror filled the fields and woods of Beleriand».

Those dungeons were a place of darkness and terror, where prisoners were threatened, tortured and killed. Finrod and Beren suffered the torture of watching their comrades being killed, night after night, by werewolves that entered the black pit at Sauron's command, since everybody refused to reveal their identities and purpose. The last one to be killed was Finrod, the actual builder of the original fortress, who died defending Beren with his bare hands, and in that moment the fairest and most beloved of the house of Finwë disappeared from Middle Earth: «He cast them therefore into a deep pit, dark and silent, and threatened to slay them cruelly, unless one would betray the truth to him. From time to time they saw two eyes kindled in the dark, and a werewolf devoured one of the companions; but none betrayed their lord».

Dark are also the webs of Ungoliant, and the dwellings of her progeny (Mirkwood and Torech Ungol), dark is the hand of Sauron, and the fumes of Thangorodrim, but we will continue our journey back to light, although, I am afraid, we will find no peace there.

TORMENT

We do not need to leave Thangorodrim to find two examples of torment, of Hell on Earth or, allow me the bad joke, *Hell on Middle-Earth*.

Now it is the time for using the binoculars you all received in your welcome packs, ¿are we ready? If you pay attention to one of the faces of Thangorodrim you will be able to glimpse the gleam of a chain and a single shackle. From this shackle once hung, in punishment and torment, the heir of Fëanor, Maedhros.

Banned from Valinor due to the Oath of Fëanor, he had arrived in Middle-Earth looking for Melkor and trying to retrieve the Silmarils, stolen by the Dark Lord. Once his father died in the Dagor-nuin-Giliath, he had the right to claim his title as king of the Noldor in exile. But he had no time to do it, for Melkor sent a deceitful embassy to meet him and offer to surrender one of the silmarils. And, of course, it was a trap. Melkor's servants captured him and, in order to display his cruelty and malice, Maedhros was hung from one hand on one side of Thangorodrim. The shackle was so tough and strong that Tolkien called it in *The Silmarillion* a «Hell-wrought bond»: «Therefore Morgoth took Maedhros and hung him from the face of a precipice upon Thangorodrim, and he was caught to the rock by the wrist of his right hand in a band of steel».

There Maedhros hung, immortal and imprisoned, for Melkor promised his kin that he would set Maedhros free if the Noldor abandoned their pursuit of the silmarils, but

the Elves knew that they could not trust any of his words. Powerless, hanging from the chain, Maedhros could hear the trumpets of Fingolfin when he challenged Melkor in single combat, and he cried aloud, but his voice was lost. Long years passed, and no one came to his rescue. Finally his friend Fingon, who still had hope in finding Maedhros, ventured alone through Thangorodrim and sang as he passed, and played the harp, challenging the orcs to attack him. His song reached deep and high, and Maedhros heard him, and answered. Unable to climb and help his friend, he heard Maedhros beg him for death, for he was too damaged, tired and desperate and wanted to end his torments. But Fingon was helped by Thorondor, the King of Eagles, when he already had the deadly arrow in the string. The shackle was unbreakable, and Maedhros pleaded for death one more time, but instead Fingon cut Maedhros' hand to set him free. Maedhros would never forget those years of torture: But Fingon could not release the Hell-wrought bond upon his wrist, nor sever it, nor draw it from the stone. Again therefore in his pain Maedhros begged that he would slay him; but Fingon cut off his hand above the wrist, and Thorondor bore them back to Mithrim (...) His body recovered from his torment and became hale, but the shadow of his pain was in his heart».

Let's move up our binoculars. There, upon the summit, you will find a high seat, the highest that existed in Middle-Earth all along its history. And that seat stands as a testimony of the cruelest and most twisted torture ever suffered in that land.

Húrin, son of Galdor, was the heir to the Lordship of Dor Lómin. He and his younger brother Húor found themselves, in their youth, visiting the hidden realm of Gondolin, whose location was the biggest secret kept in the First Age. After many adventures, including his defence of Hithlum and the death of his father, he became the Lord. As such, he fought bravely in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad (the Battle of Unnumbered Tears) and after helping Turgon escape back to Gondolin, he was captured by Melkor and dragged to Angband.

Since Húrin mocked the Dark Lord and resisted his threats, Melkor imposed him the cruelest torture: he pronounced a course that would fall over Húrin's people and his direct family, and he also sat him in the high seat atop Thangorodrim to witness the disgrace of his wife and children: «But upon all whom you love my thought shall weigh as a cloud of Doom, and it shall bring them down into darkness and despair. Wherever they go, evil shall arise. Whenever they speak, their words shall bring ill counsel. Whatsoever they do shall turn against them. They shall die without hope, cursing both life and death».

From there, and along a span of 28 years, he would witness the murder, destruction, suffering, torture, madness, incest and suicide that befell over his lordship of Hithlum, his own children and his own wife. And, what is more, he only saw what Melkor wanted to show him (Melkor calls it *with my eyes* and *with my ears*), so Húrin received a distorted image of the events, and their terrible consequences were grotesquely intensified to *his eyes* and to *his ears*: «Sit now there; and look out upon

the lands where evil and despair shall come upon those whom thou lovest. Thou hast dared to mock me, and to question the power of Melkor, Master of the fates of Arda. Therefore with my eyes thou shalt see, and with my ears thou shalt hear; and never shalt thou move from this place until all is fulfilled unto its bitter end».

Melkor then decided to free him, but everywhere he went he was expelled and mistreated. He caused great disgraces to everyone he visited, triggering the fall of the hidden city of Gondolin and the death of the Elvish king Thingol.

To be condemned to witness, powerless and alone, through long years of torment all the mischief and violence that Melkor caused to innocent people is, indeed, Hell on Middle-Earth. But we still have to visit a final stage of Hell before we finish this terrific tour. We will get closer to the shore. Please keep hands and arms inside the vehicle, it will be a swift journey.

ISOLATION

In Spain we have two sayings that are very useful for this occasion. The first one says: *eyes that do not see, heart that does not feel*. And the second goes like this: *the best way to show your contempt is to ignore*.

To sentence someone to oblivion is to eliminate his identity, to stop thinking about him, not to pronounce his name and to erase him from History. That is the cruellest and more effective way to damn someone to Hell. A silent Hell, a lonely Hell without death. The void.

This beautiful beach where we are standing now was the point chosen by Gondorian king Tarannon Falastur to send his wife into oblivion, to sentence her to the nothingness, to condemn her to a lonely Hell while still alive.

We have scarce information about Queen Berúthiel of Gondor, even Tolkien did not write about her in detail. Christopher Tolkien said that the only manuscript that comes before Berúthiel's Exile is almost wholly illegible. We would not be curious about her if it weren't for her cats, mentioned by Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings*. Berúthiel was a strange woman in the eyes of the people of Gondor. It is very likely that she was a Black Númenórean, coming from the area of Umbar, although she despised the sound and smell of the sea so she decided to live in Osgiliath, apart from her husband. She always wore black and silver, and loathed any colours. The only decorations she liked were *tormented sculptures beneath cypresses and yews*: «Berúthiel lived in the King's House in Osgiliath, hating the sounds and smells of the sea and the house that Tarannon built below Pelargir 'upon arches whose feet stood deep in the wide waters of Ethir Anduin'; she hated all making, all colours and elaborate adornment, wearing only black and silver and living in bare chambers, and the gardens of the house in Osgiliath were filled with tormented sculptures beneath cypresses and yews».

She also hated cats, but they followed her, so she took advantage of it: she tortured and trained nine black cats and a white one. The black ones spied for her, and the white one spied and tormented the black cats.

It seems that Tarannon finally decided to get rid of his wife, sending her to the Hell of isolation. And he did so in the worst way possible: he erased her name from the Book of the Kings, and embarked her and her cats on a ship, sending them to sail without any company. Set on a journey over the sea she hated, with only the company of the cats she also hated, into nothingness, forgotten forever: «King Tarannon had her set on a ship alone with her cats and set adrift on the sea before a north wind. The ship was last seen flying past Umbar under a sickle moon, with a cat at the masthead and another as a figurehead on the prow».

Well, the sun is setting, and the sky is darkening. Look, there is the bright star, the ship of Eärendil, Vingilot, sailing through the skies with the radiance of its silmaril. Eärendil makes this journey every night to watch over our Earth, and to keep an eye on the Door of Night. You know, the portal in the Uttermost West leading to the Timeless Void, the space outside Time and Creation where the Valar finally threw Morgoth after the War of Wrath. They sent Satan to Hell to be alone, to be tormented, to be in the darkness and in the absence of the Imperishable Flame: «But Morgoth himself the Valar thrust through the Door of Night beyond the Walls of the World, into the Timeless Void; and a guard is set for ever on those walls, and Eärendil keeps watch upon the ramparts of the sky».

With this last view, our guided tour has ended. Please do not forget your personal belongings, and thank you for coming to this tour offered by Eriol Tours. Please keep in touch for further tours such as "*Purgatory: Frodo's last sail and Niggle-Parish train station*". My name is Heorrenda and it has been a pleasure to be your guide.

Thank you.