

Balrogs: being and becoming

ALAN TIERNEY

Dreadful among these spirits were the Valaraukar, the scourges of fire that in Middle-earth were called Balrogs, demons of terror. (ref. 1, p. 23)

One of the most memorable scenes in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR)² is Gandalf's confrontation with the 'Balrog' on the bridge of Khazad-Dûm. Balrogs are demonic spirits³ of Tolkien's own invention, and appear sporadically within the history of his secondary world. There has been much speculation and debate among Tolkien's readership as to the 'actual' appearance and true nature of the creature, as Tolkien's description of the Balrog is notoriously ambiguous and vague. This has inspired varying (often derivative) interpretations of the creature in popular culture, although few (if any) of these seem to capture Tolkien's description of the Balrog in a satisfactory way. However, it should be noted that Tolkien's own approach to the Balrog changed over time, and that this may be reflected by the mutability implied in his description.

Here, I will attempt to show that this mutability is central to Tolkien's idea of the Balrog, and that the Balrog was very much a multivalent creation that embodied many of the central themes of Tolkien's work, such as industrialization and the different ways in which evil is manifested. I will also argue that, despite the relatively few instances in which they appear, Balrogs were important parts of Tolkien's secondary world, embodying diametrically opposite traits to those of Elves that "represent, as it were, the artistic, aesthetic, and purely scientific aspects of the Humane nature raised to a higher level"⁴. To this end, I will scrutinize Tolkien's descriptions of Balrogs and then look at how these descriptions have been interpreted by others. I will then identify any influences on their conception and examine the various names (and their meanings and etymology) that Tolkien applied to them. I will also attempt to establish exactly what Tolkien's approach to the Balrog was, and how these creatures fitted into his mythology, before finally comparing this to the interpretations of others.

Balrogs were originally conceived by Tolkien during the early stages of creating his secondary world. The earliest⁵ description that has been published is from an early version of his story *The Fall of Gondolin*⁶.

Yet as meed of treachery did Melko threaten Meglin with the torment of the Balrogs. Now these were demons with whips of flame and claws of steel⁷, by whom he tormented those of the Noldoli who durst withstand him in anything — and the Eldar have called them Malkarauki. (ref. 6, p. 169)

And:

Of these demons of power Ecthelion slew three, for the brightness of his sword cleft the iron of them and did hurt to their fire. (ref. 6 p. 181)

The whips are a constant throughout the evolution of the Balrogs, as is their demonic nature. However, the claws of steel were omitted from later descriptions, and the allusion to them being composed (partly?) of iron is never used again. There is one further description of Balrogs in *The Fall of Gondolin*. In this passage, a Balrog is in combat with the elf-lord Glorfindel.

Now had [Glorfindel] beaten a heavy swinge upon its iron helm, now hewn off the creature's whip-arm at the elbow. . . . Glorfindel's left hand sought a dirk, and he thrust up that it pierced the Balrog's belly nigh his own face, for that demon was double his stature. (ref. 6, p. 194)

Here it is implied that the Balrog is of a fixed shape and solid form and, for the first time, an indication of physical size is given. The Balrog also seems to be armoured, a concept that was later abandoned. It is interesting to note that some of the key features of the Balrog in *LOTR* — shadow and flame, for example — are absent at this early stage. However, in *The Lay of Leithian* (a slightly later work), some of these elements begin to appear.

About him sat his mighty thanes,
The Balrog-lords with fiery manes,
Redhanded, mouthed with fangs of steel;
Devouring wolves were crouched at heel. (ref. 8, p. 296)

At this point, the 'claws of steel' have become fangs and the Balrogs have acquired manes. Also, the motif of flame first appears in a limited form. Tolkien's conception of the Balrog is becoming more defined at this point. This conception is further developed in some early drafts of *LOTR*⁹.

A figure strode to the fissure, no more than man-high¹⁰ yet terror seemed to go before it. They could see the furnace-fire of its yellow eyes from afar; its arms were very long; it had a red tongue.¹¹ Through the air it sprang over the fiery fissure. The flames leaped up to greet it and wreathed about it. Its streaming hair seemed to catch fire, and the sword that it held turned to flame. In its other hand it held a whip of many thongs. (ref. 9, p. 197)

Christopher Tolkien notes that written on the manuscript from which this passage is taken, are notes which read:

Alter description of Balrog. It seemed to be of man's shape, but its form could not be plainly discerned. It felt larger than it looked. (ref. 9, p. 199)

And:

And a great shadow seemed to black out the light. (ref. 9, p. 199)

This description marks not only an advancement but also a departure from earlier conceptions. Gone are the steel claws/fangs and there is no mention of armour. The description of eyes is a new detail, as is the red tongue and the length of the arms. However, these details were omitted from the final version. It seems from the addendum notes that Tolkien was dissatisfied with this description and so made three very significant changes. The Balrog's shape became indistinct, the appearance of the Balrog was implied to be subjective¹² and the motif of shadow was used for the first time. These new features became prominent in the final version of the Balrog that was published in *LOTR*¹³.

“Then something came into the chamber. I felt it through the door, and the orcs themselves were afraid and fell silent. It laid hold of the iron ring, and then it perceived me and my spell. What it was I cannot guess, but I have never felt such a challenge. The counter-spell was terrible. It nearly broke me. For an instant the door left my control and began to open! I had to speak a

word of command. That proved too great a strain. The door burst into pieces. Something dark as a cloud was blocking out all light inside and I was thrown backwards down the stairs. All the wall gave way, and the roof of the chamber as well, I think.”

(ref. 2, p. 345)

In this passage we see a more ‘concrete’ allusion to the Balrog being a thing of shadow. We also see the first character reaction to a Balrog. The description is further elaborated in the next passage;

“It was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater¹⁴, and a power and terror seemed to be in it and go before it. It came to the edge of the fire and the light faded as if a cloud had bent over it. Then with a rush it leaped across the fissure. The flames reared up to greet it, and wretched about it; and a black smoke swirled in the air. Its streaming mane kindled and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left hand it held a whip of many thongs”.

(ref. 2, p. 349)



Withywindle

Phyllis Berka

The first thing to note about this passage is that the Balrog has regained its former size. Also, the sword it carries now seems to be composed of flame rather than metal. The flame and smoke described seem to react to (and may even be a part of) the Balrog. In the next passage, the Balrog is actually described as a “fiery shadow” and “streaming with fire”.

The dark figure streaming with fire raced towards them. The orcs yelled and poured over the stone gangways. Then Boromir raised his horn and blew. Loud the challenge rang and bellowed, like the shout of many throats under the cavernous roof. For a moment the orcs quailed and the fiery shadow halted. (ref. 2, p. 348)

In the next passage, Tolkien alludes for the first time to the possibility of the Balrog having wings.

His enemy halted again, facing him; and the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings¹⁵. It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. (ref. 2 p. 348)

The fiery nature of the Balrog is made more explicit in the above passage as, for the first time, a Balrog issues fire from its own body¹⁶. An interesting feature in the next passage is when the Balrog’s fire dies down and the darkness grows. This seems to suggest that the Balrog can draw power from the fire.

The Balrog made no answer. The fire in it seemed to die, but the darkness grew. It stepped forward slowly on the bridge, and suddenly it drew itself up to a great height, and its wings were spread from wall to wall; but still Gandalf could be seen, glimmering in the gloom; he seemed small: and altogether alone; grey and bent, like a wizened tree before the onset of a storm. (ref. 2, p. 349)

The Balrog here seems to grow, and its ‘wings’ become enormous. This represents the most concrete example of the Balrogs mutability. The final description of the Balrog in *LOTR* is from a scene in which Gandalf relates the story of his battle with the creature¹⁷.

“He was with me still. His fire was quenched, but now he was a thing of slime, stronger than a strangling snake.” (ref. 2, p. 523)

This is one of the most interesting (although typically ambiguous) of all the descriptions of the Balrog. Once its flame is extinguished by water it turns to slime (like wet ash). However, it is not explained whether or not this means that the Balrog just has slimy skin, or has become an amorphous blob. Whichever, there is still a certain amount of mutability implied. These descriptions in *LOTR*, led Tolkien to revisit the descriptions of Balrogs in his earlier work. For example, the following passage, taken from *The Silmarillion*¹⁸:

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 their corruption: their hearts were of

fire, but they were clouded in darkness, and terror went before them; they had whips of flame. (ref. 1, p. 43)

As can be seen, the Balrogs have taken on the characteristics that Tolkien developed in *LOTR*, especially the fire and shadow (both of which are highly mutable). These descriptions differ markedly from the early versions of the Balrog, in that the creature is now more elemental, indistinct and mysterious; almost a shape made out of fire and smoke. However, these almost ‘impressionistic’ descriptions — abstract, subjective and based on character reaction — leave much to the imagination, and have led to varying depictions in popular culture, which often involve much artistic licence and draw heavily from other sources.

There are several artists who have gained reputations as illustrators of Tolkien’s work including Alan Lee, Ian Miller and Roger Garland. However, the artist John Howe has produced several pieces of work that depict Balrogs in particular. Howe’s *Glorfindel and the Balrog*¹⁹ shows Glorfindel’s duel with a Balrog on Cirith Thoronath⁶. This piece seems to draw solely on Tolkien’s earlier descriptions of Balrogs as there is no presence of shadow and flame, even in the Balrog’s sword. Other illustrations of the Balrog in Howe’s portfolio include *Moria*²⁰, *Gandalf and the Balrog II*²⁰ and *Gandalf Falls with the Balrog*²⁰. These works depict Gandalf’s battle with the Balrog at the bridge of Khazad-Dûm from *LOTR*, although the design of the Balrog seems to draw more on descriptions in Tolkien’s earlier work: it is solid, visible, armoured and seems to have steel fangs. Also, the Balrog in these pictures displays shadow and flame. However, Howe has also used his own approach. His Balrogs are bestial, Minotaur-like creatures that have wings and seem to be based partly on depictions of Christian demons. Although Tolkien does describe the Balrogs as demons, there is no reason to suppose they resemble the traditional image of Christian ones.

Another artist who has illustrated Balrogs in several pieces of work is Ted Nasmith. These include *The Bridge of Khazad-Dûm*²¹ and *At the Bridge*²¹. These images draw on the descriptions of flame and shadow to a greater degree than Howe’s, and have opted to show a wingless Balrog. The quality of the Balrog in Nasmith’s depictions is perhaps unsatisfying, and presents a highly bestial creature. Other Balrog illustrations, such as Andrzej Grzechnik’s *Glorfindel Fighting Balrog*²¹ and Greg and Tim Hildebrandt’s *The Balrog*²¹, depict Balrogs with faces that are less bestial and more humanistic, which connotes a reasoned malevolence rather than mere savagery and is perhaps more in line with Tolkien’s conception. One final noteworthy illustration of a Balrog is featured in Catherine Karina Chmiel’s *But Morgoth Sent the More*²¹. This depiction relies almost wholly on Tolkien’s (earlier) descriptions and atypically seems to have no demonic preconceptions. This Balrog has no wings, horns or tail, is quite shadowy and mysterious, and is also of ‘man-shape but greater’. Of all the illustrations discussed, this seems to capture Tolkien’s descriptions most successfully (albeit the earlier versions).

Balrogs have also appeared in other media, such as action-figures, role-playing games and war-games, for example, Tony Akland's sculpture of Mighty A'Angor, Gigantic Balrog, which is a lead miniature used for role-playing games. This again seems to be heavily influenced by Biblical and mythological demons²². There have also been two cinematic representations of Balrogs, first by Ralph Bakshi²³ and then by Peter Jackson²⁴. Both make use of the shadow and flame motifs, although they are each overly bestial in appearance (particularly Bakshi's, which seems to have a lion-like head²⁵). Both versions are quite impressive on screen, and Jackson's version is particularly effective²⁶. However, it could be argued that an opportunity has been missed. Cinema (particularly in the digital age) is possibly the best medium for capturing the mutability and indistinct nature of the Balrog. It could also be argued that none of the depictions discussed successfully capture all the aspects of Tolkien's descriptions, and few of the deeper meanings that are present in the language Tolkien uses to name the Balrogs.

The first mention of the Balrog in *LOTR* is during the Council of Elrond when the dwarf Glóin says: "Too deep we delved there, and woke *the nameless fear*" (ref. 2, p. 315, my italics). It is fair to say that much of Tolkien's writing was shaped (partly) with the intention of justifying the etymologies of the languages²⁷ he created. This implies that the nameless fear is not just an arbitrary description; for Tolkien, names were descriptive (see Table 1), so 'nameless' can justifiably be construed as 'indescribable'²⁸. Even the names that are later given to the Balrog ('Durin's Bane'²⁹ and 'flame of Udûn'³⁰) are proxy names that do not refer to the Balrog directly. This certainly fits with the ambiguous description in *LOTR*. However, the earlier versions of Balrogs are less vague, and Tolkien had several names for them³¹.

The Sindarin word 'Balrog' and the Quenya word 'Valarauko' (-ar pl.)³², translate into English as 'demon of might' and are constructed thus (another example is in ref. 33).

So it can be seen that the names that Tolkien used are descriptive and give a strong indication of what the Balrog represented for Tolkien. The words 'bal/vala' and 'rog/rauko' are etymologically linked to other words that mean, for example, cruel, terror and torment. These terms have been used or linked to the Balrog at various times, and may have helped shape Tolkien's concept of the creature. For example:

The torment of the Balrogs will be ours ... one worthy of the torment of the Balrogs. (ref. 6, p. 15, my italics)

However, as Shippey notes³⁴, in an early academic paper Tolkien argued that an Anglo-Saxon word, *Sigelhearwan*, was mistranslated as 'Ethiopian' when it actually was a reference to 'the sons of Múspell', the Norse fire-giant. Shippey believes that Tolkien's fascination with this word may be the source of the Balrog's conception. Noel³⁵, in a similar vein, believes that Gandalf's battle with the Balrog on the bridge of Khazad-Dûm is based on the battle between the giant Surt(r), and Freyr, which destroyed the rainbow bridge Bifröst. As Thompson states³⁶:

Deities are the abstract ideas of objects or feelings. Priestcraft separated these objects from the feelings and gave them will and 'first cause'.³⁷

Gods of the Greek pantheon are a good example of this, and there are parallels of this in Tolkien's own work (the Ainur where, for example, Varda represents light and Ulmo represents the motion of water). With this in mind, it can be reasoned that this could also apply to Balrogs, who (as well as the terms mentioned above) may personify terror.

It was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater, and a power and *terror* seemed to be in it and go before it. (ref. 2, p. 345, my italics)

And:

Their hearts were of fire, but they were clouded in darkness, and *terror* went before them; they had whips of flame.

(ref. 1, p. 45, my italics, they are also described as "demons of terror").

These passages from *LOTR* and *The Silmarillion* respectively, are later writings, but the association with the Balrogs and terror goes back to Tolkien's earliest drafts. In *The Fall of Gondolin*, Rog says:

"Who now shall fear the Balrogs for all their *terror*?"

(ref. 6, p. 178, my italics)

The above passages imply that the terror is not just a reaction of those seeing a Balrog; rather it is terror as an 'active force' that is as much a part of the Balrogs as flame and shadow. Further evidence of this is in the next passage, where terror is used not only to name the Balrog, but is also present in the overall tone of the dialogue.

Then Aragorn recounted all that had happened upon the pass of Caradhras ... the coming of the *Terror*³⁸. "An evil of the Ancient World it seemed, such as I have never seen before," said Aragorn. "It was both a *shadow and a flame*, strong and *terrible*."

"It was a Balrog of Morgoth," said Legolas; "of all elf-banes the most deadly, save the One who sits in the Dark Tower."

"Indeed I saw upon the bridge that which haunts our darkest dreams, I saw Durin's Bane," said Gimli in a low voice, and dread was in his eyes.

"Alas!" said Celeborn. "We had long feared that under Caradhras a *terror* slept." (ref. 2, p. 375, my italics)³⁹

It seems clear that for Tolkien, the Balrogs symbolized terror, but they also symbolized other concepts, some of which are represented by the Balrog's other constant: the whip.

The whip of many thongs carried by the Balrogs is the type of whip used for punishment by torturers and slave drivers, and can be said to be a symbol of slavery, subjugation and coercion. Other concepts can also be associated with the whip, such as terror, torture, torment, cruelty and power

TABLE 1

English	Noldorin/Gnomish	Sindarin (S.)	Quenya (Q.)	Old English
Anguish	Bal			
Crush			Mala	
Cruel	Bal	Balc		
Demon	rhaug/graug	Rog	Rauko	bealu
Evil				
Feel terror		Groga		
Hate	Mog	Mog	Moko	
Horror		Gorog		
Power		Bal	Vala	
Powerful/hostile creature			rauko/Arauko	
Strife/war	Goth	Goth	Koso	
Terrify		Gruitha	Ruhta	
Terrible			Rúkima	
Terror	Ruku	Raug	Rukin	brogan
Torment		Baul	Ngwal	
Torture			(m)valkanë	

See ref. 45, p. 209 and refs 51–55

— all words that are part of the Balrog’s etymological history. However, terror is the concept most closely associated with the Balrog, and terror, when applied with the whip, is a means of coercion. Coercion is a feature of ‘The Machine’, a phrase that for Tolkien was a trope, by which he meant, as Christopher Tolkien explains⁴⁰:

the attempt to actualise our desires ... this meant coercion, domination, for him the great enemy; coercion of other minds and other wills; this is tyranny. But he also saw the characteristic activity of the modern world, the coercion, the tyrannous reformation of the earth. That is why he hated machines.

This refers to the way in which industrialization has not only shaped the world in which we live (in Tolkien’s opinion, not for the better), but also the lives we lead and the modification of people. There are also aspects of the Balrog that correlate with The Machine; the flame and smoke that surround the Balrog are evocative of the furnaces of industry, and the description of its ‘wings’ conjures images of vast plumes of smoke rising from the chimneys of Victorian factories. Furthermore, as Clark notes⁴¹:

[Dragons are] ... the work of ‘smiths’ and sorcerers, these forms [in three varieties] violate the boundary between mythical monster and machine, between magic and technology ... The iron dragons, carry orcs within and move on ‘iron so cunningly linked that they might flow ... under bombardment, ‘their hollow bellies clang ... yet it availed not for they might not be broken, and the fires rolled off them’. The more they differ from the dragons of mythology, however, the more these monsters resembled the tanks of the Somme.

This ‘industrial’ version of dragons can also be applied to the early version of the Balrogs. They were originally said to contain iron, and, as Tolkien’s first writings of Middle-earth were conceived at the Somme, it is likely that the machinery

of war was as much the basis for his original conception of the Balrogs as it was for the dragons (although Balrogs could also have represented the opposing war leaders)⁴². However, just as Tolkien’s concept of ‘The Machine’ broadened later, so did his conception of the Balrogs. Christopher Tolkien states that his father made explicit the fact that ‘The Machine’ was a major theme in his work⁴⁰.

It can be said, with a reasonable degree of certainty, that Elves in Tolkien’s work represented his ‘poetic imagination’⁴³. The Machine is the antithesis of this. The Balrogs were conceived to be (originally) of the same order of power as the greatest Elves, such as Glorfindel and Fëanor, and were diametrically opposed on several levels. Table 2 demonstrates this clearly. It makes clear the polar opposition between these two creations. The original idea was that the Balrogs had been bred by Melko.

And in Utumno he wrought the race of demons whom the Elves named the Balrogs. (ref. 44, p. 70)

And:

He devises the Balrogs and the orcs. (ref. 45, p. 295)

TABLE 2

Balrogs (the machine)	Elves (poetic imagination)
Magic	Enchantment
Industry	Nature
Shadow	Light
Corruption	Growth/fecundity
Terror	Joy
Pragmatism	Idealism
Functionality	Artistry
Torture	Pleasure
Power	Creativity
Coercion	Freedom
Fear	Hope

Later, instead of ‘bred’ they were ‘multiplied,’ and they became more powerful. As Christopher Tolkien states;

The early version of the Balrogs makes them less terrible and are certainly more destructible than they afterwards became.
(ref. 6, p. 212)

By this, Christopher Tolkien is referring to the fact that Balrogs were later recast as Maiar⁴⁶ although there were still ‘a thousand Balrogs’ (ref. 45, p. 302). However, one of the last notes Tolkien left, which he unfortunately was never able to elaborate on, read:

There should not be supposed more than three or at most seven ever existed.
(ref. 44, p. 79)

The reason that the Balrogs increased in power but grew smaller in number⁴⁷ is that they began to embody a wider and more mutable concept. Shippey states⁴⁸ that the Roman senator Boethius believed that there was no such thing as evil, only an absence of good. This ties in with the motif of the mutable shadow. The Balrogs may have come to represent the faceless corruption of ruling hegemonic powers (or the evil in wars) that is detectable and determinable, but that is unidentifiable and even abstract — the shadow can be seen, but not the source. As Shippey states:

People of Tolkien’s generation had a problem identifying evil, they had no difficulty recognising it, but the puzzling thing is that this seemed to be carried out by entirely normal people, and indeed Tolkien, who was a combat veteran, knew that his own side did things like that too. The nature of evil in the 20th century has been curiously impersonal. It’s as if sometimes nobody particularly wants to do it. In the end you get the major atrocities of the 20th century being carried out by bureaucrats.⁴⁹

Here Shippey is referring to the Nazgûl⁵⁰, but the principle is the same; they and the Balrogs are abstracts of the negative emotions and corrupt organizations that lead to repression and true evil.

Some of the above interpretations of the Balrog by others are varied and sometimes quite interesting and/or accurate. However, none of these approaches truly captures the conceptions and complexity of this multivalent creation. Because of the vagueness of Tolkien’s creation, there is a proclivity to fill the gaps by introducing intertextual concepts. However, some of these artists (and directors) seem to have missed the point. The descriptions of the Balrog are vague, figurative, symbolic and mutable because that is what a Balrog is — it is a manifestation of the abstract, and Tolkien has created a creature that the reader and artist alike have to use their own interpretation and conception of evil, terror and corrupt power to visualize. In this sense, it could be said that all interpretations are necessarily subjective and thus correct.



1. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Silmarillion* (Harper Collins, 1999).
2. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Lord of the Rings* (Harper Collins/BCA, 1991).

3. In Tolkien’s work, spirits of this kind are referred to as Ainur. They are similar in nature to both Biblical angels and demons, and the gods of Norse and Greek pantheons. The greatest of these are called Valar, the rest are Maiar, of which Balrogs are one type (Gandalf another).
4. Carpenter, H. (ed.) *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* 236 (Harper Collins, 1995).
5. Much of the material that does not appear in *LOTR* is assembled from notes, and is thus often difficult to date accurately.
6. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The History of Middle-earth Volume II: The Book of Lost Tales Part Two* (ed. Tolkien, C.) (Harper Collins, 2002).
7. There is an almost identical description on page 179 of ref. 6, although it contains the added line “and in stature they were very great”.
8. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The History of Middle-earth Volume III: The Lays Of Beleriand* (ed. Tolkien, C.) (Harper Collins, 2002).
9. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The History of Middle-earth Volume VII: The Treason of Isengard* (ed. Tolkien, C.) (Harper Collins, 2002).
10. Later versions of this sentence include: “The shape of a man perhaps, and not much larger”, and then “... and not much greater”, ref. 9, page 202. However, this small sized version was quickly abandoned.
11. This detail may be informed by some gargoyles, which are often depicted with extruding tongues.
12. It could be argued that these two descriptions imply the beginnings of the mutability seen in the published version of the Balrog.
13. This passage is spoken by Gandalf in the book.
14. It is interesting to speculate how various characters see the Balrog. The descriptions given in *LOTR* would seem to be from the perspective of the ‘mortal’ characters. It is likely that the Balrog would appear differently to Elves, who can ‘see’ beings in the shadow world. It is significant that Legolas recognizes what he sees instantly and is terrified by it. Elves have no fear of the dead, the undead or even the Nazgûl, yet the Balrog paralyzes Legolas with dread. Another strange case is Gandalf. As a fellow Maiar, one would expect him also to recognize the Balrog, yet this does not seem to be the case. It could be that his ‘true’ form, that of the Maiar Olórin, would recognize a Balrog, but his ‘limited’ and earthbound form (Gandalf) cannot, and can only see from the perspective of a mortal.
15. There is much speculation among Tolkien’s readership as to whether the Balrog’s wings were real or whether this reference to them was a figurative description. There are also debates as to whether or not it could fly, whether it could speak, and if it was under the control of Sauron.
16. There are earlier indications that they can do this, but these are highly ambiguous.
17. An earlier version of this passage adds to this description “sleek as ice, pliant as a thong, unbreakable as steel” (ref. 9, p. 431).
18. The published version of *The Silmarillion* is ostensibly composed of the most recent notes. However, there are concessions to this where issues of contradiction or incompleteness arise.
19. Howe, J. in *The Tolkien Calendar 1991* (Allen & Unwin, 1990).
20. Online at <http://www.john-howe.com>.
21. Online at <http://fan.theonering.net/rolozo/collection>.
22. This design was commissioned c. 1985 for Citadel Miniatures Ltd. It also seems rather reminiscent of the demon in the film *The Night of the Demon* (dir. Tourneur, J.) (Columbia Pictures, 1957).
23. Bakshi, R. (dir.) *The Lord of the Rings* (Warner Brothers, 1978). This Balrog was designed by the animation department of the film, although the actual artist is not specified.
24. Jackson, P. (dir.) *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (New Line Cinema, 2002). This Balrog was designed by Weta Digital. The actual artist is not specified, although John Howe was involved, and Jackson acknowledges that this version was inspired by Howe’s earlier work (see *The Lord of the Rings: Extended Edition* disc 3, ‘Designing Middle-earth’ New Line Cinema, 2002).
25. This may possibly be because Tolkien describes Balrogs as having manes.
26. Jackson’s Balrog is composed of lava with a constantly shifting and cracking ‘skin’ of crust. This does sound an almost Tolkienesque idea, despite its inaccuracy.
27. Noldorin and Gnomish are early versions of the later languages Sindarin and Quenya.
28. For mortals at least. Elves seem to be able to describe them quite well (see ref. 14).
29. This refers to the fact that the Balrog killed the dwarven king Durin IV.
30. *Udûn* is Sindarin and means *Utumno* in Quenya, Melko’s original underground fortress. It could therefore refer to any Balrog and is not necessarily a specific name for this particular one.
31. Some of these terms are older than others, and in some cases obsolete.

However, this is not reflected in the text as they are only mentioned to demonstrate the terms and concepts Tolkien applied to Balrogs.

32. Originally, the definite article of Balrog was i'Malrog and the plural i'Malaraugin (araukë and Malkaraukë respectively in Quenya).
33. Gothmog refers to Gothmog: the Lord of Balrogs, High Captain of Angband. Also called Kosomot, Kosomok(o) or Kosmoko, he was originally intended to have been the son of Melko (Morgoth) and Ulbandi(?) (later the ogress Fluihuin). However, this idea was abandoned and he was later made into one of the Maiar that were loyal to Melko. Gothmog was the most powerful of the Balrogs, and killed several prominent elves including Féanor and Fingon, until eventually, he and Ecthelion slew each other during the attack on Gondolin. Gothmog is one of only two Balrogs named by Tolkien. The other is called Lungorthin; Lord of Balrogs. Lungorthin is only mentioned once in all of Tolkien's notes and Christopher Tolkien believes that it is 'a' Balrog lord, rather than 'the' Lord of Balrogs, as Gothmog is referred to by this title both before and after this reference.
34. Shippey, T. *The Road to Middle-earth* 39 (Harper Collins, 1992). Further developed in Shippey, T. J. R. R. *Tolkien: Author of the Century* 84–85 (Harper Collins, 2001).
34. In *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader* (ed. Chance, J.) 180 (Univ. Press Kentucky, 2004).
36. Thompson, E. P. *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994).
37. That is to say, they come to be regarded as the instigators of the concepts they were originally conceived of to embody.
38. Significantly, the capitalization of the word terror is Tolkien's own.
39. See also in the same text "They roused from sleep a thing of terror" (p. 1109).
40. Bailey, D. (dir.) *A Film Portrait of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Landseer Films and Television Productions, 1992).
41. Garth, J. *Tolkien and the Great War* 220–221 (Harper Collins, 2003).
42. And possibly Tolkien's idea of 'The Machine'.
43. Most of the views Tolkien stated regarding art, nature and aesthetics are mirrored in the nature of the Elves.
44. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The History of Middle-earth Volume X: Morgoth's Ring* (ed. Tolkien, C.) (Harper Collins, 2002).
45. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The History of Middle-earth Volume IV: The Shaping of Middle-earth* (ed. Tolkien, C.) (Harper Collins, 2002).
46. Tolkien sometimes used the term Umaiar for evil Maiar.
47. This low number of Balrogs would have created some major continuity problems that Tolkien was never able to address, and it is interesting to speculate how he would have resolved them. Several Balrogs are killed throughout his history — substantially more than seven. He may have explained this away by having the Balrogs reincarnate like the Elves and Maiar can. However, in Tolkien's secondary world, evil spirits are less potent after they are reborn (this is why Sauron cannot take form again after *LOTR*), but it could be that Morgoth replenished them. Another problem is why have they not been reborn again? This could be because Morgoth is no longer there to replenish them, or it may simply be that most of them were killed by Manwë, who is not only more powerful than even Morgoth, but the most powerful being in all of Arda.
48. Shippey, T. J. R. R. *Tolkien: Author of the Century* 130 (Harper Collins, 2001).
49. *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers Extended Edition Disc 3 'Origins of Middle-earth'*.
50. It could be that, given the description of the Lord of Nazgûl (ref. 2, p. 874) "a shadow of despair", that the Ringwraiths were Sauron's attempt to create Balrogs of his own.
51. Allan, J. *An Introduction to Elvish* (Bran's Head Books, 2001).
52. Noel, R.S. *The Languages of Tolkien's Middle-earth* (Houghton Mifflin, 1980).
53. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The History of Middle-earth Volume I: The Book of Lost Tales Part One* (ed. Tolkien, C.) 250 (Harper Collins, 2002).
54. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The History of Middle-earth Volume VI: The Lost Road and Other Writings* (ed. Tolkien, C.) 377 (Harper Collins, 2002).
55. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The History of Middle-earth Volume XI: The War of the Jewels* (ed. Tolkien, C.) 329–330 & 415 (Harper Collins, 2002).



Andunie
Jef Murray