FANTASY AS AN EXPRESSION OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS: GOOD AND

EVIL IN J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S <u>THE LORD OF THE RINGS</u>

By

GWENETH AVIS SPRY

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Department of ___ENGLISH___

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

When J.R.R. Tolkien wrote <u>The Lord of the Rings</u>, he states he did so in response to two things: humankind's unwitting disposition to evil, particularly the evil associated with the desire for power; and, the dearth of myths and legends indigenous to his beloved England. This dearth, he felt, contributed to the failure of the English to recognize, or differentiate between good and evil. Humankind, Tolkien observed, sits "chained in material cause and effect" and no longer thinks in mythic terms, and this dissociation between the material and the mythical, he implies, deprives folk of a most valuable form of knowing. Accordingly, in an effort to provide redress, and to refocus twentieth century consciousness on the properties of good and evil, Tolkien constructed a fantasy that, using the mythic patterns and symbols of Celtic and Northern myths, presented good and evil as concrete and recognizable properties. The unexpected initial success of <u>The Lord of the Rings</u> suggests that Tolkien's creation did indeed resonate with his readers, and the ongoing and recent renewal of interest in his novels indicates that the mythic elements he built into the narrative have not lost their impact.

This thesis, therefore, examines the way in which Tolkien's traditional mythic representations of good and evil as oppositional and conflicting properties, provide a means of focusing human consciousness on the reality of these distinct categories. In conjunction, this thesis also examines the way in which Tolkien emphasizes the pivotal role of myths and legends in providing not only an understanding of such existential issues as good and evil, but also the importance of this understanding in developing a moral sensibility.

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"For the God, all things are fine and good and right, but human beings have

supposed that some things are wrong and other things right"

(Heraclitus, Fragment 102)

When New Line films released Peter Jackson's <u>The Lord of the Rings: The</u>

<u>Fellowship of the Ring</u> in December of 2001, almost immediately it began earning Oscar

nominations. On 13 February 2002, David Germain of the Vancouver newspaper, <u>The</u>

<u>Province</u>, reported that this film led the Academy Award field with thirteen nominations,

among which were citations for best director, best supporting actor and best picture. And

on 7 January 2002, this same newspaper reported that <u>The Lord of the Rings: The</u>

<u>Fellowship of the Ring</u> remained the number one movie in the U.S. for the third straight

weekend, grossing $200 million in box office sales. Why the enormous success of this

fantasy epic? Mick LaSalle of the <u>San Francisco Chronicle</u> argues that the reason lies in

the serious manner in which Jackson addresses "two profound things" that appear central

to Tolkien's original story line: "the horror of power without spiritual understanding, and

the nature of courage" (1). And these themes resonate with twenty-first century

audiences, he argues, because in relation to the increase of global terrorism they "feel sad

and close. We see visions of a fallen planet," he states, "of men unable to control their

lust for power, of wizards of unimaginable knowledge who have sold their souls for

profit," and most of all, "we see a world in fear, and a shadow from another land that

threatens everything" (2). In other words, these themes address the issue of the manifestation of evil in a world that no longer seems able to differentiate between what is good and what is, in fact, evil. The popularity of the film The Lord of the Rings and the subsequent Two Towers is, however, an example of history's repeating itself; this popularity simply reiterates the enormous success of the original novels when they were first published in the 1960's. Although Jackson modified Tolkien's storyline slightly to accommodate twenty-first century sensibilities, he left the structure of the plot unscathed, and this means that Tolkien's original message has lost none of its significance. While Jackson's film offers a particular way of examining this message, this discussion will focus on the novels from which he drew his inspiration in order to analyze Tolkien's continued relevance in relation to the perception of good and evil in the world of the twenty-first-century.

Records of the stories, myths, religious doctrines and philosophical debate of humankind reveal a constantly emerging struggle of the human psyche to come to terms with, or comprehend, the nature of good and evil. As Maximilian Rudwin observes in The Devil in Legend and Literature, the "eternal duel between Good and Evil in the cosmic order is the very essence of all mythologies, all religions and many of the arts" (vii). Certainly, in terms of Christianity, the tension between God, who is absolutely good, and Satan, who, in the New Testament, is absolutely evil, constitutes a central theme that culminates in *Revelations* with the ultimate battle between good and evil. Similarly, Egyptian myths reveal a conflict between the good god Osiris and his evil brother Set, while Zoroastrianism describes a battle between Ahura Mazda, the god of light and goodness, and his evil brother Ahriman. In Norse mythology, it is the trickster

god, Loki, who acts in conflict with the good god Balder. In some religions, such as Manichaeism, the powers of good and evil appear as equals, as binary opposites, while in others, like those of the Christian myth in which Satan was cast out from heaven, but not destroyed by the One God, supremacy is ascribed to this good deity – evil being a slightly subordinate power. In all portrayals however, good and evil consistently appear as opposing forces, and regardless of whether this dualism is implicit or explicit, one rarely occurs without the other. What is more, as Anthony S. Mercatante points out, in the myths of many cultures the inception of evil occurs at the moment of creation, and this concept not only implies a dualistic relationship between good and evil, but also that evil is an integral part of reality (12).

In terms of the perceived dual nature of these concepts, however, C.G. Jung points out that "[r]ecognition of the reality of evil necessarily relativizes the good, and the evil likewise, converting both into halves of a paradoxical whole" (Memories, Dreams and Reflections 321). This view suggests that each manifestation of evil or good brings into actuality its relative opposite, and consequently both concepts assume many guises. Such diversity could explain why attempts to define the phenomenology of good and evil have thus far proved circulatory and non-specific; for despite eons of debate and analysis, and despite various religious theodicies, modern society appears no closer to understanding good and evil than were those of yore. In fact, according to some critics, the moral relativism or ambiguity inherent in postmodern Western thought makes identification of these concepts even more difficult.

Kenneth J. Gergen argues that the globalization of our society, with its "plurality of voices" all "vying for the right to reality," and the resultant sense of a loss of

psychological certainties, has led to a breakdown in our ability to conceptualize such abstractions as good and evil (7). In our postmodern world where the individual, who is "in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction," is the arbiter of what is right and good, and where "anything goes that can be negotiated," morality is situationally determined -- simply a matter of perception (7). Such perceptual relativism seems to leave us bereft of the wherewithal to evaluate what is good and what is evil. According to Jennifer Geddes, some even argue that our postmodern society "has few resources with which to respond to the occurrence of evil, few resources which might guide one in making moral judgements" (2). And because we can no longer differentiate, we either decree everything 'other' as evil or, we "refrain from making any moral judgements whatsoever" (2) for "fear of offending someone (or anyone)" (1). Whether we choose the former fundamentalist approach, or the latter, which demonstrates a kind of apathetic and "bland tolerance towards everything," both views display a "thoughtlessness" that not only avoids "the difficulty of grappling with evil," but also demonstrates our inability to distinguish evil from good (1). Jean Baudrillard further suggests that because we no longer have the ability to identify evil we attempt to anaesthetize its effects. Ours is a society, he argues, that solves problems by "casting off the negative, by disseminating the energies of everything condemned by society within a simulation entirely given over to positivity and factitiousness, by instituting a definitively transparent state of affairs" (44). We are, says Baudrillard, "under the sway of a surgical compulsion that seeks to excise negative characteristics and remodel things synthetically into ideal forms" (45).

Ken Wilber, however, directly attributes this lack of moral certainty to the disappearance of metaphysical sensibilities, once nurtured by traditional religious

doctrines and myth, brought about by the success of scientific materialism. This term

describes the doctrine of modern physical theory that reduces all phenomena to motions

of matter, and, Wilber continues, constitutes "in whole or part, the dominant official

philosophy of the modern West"(10).[1] The elegant empirical proofs of this theory provide

truths so convincingly absolute that issues of a metaphysical nature are undermined

through a lack of verifiable or quantifiable data. Ever since the Enlightenment, argues

Wilber, as the natural sciences assumed more power as arbiters of reality, explanations of

the material universe, "including material bodies and material brains," became subsumed

under the jurisdiction of "science, and science alone" (10). As a consequence, the great

wisdom traditions that articulated *higher modes of development* beyond rationality," lost

explanatory credibility so that "moral wisdom, contemplative insights, interpretive

knowledge, introspective perceptions, [and] aesthetic-expressive realities," no longer

suffice as sources of truth (81). Now, says Wilber, religion, while "cute for kids" is

"deadly for adults, and its persistence into maturity [. . .] is a sign of pathology, lack of

logical clarity, or existential inauthenticity. There are no exceptions because there is no

God. And there is no God because science registers that which is real" (15-16).

To undermine the credibility of myth and religious doctrine, however, is to

invalidate the traditional means by which Western society organized questions of a moral

nature, and the result is a world determined solely by scientific outcomes. Now,

according to this materialist approach, consciousness is no more than a consequence of

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[1] According to Denis McCarthy "Materialism has been the foundational philosophy of many scientific geniuses throughout history and is the one common thread that unites many of the world's most significant scientific documents. Quite a few revolutionary intellects, including Democritus, Huygens, Newton, Herapath, Maxwell, and Boltzmann have helped carefully define the philosophy. Many others have used the basic tenets of Materialism in developing theories that have revolutionized our view of the Universe and now serve as the foundation of modern science. The atomic theory, the kinetic theory of gasses, statistical mechanics, Maxwell's field theory, and even the theory of evolution have all highlighted the importance of Materialist philosophy" (Scientific Materialism 1).

the interaction between matter and energy, where qualities such as joy are "reduced to levels of dopamine: depression to the levels of serotonin at the synapses," and religious ecstasy to no more than "a massive discharge of dopamine in the brain" (82). If thought and behaviour are merely the result of physiological structures and events, then scientific materialism not only precludes the possibility of metaphysical explanations for abstractions like good and evil, it also creates a situation in which great evil may occur, or great good be ignored, through lack of comprehension. As an example, Jennifer Geddes points out, some people would now like to discard the term evil altogether on the grounds that it is an anachronism, a product of the repressive and exploitive doctrines of the Christian Church. Others find the term so relative they can no longer accept its relevance as a descriptive concept: "[e]vil after postmodernism, it is argued, becomes aestheticized as transgression, as excess, as sublime, and the real sufferings of the victims of evil become eclipsed" (2).

Given the effects of the development of scientific materialism on human understanding, and given the impotence of traditional theoretical or religious explanations in relation to this shift in knowledge acquisition, how is Western society to reconcile the ongoing manifestations of good and evil in the world with a consciousness that seemingly no longer has the tools with which to conceptualize them? Certainly, the lack of a credible explanatory source does not negate the reality of good or evil, so, the questions still remain: what is evil, where does it come from and how can we identify it? Similarly, how do we come to know what is good? And furthermore, as those imbued with the relativism of postmodernism would ask, how can we distinguish between the two?

As the recurrent success of Tolkien's <u>The Lord of the Rings</u> suggests, one answer seems to lie in the power of storytelling; in the reflective processes made possible by the interaction between the narrative and the audience/reader. In her discussion on "Narrating Evil: A Postmetaphysical Theory on Reflective Judgement," Maria Pia Lara points out that whereas theoretical debate and traditional religious narratives have proven historically inadequate in defining evil, there is new interest in storytelling as a method of explication. This desire to make sense of the world through stories reveals what Lara sees as "an important new trend in philosophy, as well as in social sciences, and that this new orientation can take consideration of evil in a fundamentally new direction" (239). But as we can see from the myths and stories of old, such a concept is not new. Stories were one way in which folk traditionally sought to work out such existential questions, and, although many have challenged the credibility of these historical narratives, their importance in relation to the development of human consciousness can perhaps be re-established. As Lara points out, "[e]ach story seems to bring something new into the realm of experiencing human suffering, throwing a different light on the link between the doer and the sufferer of evil deeds and on what is important to remember" (241). The power of the narrative cannot be under-rated, for "narratives can morally 'construct' their readers and reorient their conduct"(249), and they do this through the development in the individual of "reflective judgment" (250). This method of comprehending morality occurs outside the theoretical framework of scientific explanations, and without the necessity of "factual accuracy," privileging instead the acquisition of knowledge, and thus moral understanding, through the resonance established between the experiences of the narrator and that of the reader (250). In this discussion Lara specifically refers to

factual stories designed to revisit morally contentious issues of the past, but, as she points out, it is not historical veracity that gives truth to such narratives -- "factual truth" is after all a "vulnerable space" -- but the possibility of moral judgment that these stories engender (249).

Given Lara's identification of the narrative as a powerful influence in shaping our moral orientation, is the perceived difference between fact and fiction an issue in terms of developing a moral sense? If the truth of a narrative not only resides in the experiences of the narrator, but also in the ability of his or her reader to obtain meaning through this story, then moral sensibility could be seen as the result of a confluence between the imaginative abilities of each party. This convergence moves the apprehension of moral understanding back into what Wilber terms contemplative insights or introspective perceptions.

The imagination is "humankind's major adaptive tool" in determining reality, says Ethel S. Person, and its value can be found even in the achievements of science (32). Like Lara, Person argues that the imagination performs a vital function in human development and understanding, for without this capacity "there could be no picturing of mental alternatives to current discomfort or deprivation, no planning of a future course of action, no creative rethinking of the past to make it pertinent to the present and future" (32). But there is a distinction to be made between the sort of imaginative thought that intellectually contemplates an issue for purely pragmatic purposes, and the kind of thought that engages imaginative thinking -- fantasy. The world of the fantastic, which moves in the realm of the psychological and emotional, is one that most of us inhabit, but that, by and large, we undervalue. Person suggests that fantasy is one of the "most

powerful catalysts that infuse and organize our lives," and that it plays an integral role in the development of the human psyche (1). On an individual level, she points out, the ability to fantasize is fundamental to the way we construct, adapt to, and interact with the world around us. Here, again, in apparent concurrence with Lara, Person argues that the stories we live by influence our understanding of the world; for, just as our personal fantasies influence the way we view this world, so too do "our experiences, and the myths and stories of the culture in which we live, shape our fantasies" (1). In effect, "[w]e are acculturated through the myths and fantasies that surround us" (216). But culture is not static; it, in turn, changes and adapts in response to the fantasies and creativity of its members (216). The imagination, then, mediates our experiences of the world. And those stories privileged by a particular group can be said to articulate its perception of reality.

In contemporary society, one of the ways in which stories reflect and express our understanding of the nature of reality, is through literature. As Person argues, literature enables the individual or group to share fantasies, and these shared fantasies perform a vital function in the ability of the individual to integrate, or make sense of the experienced world. Renowned science fiction/fantasy writer Ursula Le Guin points out that "[w]e read books to find out who we are [. . .]. And a person who had never listened to nor read a tale or myth or parable or story, would remain ignorant of his own emotional and spiritual heights and depths, would not know quite fully what it is to be human" (qtd. in Le Guin 31). Moreover, fantasy, both personal and literary, allows us the opportunity to experience existential dilemmas that normally lurk outside the bounds of logical explanation: "[m]ost great fantasies contain a very strong, striking moral

dialectic," explains Le Guin, "often expressed as a struggle between the Darkness and the Light," and this struggle represents a journey toward understanding, or recognizing the role of evil in life (65). Thus, when a society reaches a point of perceived crisis, such as the postmodern inability to definitively conceptualize good and evil, the written narrative is one place in which we may expect to find not only a reflection of the anxiety associated with this issue, but also attempts to effect a resolution.

The ongoing success of J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novels, The Lord of the Rings, which were written during the period of the First and Second World Wars, suggests that these stories, indeed, address issues pertinent to what it means to be human in both the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. Tolkien's original intent in writing Rings was to examine what he considered the failure of Western society to understand the evil associated with "mechanism," and "'scientific' materialism" (Carpenter 110). This "horrible evil," Tolkien stated, "sticks out so plainly and is so horrifyingly exhibited in our time, with its even worse menace for the future, that it seems almost a world wide mental disease that only a tiny minority perceive [. . .]" (88). But the recent resurgence of interest in these stories, precipitated by Jackson's films, implies that Tolkien's novels continue to address an inability to conceptualize evil in postmodern society. To reorient Western consciousness toward an understanding of good and evil, however, and to re-establish the spiritual element necessary for such reorientation, Tolkien reaches into the realm of myth. In Rings he utilizes traditional, mythic symbols of good and evil to create a work of "heroic legends and high romance"that presents these concepts as identifiable and concrete properties. In so doing, Tolkien challenges his readers to reassess their assumptions of what constitutes these categories. Moreover, by associating evil with

technology, and by depicting the effects of this technology in conflict with the forces of good, he implicates the "man- made" in both the manifestation of evil and the failure of moral apperception (96).

Tolkien does not specifically define what he considers the nature or function of myth, but in his discussion on fairy-stories, he outlines several qualities of myth that he seems to deem essential to the form. Myths, Tolkien writes, describe primordial events, and these events form the foundational matrices of fairy-stories. As an example, Tolkien illustrates the precedent of the "Olympian nature-myth: Norse god Thórr," which later turns up in the Elder Edda as a fairy-story (25): "If we could go backwards in time," says Tolkien, "the fairy story might be found to change in details, or give way to other tales. But there would always be a 'fairy-tale' as long as there was any Thórr" (25-26). Tolkien does not appear to argue here for a linear progression of what seems like the decay of myth into fairy-story, for he goes on to state, "there is no fundamental distinction between the higher and lower mythologies" – that is, between myth and folk or fairy-stories (24). Both come from the same source, humankind: even "the shadow or flicker of divinity that is upon [the gods] they receive through [humankind] from the invisible world, the Supernatural" (24). And both emerge out of the corpus of figures and experiences that comprise the whole history of the stories of a culture, the "Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story" (27). The Cauldron stores all of the primordial events and experiences, "the great figures of Myth and History," and then the fairy-tale element organizes them into the myths and stories humankind subsequently comes to know (29). Therefore, as a product of "language and of the mind" both myths and fairy-stories reflect a particular vision of truth in relation to the individual's experience with his or her world

(17). Moreover, in the context of the supernatural, Tolkien suggests an association, or

"entanglement," between religion and myth: "[s]omething really 'higher' is occasionally

glimpsed in mythology: Divinity, the right to power (as distinct from its possession), the

due of worship; in fact religion" (26). And this supernatural, religious aspect also

suggests a moral element, which, Tolkien argues, is an essential component of any myth

or fairy story (Carpenter 144).

In the poem "Mythopoeia," which Tolkien wrote "[t]o one who said that myths

were lies and therefore worthless, even though 'breathed through silver'" (85), Tolkien

offers further elucidation of the nature of myths and in so doing, not only confirms myths

as conveyers of primordial events, but also suggests that they arise from the dark reaches

of the unconscious:

> [. . .] those that felt the stir within
>
> by deep monition movement that were kin
>
> to life and death of trees, of beasts, of stars:
>
> free captives undermining shadowy bars,
>
> digging the foreknown from experience
>
> and panning the vein of spirit out of sense.
>
> Great powers they slowly brought out of themselves,
>
> and looking backward they beheld the elves
>
> that wrought on cunning forges in the mind,
>
> and light and dark on secret looms entwined (86)

The myth-makers, through their ability to access the "Faërie" or elven element, bring into

conscious awareness these normally hidden contents of the mind. Furthermore, in this

poem Tolkien suggests that myths not only give meaning to, or explain humankind's experiences in the world, but also, that it is humankind that ultimately determines this meaning:

> [. . .] there is no firmament,
>
> only a void, unless a jewelled tent
>
> myth-woven and elf-patterned; and no earth,
>
> unless the mother's womb whence all have birth. (87)

When he states that "[t]he heart of man is not compound of lies,/ but draws some wisdom only from the Wise,/ and still recalls him," Tolkien suggests, too, that myths are repositories of wisdom (87); and that the collective experiences of humankind, expressed through the "elf-patterned" myths or stories, reflect truths about the human condition. To know these stories, therefore, is to recognize and understand the ancient wisdom they contain:

> Blessed are the legend-makers with their rhyme
>
> of things not found within recorded time.
>
> It is not they that have forgot the Night,
>
> or bid us flee to organized delight,   (87)

Moreover, the line "Of things not found within recorded time," articulates the way in which the mythmakers render present the primordial events and figures that constitute the truths within such stories. These myths and stories maintain, in conscious awareness, the eternal truths contained within the "Cauldron."

C.G.Jung, whose theories on the nature of myth seem to conform with Tolkien's observations, explains that this connection between the logical, rational

sequencing of the conscious intellect with the non-rational, universal and emotional elements of what he calls the collective unconscious, facilitates conscious recognition of these eternal truths: "[m]yths and fairytales give expression to unconscious processes" says Jung, "and their retelling causes these processes to come alive again and be recollected, thereby re-establishing the connection between conscious and unconscious"(Mythology 88). In addition, the connection set up by the symbols in myths facilitates a return to the "inward reaching mythic state of thinking" that is in direct opposition to the "*dialectical* thinking" epitomized by the "language of science and technology" (110). Dialectical thinking, says Jung, precludes mythical thinking, and, by extension, the transcendent. The symbols of myth, then, precipitate recognition of abstractions such as good and evil by situating the individual within the greater context of the collective unconscious. Within this context, the individual achieves a sense of belonging and of meaning. In the absence of religious convictions, says Jung, this sense is vital to conferring an awareness of purpose in life (96).

Because Tolkien appears to privilege myths or stories as a way to reintegrate human consciousness with the properties of good and evil, this discussion will focus on the way in which he utilizes the symbols and patterns extant in the Northern and Celtic myths to construct a storyline that expresses both good and evil as recognizably distinct, yet interdependent and conflicting categories. Moreover, although there is no evidence that the theories of either C.G. Jung or Mircea Eliade influenced Tolkien in any particular way, the discussion will also, in relation to the function of myth, incorporate the some of the ideas of both these theorists. Certainly, Jung and Eliade are not the only theorists relevant to a discussion of the nature and function of myth. The theories of any one of

the many scholars of myth would have provided equally adequate explanatory details in

this respect. For example, Claude Levi-Strauss's hypothesis on the organization of the

world in terms of binary oppositions has particular relevance to Tolkien's ideas about the

dualistic nature of good and evil. But Levi-Strauss' structural approach to myth seems at

odds with Tolkien's more organic style: "it is precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the

unclassifiable individual details of a story," Tolkien points out, "and above all the general

purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count" (Tree

and Leaf 19). The ideas of both Jung and Eliade, however, provide heuristic value in

that they seem to resonate especially well with Tolkien's assertions on the function of

story or myth. Jung's theory on the role of archetypal symbols and the collective

unconscious seems similar to Tolkien's ideas on the function of the Cauldron of Story.

As well, Jung's assumptions about the dualistic nature of good and evil parallel those of

Tolkien who reveals, in Rings, a similar point of view. Eliade's theories on the function

of origin myths in relation to understanding the present, seem to particularly reinforce

Tolkien's emphasis on Story or myth as significant in this respect. Eliade's hypothesis

on renewal myths also seems to coincide with Tolkien's depiction of the renewal of

Middle Earth following the destruction of Sauron's evil. Furthermore, the theories of

both Jung and Eliade reinforce Tolkien's emphasis on the significance of myths and

stories in linking present consciousness with the unconscious wisdom of the ancients.

And this is a link that also reveals how the symbols and events in these myths and stories

constitute paradigms for human behavior and thus act as prototypes for human

understanding: "when we have explained many of the elements commonly found

embedded in fairy-stories," says Tolkien, "as relics of ancient customs once practiced in

daily life, or as beliefs once held as beliefs and not 'fancies' -- there remains a point too

often forgotten: that is the effect produced *now* by these old things in the stories as they

are" (<u>Tree and Leaf</u> 31).

Tolkien's myth

When Tolkien first conceived of writing Rings he states he did so in response to

the poverty of myths and stories indigenous to his beloved England. He seemed to

lament this poverty, because, in relation to the human experience, it constituted a form of

cultural amnesia. Just as Lara posits the power of Story in constructing truth in a moral

sense, so too does Tolkien argue for a similar form of truth, or wisdom, contained in

myths and legends: "do not despise the lore that has come down from distant years;" he

has Celeborn warn Boromir, "for oft it may chance that old wives keep in memory word

of things that once were needful for the wise to know" (The Fellowship of the Ring 354).

Humankind, Tolkien observes, sits "chained in material cause and effect" and no longer

thinks in mythic terms, and this dissociation between the material and the mythical

deprives folk of a most valuable form of knowing (Carpenter 100). Myths and fairy-

stories preserve, or are repositories of ancient wisdom, he argues, that continually speak

through the ages of issues pertinent to the human condition: "they open a door on Other

Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time,

outside Time itself, maybe" (Tree and Leaf 32). In other words, the myth enables a

connection with the timeless truths of antiquity. In his discussion on the role of myth and

ritual in primitive societies, Mircea Eliade refers to this process as "living" a myth, and

states that when the "protagonists of the myth are made present, one becomes their

contemporary," which "implies that one is no longer living in chronological time, but in

the primordial Time, the Time when the event *first took place*" (Myth and Reality 19).

This process also implies that in living the myth, one gains insight into the knowledge or

wisdom imparted through its symbols. Thus, the ability to experience the myth confers the timeless wisdom, or truth, it contains.

The truths experienced through myth are not intellectually inspired, the result of inwardly reflective ideology, but rather, stem from symbols that express the way the human psyche experiences the world. Eliade states that in archaic societies, myths preserve, symbolically, *"true history,"* that is, "the history of the human condition" (Myths, Rites, Symbols 255). As such, myths not only embody the values and traditions of a particular society, they constitute "the paradigms for all significant human acts" (Reality 19). Myths achieve this function by informing folk of the "primordial 'stories'" that constitute their existential foundations. In providing these models for human behaviour, myths also, by virtue of their repetition and symbolic representation of the supernatural, orient human consciousness toward a transcendent "other" world: a dimension that suggests not only permanence and continuity, but confers meaning and purpose to existence: "myths reveal that the World, man, and life have a supernatural origin and history, and that this history is significant, precious, and exemplary" (19). And whereas modern humankind considers itself constituted by a linear aggregate of human history, that is, the history of verifiable technological achievements, the so-called primitive societies regard themselves as constituted solely by myth. Furthermore, mythical events have profound socio-religious importance in that they provide the founding premise upon which all aspects of existence are predicated. Without myths, a society not only lacks a sense of cultural identity and wisdom, but also has no way to recognize or react to issues of existential import. This lack of myth also means that the members of this society do not have the opportunity to develop perspective on life's

meaning. So, when Tolkien bemoans the dearth of such myths in English culture, he iterates this archaic understanding of myths as powerful arbiters of reality, and infers that their absence represents a serious detriment to understanding the present – most particularly in understanding the role of evil in the world.

Through the creation of Rings, Tolkien hoped to illustrate not only what he saw as humankind's unwitting predisposition to evil, but also what he perceived as the demonic inspiration associated with the creations of science and technology: "the tragedy and despair of all machinery" he observed, is that ultimately this predilection for evil in humankind, or the "Fall," means that the invention of any machine is no more than an attempt to "actualize desire, and so to create power in this world," and consequently, the "devices not only fail of their desire but turn to new and horrible evil" (Carpenter 87- 88). The seductive nature of power, Tolkien argued, causes the creators of machines to lose an appreciation for their place in the grand scheme of things, and to "rebel against the laws of the Creator – especially against mortality" (145). Moreover, Tolkien found appalling the unrecognized, corrupting influence of this creative power; for it seduces humankind into foregoing the development of "inherent inner powers or talents" through the illusion that the impressive efficiency of such sub-creations constitute the totality of desire and purpose. In addition, he despaired of "the corruptive motive of dominating" that results from this power, and that consequently transforms an originally good intent into "frightful evil" (145-146). Like Jung, who argued that the scientific mind, which "is ceaselessly employed in stripping experience of everything subjective," has become so materialistic that "we have become rich in knowledge but poor in wisdom" (Segal 118), Tolkien argues that greater technological achievements do not lead to greater wisdom. In

fact, Tolkien seems to suggest an inverse relationship between knowledge and wisdom. Technological advances may equate with an increase in knowledge, he implies, but they do not automatically confer greater insight: "[h]ow could a maker of motorbikes name his product Ixion cycles!" he exclaims, when Ixion was "bound forever in hell on a perpetually revolving wheel!" (Carpenter 88). Thus far, all that these advances have produced is an unrecognized potential for greater evil. We have come from "Daedalus and Icarus to the Giant Bomber," Tolkien points out, but we have learned nothing: "[e]ven if people have ever heard the legends (which is getting rarer) they have no inkling of their portent" (88).

In The Fellowship of the Ring, Tolkien demonstrates how this disjunction between knowledge and wisdom works to the detriment of society when the myths no longer hold sway. Rumours of Sauron's increasing power had reached the Shire, but because of their disinterest in the stories of old, most of the Hobbits, as Ted Sandyman illustrates, ignore the portent of these new tales, and scoff at the increasing reports of dark and terrible creatures seen lurking beyond the borders:

> "'Queer things you do hear these days, to be sure,' said Sam.
>
> Ah,' said Ted, 'you do, if you listen. But I can hear fireside-tales and children's stories at home, if I want to.'
>
> 'No doubt you can,' retorted Sam, 'and I daresay there's more truth in some of them than you reckon. Who invented the stories anyway? Take dragons now.'
>
> 'No thank 'ee,' said Ted, 'I won't. I heard tell of them when I was a youngster, but there's no call to believe in them now.'" (51)

Ted's refusal to acknowledge the stories reveals the dynamic behind the failure of the old myths to find explanatory power in the modern world: they do not appear to have any relevance. But through Ted Sandyman's response, Tolkien illustrates how the failure to value the stories of old, especially in relation to the present, results in a loss of appreciation for the power of evil:

> ""It would be a grevous blow to the world, if the Dark Power overcame the Shire; if all your kind, jolly, stupid Bolgers, Hornblowers, Boffins, Bracegirdles, and the rest, not to mention the ridiculous Bagginses, became enslaved.' Frodo shuddered. 'But why should we be?' he asked. 'And why should [Sauron] want such slaves?'" (Fellowship 55)

In his ignorance, Frodo cannot even imagine the single-minded malevolence that drives evil and so Gandalf's observation makes no sense to him.

As Tolkien's example illustrates, without the preserved and repeated memories of the myths and stories to remind us of this potential for evil, we seem doomed to repeat the tragedies of history; but, concomitant with Tolkien's belief that myths continue to have a role in contemporary society, Eliade also maintains that this ancient form of knowing has not dissipated with the civilizing of the ancient cultures; it remains a functional, albeit latent force in the contemporary psyche. Despite the patina of scientific reasoning that dictates our modern vision of reality, and despite the consequent assumption that all myths are lies, Eliade states that these ancient forms of knowing persist, buried in the deepest reaches of our subconscious psyche: the symbols of myth continue to manifest themselves, he says, even in the superficiality of our desacralized world, through dreams, and the imagination: "if the gods no longer appear under their

real names in the tales, their outlines can still be distinguished in the figures of the hero's protectors, enemies, and companions. They are camouflaged – or, if you will, 'fallen' – but they continue to perform their function" (Reality 200). Just as Tolkien seems to believe, Eliade argues for a form of truth that continues to make itself available through myths, and that asserts itself, even though the modern psyche no longer realizes its value.

To re-orient the English psyche to the possibilities inherent in these ancient structures, Tolkien conceptualized a story of mythic proportions: an "heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history" in the grand style of those myths and legends extant in Greek, Celtic, Scandinavian, Germanic and Finnish narratives that would articulate not only the intimate bond between "tongue and soil," but also the particular "tone and quality" of what it means to be English (Carpenter 144). These characteristics he would place within a fabric of tales interwoven with both the cool, clear landscape of Britain and Northwestern Europe, and the "fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic" (144). In other words, Tolkien sought to capture the soul of England. Although Tolkien felt he was being perhaps a little presumptuous in the scope of his vision, the complexity of his idea demonstrates an understanding that the power of myth lies not only in its ability to tell a good tale, or in its ability to rehash standard historical facts, but in its capacity to express certain fundamental truths relevant to the individual in the context of his or her culture. And the emphasis on the specific location reiterates the precept that relevance and meaning obtain partially from the myth being properly naturalized to the culture it addresses.

By weaving the characteristics of this landscape into a tale of fantastical proportions, however, Tolkien invokes another aspect of myth that confers meaning.

Concomitant with the consciously conceived aspects of this story, Tolkien describes the influence of an unconsciously generated element that lifts the narrative out of the realm of a regular tale into that of the numinous: this element he terms "Faërie." Fairy-stories are a universal phenomenon in every culture where there is language, says Tolkien, and from ancient times until the present, the elements of Faërie can be found woven throughout the folk-lore and fairy-stories that constitute humankind's "intricate web of Story" (Tree and Leaf 21). As an unconscious product of the human imagination, Faërie spontaneously and subtly insinuates itself into a story line at the moment the author begins to sub-create: when the human mind begins to fantasize and create new and fantastical forms from the existent universe (10). Tolkien says that this element, "in its operations" (13), is the art of enchantment "that produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator and can enter," suspend disbelief, and experience the created world as if it were real (53). The success of the Art lies in the ability of the story to satisfy "certain primordial human desires [. . .] to survey the depths of space and time" and "to hold communion with other living things" (13). In other words, Faërie describes the ability of the author to create a believable fantasy. Such a fantasy, as Ursula Le Guin points out, enables the author to address issues of existential or moral importance "not describable in the language of rational daily life," in "the symbolic language of the deeper psyche [. . .] without trivializing them" (65). And by virtue of its spontaneous appearance, Tolkien argues that Faërie, or, as Le Guin would have it, the mythic impulse, speaks the hidden language of the soul.

In discussing the process of creating Rings, Tolkien described an aspect of Faërie that influences the process of sub creation despite the conscious willed intentions of the

author. For, says Tolkien, although he carefully considered every word that went into his manuscript, the individual stories came unbidden, from a seeming unconscious source (Faerie), and that he "had the sense of recording what was already 'there,' somewhere: not of 'inventing'" (Carpenter 145). Tolkien also refers to the unconscious effect of Faërie when he states that he felt he was a "chosen instrument," although not entirely fit "for the purpose," and that he was not the sole author of <u>Rings</u> (413). Tolkien's description of the spontaneous emergence of Faërie in his stories, however, does not imply that <u>Rings</u> is the solely the product unconscious impulses. As one critic observes, Tolkien's ability to construct a credible fantasy draws on not only his immense knowledge of and experience with Anglo-Saxon and Medieval literature, but also from his great and enduring love of myths in general (Echard 1). Like any author, Tolkien's creative possibilities arise out of the gestalt, or sum total of his conscious and unconscious experiences, and so his academic background cannot be discounted (413).

Be that as it may, the unpremeditated appearance of this mythic impulse and the nature of its manifestation, led Tolkien to argue that myths or fairy stories convey certain truths about the culture from which they arise. In fact, he goes even further to imply a link between fairy-story and myth. Each forms and is formed out of the "soup" that constitutes the experiential totality of a culture, and as such, contains and reflects certain elemental truths. In concurrence with the archaic idea of myths as true stories – as not only living repositories of the sacred and historical, but also as powerful determinants of the present and future, Tolkien argues for their continued relevance: " I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were

discovered and must always reappear" (Carpenter 147). Furthermore, he argues for

concurrence between history and myth; for as events and personalities become added to

the soup, "where so many potent things lie simmering agelong on the fire," they

inevitably integrate with the pre-existing, and indeed, ancient contents of the cultural

memory to become part of the totality that forms the "Cauldron of Story" (Tree and Leaf

27). Once integrated, these facts become modified, forgotten or transformed, depending

upon the collective cultural sensibilities, but nonetheless, contribute to the ingredients

that comprise all the possibilities of that culture. What comes out of the "Cauldron" then,

even if in the guise of mythic symbols, or Faërie, symbolizes or reflects the collective

experiences of that culture, and as such can be determined as truth.

In many ways the function of the Cauldron of Story epitomizes what C.G. Jung

describes as the Collective Unconscious, and the potential patterns of experiences

contained there in, the archetypes. Like the integrated ingredients of Tolkien's "soup,"

archetypes are subconscious, living psychic forces: complexes of experiences that

through symbols "bring into our ephemeral consciousness an unknown psychic life

belonging to a remote past. It is the mind of our unknown ancestors, their way of

thinking and feeling, their way of experiencing life and the world, gods and men" (The

Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 286). As such, they form the invisible

foundational matrices of our conscious mind. Furthermore, while the archetypes may be

"indirectly occasioned by consciousness" through symbolic representation, neither the

conscious, rational mind, nor the personal unconscious psychic processes can mediate

their emergence: they arise spontaneously from the consciously inaccessible repository of

primordial and oft-repeated experiences common to all humankind, the Collective Unconscious (Archetypes 4).

If the truths that emerge from the soup, the unconscious psyche, are only partially facilitated by the conscious intellect through symbols or metaphor, how is one to consciously acquire meaning from their presence? As Tolkien observes, "the trouble with the real folk of Faerie is that they do not always look like what they are" (Tree and Leaf 8). The symbols are not the symbolized. Because of their source, they are not allegories or signs of consciously knowable things. Unlike a sign or allegory, which is consciously constructed to denote a specific meaning – a metaphor that personifies an abstract universal, as C.S. Lewis describes it, the meaning of a symbol derives from the unconscious and describes a "transcendental reality which the forms of discursive thought cannot contain" (The Allegory of Love 47). In other words, the symbol is not a conscious construct and so its meaning can only be acquired through the experience it recalls.

Commonly, these symbols express themselves through dreams or fantasies, but according to Jung, myth is the most efficient means of communication: "[m]yth is the primordial language natural to these psychic processes, and no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythical imagery" (Segal 25). However, the manifestation of mythic symbols in a story, although spontaneous, is not arbitrary. Myths do not unintentionally disclose the contents of the unconscious. So the unpremeditated emergence of mythic symbols not only suggests that the storyteller has tapped into and made manifest images from a pre-existent body of mythic material, the archetypes, but also that the symbols arise in response to an unconscious urge for

understanding. As Joseph Campbell explains, "[t]he symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source" (The Hero With a Thousand Faces 4).

The myth then, is the vehicle through which the archetypes find expression, and the mythmaker, advertently or inadvertently, acts as a conduit for their symbolic representation. Myths commonly contain the symbols of many archetypes, but usually one predominates and provides the framework within which it may become manifest, and through which it may develop the full extent of its mythic potential (Segal 43). In Rings, the heroic journey, or quest, provides the archetypal framework upon which Tolkien builds his story, and through the interaction of this motif with its attendant archetypal images -- Frodo and Samwise, the protagonists who symbolize the archetype of the sub-hero; Gandalf, the Merlinesque 'wise old man' figure; or Aragorn, the warrior king, to name a few; constructs a storyline through which to present the metaphysical concepts of good and evil as tangible, recognizable realities.

Good and Evil in Tolkien's Myth

The heroic quest is an ancient and universal construct and there are many culturally determined variations of the form, but almost invariably the emergence of the hero in myth or story occurs in times of crisis and reflects, as Jung says, human need – a need for understanding or resolution. For Tolkien, such a need sprang from a deep urge to rationalize the evil behind the misery, "the torture, pain, death, bereavement, injustice," and the "staggering" and "utter stupid" spiritual, moral and material waste perpetrated by the two World Wars (Carpenter 75-76). Accordingly, he sets Rings in the fictional Middle Earth where a rising menace of evil threatens to engulf the free world as Sauron, the previously defeated evil agent of Morgoth, rebuilds his power and seeks to regain possession of the One Ring – the evil Ring of Power forged within the Elven halls of Eregion that would confer absolute autocracy over good and permit the enslavement and destruction of all the lands and people of Middle Earth. As this plot, and as many other heroic myths attest, the heroic journey involves conflict -- a battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. And although such a confrontation takes place, ultimately, to bring some form of salvation to the hero's community, the defining moment comes when this figure, who "bears the possibilities of life, courage, love – the commonplaces, the indefinables which themselves define our human lives," overcomes the often overwhelming odds to effect change in the world (Butler 6).

By utilizing this motif, Tolkien brings into play a time-honoured pattern of conflict extant in several Indo-European mythic traditions. Geoffrey Burton Russell points out that religions such as Islam and Christianity, which recognize good and evil as valid organizing factors of the moral universe, understand them to be conflicting forces: a

"coincidence of opposites" (7). In this capacity, as in Rings, evil, which is almost always associated with "[b]lackness and "darkness," fear, corruption, death and destruction, is often portrayed in conflict, or at war with good: the force of "whiteness and light" (10). And the tension between them issues from the desire of evil to dominate: to corrupt the goodness of god's creation and thus to rule in its own right. In keeping with this concept, and in a manner that recalls the antagonistic relationship between Satan and God in the New Testament, where "The Lord is creator of all things and guarantor of their goodness," but where "Satan and his kingdom have twisted and corrupted this world," Tolkien portrays evil in Middle Earth as hostile to or a negation of all that is good (49).

There are many forms of good in Middle Earth, but the most evident is that epitomized by the Elves. Antithetical to the morbid nature of the Dark Lord, the Elves are beings of Light: they 'shimmer' and 'glimmer' as they walk in the night, and they have, as Pippin recalls, an inner radiance (The Fellowship of the Rings 86). Glorfindel, the Elf Lord who appears at the Ford of Rivendell to turn back the Black Riders, in his wrath reveals himself like an avenging angel shimmering with power, "a shining figure of white light" (Fellowship 209). And Galadriel, who is arguably the most powerful of the Elves in the fight against the resurgence of Sauron's evil, is "a typical mythic Elf-queen": she is "tall, noble and fair"; her clothing is white and her hair golden – "a colour rare among Elves" (Noel 118). There is, as well, an otherworldly, almost numinous quality to these folk, as Frodo observes upon meeting Celeborn and Galadriel for the first time:

> Very tall they were, and the lady no less tall than the Lord; and they were
>
> grave and beautiful. They were clad wholly in white; and the hair of the
>
> Lady was of deep gold, and the hair of the Lord Celeborn was of silver

long and bright; but no sign of age was upon them, unless it were in the

depths of their eyes; for these were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet

profound, the wells of deep memory.

(<u>Fellowship</u> 336).

In this respect Tolkien seems to draw on the mythic images of the Teutonic and Celtic

Elves to whom the ancient myths consistently ascribe "[w]hiteness and brightness" (Noel

114). "In the Teutonic languages," says Noel, "Elf, Alf, Alp, and Albs are words for

Elves, related to the Latin *albus* ("white")" (114). Furthermore, like the Irish Sidhe and

the Teutonic Light Elves, the Elves of Rivendell and Lothlorien are also immortals, tall,

with an ethereal beauty that transcends that of humankind, and they possess "unearthly

powers" such as magic and foresight (113).

Tolkien's elves derive their luminosity from starlight, and through this association

Noel speculates that Tolkien not only utilizes the Teutonic belief that "stars were jewels

in the sky," but also the belief that the "ancient symbolism of the star [is a] token of hope

and guidance" (118). When Galadriel raises her hand to Eärendel, the Evening Star, and

reveals to Frodo Nenya, the Ring of Adamant, and one of the three Elven Rings of

Power, she draws from just such a symbol. Eärendel is the father of Elros and Elrond,

who was transformed and became a "star in the darkness"; the "looked for that cometh

unawares, the longed for that cometh beyond hope" – the Evening Star (<u>The Silmarillion</u>

248-9). As the rays of Eärendel beam down on Galadriel and cast a shadow only about

her, capturing the light of her ring so that it glitters "like polished gold overlaid with

silver light," and twinkles "as if the Even-star had come down to rest upon her hand,"

they bestow upon her all the possibilities this symbol entails (<u>Fellowship</u> 346). And

while Frodo gazes on this sight, "suddenly it seemed to him he understood" (346): Galadriel's ring contains the "secret power" that "holds evil from the land" (320). When he entered Lorien, Frodo perceived this power as a living force of "power and light" that emanated from "a hill of mighty trees," and that "held all the land in sway" (333). As Galadriel points out to Sam and Frodo, "do not think that only by singing amid the trees, nor even by slender arrows of elven-bows is this land of Lothlorien maintained and defended against its enemies" (346).

Furthermore, just as her ring symbolizes hope, Galadriel confers the promise of hope for the future through the gifts she bestows on the Company of the Ring as they depart from Lothlorien. While each in its way has significance in relation to the quest, those gifts she gives Aragorn, Sam, Frodo and Gimli seem to be especially important. To Sam, the "little gardener and lover of trees," she gives a small box of elven earth (Fellowship 356). This gift promises the hope of renewal and regrowth of the natural world even should Sauron render the land "barren and laid waste" (356). To Frodo she gives a small crystal phial of light from Eärendel's star that, in Sam's hands not only ultimately saves Frodo's life, but gives Sam sufficient hope to continue on to Mount Doom in the face of Frodo's presumed death. Gimli, who receives only a lock of Galadriel's hair, symbolically receives the gift of love, and with it, the knowledge of a love and acceptance that transcends mortal understanding: "[t]orment in the dark was the danger that I feared," Gimli explains to Legolas, "and it did not hold me back. But I would not have come, had I know (sic) the danger of light and joy" (358). To Aragorn though, Galadriel gives several tokens, all of which suggest hope for Middle Earth in the coming Fourth Age of Man, and that foreshadow Aragorn's destiny as king: the first gift

is the sheath that was made to fit Elendil's reforged 'Sword-that-was-Broken,' and from which "the blade that is drawn [. . .] shall not be stained or broken even in defeat" (355). Symbolically, says Verlyn Flieger, this association between Aragorn and the sword draws from a motif common in myths and legends that not only denotes the emergence of a hero, but also links the fate of that hero with his sword (47). Secondly, Galadriel bestows the clear, green "Elfstone of the House of Elendil," and, as she does so, bids Aragorn to "take the name that was foretold for [him], Elessar": the name out of the legends that foretells the future king of Gondor (355). As Aragorn accepts these gifts, "those who saw him wondered; for they had not marked before how tall and kingly he stood" (355). Cognizant of the waning power of the Elves in Middle Earth, Galadriel symbolically passes the elven symbols of hope to those who will succeed them.

According to Ruth Noel, Galadriel's gift giving aligns her with the Teutonic white women. Like Galadriel, these women traditionally gave gifts that at first seemed insignificant, but that ultimately proved to be of great importance (119). But although Noel finds many parallels between Galadriel and these women, Galadriel's description also brings to mind the powerful Celtic goddess Arianrhod, also a White Woman. Arianrhod was the goddess mother of the Celts and the keeper of the endlessly circling Silver Wheel of the Stars, the Milky Way. Caer Arianrhod, the name given to the Corona Borealis, is said to be her home, and she is associated with Caer Sidi, the Tower of Initiation where poets and bards went to learn the wisdom of the stars; it is also said to be where the dead went to be replenished before rebirth. Symbolically, these aspects of Arianrhod are significant, because, as in the myths, the Company of the Ring not only seek the wisdom of both Elrond and Galadriel to assist them in their quest, but their

sojourns with the Elves represent a kind of restoration or renewal of both body and spirit: "[a]ll the while that they dwelt there the sun shone clear, save for a gentle rain that fell at times, and passed away leaving all things fresh and clean . . . It seemed to them they did little but eat and drink and rest, and walk among the trees; and it was enough" (340).

But as the Company heals, and becomes restless to move on, Frodo's expressed desire to see Galadriel before they depart brings forth the Lady in her capacity as Wise Woman. In appearing only when Frodo calls, Galadriel reveals that goodness is not an impositional force; for despite her great depth of wisdom, she does tender her knowledge before being petitioned, and therefore does not guide through coercion or domination. She knows that the Company entered Lothlorien in order to seek healing and advice for their journey, but not until Frodo voices his longing to see her does Galadriel come forward with her Mirror to provide counsel. As Gildor cautioned Frodo in the woods near Woodhall, "advice is a dangerous gift, even from the wise to the wise, and all courses may run ill" (Fellowship 87). Accordingly, while Galadriel invites both Sam and Frodo to look into the Mirror, she does not insist, neither does she offer an interpretation of the visions obtained: "I will not give you counsel, saying do this or do that," she warns, "for not in doing or contriving, nor in choosing between this course and another, can I avail; but only in knowing what was and is, and in part also what shall be" (339). Although the visions from her mirror are ambiguous to the extent that they derive from the past and the present, and draw from the future, they provide the possibilities from which the hobbits must decide their own course of action. As Richard Purtill points out, through Galadriel's mirror "Frodo and Sam each find an understanding of themselves through what they choose to ask and see" (2). In other words, Galadriel presents no more

than the possibilities determined by the needs of the individual. Galadriel's power is not divine, and she will not impose her will by offering explanations of the visions, neither will she make predictions where other wills are concerned; it is up to Sam and Frodo to interpret and act upon the information given. Purtill further observes that when the Company first meets with Galadriel, and she looks into their minds to test them by offering alternatives to their quest, the only person who does not see her as offering choices, but attempting to influence them instead, is Boromir. His suspicion and subsequent fall into temptation demonstrate how even the smallest taint of evil may pervert the perception of good to achieve a negative outcome (Fellowship 83).

Galadriel's ring reveals that a good deal of the power the Elves wield derives directly from the power of all three Elven Rings. Forged at the same time as the One Ring, into which Sauron poured a significant portion of his evil power, and indelibly linked to it by virtue of this origin, the power of the Elven Rings not only pertains to the "prevention and slowing of *decay*," a virtue of *all* the Rings of Power (Carpenter 152), but also lies in their affirmation of life and goodness: "they were not made as weapons of war or conquest: that is not their power," explains Elrond, "[t]hose who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making and healing, to preserve all things unstained" (Fellowship 257). But while the Company of the Ring received healing and advice from the Elves in both Rivendell and Lothlorien, such care is not given without due consideration, and does not generally extend to those outside the Elven kingdoms. The main focus of the Elves' work seems specifically related to their great love for the natural world: "[t]he love of the Elves for their land and their works is deeper than the deeps of the Sea," (346) Galadriel tells Frodo, and as she

presents the gift of earth to Sam at the departure of the Company from Lothlorien, she

reveals that her name is synonymous with "garden" (356). This love of nature does not

imply the wish to exploit or achieve power over the physical world, but simply to elicit

the best possible outcome from its natural tendencies: a fact that manifests itself through

the lush richness of the countryside in the Land of Lorien where "no blemish or sickness

or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth" (332). And so sufficient

is its tranquility and beauty that Sam exclaims he feels as if he is "*inside* a song" (332).

What the Elves do and how they do it is not always obvious though. The subtle

nature of their influence makes their kind of good seem an inert quality: while creative, it

is not active in the destructive way of evil that works from a position of control. Their

industry is non-intrusive and appears to succeed through enabling rather than through

domination: "you can't see nobody working it," says Sam (Fellowship 342). Thus, the

regenerative skills of the Elves seem an integral part of nature evoked by the power of the

Three Rings. This power simply seems to weave its way seamlessly through the natural

landscape to form part of the natural life force: "[w]hether they've made the land, or the

land's made them, it's hard to say, if you take my meaning," explains Sam, "it's

wonderfully quiet here. Nothing seems to be going on, and nobody seems to want it to.

If there's any magic about it, it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hands on it"

(342). Nonetheless, as Frodo points out, in the "wholesome peace" of Rivendell and the

Golden Woods of Lothlorien "You can see and feel it everywhere" (342). Through these

images Tolkien articulates good as an unobtrusive force that, as the journey into

Lothlorien, and its secluded geographical location suggest, one must actively search out.

The sense that the Elves remain inert, suspended in a seemingly inactive world, derives partly from the fact that they, like the Celtic Sidhe, live in a land that transcends, or exists outside linear time (Noel 115). As if walking into a living myth, the moment Frodo "set foot upon the far bank of Silverlode a strange feeling" settled on him that "deepened as he walked on into the Naith: it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more" (Fellowship 331). To a mortal like Frodo, time in Lothlorien seems suspended between the certainty of the linear progression of time in the world outside, and the sort of time that seems to fold back on itself, maintaining all things as simultaneous occurrences, within. Lothlorien seems a "timeless land that did not fade or change or fall into forgetfulness. When he had gone and passed again into the outer world, still Frodo, the wanderer from the Shire would walk there" (333). As Jung argued, and as Tolkien implies, mythic time incorporates all time, both past and present, and within it all things merge into the present. So in contradiction to the linear time of mortals, who are subject to the cycles of decay typical of time that "flows through the mortal lands" (368) outside Lothlorien, things within endure *in perpetuum*: as Bilbo points out, time does not seem to pass in the Elven lands, it just is (222).

The juxtaposition of time that passes and time that "just is" articulates a peculiar aspect of time in Middle Earth. While seemingly distinct within and without Lothlorien, time exists in both places simultaneously as both possibilities. Things within Lothlorien, as Frodo observes, exist outside linear time, and yet by virtue of its location, contained as a small isolated pocket within Middle Earth, Lothlorien is very much inside time as well. Tolkien equates the time that passes outside Lothlorien with a progression of things

constantly moving toward extinction -- activity and decay (evil, mortality). But time that "is" within Lothlorien exists as a continuum in which there is no distinction between past, present and future; it holds all things suspended in a state of continual parturience (good, immortality). Therefore the same contiguity can be applied to good and evil: "in this high place," Haldir points out to Frodo as they look east from Cerin Amroth, "you may see the two powers that are opposed to one another; and ever they strive now in thought" (Fellowship 333). Good and evil, like the two perceptions of time, exist simultaneously, yet the existence of one can only be perceived by virtue of the other. And the tension generated by this concurrent relationship suggests two things: that good and evil constantly struggle against each other for supremacy, and that the manifestation of a particular good is a direct consequence of the simultaneous manifestation of its contingent opposite. Here, Tolkien's presentation of good and evil seems consistent with Carl Jung's observation that these qualities represent "opposite poles of a moral judgment," and as a consequence, "judgment can be made about a thing only if its opposite is equally real and possible" (Mythology 51).

The Elves do not constitute the totality of righteousness in Middle Earth, however, for the motif of light and whiteness as symbols of good extend to other characters who similarly strive against the evil of Sauron: Gandalf, the Grey Pilgrim, emissary to the Valar and sent to Middle Earth to assist the in the battle against Sauron, initially appears as the 'Wise Old Man' who counsels Frodo prior to his quest. But after Gandalf's resurrection following his mortal struggle with the evil Balrog, he makes a return as Mithrandir the battle-ready White Rider whose coming strikes such terror into the hearts of Saruman's evil army that they flee with madness (The Two Towers 128). In

the same battle, Théoden, King of the Mark, appears helmed in gold and mounted on a horse "white as snow" (127). And the wizard Saruman, as head of the White Council, was known, before his complete fall into evil, as Saruman the White.

In keeping with the traditional dualistic concepts of good and evil that Russell describes, and in contrast to this whiteness and light of good, Tolkien presents the agents of evil as dark or shadowy beings: Sauron is the "Dark Lord" and his reach a "black shadow" that "gropes" ever to find the Ring (Fellowship 380); the Ringwraiths, or Black Riders, are so black that they seem "like black holes in the deep shade" of night (Fellowship 191); the Orcs, in their various forms, come clad in black mail from head to foot and are large, yellow-fanged, evil smelling, "grim," "swart" and "dark" (Towers 43). The evil Balrog that bore Gandalf away down into the depths of Moria is a remnant of the evil of the First Age, and appears as "a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, man shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it" (Fellowship 313). While Gollum, who fell to the Dark Lord while bearing the One Ring looks like a black "prowling insect" with "two pale gleaming lights" for eyes (Towers 192). Shelob, the malevolent, giant spider-like creature who lives in the dark holes of Cirith Ungol has a great black 'loathly' bulk: she weaves "webs of shadow; for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness" (Towers 296). She is, says Tolkien, "the offspring of Ungoliante, the primal devourer of light, that in spider form assisted the Dark Power" (Carpenter 180). And the preference of these creatures for darkness distinguishes them from the good: "it is the mark of evil things that came in the Great Darkness that they cannot abide the Sun," Treebeard tells Merry and Pippin, although some, like Saruman's hybrid orcs, "endure it, even if they hate it" (Towers 66).

An aversion to light though, is also symbolically an aversion to life, the truth of which can be seen in the landscape and in the people who come under Sauron's influence.

As the antithesis of good, which nurtures life, wherever evil prevails the natural cycles of life cease. Because the Dark Lord symbolizes the negation of all positive aspects of light, goodness and life, his attempts to create amount to no more than a negation of the creative urge, so, when he asserts his influence, the result is always destruction or desecration. The natural rhythms and flow of nature dwindle to nothingness under evil's destructive force until at last the defilement perpetrated on the land destroys all semblance of life. For example, when the company of the Ring leave Rivendell and travel south, Aragorn notices the first stages of evil's blight: "[n]o folk dwell here now," he explains, "but many other creatures live here at all times, especially birds. Yet now all things but you are silent. I can feel it. There is no sound for miles about us, and your voices seem to make the ground echo [. . .]. I have a sense of watchfulness, and of fear, that I have never had here before" (Fellowship 271). The landscape appears much as it was, but no life remains. When evil becomes active in the land, however, particularly as it asserts itself through technology, this position of malevolent abeyance disintegrates into downright destruction.

At Isengard, Saruman's stronghold, the transformation of the landscape that occurs in concert with his fall into evil reflects this dynamic:

> Shafts were driven deep into the ground; their upper ends were covered by low mounds and domes of stone, so that in the moonlight the ring of Isengard looked like a graveyard of unquiet dead. For the ground trembled. The shafts ran down by many slopes and spiral stairs to caverns

far under; there Saruman had treasuries, storehouses, armouries, smithies

and great furnaces. Iron wheels revolved there endlessly, and hammers

thudded. At night plumes of vapour steamed from the vents, lit from

beneath with red light, or blue, or venomous green. (140)

This sheltered valley that had once "been fair and green," a fertile, productive land, now

"reeks," and so despoiled is its landscape by the constant need to fuel the fires of

Saruman's industry, that where once there had been "groves of fruitful trees," all that

remains "among the rank grasses" are "the burned and axe-hewn stumps of ancient

groves. It was a sad country, silent now but for the stony noise of quick waters. Smokes

and steams drifted in sullen clouds and lurked in the hollows" (Towers 139). The glory

that was once Isengard is now a wasteland transformed by Saruman's creative desires.

Even though water, the liquor of life, still flows in the land, it nurtures nothing except a

"wilderness of weeds and thorns" and the tilled patches of Saruman's slaves (139).

Under the continued influence of evil, eventually, as Sam's description of Mordor attests,

the land becomes hostile, barren, empty and dark: a negation of life.

Whereas the husbandry of the Elves maintains Lothlorien as an enclave of

growth and fertility, through the eyes of Sam and Frodo, Tolkien presents Sauron's Land

of Shadow, Mordor, as a complete negation of this aspect of good; it is country

permanently destroyed or blighted by the negative influence of evil:

Here nothing lived, not even the leprous growths that fed on rottenness.

The gasping pools were choked with ash and crawling muds, sickly white

and grey, as if the mountains had vomited the filth of their entrails upon

the lands about. High mounds of crushed and powdered rock, great cones

of earth fire-blasted and poison-stained, stood like an obscene graveyard in endless rows, slowly revealed in the reluctant light. They had come to the desolation that lay before Mordor: the lasting monument to the dark labour of its slaves that should endure when all their purposes were made void; a land defiled, diseased beyond all healing. (Towers 209)

Mordor, says Sam, is "cruel and bitter," its cliffs and ridges "edged notched and jagged with crags like fangs" that stand out "black against the red light behind them" (The Return of the King 153). Moreover, the landscape about Mount Doom seems "drenched with blood," and appears "like twisted dragon shapes vomited from the tormented earth" (153). As Sauron's power increases and the threat of war looms, the negative force of evil concomitantly manifests itself as a great black cloud that gathers in Mordor and creeps out across the sky to engulf all forms of light in its path:

Merry looked outside. The world was darkling. The very air seemed brown, and all things about were black and grey and shadowless; there was a great stillness. No shape of cloud could be seen, unless it were far away westward, where the furthest groping fingers of the great gloom still crawled onwards and a little light seeped through them. Overhead there hung a heavy roof, somber and featureless, and light seemed rather to be failing than growing. (65)

As the Dark Lord extends himself beyond the borders of Mordor, the symbol of goodness, light, becomes obliterated or negated under the weight of his influence.

A similar form of negation can be seen in the way evil influences people. Once Boromir, son of Denethor and a Prince of Men understood Frodo to possess the evil One

Ring, he vigorously sought to obtain it. Unlike the Elves and wizards whose wisdom and courage Boromir questions, the Ring, he tells Frodo, will not corrupt "True-hearted Men" (Fellowship 377). Such is his sense of superiority that Boromir reasons the Ring would give him "strength in a just cause": the power to draw together an army sufficient to defeat Sauron's forces (377). But his motive, although toward a good end, is for pure power: "[t]he Ring would give me Power of Command," he cries, "[h]ow I would drive the hosts of Mordor, and all men would flock to my banner!" (377). In his desire to achieve political advantage Boromir refuses to heed the warning given at the Council of Elrond that evil cannot be used to combat evil. In his single-minded desire to control the power of the Ring, Boromir convinces himself that a thing of such pure evil could be used to achieve good. When Frodo thwarts his desire, however, the taint of the Dark Lord wrests Boromir's mind into anger, doubt and negativity so that despite his best intentions, evil asserts its destructive influence: "[m]iserable trickster!" he shouts at Frodo, "[n]ow I see your mind. You will take the Ring to Sauron and sell us all. You have only waited your chance to leave us in the lurch. Curse you and all halflings to death and darkness!" (378). With these words Boromir not only negates life and love and destroys the bond of trust that existed between them, but he also reveals the face of evil that conquers by division: "indeed," remarks Haldir in a manner that foretells the rift between Frodo and Boromir, "in nothing is the power of the dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him" (330).

Sauron not only prevails through isolation and division. As the Lady Galadriel intimates, he also overcomes his victims through despair. Denethor, able Steward of Gondor, whom Sauron manipulated through the Palantir, the "seeing stone," unwittingly

performs Sauron's will when out of despair he seeks death for both himself and his only remaining son, Faramir. Long driven to suspicion, fear and despair through Sauron's deceptions, Denethor no longer finds hope a condition of life. When the Palantir appears to predict the fall of Gondor to the hoards of Mordor, Denethor asserts his will, the mark of a free man, but makes the choice of evil: death. He calls for a funeral pyre for himself and Faramir – a living sacrifice to the Dark Lord: "[b]etter to burn sooner than late," he says, "for burn we must" (Return 86). In a negation of all that his life has meant up until this point he cries, "[w]e will burn like heathen kings before ever a ship sailed hither from the West. The West has failed!" (87). Gandalf points out, however, that the heathen kings performed such acts under the "domination of the Dark Power" out of pride and despair, "murdering their own kin to ease their own death" (115). This is a selfish act that reveals evil capable of no more than self-gratification. Denethor's urge to retain control and subvert Sauron's influence by determining the moment of his death, an apparent act of free will, ironically becomes no more than an expression of Sauron's intent: the denial of life.

As these previous examples show, pride and the desire for power and control (for whatever reason) precipitate evil, but Saruman's fall reveals how subtle and seamless is the transition between a good intention and an evil act when these characteristics assert themselves. Saruman is equal to Gandalf in that he is of the Order of the Istari, Wizards and emissaries of the Valar, who were sent to Middle Earth to assist the inhabitants in their fight against Sauron. As such, Saruman is also leader of the White Council and thus representative of all that is good; but through his desire for knowledge and his love of technology becomes seduced and thus enslaved by the Dark Lord: "[t]he time of the

Elves is over," he tells Gandalf, "but our time is at hand: the world of Men, which we must rule. But we must have power, power to order all things as we will, for that good which only the Wise can see" (Fellowship 248). Saruman's rationalization of the means to that power, however, reveals just how lost he has become in relation to the precepts of Good. For, Saruman points out, while deplorable evils may occur in the process of gaining power, the ultimate goal of "Knowledge, Rule, Order; all things that we have striven so far in vain to accomplish," justifies the measures required to achieve this power (249).

In this respect Saruman makes the mistake of confusing utility, or usefulness, with morality – with the idea that a thing is good if it benefits the greatest number of people. But the flaw with this reasoning, with equating human happiness or morality with usefulness, says David Deutsch, is that the decision as to what is good still relies upon individual judgment (361). Despite all efforts to achieve objectivity, the individual's wants and needs, that is, desires, influence such judgments. So if the determination of what is useful or moral relies on individual interpretation, then the reasoning of those who make the decisions is suspect: *"we choose our preferences,"* says Deutsch, "[i]n particular, we *change* our preferences, and we give moral explanations for doing so" (361). As Saruman confirms, reasoning that relies on individual interpretation, which is subject to desire, is no basis for determining what is right or moral for others.

Accordingly, in describing the new "world of Men" in relation to power, and in stating that this power is necessary "to order all things as we will," Saruman exposes his vision of this new order as one ruled by domination. The sense of superiority and pride – delusions of grandeur— that result from his great gain in knowledge not only dominate

Saruman's imagination, but subjugate his vast wisdom so that he now scorns the White

Council as "weak or idle," and calls a "hindrance" all their efforts to date against the

Dark Lord (Fellowship 249): "I am Saruman, the Wise," he cries, "Saruman Ring-

maker!" (248). In his arrogance he does not see the irony, or the danger of his statement.

Tom Shippey observes that the equivocal language Saruman uses during this

exchange with Gandalf exposes him as a consummate politician: always hedging his bets

to favour the winning side (J.R.R.Tolkien 75). Saruman tells Gandalf that their future

lies in joining with the new rising power in Middle Earth, Sauron, for in that course lies

not only wisdom and hope, but also rich rewards (Fellowship 249). But when Gandalf

rebuffs Saruman's suggestion, Saruman simply switches tactics and suggests they join

forces to betray Sauron and become the new power instead: "if we could command [the

Ruling Ring] then power would pass to *us*," urges Saruman, "[t]hat is in truth why I

brought you here" (249). Saruman's attempt to coerce Gandalf into revealing the

location of the One Ring does no more than expose his desire for autocratic rule: "only

one hand at a time can wield the One," says Gandalf, "so do not trouble to say *we*" (249).

Saruman's powers of persuasion have no effect on Gandalf, who retorts that the only time

he has heard speech such as Saruman's before is out of the "mouths of emissaries sent

from Mordor to deceive the ignorant" (249). But while lost on Gandalf, Saruman's skills

in oratory are a real threat to others.

Following the overthrow of Isengard, as Gandalf, Théoden and company

approach Saruman's stronghold, Orthanc, Gandalf warns his company to beware of

Saruman's voice because of his ability to seduce and flatter:

> Suddenly another voice spoke, low and melodious, its very sound an

> enchantment. Those who listened unwarily to that voice could seldom report the words that they heard; and if they did, they wondered, for little power remained in them. Mostly they remembered only that it was a delight to hear the voice speaking, all that it said seemed wise and reasonable, and desire awoke in them by swift agreement to seem wise themselves. (<u>Towers</u> 162)

A talent of evil, apparently, is its persuasive, eloquent rhetoric, and its power lies not so much in what it says, but the manner in which it speaks. For this reason Tom Shippey remarks that Saruman "is the most contemporary figure in Middle Earth, both politically and linguistically," because he reflects so well what Tolkien's contemporary, George Orwell, was to describe as "doublethink" (<u>Tolkien</u> 76).

But Saruman's persuasive voice is also the voice of technology. The rhetoric -- the double-speak and the grandiose promises that so mimic those of Feverstone's justification of the biochemically manipulated "new" human of C.S.Lewis' <u>That Hideous Strength</u>, articulate the mesmerizing power of its influence. And Saruman's bewitching tones symbolize the seductiveness of the products of technology that Tolkien believed corrupted or perverted the course of good in the world. So convincing is this voice, and so articulate is its reasoning that even though Saruman speaks from the defeated ruins of his stronghold, the voice continues to hold power and enchant those who hear it: "I would save you, and deliver you from the ruin that draws nigh inevitably," Sauron tells Théoden, "[i]ndeed I alone can aid you now" (<u>Towers</u> 162). As Gandalf explains to Treebeard, the voice is all the more persuasive because it works by exploiting weakness: "the soft spot in your heart" (<u>Return</u> 228). That Gandalf does not intervene, even when

Théoden appears lost in the thrall of Saruman's words, again iterates the idea that good,

and ultimately the recognition of the evil inherent in the processes of technology, can

only come of decisions made freely: "[t]hose who listened to him were not in danger of

falling into a trance," says Tolkien, "but of agreeing to his arguments, while fully awake.

It was always open to one to reject, *by free will and reason*, both his voice while

speaking, and its after-impressions. Saruman corrupted the reasoning powers" (Carpenter

277). So Théoden's rejection of Saruman's wheedling has significance in it occurs

without coercion or persuasion -- an act that signifies Théoden as a free man.

According to Ruth S. Noel, Saruman has "all the adjuncts of a medieval sorcerer:

a tower from which to view the stars, a magic staff, and the prophetic globe of the crystal

gazer. His search for the skills to make or take a Ring of Power is comparable in

ambition and futility to the Alchemists search for the Philosopher's Stone" (108). Like

the Alchemists, who sought to exploit the relationship between man and the cosmos for

their own benefit through scientific and technological methods, Saruman similarly seeks

the knowledge that will give him power. But in the same manner that the Elven-smiths

of Eregion, who so desired knowledge that they joined forces with Sauron to forge the

Great Rings of Power, fell subject to evil intent, so too does Saruman. Whereas the Elves

recognized the danger of evil in sufficient time to protect the three Elven Rings and

subvert Sauron's urge for complete domination, in his pride, Saruman would set himself

up in Sauron's place. As one of Sauron's orcs remarks, "Saruman is a fool, and a dirty

treacherous fool. But the Great Eye is on him" (Two Towers 42). Deceived by the Dark

Lord into believing he had "made it better, as he thought" through his technological

successes, Saruman, in effect, sacrifices his self by turning his back on the wisdom and

goodness bestowed upon him by the Valar, and sets himself up as sub creator of his own kingdom. Saruman covets the One Ring as the key to dominance over all – even Sauron, and so reveals the extent of his Fall; for just as Sauron desecrated Mordor in his efforts to create and through his desire for control, so too is Saruman on the way to achieving the same end: "[h]e is plotting to become a Power," Treebeard tells Merry and Pippin, "[h]e has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment" (Towers 66). Saruman has, says Treebeard, become a "black traitor."

Whatever Saruman seeks to achieve, however, can never be more than an abomination of the good. Since the creative process constitutes the actualization of desire, and since Saruman's desires already reflect the will of the Dark Lord, whatever he produces can be no more than a redefined version of evil and corruption. Evil can only corrupt, it cannot create, and Frodo points out to Sam that the evidence is in Sauron's orcs: "the shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them" (Return 167). The pattern of this dynamic Treebeard sadly observes in Saruman's hybrid orcs: "[h]e has taken up with foul folk, with the orcs [. . .]. Worse than that: he has been doing something to them; something dangerous. For these Isengarders are more like wicked men [. . .]. Are they men he has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be black evil" (66). In this respect, Tolkien reiterates a theme taken up by his contemporary and friend C.S.Lewis in That Hideous Strength, and that Mary Shelley's much earlier Frankenstein addresses, of the issue of scientific sub creation that

ultimately fails in its conception – a failure that exposes the fallacy, or evil that occurs when the human mind believes itself to be equal to that of the Creator.

As Saruman's example reveals, evil is an opportunistic force that corrupts not only by exploiting desire, but also that enslaves by deceit and temptation. As a token of Sauron's evil, the influence of the One Ring demonstrates the dynamics behind this process. Imbued with the full measure of Sauron's subtleties, this Ring is inherently evil. Like Odin's ring, Andvari, it carries a curse, which in this case is the promise of unlimited power (Noel 161). Sam, the simple hobbit, describes this seductive process; for even though the Ring was not on his finger, but on a chain around his neck, "he felt himself enlarged . . . a vast and ominous threat halted upon the walls of Mordor" (Return 155). As the Ring "gnawed" at his "will and reason," it conjured "[w]ild fantasies," where, "he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land and armies flocking to his call as he marched to the overthrow of Barad-dûr" (155). Then he saw a vision of the vale of Gorgoroth under his command transforming itself into a great and fruitful garden – all he needed to do was put on the Ring, and, he felt, all this could be his. Sam does not desire authority over others, however, only his own little garden, and so he is able to exert his will and subvert the Ring's influence. But how much greater would the temptation and vision of power be if the Ring bearer were to possess enormous personal power already?

Gandalf and Galadriel both articulate the effects of such a possibility: "[t]he Rings give power according to the measure of each possessor" (Fellowship 347), advises Galadriel, so the more powerful the bearer, apparently, the greater the corrupting influence of the One Ring: "[w]ith that power I should have power too great and terrible,"

cries Gandalf as he refuses Frodo's offer of the Ring, "[a]nd over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly" (67). As Sam found, the Ring exploits the desires of its possessor toward an evil end: "the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good," and the "wish to wield it would be too great for my strength" (67). Galadriel, too, refuses the Ring on the same basis, for although she had often thought of possessing it, she also would succumb to its temptations: "[t]he evil that was devised long ago works on in many ways, whether Sauron himself stands or falls," she tells Frodo, and were she to accept the Ring, even she could not escape its influence: "in place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!" (347). The combination of light, beauty and evil, Galadriel hints, would be even more terrible than that power Sauron wields now. Gandalf points out too, that while he would accept the Ring with the desire to achieve good, its corrupting influence would soon transform what began as a good intention into an act of utmost evil.[2]

While folk such as Gandalf and Galadriel would, in the event they wore the Ring, eventually become like Sauron, powerful, dominating and evil, the effect is very different for ordinary mortals. As Gandalf tells Frodo, the evil would come to "utterly possess" a mortal and drain the life force right out of him or her:

> A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he
>
> does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every

---

[2] Tom Shippey remarks that what Tolkien shows here is that even the most pure forms of goodness can be corrupted; because, as the atrocities of the so-called civilized twentieth century show, even the strongest and wisest can not resist the call of power in the end ("Orcs, Wraiths and Wights" 195).

> minute is weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself
>
> invisible, he *fades*: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and
>
> walks in the twilight under the eye of the dark power that rules the Rings.
>
> Yes, sooner or later – later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with,
>
> but neither strength nor good purpose will last – sooner or later the dark
>
> power will devour him. (<u>Fellowship</u> 53)

The Ringwraiths, or Nazgûl, those mortal kings of old who accepted Rings of Power

from Sauron, provide the proof of this process. Formless and invisible without their

cloaks, they exist suspended in a shadowy half-life somewhere between life and death,

shapes without substance: "black mantled, huge and threatening" Pippin says of the

Nazgûl Chief, "[a] crown of steel he bore, but between rim and robe, naught was there to

see, save only a deadly gleam of eyes" (<u>Return</u> 102). In this state no sense of self-hood

remains, except, for the Morgul-king, his hatred for Middle Earth. His existence, and

thus that of all others who come under Sauron's jurisdiction, is no more than an extension

of Sauron's desires; for once born "away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all

darkness," as the Nazgûl Chief informs Ēowyn, " thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy

shrivelled mind be left naked to the Lidless eye" (103). Frodo's vision of Sauron's Evil

Eye in Galadriel's Mirror confirms this prediction:

> But suddenly the mirror went altogether dark, as dark as if a hole had
>
> opened in the world of sight , and Frodo looked into emptiness. In the
>
> black abyss there appeared a single Eye that slowly grew until it filled
>
> nearly all the mirror [. . .] The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself

glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil

opened on a pit, a window into nothing.

(<u>Fellowship</u> 345)

As its predatory stare signifies, the power of this Eye lies in terror. When Frodo sat on

the Seat of Seeing on Amon Hem with the Ring "upon him," he very nearly becomes

trapped by this "fierce eager will" as the Eye "leaped toward him" in response to the call

of the Ring (379-380). But the reality of this symbol is that evil promises nothing; it is

no more than a chaotic void of hopelessness and despair.

The symbol of the Eye is an ancient yet enduring motif: in the Christian bible,

Matthew 6:22 and Luke 11:33 both express the eye as a measure of the soul. And the

deep pit of darkness Frodo sees through the Eye in the mirror seems to represent the

empty, lifeless void of the soullnessness of evil. In addition, the Evil Eye is a widespread

and recurring symbol of death, destruction and misfortune throughout Indo-European

folklore, and while many stories pertain to its effect in relation to mothers' milk drying

up, crop failures and disease in cattle, Tolkien's depiction of the malevolence of the Eye

highly suggests an association with the Celtic god of death and destruction, Balor of the

evil Eye who was slain by his grandson, Lugh, the god of light; or, even the Basilisk, the

evil snakelike creature whose image denotes "pure destructive power" and who possesses

the ability to kill at a glance (Boria Sax, "The Basilisk and the Rattlesnake, or a European

Monster Comes to America").

While the vast emptiness revealed by the symbol of the Eye determines evil to be

the negation of all that represents life and hope, this same image also reflects Sauron's

lack of substance. Except through the symbol of the Ring, the Eye, and the shadowy

forms of the Ringwraiths; and of course, through the influence he exerts over his minions, in this incarnation Sauron is a formless potential: he does not even "use his right name, nor permit it to be spelt or spoken," says Aragorn (Towers 49). Formlessness does not equate with powerlessness though, and to exist as a potential force insidiously encroaching on Middle Earth, ensnaring all susceptible to his influence, seems to present a greater and more ominous threat than does an actualized figure upon which the forces of good may focus. But, as the subtlety of his presence suggests, equally subtle is the force behind his purpose: while folk may determine his influence wherever there is the urge for power, control and dominance, as the Eye implies, the real augur of his presence, and his main weapon of intimidation and control is psychological: pure, irrational fear.

When Frodo and his hobbit companions embark on the quest to destroy Sauron's Ring, the first hint of the dark force of evil comes through their fearful encounter with the Ringwraith on the road to Crickhollow. As the Black Rider approaches on his horse, Frodo feels such a "sudden unreasoning fear of discovery" that he hardly dares to breathe (Fellowship 79). The rider stops, sniffs the air as if searching for something, but then moves on: not an unreasonable thing to do. But reason is not at play here, Frodo's urgent need to avoid discovery is an intuitive or emotional response: "I've never seen or felt anything like it in the Shire before," he says. Further on, just before the Wraiths besiege them at Weathertop, "[a]ll seemed quiet and still, but Frodo felt a cold dread creeping over his heart" (191). Stoic and practical Sam feels suddenly afraid and *feels* the black shapes "creeping up the slope"; and then, at the critical moment of attack, Frodo feels "a thin piercing chill," while Merry and Pippin throw themselves flat on the ground in pure terror (191). Gandalf, too, reports feeling suddenly afraid as he entered the gates of

Saruman's stronghold, Orthanc, though he could fathom no reason for it (247). The fear precedes the presence of evil, and its effects, as Aragorn points out, are strongest in darkness and loneliness (172). As a psychological tactic, this fear stimulus is very effective because with each successive engagement, the presentiment of fear and terror intensifies, so that, as the image of the predatory Eye suggests, Sauron's victims eventually become immobilized through sheer terror. This effect can be seen, ultimately, when Sauron increases the power of the Nazgûl and gives them winged beasts to ride.

When a Nazgûl passes over the Company of the Ring on the River Anduin, the fear engendered is sufficient that almost all in its vicinity are rendered useless through fright: "Frodo felt a sudden chill running through him and clutching at his heart; there was a deadly cold, like the memory of an old wound, in his shoulder. He crouched down as if to hide" (367). Furthermore, when the Lord of the Nazgûl, "the shadow of despair," descends screeching on Faramir and his men at the Siege of Gondor, and the men break away "flying wild and witless here and there, flinging away their weapons, crying out in fear, falling to the ground" (Return 82), Pippin and Beregond demonstrate the power behind this increasing magnitude of terror and hatred:

> Suddenly as they talked they were stricken dumb, frozen as it were to
>
> listening Stones. Pippin cowered down with is hands pressed to his ears;
>
> but Beregond, who had been looking out from the battlement as he spoke
>
> of Faramir, remained there, stiffened, staring out with starting eyes.
>
> Pippin knew the shuddering cry that he had heard; it was the same that he
>
> had heard long ago in the Marish of the Shire, but now it was grown in
>
> power and hatred, piercing the heart with a poisonous despair. (Return 71)

This type of psychological oppression has not been felt before. Frodo describes it as an external force that binds "as if with a spell," and just as the Evil Eye held him captive in its gaze, the power of the Nazgûl, the Witch King, "capture[s] him like a bird at the approach of a snake, unable to move," while his might beats upon Frodo like "a great power from outside" (280). Similarly, Boromir tells the Council of Elrond that in a recent skirmish the forces of Gondor fell because Sauron's reincarnated power incorporated a new and more potent form of evil: "[w]e were outnumbered, for Mordor has allied itself with the Easterlings and the cruel Haradrim; but it was not by numbers that we were defeated. A power was there that we have not felt before [. . .] like a great black horseman, a dark shadow under the moon. Wherever he came a madness filled our foe, but fear fell on our boldest, so that horse and man gave way and fled" (Fellowship 236). Like a microorganism adapting to a hostile environment, Sauron's reconstituted power shows adaptation to all known forms of resistance.

In the battle at the end of the Second Age, when the combined forces of Gil-galad, Elven king, and the king of Men, Isuldur, defeated Sauron, Gil-galad's Spear and the Sword of Elendil of Westernesse represented the traditional forms of resistance. As Isuldur's action of chopping the Ring from Sauron's finger suggests, in this battle Sauron had the substance and shape of a man. In "this earlier incarnation," explains Tolkien, Sauron "was able to veil his power (as Gandalf did) and could appear as a commanding figure of great strength of body and supremely royal demeanour and countenance" (Letters 332). But as his power regenerates, Sauron eschews form, and instead develops new and thus far unexploited psychological strategies of intimidation and control: and as Gandalf hints, a more devious and powerful form of evil. Contrapuntal to Sauron's

adaptation, however, when the Ring makes its way to Frodo and he takes up the challenge to be its bearer, a similarly hitherto unrecognized form of good arises. As Gandalf tells Frodo, while "there is a power in Rivendell to withstand the might of Mordor, for a while: and elsewhere other powers still dwell. There is power too, of another kind in the Shire" (215). The power of the Shire is unknown to Sauron, and against the form of good that the hobbits exhibit Sauron has yet to test his might.

Yet consistent with Tolkien's concept of a particular good being contingent on a particular polar opposite, the type of good the hobbits exhibit naturally arises in response to Sauron's adaptation. The concept of good as white and elven becomes blurred in this new conflict. Against Sauron's lack of substance but increased psychological power, lies the stoic, unworldly innocence of the hobbits. They bear none of the traditional and identifiable 'good' markers: none of Frodo, Sam, Pippin or Merry wears white. They are halflings, with no great strength of arms, nor any great wisdom. In fact, several times Gandalf refers to them as "foolish." Tolkien describes Sam as the typical hobbit: he has "a vulgarity [. . .] a mental myopia which is proud of itself, a smugness (in varying degrees) and cocksureness, and a readiness to measure and sum up all things from a limited experience, largely enshrined in sententious traditional 'wisdom'" (Carpenter 329). Moreover, typical of Hobbit nature, none of them have any real desires other than to live a comfortable life with plenty of good food and enough weed to satisfy an evening by the fire. In all, they do not have the substance of power, and thus could be seen as the

contingent opposite of Sauron's insubstantiality.[3] As Elrond remarks, "neither strength

or wisdom" are sufficient against this new Sauron, and the "quest may be attempted by

the weak with as much hope as the strong" (Fellowship 258).

Furthermore, Tolkien explains that when Frodo accepts the quest to destroy the

Ring, he does so out of a sense of duty: "I will take the Ring," he says, "though I do not

know the way" (Fellowship 259). He has no ambition for personal gain and neither does

he seek power or glory:

> Frodo undertook his quest out of love – to save the world he knew from
>
> disaster at his own expense, if he could; and also in complete humility,
>
> acknowledging that he was wholly inadequate to the task. His real
>
> contract was only to do what he could, to try and find a way, and to go as
>
> far on the road as his strength of mind and body allowed. (Carpenter 327)

Frodo's complete humility provides a foil for Sauron's evil, which cannot prevail in the

absence of desire. Moreover, Sauron cannot understand love and the willingness of folk

to sacrifice themselves for each other, so Sam's love for Frodo and his declared intent to

see the quest to its end, despite the fact that he may never see the Shire again, prove to be

a crucial factor in the success of their journey: Gandalf observes that "the only measure

that [Sauron] knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts" (258).

Intricately bound up with the heroism of the hobbits though, is that of Aragorn.

As a representative of good, Aragorn too appears without the typical elven markers. In

fact, initially, Tolkien presents Aragorn as one of the most morally ambiguous characters

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[3] According to Jung, "observed reality" determines that a thing can only be conceptualized in relation to its polar opposite. There can be no concept of light without darkness, above without below, or good without evil. Therefore "if you allow substantiality to good, you must also allow it to evil. If evil has no substance, good must remain shadowy, for there is no substantial opponent for it to defend itself against, but only a shadow, a mere privation of good" (Jung on Evil 52).

in the story. Aragorn is a Ranger, one of the seldom-seen tall, dark "mysterious" wanderers whom the Bree folk say have "strange powers of sight and hearing, and to understand the languages of beasts and birds" (166). When the hobbits meet him at the Prancing Pony, in Bree, Frodo notes Aragorn's dark and dirty clothes and the intense "gleam of his eyes" as he closely observes the hobbits from under the dark shadow of the drawn hood of his cloak (Fellowship 156). Although his eyes are not red, the piercing stare and the darkness of Aragorn's visage recall Merry's description of the Witch king during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. And Frodo feels uncomfortable under that gaze. Butterbur, too, suspicious of what he does not understand, aligns Aragorn (Strider) with the Dark Forces when he associates him with the Black Riders. He also goes on to warn Frodo against "taking up with a Ranger" (149). Although his initial appearance concerns the hobbits, Frodo accepts Aragorn's offer of help partly on the grounds that Aragorn does not really seem to be how he chooses to present himself, and that if he were truly in league with the Dark Forces he would somehow "seem fairer and feel fouler" (170).

As his appearance suggests, the type of good Aragorn represents, like that of the Elves, works behind the scenes. Unlike the Elves, though, whose focus is on the natural world, Aragorn strives to protect the *inhabitants* of Middle Earth against evil. He is one of the last Men of Westernesse, Tom Bombadil enigmatically hints to the hobbits, and though few now remember them "yet still some go wandering, sons of forgotten kings walking in loneliness, guarding from evil things folk that are heedless" (146). Aragorn describes himself as a hunter of evil, and tells Elrond's council that many of the roads and lands of the North remain safe because of the efforts of the Rangers. Although they receive nothing but scorn and derision from the folk of those regions, "yet we would not

have it otherwise," Aragorn states (239). Aragorn does not appear to seek fame and glory, and neither does he appear driven by pride, even though he is Isuldur's heir and understands the stories that not only foretell his claim to kingship of Gondor, but also his role in the coming war against Sauron. As an example, when Aragorn reveals Elendil's 'Sword-that-was-Broken' to Boromir at the Council of Elrond, and Boromir clearly challenges Aragon's claim to the legends, Aragorn deflects the veiled insult with a mild rejoinder: "[m]ayhap the Sword-that-was-Broken may still stem the tide," Boromir states, "if the hand that wields it has inherited not an heirloom only, but the sinews of kings of men," to which Aragorn replies, "[w]ho can tell? [. . .] But we will put it to the test one day" (Fellowship 256). Aragorn has no need to justify his worth to Boromir because, through the stories, he knows the time draws near when the truth of his heritage will require no justification.

Furthermore, even as future king, Aragorn does not appear to desire power. When Frodo learns Aragorn's heritage he attempts to give him the Ring, crying: "it belongs to you, and not to me at all!" but without the internal struggle evident in Galadriel when Frodo offered her the Ring, or, the burning desire for it evident in Boromir, Aragorn firmly but gently refuses the offer saying: "it does not belong to either of us [. . .] but it has been ordained that you should hold it for a while" (236). Just as he seems to have a deep appreciation for the power of the Ring, Aragorn seems to understand and recognize the nature of evil. Although he has enormous respect and fear of its capabilities, as well as a deep sadness over its consequences, he does not appear struck down by the fear of evil. This situation, says Tolkien, negates the power of the Nazgûl over him: "[t]heir peril is almost entirely due to the unreasoning *fear* which they

inspire (like ghosts). They have no great physical power against the fearless" (Carpenter

272). But the reason for Aragorn's understanding seems to stem from his great

knowledge of the land and its lore gleaned from his many years of travel with Gandalf:

"[h]e knew many histories and legends of long ago," observe the hobbits, "of Elves and

men and the good and evil deeds of the Elder days" (<u>Fellowship</u> 187-8). Through the

stories, Aragorn knows the origins of things, and that knowledge gives him a measure of

power over them. But this power does not equate with domination; it is rather an

understanding of how a thing came to be and the history and nature of its interaction with

the world, which in turn confers wisdom about the thing. Tolkien's idea, here, of the

value in knowing the ancient stories, seems to reiterate mythologist Mircea Eliade's

theory of the importance of these ancient structures not only in self-understanding, but

also in giving meaning to the present. David Doty provides a contemporary analogy:

> Many history books, government reports, and teledocumentaries, for
>
> example, begin with 'The Origins of the XYZ Problem.' Or consider the
>
> vast technology of the medical research laboratory, harnessed to answer
>
> questions about the origins (etiology) of a disease. Or think of the
>
> psychoanalyst searching in the personal past for the origins of a neurosis;
>
> or of the cultural anthropologist or political scientist looking for the
>
> origins of a particular social pattern. (98)

A form of truth, therefore, can be found in these stories, and if remembered, the stories

continue to make such truths available. As Aragorn tells Pippin, "the heirs of Elendil do

not forget all things past" (<u>Fellowship</u> 197). So wisdom, at least in part, obtains from the

myths and stories of old.

Through Aragorn's skills in healing, however, Tolkien demonstrates how such truths become manifest and obtain relevance in the present. Although Aragorn revealed his ability as a healer when he tended Frodo following the attack of the Ringwraiths on Weathertop, when he heals Merry, Éowyn and Faramir in the House of Healing in the City of Gondor, he brings to life a myth of Kingship: supposing Faramir's death to be imminent, the old wife Ioreth wails, "[w]ould that there were kings in Gondor, as there were once upon a time, they say! For it is said in old lore: *the hands of the king are the hands of a healer*. And so the rightful king could ever be known" (Return 120). When Aragorn enters the House of Healing and revives the dying Faramir with the help of the herb athelas, and Faramir awakens, saying, "My lord, you called me. I come. What does the King command?" Aragorn simultaneously enters into and emerges out of the myth, at once fulfilling the prophecies and publicly announcing his royal status (125):

> *When the black breath blows*
>
> *And death's shadow grows*
>
> *And all lights pass,*
>
> *Come athelas! Come athelas!*
>
> *Life to the dying*
>
> *In the king's hand lying!* (124)

This rhyme, which the old Lore Master states the women like Ioreth "repeat without understanding" (and which he, too, disregards), not only foretells the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, but also holds the clue to the remedy for the Nazgûl's poison. This is a remedy that only Aragorn, as 'true king' of Gondor can, and does, administer successfully (124).

Through Aragorn, Tolkien shows how the stories of the past not only continuously evolve, finding unexpected relevance in the present through seemingly meaningless rhymes and riddles, but also how the stories of the present build on those of the past so that both present and past constitute the truth of the moment: "[d]o we walk in legends or on the green earth in the daylight?" one of the *éored* asks Aragorn, to which Aragorn replies "A man may do both [. . .] For not we but those who come after will make the legends of our time. The green earth, say you? That is a mighty matter of legend, though you tread it under the light of day" (Towers 30). Sam, too, comes to understand this point as he realizes Frodo carries with him a part of the tale of Eärendel: "you've got some of it in the light of that star-glass the Lady gave you!" he cries to Frodo, "[w]hy, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's still going on. Don't the great tales ever end?" (285). Of course, Tolkien would answer "no." The great tales like those that involve the ongoing conflict between good and evil continuously unfold despite human rationalization. They constitute the present and those that ignore this premise, as the hobbits' blissful ignorance reveals, do so at their peril.

Here, says Michael Stanton, Tolkien who was himself a scholar "of the highest order," steeped in book learning, validates the wisdom found in traditional folktales and legends (79). In fact, in this instance, Tolkien even appears to mock academia. Following Aragorn's success in healing Faramir, Éowyn and Merry, when Merry expresses a desire for pipe-weed, Aragorn draws on the difficulty he had in convincing the herb-master of the virtues of the herb athelas and sarcastically suggests that the most Merry will obtain is a lecture:

And he will tell you that he did not know that the herb you desire had any

virtues, but that it is called *westmansweed* by the vulgar, and *galenas* by

the noble, and other names in other tongues more learned, and after

adding a few half-forgotten rhymes that he does not understand, he will

regretfully inform you that there is none in the House, and he will leave

you to reflect on the history of tongues.

(Return 129)

While Tolkien seems to suggest a place for both mythic and academic forms of knowing,

he also seems to suggest the folly of privileging the academic over the mythic.

The association of the king with healing, though, draws from a motif found in

Celtic myth that links rightful kingship with the status of the land: "[t]he concept of the

king as healer," Verlyn Flieger observes, "derives from the early Celtic principle of sacral

Kingship, whereby the health and fertility of the land are dependent on the coming of the

rightful king. Where there is no king, or the king is infirm, the land will also be barren"

(50). Certainly, when Gandalf and Pippin enter Minas Tirith, Pippin notices the symbol

of Gondor's greatness, the white tree grown from the seed that was brought to Gondor by

Isildur, standing dead, with water dripping "sadly from its barren and broken branches"

(Return 20). But when Aragorn steps into his role as king, Gandalf finds a replacement

sapling that thrives as Aragorn, now king Elessar, rebuilds the city and brings peace and

fertility to the land.[4]

Aragorn's association with healing and his rise from obscurity to warlord to

kingship identifies him as the "traditional epic/romance hero, larger than life, a leader,

fighter, lover, healer" (Flieger, 41). But where Aragorn's quest, by virtue of Frodo's

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[4] Ruth Noel also points out that this association of kingship with healing draws as well from a long tradition of English kings who were known for their healing touch (75).

success, takes him from anonymity and darkness into light and fortune, Frodo goes from "light to darkness" (42). Frodo, Flieger argues, is the typical fairy tale hero – "the common man [. . .] the unlikely hero who stumbles into heroic adventure and does the best he can" (42). And while Frodo embarks on an anti-quest, to destroy rather than obtain something, losing all that he holds dear in the process, Aragorn, through Frodo's efforts, undertakes a "true quest to win a kingdom and a princess" (42). His transformation from Strider, the mysterious Ranger, to Elessar the Elfstone, King of Gondor, causes Flieger to argue also that Aragorn is the "fair unknown" who, like the "young Beowulf, the young Galahad, the boy Arthur, all the heroes whose early years are spent in obscurity but who are destined for greatness and whose birth or origin foreshadows that destiny," at the critical moment steps out of anonymity into his predestined fate as future king (43).

Aragorn, and also the hobbits, symbolize a new form of good. For as the Third Age wanes in Middle Earth and the Age of Men begins, the previous form of good, symbolized by the Elves, dissipates. As Elrond feared, and as Galadriel hinted, the destruction of the One Ring brings about a contingent loss of power in the Elven rings so that the goodness and power that Galadriel represents ceases to exist. Seemingly, her kind of good, linked as it is to Sauron's manifestation, has run its course and is not applicable to the next form of evil -- and Gandalf makes plain that there will be another incarnation of evil: "other evils there are that may come" he states, "for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary" (Return 137). As if to confirm this suggested *fin de siecle*, Aragorn's rise to kingship, and thus the new form of good, relies not on the power of the Elves, but on the ability of the unskilled, and unlearned Frodo to destroy the existing

symbol of evil. Through Frodo's unselfish heroism Tolkien demonstrates that the kind of good Aragorn represents, that which utilizes power without the desire for power, is contingent on the willingness of others to sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

The new era is not without hope, however, following the destruction of the Ring, when Gandalf places the White Crown upon Aragorn's head, and the people of Gondor accept Aragorn as their king, the hope formally symbolized by the Elves, but retained through the symbol of Galadriel's gifts, comes to fruition:

> But when Aragorn arose all that beheld him gazed in silence, for it seemed
>
> to them that he was revealed to them now for the first time. Tall as the
>
> sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he
>
> seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat on his brow,
>
> and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him.
>
> (Return 216)

Good, and thus hope prevails. As the myths from which his character derives foretell, Aragorn's investiture as king gives the promise of hope for the future. Even though the Elves depart from Middle Earth, Aragorn, as king, but yet as a mortal, brings to his reign the elven qualities of wisdom, healing, and the possibility of the rejuvenation of the land. These attributes in turn bring peace and reunification of all the peoples of Middle Earth.

The ultimate passing away of all things that defined the Third Age once Sauron is destroyed, and Aragorn's gradual emergence as a hero whose role proves pivotal in the regeneration of Gondor and Middle Earth, suggests that Rings is what Mircea Eliade defines as a myth of renewal; it is a story of the rise and fall of evil that reflects the potential of humankind to "fall," and thus require regular "cleansing" by the forces of

good. According to Eliade, such myths, which signify the end of one cosmic cycle and the beginning of the next, occur in the myths of many cultures and appear to do so in response to the understanding that humankind lives in a world subject to the cycles of decay and death, and that this world "requires a periodic repairing, a renewing, a strengthening" (49). Furthermore, such myths incorporate the idea of "perfect beginnings" that the renewal ritual strives to create. Before this ideal state can be achieved, however, all aspects associated with the deteriorating current cycle must be eradicated: *"for something genuinely new to begin,"* Eliade points out, *"the vestiges and ruins of the old cycle must be completely destroyed"* (51). For the new order to begin, the old cannot be rehabilitated or repaired: "nothing will serve but to destroy the old world so that it can be recreated *in toto*" (52).

The new world exemplified by Aragorn, while incorporating elements of the old, is one predicated on the new: on replenishing and reconnecting the land and its people through the reemergence of the spiritual made possible by the symbol of Aragorn's kingship; it is not one determined by the materialistic and destructive certainties of technological progress. In as much, Aragorn's symbolic regeneration of Middle Earth acknowledges the dynamic cycle of ebb and flow in the relationship between good and evil, and through the association drawn between this cycle and the Fall of humankind, Tolkien implies continuity of this cycle.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Tolkien did not write for postmodern audiences, the continued success of <u>The Lord of the Rings</u> suggests a timeless quality inherent in the novels that continue to resonate with his audiences, even fifty years after these books were written. This quality appears to reside in the mythic elements and symbols Tolkien built into his creation that provide an opportunity for the human intellect to focus on the fundamental constituents of good and evil. To achieve this focus, Tolkien utilizes the traditional mythic representations of good and evil as oppositional and conflicting properties. Then, by placing these properties within the structure of the quest motif, which guarantees conflict, Tolkien articulates them as polar opposites that continually strive against each other for domination. In depicting these qualities as co-existent yet distinct, Tolkien reiterates his belief that "you have to understand the good in things to detect the real evil," which in turn not only suggests a dualistic relationship between these concepts, but makes recognizing one contingent on acknowledging the reality of the other (Carpenter 55). By polarizing good and evil in this way, and by placing them in conflict with each other, Tolkien clearly illustrates their distinct properties and thus facilitates understanding of their essential elements.

Firstly, through the symbol of the Elves, and more particularly through Galadriel, Tolkien presents the nature of good as associated with the qualities of beauty, light, brightness and white. But through the Elves' powers of healing and their great love of nature and the land, Tolkien suggests that good inheres in these properties as well -- he portrays Lothlorien and Rivendell as enclaves of natural serenity and beauty similar to

the Greek vision of Arcadia, or, in a manner similar to the bucolic pastoral fancy of

Romantics like Coleridge and Wordsworth, and in doing so suggests that true goodness

can only be found in such rural purity[5] – in the absence of technology and

industrialization. Through Gimli's experience with Galadriel, Tolkien reveals goodness

to be intimately bound up with the Christian idea of love and acceptance as well. And in

Gimli's case, this is a love so pure and powerful that it transcends the bounds of mortal

endeavour. Because Galadriel wields the power that keeps Lothlorien from evil, through

her, Tolkien also seems to suggest that love is a way in which evil may be negated.

Additionally, through Galadriel's mirror, Tolkien articulates good as a force that enables

and enhances individual freedom of choice: that fosters, in the individual, the ability to

choose, unimpeded, the best possible outcome for any given situation, and, as such, he

presents good and wisdom as coterminous.

Tolkien emphasizes these ideas of choice, or free will and good as conjunctive

qualities through the self-sacrificing actions of both Sam and Frodo. Sam's willingness

to undergo the quest with Frodo despite the uncertainty of the outcome, and, Frodo's

willingness to take on the task of destroying the One Ring despite the danger and the

overwhelming odds, articulates an aspect of good that puts the greater benefit of the

community ahead of personal gain. The ability to conceive of this good arises from

Frodo's capacity to visualize a world greater than that determined by his own desires.

Although the hobbits' inexperience with evil could generate the argument that they

accepted the danger of the quest out of ignorance, as Elrond makes clear at the outset,

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[5] As a caveat though, Mircea Eliade points out that for the ancients such "bucolic" conceptions of life
"showed us no archaic Arcadia," but in fact incorporated "torturing victims for the benefit of crops, sex
orgies, cannabalism, head hunting," all of which he considers constitutes a "tragic conception of life"
(Myth 144).

neither is obligated to undertake, or complete the task. At any time, he urged, any member of the Company of the Ring could quit the process without censure. Each undertakes the task freely, and each is free to terminate his commitment at any time. Therefore, once the danger of the quest becomes a reality for Frodo and Sam, they have the option not to continue. But with the future safety of the Shire at stake, neither exercises this alternative. The kind of self-sacrifice epitomized by Sam and Frodo cannot be confused with the type of utilitarianism proposed by Saruman. The greater good conceptualized by him involves the sacrifice of the Many in order to benefit the One. And this sacrifice is not undertaken freely. Part of Saruman's evil is encompassed in his desire to further the cause of technological progress in the belief that the ultimate benefit derived from his machines justifies the means of achieving their reality. However, as Thomas Cushman ironically observes, "part of the 'grand design' of the Enlightenment project was that, through the march of time," and through the benefit derived from scientific developments, good was supposed to supersede evil (97). But, he continues, "it is the very technologies that are supposed to eradicate evil [. . .] that have also contributed to the emergence of new forms of cruelty and, ironically, to the maskings of their painful truths" (97). Here, Cushman confirms Tolkien's argument, personified by Saruman, that the illusion of power generated by the ability to sub create leads to evil. For Cushman, too, seems to argue that the success of scientific materialism not only negates the spiritual through its convincing proofs, but as a consequence, it causes humankind to lose appreciation for its place in the grand scheme of things. Furthermore, as Tolkien argues, this illusion of power leads to the perception that the absolute and

tangible proofs of material cause and effect constitute the pinnacle of human possibilities and desires.

The limiting effect of this materialistic view also contrasts the possibilities signified by good, and this contrast is in keeping with Tolkien's apparent concept of the oppositional nature of good and evil. Whereas Tolkien presents good in terms of light, and as a life-affirming positive force, in comparison evil is dark and destructive, a blackness that manifests in ugliness. Whereas the Elves personify extraordinary physical grace and beauty, the products of evil, as symbolized by Saruman's Orcs, are distinguished by deformity, rankness and depravity. Where good equates with life and healing, as Sauron's desecration of Mordor, or Saruman's similar effect on Isengard attest, evil destroys. Moreover, as the symbol of Sauron's Evil Eye denotes, evil is emptiness, a negation of life and the antithesis of nature and free will. As the Eye's predatory connotations suggest, evil functions by devouring all in its path. Furthermore, as Saruman demonstrates, evil is also a coercive force that not only seeks power through domination and oppression, but also corrupts by exploiting desire, particularly the desire for power.

Through Saruman, but through Sauron as well, Tolkien presents evil as self-absorbed and thus self-limiting. As Saruman's knowledge increases, so too does his inability to appreciate the subtle powers of good. Like Sauron, who, to his final undoing failed to anticipate the type of goodness exemplified by the hobbits, Saruman loses the understanding of evil as a negative force through the success of his technological achievements, and consequently, he also loses the ability to appreciate that evil cannot create; it only destroys. Unlike the hobbits who are able to look beyond their immediate

situation, Saruman's vision becomes confined to the limits of his desire -- evil can only perceive itself, and that, Tolkien intimates, is a fundamental reason why evil, although ostensibly a much more powerful force than good, forever arises, but is continually subdued.

While Saruman illustrates the dynamics of evil's insidious and corrupting influence on one who seeks power, through the symbols of the Ringwraiths and the Evil Eye, Tolkien articulates evil as a purely psychological force. Both symbols lack substance, and their power lies in the impact they have on the psyche. Their presence, and thus the presence of evil, can be determined by the horrible intuition of overwhelming and unreasoning fear their appearance evokes. Furthermore, Frodo experiences the power of the Eye as an oppressive, yet strangely compelling external force that beats on his mind, forcing him to do its will. But as the vast emptiness behind the symbol of the Eye suggests, Sauron's evil has no substance, and so has no basis in the material world. Sauron's power, like that of the Ringwraiths, manifests itself physically through the emotions elicited by its influence on conscious awareness. Through these psychological effects Tolkien seems to suggest that evil is a quality that emerges from, or is a product of consciousness. Haldir's description of good and evil "ever striving in thought," appears to confirm this perception. Furthermore, Frodo's experience of the Chief Nazgûl's might beating on his mind like a great power from outside, suggests that evil is an external force that works by subjugating conscious apperception. A force that the individual will may resist if strong enough. Either way, it seems to be a force that affects the psyche of the individual.

If evil is a product of the conscious mind, it is also a product of reason, "which in point of fact," Jung argues, "is nothing more than the sum total of [. . .] prejudices and myopic views" (Archetypes 13). So as far as Jung is concerned, evil is a direct consequence of ignorance. However, as the example of Saruman's fall suggests, and Gandalf's and Galadriel's refusals of the Ring reveal, even great wisdom does not confer immunity. Whether Hobbit, Maiar or Elf, all must remain vigilant and cognizant of its insidious force. This oppressive psychological effect though, diametrically opposes the non-intrusive enabling effect of the good of the Elves, which works to free the mind rather than seeking to control it.

The oppositional relationship Tolkien sets up between the good of the Elves and the evil of Sauron implies a dualistic relationship between these categories, a fact that Tolkien makes particularly clear through the connection between the two forged by the Rings of Power. While some critics resist the idea that Tolkien's depiction of good and evil resembles the Taoist concept of the two constituting equal halves of a whole, the loss of power of the Elven Rings in concert with the destruction of the One Ring strongly suggests such a relationship. The falling away of both the good and the evil of the Third Age when Aragorn assumes kingship not only confirms this 'yin/yang' correlation, but also determines good and evil to be part of an eternal yet constantly evolving dynamic, that, as Gandalf indicates, and as Aragorn's role of renewal suggests, continually reinvents itself. In this respect, good and evil could be regarded as relative concepts, but only in terms of their relationship with each other. While the conditions of their appearance may vary, as qualities of the human experience their essential elements remain constant: "[h]ow shall a man judge what to do in such times" asks Éomer, "[a]s he

ever has judged," says Aragorn, "[g]ood and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house" (Towers 34).

Given that Tolkien presents The Lord of the Rings in a highly symbolic and fantastical form, how is the reader to equate the relevance of the narrative to real life? More particularly, how does Tolkien's story address the loss of spirituality and meaning in our postmodern world? In one respect he creates meaning by making the mythic symbols accessible to the reader. Colin Manlove points out that in Rings Tolkien's description of the symbols is sufficiently vague as to make them universally available, which in turn facilitates individual interaction with them. As Ethel Person would argue, this interaction allows the reader to fantasize and thus assimilate the symbol into the spectrum of his or her conscious and unconscious experiences, and thus give it meaning. For example, Manlove cites Frodo's first impression of Cerin Amroth where the grass was "as green as springtime in the Elder days," and the trees on its knoll "beautiful in their shapely nakedness" (Fellowship 332). These descriptions actually offer very little information; Tolkien leaves the details to the reader's imagination, and thus the symbol becomes an experience unique to each individual. Frodo, says Tolkien, "saw no colour but those he knew" (332). The subconscious recognizes and understands these symbols, says Manlove, "Tolkien has only to beckon it in" (194). Similarly, Tolkien does not attempt to describe categorically the qualities of good and evil: love, honour, respect, hate, greed, and pride. Instead, he personifies them in the figures of the symbols, and, in engaging with these symbols, the reader initiates a connection between the conscious and

unconscious mind that facilitates conscious awareness of the timeless truths these symbols represent.

Through the Elves, but also through the example of Aragorn, Tolkien demonstrates that another aspect of this recognition inheres in understanding the preserved myths and stories of the culture. These myths, as Aragorn's understanding of evil reveals, confer wisdom, and thus give meaning to the present. Good is intimately bound up with wisdom, Tolkien implies, and this wisdom obtains largely from the knowledge of the stories that comprise the history of one's people. As Frodo's impression of time in Lothlorien articulates, to know the myths is to 'live' the experiences of the ancients. Moreover, to enter into mythic time through the stories not only reintroduces a sense of belonging, but also the connection established with the timeless and enduring contents of the Cauldron of Story, or, Jung's Collective Unconscious, confers a sense of continuity and thus psychological and moral certainty.

The mythic symbols connect the modern mind with the truths inherent in the myths of old, and the truth of good and evil emerges from these myths through the unconscious, emotional level, rather than on that of conscious rationality. The irrational fear evoked by the Nazgûl, or ringwraiths, and the intense emotion experienced by Gimli in response to Galadriel's love, determine that the concepts good and evil cannot be understood through reason, but through the emotions their presence solicit: one identifies and distinguishes the difference between them by the way they *feel*. Therefore, given the historical inability of religion, philosophy and science to determine a rational, singular truth of good and evil, and given the moral relativism inherent in modern consciousness that obfuscates the perception of these categories, what Tolkien does is present concrete

and recognizable mythic symbols within the time-honoured structure of the quest motif

so that the individual may, through the emotions elicited by his or her interaction with the

narrative, determine the constituents of good and evil. As Mia Pia Lara contends, the

emotional response to the text creates the opportunity for reflective judgment, which in

turn facilitates moral apperception. In other words, good and evil are an implicit

component of the human experience, and to understand them one must circumvent

rational materialistic explanations, and access their meaning through the emotional

intelligence made possible by the symbols of the myths. This understanding reintroduces

the possibility of the transcendent, of the metaphysical sensibilities that Ken Wilber

argues the "real" proofs of scientific materialism rationalized out of existence.

In relation to the postmodern conscious experience then, the mythic symbols

provide immediate and tangible proof of the existence of these categories, and through

his depiction of the consistent and intimate association between evil and the desire for

power, control or ambition, Tolkien also confers an element of predictability to the

manifestation of evil. This certainty, Thomas Cushman argues, is vital to postmodern

sensibilities. More than anything, he states, it is the unpredictability of the emergence of

evil that concerns modern consciousness (97). For in the increasing globalization and

secularization of contemporary society, which, Cushman goes on to argue, gives agency

to more and creative ways of examining the past and reconfiguring the present, the

likelihood of new expressions of evil that as yet we have not even imagined becomes

possible. Tolkien pre-empts this fear through the example of Sauron's re-emergence as a

transfigured form of evil. Moreover, as Sauron's rise to new power during the reign of

the Elves in the Third Age of Middle Earth demonstrates, wherever there is good, there is

evil, whether or not it is acknowledged. So some form of recognition of the circumstances that invoke evil is essential to perceive, and thus anticipate its emergence. As Tolkien infers throughout his story, and like the evil of Macbeth's witches, evil forever lies just under the surface of human endeavour anticipating the right terms and conditions for its reappearance.

Even though Tolkien did not write in the postmodern era, and, even though he intended the specifically Celtic or Northern elements of his symbols to appeal explicitly to English audiences, the enduring and widespread success of his creation articulates not only a universality, but an ongoing unity of the human experience. Moreover, in confirmation of Eliade's theory that the symbols of myth continue to find meaning in the postmodern world, even if unrecognized, the success of Jackson's films reveals that the mythic elements Tolkien crafted into his story not only maintain relevance in terms of the postmodern conscious experience, but also respond to, and provide answers for an unconscious urge to conceptualize or understand good and evil. Furthermore, the ongoing success of Tolkien's creation confirms Ethel Persons argument that the myths and stories privileged by a culture reflect certain truths about that culture, and give meaning to the individual experiences within its collective existence. In relation to Tolkien's concern over the poverty of myths and stories indigenous to his beloved England then, Rings not only answers to this lack, but also validates myths and stories as powerful and legitimate organizing principles in a moral universe.

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