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# The Undefinable Shadowland:

A Study of the Complex Question of Dualism in  
J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

*In memory of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien,  
to whom I owe so much*

*The Road ever goes on and on  
Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow if I can*

*Pursuing it with weary feet,  
Until it joins some larger way,  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say.*

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## Introduction

"I dislike Allegory - the conscious and intentional allegory - yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth and fairy tale must use allegorical language" (*Letters* 145). These are the words of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. After the publication of his best selling fantasy novel *The Lord of the Rings* in three volumes in 1954 and 1955<sup>1</sup>, many allegorical interpretations were produced. Some of them were quite innocent while others took on the most preposterous theories. Tolkien refuted all allegorical inclinations. Instead he gave three reasons for the creation of his vast and almost complete mythology. His philological interest, which he had had ever since early childhood, was one of them. Very early he started to invent languages of his own. As time went by they became complex languages with grammatical rules and a wide vocabulary. He had to give them a history in which they could develop. This history he named *The Book of Lost Tales*<sup>2</sup>, which later developed into the final version that we know as *The Silmarillion*<sup>3</sup>. In this complex piece of work, we are told about the creation of the universe, the establishment of Middle-Earth (the known world), and the progress of its inhabitants; elves, dwarves, men, hobbits, orcs, dragons, etc.

Another reason for this mythology was his poetry. He lacked a medium where he could express his innermost feelings without making them seem out of place. He started to weave his poetry into this imaginary world, thus it made sense, not only to him, but also to the people who read it. Thirdly, he was of the opinion that England lacked a mythology of its own:

Do not laugh! But once upon a time . . . I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic to the level of romantic fairystory - the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths - which I could dedicate simply: to England; to my country (Carpenter 1978: 97).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers* were published in 1954, and *The Return of the King* was published in 1955.

<sup>2</sup> Posthumously published in two volumes in 1983 and 1984, edited by his son Christopher Tolkien

<sup>3</sup> Posthumously published in 1977, edited by Christopher Tolkien.

England had no stories of its own as the Greeks, the Scandinavians, the Celts and the Finns had. They had a historical documentation, but not a mythological one. He had his good reasons for this imaginary world, but they were never allegorical. This is important to know for further investigations and interpretations of his works.

The theme of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, is a familiar and often used one. The constant fight between Good and Evil. The hopeless struggle of the small and weak against the endless power of Darkness and its inhuman advocates. The hobbit, or halfling, Frodo Baggins has come into the possession of the One Ring, forged by the evil Sauron in the early years of the Second Age of the world; Middle-Earth. Into this ring Sauron has put much of his power to be able to conquer the known world. With it he will be able to rule over the wills of the masters of the lesser rings, i.e. the elves, the dwarves and men. During the Last Alliance between men and elves, the Ring is cut off Sauron's finger and later vanishes into the depths of River Anduin. There it lies for many long years "and passe[s] out of knowledge and legend" (LR 66), until it is found again, and comes into the possession of Sméagol, a being of hobbit kinship. Little by little, the Ring turns Sméagol into an evil and wretched creature, later known as Gollum.

It is from Gollum that Bilbo Baggins comes into possession of this powerful ring, as told in *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*. To him it is only a harmless, magical ring that makes you invisible, and when he passes it on to his nephew Frodo, Bilbo has not become aware of the evil powers it occupies. Now, conscious of its reappearance, Sauron is searching for it again with the aid of the feared Black Riders, the Ringwraiths. The only way to destroy it is to throw it into the fires where it once was forged: "to find the Cracks of Doom in the depths of Orodruin, the Fire-mountain, and cast the Ring in there" (LR 74). This is the task that Frodo Baggins, of an obscure and forgotten people, must carry out. With the help of his trusted friends, and the wizard Gandalf, he must save the world from eternal darkness.

Along this perilous journey they make contacts with various characters, creatures and peoples, some good, others evil. On the surface it is all black and white. Two powers fighting each other, one to conquer the world, the other to liberate it. Consequently, the people and creatures involved in this war are either good or bad. By choosing sides, as people many times are forced to do in times of war, their fate is signed. Fighting for Sauron means that you are of evil origin, and accordingly, fighting for the White City of Minas Tirith<sup>4</sup> means that you are of good origin. Luckily, or unfortunately, this is not so, depending on how you look at

it. In Tolkien's world we find a third category. In my opinion, it is the most complex and interesting of the three. Within fantasy literature this category is labelled "the Neutrals", "they who are not sure" or "they who do not care". It would be wrong to use this label for the category I intend to investigate because that, in turn, consists of sub-categories where some cannot be considered as Neutrals. As an overall name for this category I choose "the Undefinable", not with the implication that their alignment cannot be defined at all. Indeed, there are characters/groups who are difficult to define, the Neutrals, but there are also characters that used to belong to one side or another and now have changed alignment. Most of these belong to the group who once were good but, in one way or another, have been enticed to the dark side. There are characters that are bad to start with but grow on you, and in the end can be considered as good. Unfortunately that concerns only minor characters in the plot, and as such, they are not interesting enough to study for the purpose of this essay. Consequently, I will not look into that category.

My intention is to show that *Lord of the Rings* is not only an epic picturing the classic struggle between good and evil, but also a story about the people in between. Those who do not really have a choice, or those who make the wrong/right one. This concerns peoples as well as individual characters. I will show that reviewers like Edmund Wilson<sup>5</sup> and Edwin Muir<sup>6</sup> both are wrong when they claim that the distinctions in *Lord of the Rings* are only seen in the light of black and white. Wilson argues that there are no serious temptations, very few major problems and: "[ *Lord of the Rings*] is a simple confrontation . . . of the forces of Evil with the forces of Good" (Spacks 82). According to Muir, the theme of *Lord of the Rings* is a simple dualistic one. There are only strictly good people and strictly evil people: "[Tolkien's] good people are consistently good, his evil figures immutably evil; and he has no room in his world for a Satan both evil and tragic" (Carpenter 1978: 222). I will also make a more thorough analysis of the creature Gollum, who is the most interesting character of them all, and one of many pieces of counter-evidence to Muir's statement.

## The Neutrals

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<sup>4</sup>Minas Tirith is the capitol of Gondor, a country bordering to Sauron's Mordor. It is in this city that the forces of the Good defend themselves against Sauron's forces, in one of the last crucial battles in the War of the Ring.

<sup>5</sup>"Oo Those Awful Orcs!" *The Nation*, CLXXXII (April 14, 1956).

<sup>6</sup> Review in *The Observer*, (August 1954).

The neutral individuals are often hard to define. Neutrality does not mean that they stand outside the conflict, because there are not any important characters in *Lord of the Rings* that do that. In this matter, neutrality concerns self-interest, and the outlook on life. The Neutrals fight for one side or another but in their minds they belong entirely to themselves. Their reasons for choosing sides are egoistic and self-preserving, and to the observer, it is sometimes hard to detect these reasons.

With peoples it is easier. Their choice is also self-preserving but it is often a political choice. It is made in the interest of survival. Not even the immortal elves, the symbol of goodness, are without faults, as Tolkien pointed out in a letter to a reader:

But the Elves are *not* wholly good or in the right. . . .They wanted to have their cake and eat it: to live in the mortal historical Middle-Earth because they had become fond of it . . . and so tried to stop its change and history, stop its growth, keep it as a pleasaunce . . . and they were overburdened with sadness and nostalgic regret (*Letters* 197).

They certainly have selfish tendencies but cannot be considered as Neutrals. In spite of their blemishes, they are still a symbol of goodness, and will continue to be so.

Instead, we can turn our attention to the people of Rohan, the Rohirrim, and the people of Dunland, the Dunlendings; two neighbouring countries. For centuries they have been fighting each other over matters concerning border disputes. At the time of The War of the Ring, the Dunlendings ally themselves with the forces of the traitor Saruman, not because they sympathise with him and his cause, but because of their hatred towards the Rohirrim. They now have the means to invade Rohan and retake areas lost in the past, that they consider theirs.

In the same way Rohan joins the other side, the Good side, in order to protect themselves against the raids of the Dunlendings and the army of Saruman. Up till then, they have stated that they are not entirely on anybody's side, because nobody is entirely on their side: "we do not serve the power of the Black Land far away, but neither are we yet at open war with him" (LR 453). The Dunlendings are bad, the Rohirrim are good. Anyone who reads *Lord of the Rings* will certainly get this impression, as we are supposed to do. Tolkien wants us to side with the Rohirrim. He guides us by presenting them favourably so that we are sure to be on the right side in the end. The Dunlendings are doomed from the beginning. They have made their choice, the wrong one, and so, they fall with their allies, even though they choose out of self-preservation. They are presented as a corrupt and bad people. Even their appearances are swarthy and threatening while the Rohirrim are blond and fair. In other words, we are never

meant to sympathise with the Dunlendings. The reason for this is simply that the story is told by the winners, the Good side. Therefore, the people of Dunland will always be remembered as an evil people, as recorded in the historical annals of Middle-Earth. If there had not been any animosity between the two countries, would the outcome have been the same?

To illustrate the neutrality of individual characters, I have chosen two who, technically speaking, both belong to the good side. One of them, Tom Bombadil, is of a good-hearted nature but refuses to involve himself in worldly matters, even though he has the crucial means of helping. The other one, Boromir of Minas Tirith, has intentions to do good, but they are of a more selfish nature. He wants to help his own people first of all, but fails in the end. Temptation wins over willpower, and the result of his actions furthers Sauron's cause. One is obviously good, and one is obviously bad. But looking more closely on these two characters, we find that the issue at hand is more complex than that.

Tom Bombadil is a mysterious and funny old man: "Old Tom Bombadil is a merry fellow/ Bright blue his jacket is, and his boots are yellow" (LR 139). He is one with nature and is not concerned with worldly matters, and lives peacefully on the outskirts of the forest with his wife Goldberry. When Frodo and his friends are rescued from Old Man Willow by Tom and brought to his house, they learn that he is a character of many mysteries. The most astonishing thing about him is that he is not affected by the Ring. It has no power over him as it has over others:

Tom put the Ring round the end of his little finger and held it up to the candlelight. For a moment the hobbits noticed nothing strange about this. Then they gasped. There was no sign of Tom disappearing! (LR 148).

Later on we learn that Tom Bombadil has walked the earth since the beginning of Time. This has raised many questions and discussions about his origin. Some critics even go so far as to say that he is the embodiment of Eru Ilúvatar, the Creator. In a letter to Peter Hastings, a bookshop keeper who had made such a suggestion, Tolkien refuted this interpretation (*Letters* 191-192). He never gave an explanation about the origin of Tom Bombadil, but he provided a reason for his existence: "Even in a mythical age there must be some enigmas, as there always are. Tom Bombadil is one (intentionally)" (174). In other words, Tom Bombadil is put in the plot so that not everything in the mythology seems to have an answer.

Whatever the reasons for his presence though, the fact remains that he possesses some extraordinary powers. He has the means to aid the Good side in this important quest, but he chooses not to. Later on, at the council of Elrond Halfelven, when it is suggested that the Ring

should be given to Tom, Gandalf replies: "If he [is] given the Ring, he [will] soon forget it, or most likely throw it away. Such things have no hold on his mind" (LR 283). This suggests that Tom Bombadil does not care about the fate of the world, a world that he himself is very fond of. If Sauron captures the Ring, Middle-Earth will find itself in eternal darkness, and its inhabitants will become Sauron's slaves forever. This goes for Tom Bombadil too. He will not be able to live the peaceful life with Goldberry in their little cottage, which he so much desires. More important, if he has the means to help save the world, it should be his moral obligation to do so, if not for his own sake, at least for the sake of the free peoples of Middle-Earth. In this light, Tom Bombadil belongs to the Undefinable category, the Neutrals, because he chooses not to take a stand.

Boromir, captain of Minas Tirith, is one of the eight members of the fellowship that are to escort Frodo on his quest to Mount Doom. At the council of Elrond, he is chosen for his great strength and skills in arms, but also as one of the representatives for Mankind. At this council, the Ring issue is discussed back and forth. What are they to do with it? In the end, it is decided that Frodo, as Ringbearer, shall carry it to Mount Doom, in the land of Mordor, i.e. Sauron's domains.

Boromir is of another opinion. He wants to use this great weapon, the Ring, against the enemy: "Why do you speak of ever hiding or destroying? Why should we not think that the Great Ring has come into our hands to serve us in the very hour of need?" (LR 285). What he does not understand is that the Ring cannot be used for good purposes. Those who have the power to use the Ring, will themselves be corrupted by it, and eventually become like the Dark Lord himself. Boromir cannot fathom this, and from that moment the Ring is ever on his mind. He wants to bring it to Minas Tirith with the purpose of saving his people, and defeat Sauron. It is a noble thought, and we cannot blame Boromir for this. It is never his intention to cease power himself. He wants to save his country and people, just like the Dunlendings and the Rohirrim.

This desire to bring the Ring to Minas Tirith, eventually becomes his fall. In a moment of madness, he tries to take the Ring from Frodo, on the mountain of Amon Hen. He is drawn by the Ring as it is ever seeking a way to get to its master; Sauron. Frodo manages to escape, and from then on, the fellowship of the Ring is split up. For a second, the Ring takes control over Boromir's mind, but, and this is important to remember, he immediately regrets his actions. He understands what he has done is wrong, and repents: "a madness took me, but it has passed" (LR 420). Though Boromir does not realise it, it is actually a good thing that happens,

as Robert Foster points out in *The Complete Guide to Middle-Earth*: "[Boromir's] madness [drives] Frodo to decide to carry on the quest alone. This [is] a good thing, since later that day Amon Hen [is] raided by orcs" (51). Of course, Boromir is not aware of this, but the fact that he repents, gives some credit to him.

In *Tolkien's World*, Randel Helms also stresses the fortunate turn the events take by Boromir's actions, but suggests that it is due to the evil will of Boromir (100). On that point, I have a different opinion. As pointed out earlier, Boromir never has any evil intentions, just selfish ones. In the raid by the orcs, he definitely atones for his mistake. In the act of defending the two hobbits Merry and Pippin, he sacrifices himself for their sake, and dies, which is probably the kind of death he has wished for all along. A heroic death, and later on, a funeral to be remembered for all times.

Boromir is never evil in thought. He is proud and only tries to do what is best for his country, Gondor. This pride is seen as a negative thing by some critics. In *Master of Middle-Earth*, Paul H. Kocher suggests that the contempt that Boromir shows for halflings, elves and wizards is a proclamation of Man's superiority over other beings (128-129). What Kocher does not consider is that halflings, elves and wizards are unreal beings to the people of Gondor. To them, they are just characters out of old fairy tales. When suddenly confronted with these fantasy figures, Boromir reacts with a form of denial. He treats them in a superior way because of ignorance. They are a threat to his perception of the world, and to his personal beliefs. Boromir is brought up to believe that Man, and particularly the men of Gondor, are the guardians of the Faith, i.e. the faith in Goodness. Halflings, elves and wizards are only fragments of the past - Legends of the Old Ages.

So how are we to judge the actions of Tom Bombadil and Boromir? Tom, who refuses to involve himself in the great matters of the world, can go on living his happy life with Goldberry. He can go on singing his merry songs, wearing his yellow boots, and continue to talk to trees and animals, as he always does, all this thanks to other people's actions and sufferings. He does not lift many fingers himself, but still he can go on living, enjoying the fruits of liberty. He is considered Good, up there with elves and hobbits.

Boromir on the other hand, is seen as a traitor. He tries to take the Ring for his own purposes. He is sent out to protect the Ringbearer with his life. Instead, he gives in to temptations and fails. He is of a bad nature. But who is the crook? The one who makes an effort with the intention to do good, and in doing so, fails? Or the one who will not bother, and lets other people do the work just so he can go on enjoying life?

Of course Tom Bombadil is of a good nature, and Boromir is too proud in his way of acting, but when it comes to judging them by their actions, one should consider the fact that Boromir tries to do good. Tom Bombadil is what he is. It would be wrong to force him into acting against his own beliefs. He plays his little part in the big stage act. He assists Frodo and his party, and gives them shelter for a brief while. Maybe this is what he is supposed to do. The outcome might not have been so successful if people with power had tried to carry out the task. As Elrond points out: "such is often the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere" (LR 287).

Boromir is also what he is. He does what he thinks is right with the best intentions. We can not blame people for failing. We can blame them for not trying, and in doing so we clearly mark that we think it is wrong not to take a stand. But if people who really do take a stand not are capable to go all the way, we have no right to call them traitors.

## **The Fallen**

Another familiar theme that occurs in the works of Tolkien is the fall of the Good. Throughout our own history the most famous being that of Lucifer's, as told in the Bible. Within the world of movies, yet another example is found in the fall of a Jedi knight in the Star Wars trilogy. Anakin Skywalker becomes the evil Darth Vader when seduced by the dark side of the Force. In the chronicles of Middle-Earth we see several other examples of this. There are ordinary mortal characters that, tempted by the Dark side, choose to change sides. Greed and ambition are the main reasons for their defection. Being promised wealth and powerful positions, they give in to temptations. They give up what they once believed in, and follow the path of leisure in the hunt for immortality, often influenced by some greater power. For a mortal, i.e. men, dwarves, hobbits etc., this fall is a human one. It is wrong but the feeble-minded man's mistakes and errors can be overlooked. He plays only a small part in the great scheme of the world. Man's time on earth is limited and somewhere on this short path, he is bound to fail, in one way or another.

The fall of those of divine grace is a matter of a more complex nature. As in most others, in Tolkien's mythology there are beings of a godlike nature. The Creator, Eru Ilúvatar, exists outside the universe, but has put some of his subjects in charge of the world. These demigods,

Valar and Maiar, do not normally interfere with the peoples and creatures of the world. They do not dwell within the physical boundaries of the world.

In times of need though, they send one of their own, to help the peoples of Middle-Earth. They often appear in human-like forms, with limited powers, and their true identity concealed. Their mission is to guide and help, without themselves changing the order of things. Some of these, one being Saruman the Wizard, fail in their mission, and become servants of the dark side. Dealing with the great matters of the universe, they fall for the temptation of power, and instead of serving their superiors and the good cause, they use this power invested in them to make themselves autocratic masters of the world. Instead of helping people in need, they try to enslave them. They want their own will to rule over the will of others.

The failure of the divine character is of course a greater disaster than the failure of the common man. The consequences are often more severe and cataclysmic, and the crime is harder to forgive. I intend to study the fallen characters of Grima Wormtongue, a man of the Rohirrim, and Saruman the Wizard, one of the lesser Maiar sent to help the peoples of Middle-Earth in their fight against Sauron.

At the time of the War of the Ring, Grima is the counsellor of king Théoden of Rohan. Théoden is old and tired, and this has been used by Grima. Instead of giving advice that is in the best interest of Rohan, Grima poisons the mind of the king to serve his own purposes. At least, that is what he thinks he is doing. In the end, it is not only his own purposes he is serving, but the purpose of a greater mind, that of Saruman's, Grima's true master, and the brain behind the corruption of Rohan and its king. In his essay "A struggle for life", Hugh T. Keenan suggests that "the pride of Théoden and his people makes them isolate themselves and ally with Saruman" (65, but in my opinion, this is not true though. It is not Théoden who seeks the alliance, but Grima, and in the end, Saruman. Théoden has no willpower to resist Grima and his evil councils, as Grima in turn has no willpower to resist Saruman.

Working his way up the ladder, Grima holds an important position as counsellor to the King. From the beginning, this position has been achieved with the best intentions for the welfare of Rohan: "once it was a man, and did [Théoden] service in its fashion" (LR 543). He is a good man to start with, and most certainly wants to do good for his country: "Grima Wormtongue, even, did Théoden honest service before he sold himself to Saruman" (Kocher 77). After reaching the position as counsellor, he feels that this is as far as he can get with legal means. He is not satisfied though. He wants to become king himself. As King Théoden's

mind and health deteriorate, Grima sees his chance when approached by Saruman. With the wizards help he can now become king of Rohan.

It is the thought of power that starts the corruption of Grima Wormtongue, not Saruman. As Grima's ambition increases, so does his greed. He sees the chance to become important, to become something greater than the common man he was to start with. When Grima welcomes the aid of Saruman, he has already crossed the border from being Good to being Bad. His plans to take the throne of Rohan must have been there long before his collaboration with Saruman in order to be receptive to Saruman's evil influence. Saruman does not make Grima, he only makes him more sophisticated, i.e. worse. With the help of Saruman, Grima sees the possibilities to realise his corruptive plans. Plans that he probably will not be able to see through on his own. It is power itself that corrupts him in the first place.

The third enemy of Grima, along with power and Saruman, is his lack of mental strength. He has not the willpower to resist the temptations he is exposed to. He is a man of simple origin, and somewhat feeble-minded, even though "he is bold and cunning" (LR 542). He should not have meddled in the affairs of the Great in the first place. Finding himself there, he is not strong enough to separate the interests of Rohan from his own. It takes a man of great power and noble lineage, such as Aragorn, the long-awaited king of Gondor, to stand against the great tide of Evil. Grima does not think big, as you have to do as a man in position of power. Grima's main interest is how to become king of a petty country, and how to win the hand of princess Eowyn through deception: "too long have you watched [Eowyn] under your eyelids and haunted her steps" (LR 542). And in the end, all things promised to him by Saruman. He does not have what it takes to be king.

When Grima is removed from power by Gandalf, he is offered forgiveness by King Théoden: "ride with me to war, and let us see in battle whether you are true" (LR 543). As is often the case with fallen characters who are offered forgiveness, he refuses it. He is too proud to accept this noble gesture. Instead he runs off to Isengard and his master. He continues to walk the path of Evil even though he could have atoned for his crimes and taken back his role in the hierarchy of Rohan, i.e. as the common citizen he once was. He has been too ensnared in the affairs of Evil, and pride prevents him from becoming Good again.

Kocher points at the irony in the fact that Evil ends up serving the purpose of the Good (46-47). This is a fact that very much concerns Grima Wormtongue. In his blind hate for his master, Grima tries to murder Saruman in the tower of Orthanc: "Wormtongue . . . proves the "best" company at the tower, not for Saruman, but for those outside, as he flings down in his

hatred the *palantir*<sup>7</sup>, the most valuable object in all of Saruman's realm" (Helms 102-103). Even his last act of evil serves the Good; the murder Saruman. The murder is again conducted in a state of pure hate. He hates Saruman more than anything in the world, still he cannot separate himself from the wizard. He lacks the willpower to take a stand against his evil master. It is only when the hate is too great to be ignored, that he can liberate himself from the burden by murder. He finds peace, not in regret and salvation, but in pure hate. The character of Grima Wormtongue definitely supports the thesis of this essay: he is evil but as he used to be good, he has travelled the long and complex way on the alignment scale. He was not born evil.

Saruman is of a divine race. Around the year 1000 in the Third Age, he comes to the shores of Middle-Earth. He is sent by the Valar, with the consent of Eru Ilúvatar, to assist Elves and Men in their oncoming fight against Sauron. Saruman is in fact a Maia, i.e. one of the lesser gods, and his original name in the West, is Curunir. He is later followed by four other Maiar, the five of them together called the Istari, of which Gandalf is the last, and as it will turn out, the wisest and most powerful. Gandalf is also the only one who sticks to his original task, and later, is allowed to return to the West.

These Maiar are called wizards. It does not mean that they are magicians and wield great magic powers. They are called wizards because of the association with the word wise, and only possess limited skills in magic. " [The Istari] possess . . . eminent knowledge of the history and nature of the World" (*Unfinished Tales* 388). They appear in the guises of ordinary men, and reveal their true identity to very few. They are strictly forbidden to show themselves in their true majestic shape. Furthermore, they are forbidden to try to control the minds of Elves and Men by showing their divine powers. The wizards are sent to help and assist within the psychical boundaries of Middle-Earth, as well as the physical ones, in the fight against another Maia, namely Sauron, simply to adjust the balance between Good and Evil.

But not even the divine are infallible. Little by little, Saruman is tempted by the great task assigned to him, and the great powers invested in him. Few are equal to him. In the West, he has just been one among many. His powers cannot match the powers of the Valar. He is indeed one of the lesser gods. In Middle-Earth, he is confronted with the fact that he is powerful. Together with Gandalf, he has the means to influence and change, without being

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<sup>7</sup> A palantir is a crystal ball used for telepathic transmissions. There were originally seven palantirs, brought to Middle-Earth from the survivors of the cataclysm of Numenor. In the palantir, you could, amongst other things, see what happened in another palantir, and, if powerful enough, read the mind of the recipient.

questioned or hindered. When Sauron eventually reveals himself, they are prepared for him. They will be able to fight Sauron with the same means that he himself possesses.

Saruman becomes the self-appointed leader of the free world. It is to him that people come in times of need, or simply to seek advice. He settles down in the fortress of Isengard, and here he becomes an acknowledged and well-known authority. Elves and Men of Middle-Earth know where to find him, and know they can depend on his assistance. Slowly, Saruman becomes proud, selfish and impatient: "yet in truth Saruman's spying and great secrecy ha[s] not in the beginning any evil purpose, but [is] no more than a folly born of pride" (*Unfinished* 350). He becomes seduced and intoxicated by this new important and powerful role as a world leader. He fails to uphold his appointed task: "their proper function . . . perverted by Saruman, [is] to encourage and bring out the native powers of the Enemies of Sauron" (*Letters* 180). Again we have a case of gradual change from good to evil, not an overnight deflection as Muir and Wilson want us to believe.

There are two major reasons for the fall of Saruman. One is the fact I have already touched upon, Saruman's greed for power. At the time of the War of the Ring, Saruman has allied himself with the forces of Sauron. They are both searching for the One Ring. Sauron relies on Saruman, and sees him as one of his subjects. Any news that Saruman receives about the whereabouts of the Ring, Sauron expects to get from him immediately, and unadulterated. Saruman has no intentions to help Sauron find the Ring. He wants it for himself. Saruman has allied himself with Sauron only to take his place as the Dark Lord when the Ring finally comes into his possession.

Saruman is not the servant of Sauron, as Kocher points out. They are alike in the sense that they both believe in total supremacy. Saruman is not Sauron's ally though; he is his competitor (68). W. H. Auden also stresses this fact, in his essay "The Quest Hero": "all alliances of Evil with Evil are necessarily unstable and untrustworthy since . . . Evil loves only itself (58). Auden points out that Evil alliances are based on fear and profitable hopes. Sauron has seduced Saruman, but he has not completely enslaved him "so that Saruman tries to seize the Ring for himself."

The other major reason for Saruman's fall is of a more petty nature. Envy is one of Saruman's human deficiencies. In a letter to Michael Straight, the editor of *New Republic*, Tolkien wrote: "[these wizards are] also . . . thus involved in the peril of the incarnate: the possibility of "fall", of sin, if you will" (*Letters* 237). The Istari is of a divine nature, but in their incarnations, they are given the human features of mind and body. They are not spared

the human deficiencies, such as temptation, envy, and death. So when Saruman gives into envy, one of the Seven Deadly Sins in our own world, this proves that his willpower is not as great as people consider it to be.

The object of Saruman's envy is Gandalf: "Saruman soon [becomes] jealous of Gandalf, and this rivalry turn[s] to a hatred" (*Unfinished* 349). Very early, Saruman realises that Gandalf is more powerful than he is: "Saruman [knows] in his heart that the Grey Wanderer ha[s] the greater strength, and the greater influence upon the dwellers in Middle-Earth". Saruman is the acknowledged leader of the Istari, but he is not the greatest of them. As the evil thoughts start to penetrate Saruman's mind, he begins to fear Gandalf. He is not able to tell how much Gandalf really knows of his scheming plans. While others treat Gandalf with respect, Saruman does not. By ridiculing him, Saruman hopes to lessen the respect for Gandalf. He begins to oppose him in public, and to derogate his councils.

Saruman's envy originates in Gandalf's popularity. Gandalf is loved by the inhabitants of Middle-Earth for his honesty and kindness. He hides his powers, and never wants people to fear or worship him. He does things for people for no special reasons, simply to help or to entertain. There is seldom an ulterior motive behind his actions. Saruman cannot fathom this thought of doing good for no particular reason. To him, the lives and actions of the petty beings and creatures of Middle-Earth are of no importance, unless they can further his cause in the great worldly matters of the world. Saruman's envy soon changes into pure hate, and from then on, he counteracts every proposal Gandalf puts forward, and every action he performs. He will only work with him if he can gain something from it, such as receiving news of the whereabouts of the One Ring, which he desires more than anything.

The one incident that leads to Saruman's envy, is that of a gift to Gandalf. On the day he lands on the shores of Middle-Earth, Gandalf is given a ring by Cirdan the Shipwright. The ring is Narya, one of the three Elven rings, hidden from Sauron. This ring is one of the important weapons in the fight against Sauron. In the right hands, it can further the cause of the Good side. Saruman cannot understand why it is not given to him. He is the first of the wizards to enter Middle-Earth. Ought it not to have been given to him? Even if he knows that Gandalf is more powerful than he is, others do not. The power of the ring should be his to wield, not the fool Gandalf's.

The simple explanation to this is that Cirdan recognises the true identity of Gandalf upon his arrival. He sees the true power invested in him, and knows that he is the right one to bear the ring: "Cirdan . . . divined in him the greatest spirit and the wisest" (*Unfinished* 389). A

reason for not giving it to Saruman can be that Cirdan also recognises Saruman's true nature, and knows that he is not suited to wield such powers. Cirdan, an Elflord, is one of the Wise in Middle-Earth. He has lived for many thousands of years and is well experienced in the great matters of the world.

Saruman is utterly defeated in the War of the Ring. After the defeat, Gandalf removes all the powers invested in Saruman. Even this traitor is given the opportunity to repent and atone for his crimes by assisting in the continuing war against Sauron, but Saruman turns down the offer. His pride prevents him from this. He cannot adapt himself to the thought of being powerless, and of becoming a subject to Gandalf, who once was a subject of his.

One of Gandalf's big mistakes is to leave the matter at that. Saruman receives no real punishment and is only imprisoned. He manages to escape from his imprisonment and performs one last act of cruelty. He scourges the Shire, the land of the hobbits, with the help of Grima Wormtongue. In the end, Saruman is killed by Grima, and his soul is rejected in the West and cast out into the void, outside the universe.

Why do Saruman risk being abandoned forever? When the Istari's task in Middle-Earth is fulfilled, they are to return to the West: "the memory of the Blessed Realm [is ] to them a vision from far off, for which . . . they [yearn] exceedingly" (*Unfinished* 390). They know they are allowed to return to the paradise they once knew, and loved so much, provided they stay true to their mission, and to the Valar. They also know, that if they give in to Evil, they will be forever banned from the same. Saruman must know what is at stake here. In spite of this knowledge, he still goes on with his plans. He must have such faith in his success, that he does not even contemplate a failure. If he manages to find the Ring and take control over Middle-Earth, he will have a paradise of his own. A paradise at least as good as the West, according to himself.

Saruman believes in his cause, just as Boromir, Tom Bombadil and Grima do. He must, or else he will not risk what he already possesses. The big difference is that his responsibility is a much greater one. If we cannot trust our gods, whom can we then trust? Saruman plays with the fate of a whole world, a world that believes in him and trusts him. Even if he once was of good origin, there are no extenuating circumstances. He chooses the Evil path, and his punishment is consequently as severe as the punishment of Sauron, or that of Sauron's master,

Morgoth<sup>8</sup>, i.e. the condemnation to spend eternity in the abyss. Of course, Evil is never meant to conquer. Destruction is in its nature: "*oft evil will shall evil mar*" (Kocher 47).

## Sméagol/Gollum

Gollum is certainly the most complex and interesting character in Middle-Earth. To try to define his alignment is almost impossible. He does not belong to any of the categories discussed above, and yet you can place him in all of them. By studying Gollum's character, you see features in him that are good, bad and neutral. You can place him in the Good category because he, along with the other bad characters in Middle-Earth, once used to be good. He also possesses some likeable features that give you a kind of love/hate relationship towards him. C.S. Lewis commented on this fact: "Even the wretched Sméagol, till quite late in the story, has good impulses" (13). Also, some of his actions, even though they are made with evil intentions, serve the Good in mysterious and, sometimes, comical ways.

You can place him in the Neutral category simply because he does not serve any other master but himself. It is true to say that the Ring is his master, but he desires the Ring for himself and his petty cravings. He has no intentions of using the Ring to conquer the world, or its inhabitants. All he wants to do is to find his "precious" and go back to his caves under the Misty Mountains. Gollum calls Frodo "master", but since Frodo is the Ringbearer, he becomes Gollum's master because of this, not by the virtue of his own person.

Finally, you can place him in the Evil category for the evil in his character. He is a vile creature, full of mischief, and will not hesitate to kill, given the chance. He has killed many times before during the long span of his life<sup>9</sup>, and his biggest wish is to kill the one who stole his "birthday present", i.e. the Ring. The only way to subdue him and make him "nice" is by force, and by threatening him. Not even Tolkien himself could truly understand the complex nature of Gollum. In a letter to Sir Stanley Unwin, his publisher, he wrote: "I do not rely on Gandalf [i.e. Tolkien] to make [Gollum's] psychology intelligible" (*Letters* 121). Just as Tom

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<sup>8</sup> Morgoth was originally one of the Valar involved in the creation of the universe. He was known as Melkor, and was seen as one of the most powerful Valar, before his fall. Sauron was but the lieutenant of Morgoth, before Morgoth was defeated and cast into the void, in the First Age.

<sup>9</sup> Gollum is almost six hundred years old, but this is all because of the Ring. A Ringbearer does not die, "he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness". Gollum is only supposed to live for about a hundred years, but the Ring extends his life, though it does not give him more life. "If he [the Ringbearer] often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he *fades*" (LotR 60), i.e. in the end, he will be no more than shadow; a living dead.

Bombadil is a mystery to the world, and to Tolkien, in many ways, so is Gollum. To do Gollum justice, you have to treat him in a category of his own.

Sméagol is a creature of hobbit-kind. He lives at the edge of the Wilderland, near River Anduin, together with his people. It is here that he first comes in contact with the One Ring. Out fishing on his birthday, Sméagol's friend Déagol finds a ring on the bottom of the river. When Déagol refuses to give him the ring, "I have given you a present already more than I could afford. I found this and I'm going to keep it", Sméagol murders his friend and takes the ring for his own: "he [catches] Déagol by the throat and strangle[s] him" (LR 66). Of course, he does not know that it is the One Ring of Sauron's, and that it has already started to take control over him. He discovers that it makes him invisible, and he starts to use it for thieving. Later, he is driven out of the village, rejected and despised. The Ring starts tearing on his mind, and slowly it turns him into a wretched creature. He begins to make guttural noises, and it is thus he receives the name of Gollum, as the noises he makes sounds like "gollum". One day he comes upon the Misty Mountains, and leaves the world of sunlight, which he has come to hate. He finds a cave under the mountains, and here he lives for hundreds of years, accompanied only by his beloved "birthday present".

It is at this point that we first meet with Gollum in the works of Tolkien. *The Hobbit* is written as a story for children, and Gollum is just one of the many characters that Bilbo meets on his long journey. Bilbo finds the Ring by accident, and manages to bring it with him, escaping from Gollum, and from a certain death, with the help of the Ring's invisibility. While writing *The Hobbit*, Tolkien had no deeper intentions with the Gollum character, or even with the Ring, for that matter. It was when he was requested to write a sequel to *The Hobbit*, that the Ring became the centre of the plot, and Gollum became one of the main characters: "Sméagol was not . . . fully envisaged at first, but I believe his character was implicit, and merely needed attention" (*Letters* 201).

In *Lord of the Rings*, we fully learn the significance of this chance meeting. The ring Bilbo finds, is not just any funny magical ring, but an important weapon to be used in the oncoming fight between Good and Evil. Gollum is not just a pathetic creature hiding under the mountains, but a character that still has an important role to play in the great matters of the world. This is a fact that Gandalf is well aware of. Frodo thinks it a pity that Bilbo does not kill Gollum when given the chance, under the mountains. To this Gandalf retorts: "[Gollum] is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet" (LR 73). Even though Gollum is an evil creature, Gandalf feels that he is connected

with the Ring, and that he might be useful in the end. Gandalf cannot see in what way this will happen, but knows that there is some greater force controlling the destiny of the world. The wheels of the world can turn in mysterious ways.

Gandalf also stresses the importance of the fact that it is pity and mercy that stay Bilbo's hand from killing Gollum (LR 73). That is the reason that Bilbo is not more affected and hurt by the power of the Ring, than he really is. Gollum comes into the possession of the Ring by murder and deceit, and it turns him into a wretch. Bilbo shows pity and mercy, when he obtains it, and that is why he is not destroyed by the Ring. It is merely "growing on his mind" and he feels "thin and stretched" (LR 60). The act of treating Evil with Good is in fact one of the themes in Tolkien's mythology, and it has been observed by many critics. They all seem to be of the same opinion, and they stress the importance of this particular act of pity, and mercy, and that it is made out of free choice (Kocher 35-36, W.H. Auden 58, Helms 43, 87). Most important, Tolkien himself was of that opinion. Frodo's salvation is achieved by "his previous pity and forgiveness of injury" (*Letters* 234). An interesting fact about the question of free choice is that it is Bilbo and Frodo that are involved in these choices, but they always seem to concern Gollum.

Gollum is captured by Sam and Frodo. With the help of the Ring, they force him to guide them to Mordor, and to help them find a way in to this dark country. During their journey, Gollum starts to develop some feelings for Frodo. His hate for one Baggins (Bilbo), who stole his precious ring, turns to a fondness for another Baggins (Frodo). As their relationship develops into some kind of mutual affection, Gollum becomes more and more ambiguous. In our terms, we could even say that he develops schizophrenic features. The two sides of Gollum are named Slinker and Stinker by Sam. One side of him, Slinker, wants to do good, and help his new master. The other side of him, Stinker, only wants to get hold of the Ring and, with the help of it, continue his mischief. I would go so far though, as to say that the good side of him represents Frodo in him, and the evil side represents Sam. The two hobbits evoke such strong feelings in Gollum that his ambiguity is partly created by them. To him, Frodo is Slinker, and Sam is Stinker.

Gollum's attitude towards Sam is quite the opposite from his attitude towards Frodo. He hates Sam because Sam hates him. He treats Gollum with contempt, and in a very deprecatory way. Sam cannot imagine that Gollum possesses any good qualities. To protect his master from this wretched creature, Sam is always on guard against Gollum, never wasting a chance to reprimand him, or to hurt him. It is actually Sam's fault that Gollum finally decides to listen

to his inner evil voice, Stinker. Having reached a point where he is about to repent and truly devote himself to Frodo, he is met by some very harsh words from Sam. Not able to accept this mistrust in him anymore, Gollum gives in to Stinker, and decides to get rid of the two hobbits (LR 742-743). This passage is very strong and emotional. Momentarily, while Sam and Frodo are asleep, Gollum becomes Sméagol again, and he feels the weariness of old age, and the heavy burden of being a slave under the Ring:

For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing.

Here we are shown that Gollum is not entirely evil. He is in fact tired of his wickedness, and wants to die peacefully, as he was supposed to do, many hundred years ago. He can still remember a time when he did not have any knowledge of the Ring. He is reminded of an ordinary and happy life, and knows that his life would not have had to be filled with never-ending misery. I for one, am moved by this apparent sadness and remorse that he feels. It makes you wonder how thorough Wilson and Muir have read *Lord of the Rings*, before writing their reviews.

A question that consequently arises is if we are to blame Sam for his mistrust. He is only trying to protect his master, and given the past of Gollum, Sam feels that they cannot trust him. Tolkien himself is not so forgiving. He is unnecessarily hard on Sam in some of his letters, and blames him for Gollum's failure to repent (110, 221, 234n). On the other hand, he also tells us that this was for the best: "Though the love [for Frodo] would have been strengthened daily it could not have wrested the mastery from the Ring" (330). In other words, they could never have trusted Gollum completely. "[Gollum] hated [the Ring] and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter" (LR 68).

In the end, it is Gollum who saves the day. At the top of Mount Doom, Frodo decides not to throw it into the fires where it once was forged. He claims it for his own, and by doing so, furthers Sauron's cause. Gollum jumps on to Frodo and bites off the finger with the Ring on. In his ultimate moment of joy, Gollum dances over the edge and down into the furnace. The Ring is destroyed after all. Again, we see that evil deeds further the cause of the Good. Without the help of Gollum, the Ring would never have been destroyed. Sauron would eventually have captured Frodo, and the world would have fallen into eternal darkness.

So are we to judge this last act of Gollum as an act of goodness? The answer is of course no. Had Gollum been able to prevent it, he would never have fallen into the flames. He would have run off with the Ring, and, in the end, Sauron would have found him too. Even if we feel sympathy for him, and gratitude, it is an act of evil that saves the world, not an act of goodness: "Gollum [is] pitiable, but end[s] in persistent wickedness" (*Letters* 234). Marion Zimmer Bradley suggests that it is an unconscious act of love that makes Gollum jump off the edge, and that "he genuinely saves Frodo, whom he loves as much as he hates" (123). On this point, I think Bradley is wrong. Gollum is beyond all feelings of love when he takes the Ring from Frodo. To suggest that he commits suicide for the love of Frodo is misleading. It is an act of Evil. It is not love he feels but desire, an overwhelming desire for his "precious". On the top of Mount Doom, he is past goodness. He has already made up his mind being reprimanded by Sam, and from here on there are only evil thoughts in his mind.

"Gollum is to me just a 'character' - an imagined person - who granted the situation acted so and so under opposing strains, as it appears *probable* he would" (*Letters* 233). Gollum is what he is, and nothing else. Again we have a character that does not live up to any preconceived stereotypes. We see a character that is a bit of a mystery to us, just like Tom Bombadil. When it comes to Gollum, Tolkien has no intentions of leading us into adapting a certain opinion, e.g. Gollum being ultimately evil. He leaves it us as readers to decide what we will eventually think of this creature. Gollum is complex because we cannot easily define him. He is Evil, Good and Neutral, all in one, and that is why we get so many different impressions of him.

## Conclusion

All that is gold does not glitter,

Not all those who wander are lost . . . (LR 186).

These two lines are a part of a longer verse, and are uttered by Aragorn at the inn of the Prancing Pony in Bree. Things that look fair might not be fair and vice versa, a theme familiar to us through Shakespeare and his play *MacBeth*. I think this applies for many of the major characters in *Lord of the Rings*. It is easy to say that this character is purely Good, or that character is only Evil, but if you look below the surface, you will see that there is more to it than that. Tolkien's world is not a dualistic world, as the two reviewers, Edmund Wilson<sup>10</sup> and

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<sup>10</sup>"Oo Those Awful Orcs!" *The Nation*, CLXXXII (April 14, 1956).

Edwin Muir<sup>11</sup>, suggest. He has succeeded in making the characters complex, and in many cases, ambivalent. Tom Bombadil is not without faults; Boromir's intention are not entirely wicked; the peoples of Middle-Earth are just as egoistic and self-preserving as the peoples in our own world; Saruman's and Grima's pasts have not been evil, and they have had many opportunities throughout their lives to stay true to the Good cause; and Gollum alone proves that Wilson and Muir have taken their arguments out of thin air. Middle-Earth is not divided into two categories; Good and Evil. There is a grey mass in between. What you have to remember about Tolkien's mythology is that you cannot get an adequate picture of his world just by reading his works once, let alone try to analyse its inhabitants. You owe more to the author than that. It is not always the first impression that is the right one. "all that is gold does not glitter".

In her lecture on Tolkien criticism, "Tolkien-bashing: The First Twenty-five Years", Jessica Yates examined Edmund Wilson's harsh criticism of Tolkien. She made a crucial discovery that gives us an indication of how to judge Wilson as a critic. Discussing the author Gertrude Stein, Wilson stated that just because something is mysterious and new, and that it does not attract our interest, does not mean that it is rubbish, or "balderdash" (*Arda*<sup>12</sup>, 79, 90). Still, that particular word is used by him when he attacks Tolkien and *Lord of the Rings* in his "Oo Those Awful Orcs", and calls it "juvenile trash". This seems to lessen Edmund Wilson's credibility, and perhaps we should not take his criticism seriously. In his essay "Tolkien and the Fairy Story", R.J. Reilly suggests that Wilson felt insulted at having to review the novel, and that is the reason for this brutal criticism (133). Unfortunately, that one review in particular, did much harm to the immediate success of *Lord of the Rings*, and in the long run, to Tolkien's status as an author.

Even though Tolkien had no allegorical intentions, he used allegorical components. The fight between Good and Evil are elements which are often used in allegories. It is inevitable to divide the plot into two camps when using such language, because that is what it is all about: the fight between two powerful forces. It is then easy to say that such a story is *only* about good and evil, as Muir and Wilson have done, and divide it into black or white. But *Lord of the Rings* is much more than that, which I have tried to prove with this essay. In between Good and Evil, there are many characters, and many distinctions, as there is in our

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<sup>11</sup>Review in *The Observer*, (August 1954).

<sup>12</sup>*Arda* is the annual presentation of research made on Tolkien's imaginary world, and is published by Forodrim, Stockholm's Tolkien Society. The word Arda means region or realm in Quenya, one of the Elven languages, and is the name for the Earth.

own society. Just because you say you believe in God does not mean that you cannot be wicked and cruel, and quite simply, that is what Tolkien's world is all about: a world with all kinds of people and creatures, ranging from Good to Evil, and where anything can happen without being pre-destined. In other words, an undefinable shadowland.

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