

CHAPTER I

LIGHT AND DARK - I

we dared to build Gods and their houses out of dark
and light¹

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Imagery of light and dark is essential in Tolkien's portrayal of good and evil. From the quotation above it is clear that it was always for him a conscious structural motif. It was certainly the dominant factor in controlling this reader's response to The Lord of the Rings, but, surprisingly, this theme has been given little critical attention. Shippey briefly considers the use of 'shadow' to portray Manichaeian evil: life is the struggle between opposite forces, 'starlight' versus 'shadow'.² Fliieger has a full length treatment of light which examines Owen Barfield's influence on Tolkien.³ While only The Silmarillion is covered in detail by her, the thesis appears forced in the brief consideration of The Lord of the Rings. Miller does more justice to the latter work in her article on colour but the emphasis is misplaced.⁴ Colour is not the dominant motif with light and dark subordinate to it. Rather the opposite applies. Furthermore I contend that light

1. J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Tree and Leaf', p. 56.

2. T.A. Shippey, The Road to Middle-Earth, London, 1982, pp. 84-86.

3. Verlyn Fliieger, Splintered Light, Grand Rapids (Michigan), 1983.

4. Miriam Y. Miller, 'The Green Sun', Mythlore, XXVI, Vol. 7, No. 4, Winter 1981.

and dark in Germanic literature is of more importance to The Lord of the Rings than is modern standardized colour notation.

There are two reasons for this neglect or misreading of the work's most powerful imagery. Firstly, using light and dark to represent good and evil is not a distinctly different conception. It is a spiritual image of ancient standing. Much use is made of it for instance in the Bible. Yet what is original and powerful is the intensity of the usage by Tolkien, and the depth and complexity which he is thereby able to bring to his metaphysical themes. Secondly, some closer examination reveals inconsistencies and contradictions, which hint at either weaknesses or a complex internal order which demands the most careful study before its full implications can be brought out. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the complex and distinct strands of this imagery for its contribution to the moral schema of The Lord of the Rings.

In general Tolkien uses the traditional if unconscious spectrum of Ancient Germanic writing⁵, in particular, the following terms in the continuum indicated:

WHITE - LIGHT - GREY - SHADOW - DARK - BLACK - NIGHT

The first two indicated Christianity; 'grey' was a variable usage; the final four were symbolic of the primal chaos and of pre-Christians. In The Lord of the Rings the most commonly used of these words are 'shadow' and 'dark', and this reflects the work's concern with evil (The lord of the rings from the title is, after all, Sauron.). But light and goodness are not relegated to the minor position this word frequency would indicate. A variety of rich cognates for light are used, including: 'dazzling', 'gleamed', 'glittering', 'glimmering', 'shining', 'twinkled', 'polished' and 'bright'. Yet despite this the predominant colours as might be expected in this

5. F.B. Grummere, 'The Use of Black and White in Germanic Tradition', Haverford College Studies, Vol. I, No. 12, cited by W.E. Mead, 'Colour in Old English Poetry', P.M.L.A., New Series Vol. VII, No. 2, 1899, pp. 175-176.

north-western world are the muted tones of a long winter and a fallen era. Extremes of good and evil are described with 'white' or 'black' for most of the work, while 'night' comes eventually to take on the most powerful metaphysical meaning. The order of the continuum is not easily recognised, for example, the Dark Lord is more evil than the Black Riders. However, the continuum above is the result of a full study of Tolkien's use of the interplay of light and dark.

Much of the difficulty in categorizing the imagery comes from the fact that it is used on several levels, however, ultimately all strata reinforce the metaphysical themes. At one level the work is placed in time at the end of an epoch, the Third Age. Memory of the previous dominance of evil looms over the present, felt by all. Yet there are significant differences in the words chosen by different characters to refer to the same time. Boromir's 'out of the shadows of the past' (I, 260)⁶ is in keeping with the Gondorian attitude to folk-memory: an imprecise view of the past but with nothing useful or morally clear cut. Hobbits have more respect for folk-memory, as is shown well by Sam's love of stories - and this is reflected in their term 'the dark past' (I, 53). Faramir, who shows more understanding than does his brother, uses the phrase 'in the days of darkness' (II, 238), an expression similar to that of the hobbits. Folk-memory in Rohan is more precise, detailed and emphatic with their 'Dead Men out of the Dark Years' (III, 70). Aragorn also uses the phrase 'the Dark Years' (II, 33) and he is understandably more concerned with folk-memory than is any other man in the work. An elf guard in Lorien prefers the phrase 'the Dark Days' (I, 358) which only varies in the compression of time, consistent with the longevity of elves.

6. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, London, 1978, (1st pub. in three parts 1954-1955). Subsequent references will be incorporated in the text thus: (I, 260) - for Volume One, p. 260.

The ultimate expression for this period is used by Gandalf, the supernatural hero of the work, and he uses it twice. When overcome with awe at the identification of the Master-ring he talks about 'the Black Years' (I, 60). Later when rebuked by Elrond for uttering the language of Mordor in Rivendell Gandalf uses the same phrase (I, 267). Both instances are emotionally charged and Gandalf would be choosing a phrase which expressed the monstrously horrific evil of the times. These descriptions of the past offer partial basis for the Light-Dark continuum above, but certainly there is here a worldview unified by the darkness imagery to describe an evil past.

Similarly light/darkness imagery is used for place names. Early in the work, Hobbit legendary tales refer with fear to 'the Dark Tower' (I, 53). Elrond mentions the 'Mountains of Shadow' in a matter-of-fact way in the history which he relates (I, 257), while Tom Bombadil speaks of 'Riders from the Black Land' (I, 159), over whom he has no control. This is an ominous reference by Tom, who has otherwise appeared all-powerful. As characters actually move closer to the evil places, the (authorial) use of 'black' increases. So 'Black Gates' are not so designated until Gollum has led Sam and Frodo near them (II, 235). At the same time Sam still refers to the Mordor beyond the gates as 'the Dark Land'. For Pippin and the others in Minas Tirith oppressed by the shadow, the ominous phrase, 'the Black Land' (III, 80), well expresses the evil. Also, after the experience of the special horror for Gimli of the underground Paths of the Dead, he can understand why the emerging river is named Blackroot (III, 62).

Mordor in a later chapter heading is called 'The Land of Shadow' in a self-deceiving retreat in the intensity of the imagery. The problem here is that the name comes at the beginning of two chapters at the culmination of which Frodo will be at the centre of Mordor. Hence to sustain the moral force of the description through this final section of the quest to its conclusion, there is an

initial modification of the imagery of distant evil to 'shadow'. In each of the above examples there is a clear sense of the dualism of good and evil; the evil place is clearly located. But this Manichaeian view is subtly undermined by the varying imagery which draws attention to the individual's reaction and spiritual state, e.g., Sam's innocence, Gollum's sins in and guilt over Mordor, Frodo's determined quest, and Gimli's doubt.

Names given to characters also add to the force of the imagery. Gandalf is first seen as 'the great wizard, Gandalf the Grey' in the Prologue (I, 20). His name appears unremarkably in a list and interest here is centred on Bilbo (given the pronoun 'he') and Thorin. Gandalf's further identity is unknown and he takes no part in the recounted story. In this context 'grey' appears to mean 'old' and to imply subconsciously that the one designated is no longer a combatant in the cosmic struggle. Soon after, we are told of the 'White Council' which had driven the evil out of Mirkwood (I, 53) and we may reflect that no one so far met in the narrative appears capable of such absolute power. In the ensuing narrative Gandalf is struggling. He cannot meet appointments, his whereabouts are unknown, he is besieged by Nazgul and later by wolves. His skills of knowledge of lore and of persuasion do not seem to be accompanied by sufficient power to drive away the present evil. He is beset by doubts and fears his own ability to withstand the evil in his path. Much later - and after his metamorphosis - there is no doubt of Gandalf's power for goodness when a chapter is named 'The White Rider' after him (II, 91). The term is used climactically by Pippin when Gandalf appears unexpectedly speeding across the contrastingly dark plains of Pelenor, soon to dispatch one of the Nazgul (III, 83). He has assumed the name 'Gandalf the White' (II, 103) after his surprise return from death and the name is associated with the concept of a person transfigured and of an extreme good that we now hope may prevail.

Yet the whole pattern is not quite so simple. One further 'White' name appears, 'the White Hand' (II, 77), the name assumed by Saruman's evil troops. In this apparent contradiction Tolkien has used the word for ultimate good to describe an evil group. A feeling of deception results, yet this is exactly what Saruman has done. He has gained the trust of others to gain their knowledge and power. It is underlining his deceitful character to name his forces 'the White Hand'. Because it is a part of Tolkien's approach to use an apparent contradiction the reader cannot be quite comfortable with the imagery. Furthermore the portrayal of good and evil is able to move further from Manichaeian concepts to Boethian. Rich light names are completed with Sam's daughter to be named after 'Eleanor, the sun-star' (III, 306). Sam decides on this name as an expression of extreme beauty, and a tone of hope for the future of Middle-earth dominates Sam's speech.

'Shadow' is used early in the trilogy as a fearfully spoken synonym for evil: 'the Shadow takes another shape and grows again and they become Ringwraiths, shadows under his great Shadow' (I, 60). When the noun is capitalized it is a cognomen for Sauron. After the horror of the first encounter with a Ringwraith, Frodo intensifies the name to 'Black Rider' (I, 87). Later, Merry is rendered unconscious by 'The Black Breath' (I, 186) from a confrontation with the Ringwraiths. At the Council of Elrond Gandalf combines the expressions in his reference to 'the Black Shadow' (I, 269), in order to show the shock of the unexpected horrifying news. At this point there ensues another retreat in the imagery. Not until the hobbits are at the Black Gate is Sauron similarly named. This time Gollum calls him 'the Black Hand' (II, 246). In between Sauron is called simply 'the Dark Lord' (I, 380) when considered by Galadriel in the calm of Lothlorien. As the action approaches its climax the capitalized 'Black' occurs more frequently: 'thy Black Master' (III, 55) for Sauron, 'the Black Captain' (III, 90) for

frequently: 'thy Black Master' (III, 55) for Sauron, 'the Black Captain' (III, 90) for the leader of the Nazgul, and 'Black Numenoreans' (III, 164) for the grouping of wraiths to which the Mouth of Sauron belongs. A sense of dread accompanies all uses of 'Black' for in each case there is an evil foe being fallen totally from primal innocence.

With the greater use of 'Black' there is a lessening of the evil effect of 'Shadow'. Gandalf's horse has been named 'Shadowfax' (II, 38) for his grey coat (also reminiscent of Gandalf) and we begin to see 'Shadow' in its intermediate role which varies between good and evil. Saruman, when trying unsuccessfully to frighten the victors at Orthanc, calls the ents 'Shadow of the Wood' (II, 185) but the name is inappropriate for those who have just acted powerfully for goodness against evil. Also acting for goodness are the spirits summoned up from the Paths of the Dead called the 'Shadow-men', 'Shadows' and 'Shadow Host' (all on III, 63). The name is apt, because with these unquiet spirits there is none of the good natured humour of the ents. These spirits are tormented and restless and the word 'Shadow' has here almost its full weight of horror. The evil of oath-breaking in their past is to be redeemed by present service, and so the intermediate sense of the word 'Shadow' takes over. Only three pages later when the 'winged Shadow' is so named there is a sense that the Nazgul are not quite as powerful or horrifying as they previously appeared. Structurally the reader is being prepared for the imminent conflict with Sauron.

The most frequent use of the words of light and dark occurs in the descriptive passages throughout the work. Its use and effects are best demonstrated through close examination of specific contexts. In the following pages two passages will be examined, the first being the meeting with Glorfindel (I, 221). This section begins after a mid-chapter break with a short paragraph setting the scene. There are 'long shadows' and soon the 'light' of the sun is cut off. The description is a

place, names and metaphysical comment. Through the particular detail in this situation the words become ominous. There is 'now no other possible course' and 'a cold wind flowed down to meet them'. The reader is being prepared here for the sudden arrival of a rider. When the company is hidden there are indications that the worst is over. The road is now 'faint and grey in the failing light'. Although this is consistent with nature, the word-choice forms a more moderate example of light and dark than was the introduction. In conjunction with this the noise of the hoofs, 'a light clippety-clippety-clip', does not sound like the feared Black Riders, and the turn round is in no doubt once the attractive sound of 'small bells tinkling' is heard.

At the end of the third paragraph the main image is provided by the look of joy on Strider's face. It is immediately followed by a new paragraph where the light imagery lags. It begins 'The light faded' and here one expects the joy to overcome the darkness and gloom of the natural surroundings. This then occurs with the brilliant description of the elf Glorfindel. There is a 'white horse gleaming in the shadows' with a headstall which 'flickered and flashed, as if it were studded with gems like living stars'. The rider's 'golden hair flowed shimmering' and 'it appeared that a white light was shining through the form and raiment of the rider, as if through a thin veil'. In this description one can see the variety of words used to describe light, but also the presence of the darker 'shadow' and 'dusk' which, by way of contrast, set off the white. Thus, within a simple natural description, the reader is given a hint of our culture's answer to the problem of the existence of evil, and of the fortunate fall which makes man's potential goodness be more glorious for emerging out of the darkness of sin and evil. The description has overt metaphysical meaning in the last part where one is to consider the matter of bodies being merely 'a thin veil' for the (transfiguring) light beyond this world. The phrase 'like living stars', is a preparation for the

light beyond this world. The phrase 'like living stars', is a preparation for the description which then strongly concludes the paragraph . Through the section there is a movement from natural description to the metaphysical.

Much later, the change in Theoden (II, 119-120) shows similar characteristics. To jolt him out of his moral lethargy, Gandalf has suddenly and dramatically made the hall 'dark as night', and is himself the only one visible, 'white and tall before the blackened hearth'. A 'flash' like 'lightning' completes the striking image. Gandalf has effectively presented a metaphor of the moral situation: at present the hall is evil and the only path to the good is through his guidance. After a pause Gandalf points up high and 'there the darkness seemed to clear' and 'a patch of shining sky' becomes visible. Once again light and good are associated with that which is beyond this world. 'Not all is dark' he says, and later 'Too long have you sat in shadows'. The description is at one level physical, but at another level metaphysical, for at this time the world does seem mostly evil and the good is only a small faint hope.

Theoden's change of character has its correlation in the related description of light. Once 'a faint light grew in the hall again', the reader knows that this is a change for the better. Then there is a one paragraph digression in which Eowyn is described with hair 'like a river of gold' in her 'white robe girt with silver', now that she is seen in 'the full light of day'. The description is rich, but qualified in that she has 'not yet come to womanhood', and placed where it is, reminds us that how kings behave will influence the fate of others, their subjects. Aragorn's unrevealed Kingship is still 'greycloaked'. Beyond, there are 'green fields... fading into distant grey', and the sky 'dark' with distant 'lightning'. This scene has only limited hope with the 'green' but this is quickly changed when a

shaft of sun stabbed down. The falling showers
gleamed like silver, and far away the river glittered
like a shimmering glass.

Theoden describes a dramatic change in surrounding nature which is a correlation for the way by which the seemingly all-embracing evil can be suddenly pierced by the good. It is with considerable understatement that Theoden says 'It is not so dark here'. When he casts aside his 'black staff... and his eyes were blue as he looked into the opening sky' the change in him is complete. The most evil word in this section, 'black', has been reserved for Theoden's prop, not his hall or the surrounding nature. In this way it is almost synonymous with Wormtongue the supporting councillor, who covertly weakens his lord. In opposition to 'black' are 'blue' and 'the opening sky'. Blue is a rare colour in Tolkien's works, just as it is in northern Europe, and its use here is a powerful expression of hope.

Contributing further to this symbolism are narrative decisions such as the necessity of night-time travel for secrecy and safety. The leaving sequentially of the Shire, Farmer Maggot's, and Rivendell⁷, in the first volume, all take place by night. In fact, almost all journeys in The Lord of the Rings take place by night. Consequently the descriptive passages involve much significant and symbolic use of light and dark. The metaphysical effect is of a small centre of goodness - (successively: friends, the Fellowship, then Ringbearer and companion) surrounded by vast evil. The image is of Manichaeian evil and it seems hopeless to continue to struggle against it for good.

These analysed passages are typical of much of The Lord of the Rings. Glorfindel's description stands out in that light and goodness are seldom given such unrestrained expression. Yet this process of descriptive writing taking on more pregnant meaning is obvious in both passages. As a result the metaphysical aspect of 'light terms' becomes densely charged throughout.

7. Elrond counsels that they journey under cover of night wherever possible (I, 292).

Variations from this pattern are reflections on the moral stance of the characters or situation involved. The journeys of epic courage into the earth are especially dark and terrifying, and in Moria there is a suffocating sense of surrounding evil, the good being represented by only the faint glimmer of Gandalf's staff. The depths of Middle-Earth are occupied by monsters, some named (Balrog, Shelob), some not (the creature in the Sirannon lake). As Gandalf warns, 'There are older and fouler things than Orcs in the deep places of the world' (I, 323). Thus he is justifiably angry when Pippin drops a stone into the subterranean well in Moria (I, 327). Aragorn's journey through the Paths of the Dead has the horror of darkness and restless spirits. But here, because of Aragorn's single-minded sure leadership, the journey has the style of a ritual of passage. Later Gandalf and the King ride toward the Black Gate in daylight, under a blue sky, for the express purpose of drawing attention to themselves and to die perhaps, so that the Ringbearer has a better chance of success. The effect of the light in conjunction with the natural detail is to ennoble their action.

Another narrative device which gives like dimension to the tale is the Darkness which comes over Minas Tirith. It feels more evil because it is unnatural, and shows Sauron's power now extending over nature and giving foreboding of worse evils to come. The Darkness has added impact, because it is so analagous to the ninth plague in Exodus (10:21), where darkness is used by God and Moses to change Pharaoh's mind. Tolkien inverts the action so that dark is a manifestation of evil but the substance and aim of the two darknesses are similar. That in Exodus is 'darkness which may be felt' while Tolkien's is 'like looking into a pool of ink' (III, 45), and when 'the heavy shadow had deepened... all hearts in the city were oppressed' (III, 80). Jewish legend claims that 'the

darkness was not of the ordinary, earthly kind; it came from hell⁸ and that the natural light would be 'made invisible and swallowed up in the density of the darkness'.⁹ Tolkien similarly describes his darkness as 'devouring light' (III, 80). The image is Manichaeian and an object of fear. Through this usage Tolkien is able to use many more terms for darkness during the assault on Gondor by the Black Captain of the Nazgul. A feeling of oppression and then of despair results. For some it is internalized: 'into their minds a blackness came' (III, 97).

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Light and dark are also used as a structural device for chapters and their sub-sections. Introductions and conclusions frequently rely upon this imagery for their impact. Beginning with a descriptive passage is usual in that it sets the scene in which the action will take place. As already shown, Tolkien uses so much light and dark for atmosphere, thereby gaining a metaphysical dimension, that these introductions set the scene psychically. So the beginning of Chapter 7, 'The Mirror of Galadriel' (I, 368), has 'shadows', 'dusk' and 'Night', reminding us of the vast evil around the sanctuary of Lorien. Then there follows a profusion of light words: 'glowed', 'twilight', 'countless lights were gleaming, green and gold and silver', and 'green' three more times. The evil is rebuffed by the good found here.

Concluding sections are more likely to end with darkness and evil. This is fitting for a quest that ever seems almost hopeless. At the end of one section the Mordor mountains are described 'as a deeper black against the black sky' (III, 196) so that the very landscape seems to be evil. In another place, after being told that 'Night fell' only two sentences previously, the chapter concludes with

8. Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews (trans. Henrietta Szold), 7 vols., Vol. II, Philadelphia, (1st pub. 1920) 1980, p. 359.

9. ibid., p. 360.

Treebeard's comment: 'Night lies over Isengard' (II, 90). The comment is both literal and allegoric, for Isengard is oppressed by evil. A similar effect on a smaller scale is gained by beginning or ending sentences with a light or dark word. It adds a sparse underscoring to the mood.

This pattern of the polarities of good and evil, light and dark, reaches its peak in the overtly metaphysical statements. In Lorien the Fellowship is told of the struggle between Galadriel and Sauron:

whereas the light perceives the very heart of the
darkness, its own secret has not been discovered. Not
yet. (I, 366)

Just as strong light pierces darkness, so goodness knows the nature of evil. As darkness, in turn, cannot pierce light, so evil cannot know the nature of goodness. In common with most of the narrative, the framework is one of Manichaeian evil struggling against human forces. Here, for the first time, the good is able to withstand the power of evil in direct conflict. Yet the light imagery has a suggestion of Boethian evil; although the evil has an intelligence, its nature is simply the absence of good. Because it is a qualified stand by Galadriel, dependent upon the fate of the Ring, the dualism continues to dominate the narrative, but the reader has been prepared for the necessitous view which the work ultimately presents.

Sometimes the imagery is a strong condemnation, for example, 'that dark mind' (II, 200) used of Sauron, or 'the dark labour of its slaves' (II, 239), for the desolation of Mordor. In other places it is used for external and internal evil, like Denethor's 'less now to me is that darkness' [the fall of Gondor] 'than my own darkness' [the loss of his son and heir] (III, 27).

Yet the strongest effect comes from Tolkien's usages of 'black' and 'night'. Thus, as Sam retells the story of Beren and the Silmaril, he describes it as 'a blacker danger than ours' (II, 321), which has considerable force, considering they

are on the stairs of Cirith Ungol about to enter Mordor itself. However, the type of evil here is imprecise. Later, when Sam and the reader believe that his Master has been killed, the climax of the description is extreme:

And then black despair came down on him... and night
came into his heart (II, 340)

This is the strongest use of the word 'night' in the trilogy and its use here, clearly an extension beyond 'black', highlights other uses of 'night' throughout.

As it is midmorning when Beregonid says to Pippin 'I fear that Minas Tirith shall fall. Night comes.' (III, 38-39), the word 'night' has here an almost Eastertide force. After these overt metaphysical uses, added weight is given to other occurrences of 'night'. The horror of the last nights spent in Mordor by Frodo and Sam is presented through the climax of the imagery of darkness (III, 212-213). Here the evil power is 'looming blacker, like the oncoming of a wall of night at the last end of the world.' Then there comes 'a dreadful nightfall', an 'ever-darkening dream', and 'the blackness of night'. After 'Night covered them both', Frodo 'turned to his own dark thoughts', while Sam was 'under a shadow of fear'. Waking from dreams of 'dark creeping shapes' Sam finds the world 'all dark and only empty blackness all about him'. In this way 'the hateful night passed slowly and reluctantly.' This all occurs in just over one page and its impact is almost overpowering. But as ever with this imagery Tolkien's touch is sure.

Evil's power to sweep one into death is described in like absolute terms. Thus an orc claims that the Nazgul would 'skin the body off you... and leave you all cold in the dark on the other side.' (II, 347) This is more extreme than the grey misty world into which wearing the Ring takes one. Yet a death into darkness is not the worst that can befall. When the Nazgul delivers his threat in person, the result is the most chilling extension of the dark imagery:

Come not between the Nazgul and his prey! Or he will
not slay thee in thy turn. He will bear thee away to
the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness, where

thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy shrivelled mind be
left naked to the Lidless Eye. (III, 116)

Heightened by the almost Hebraic phrasing, here the state of possession by evil is presented as transcending the usual imagery of darkness. Presumably this is passage into Chaos beyond this world. It is reminiscent of the description of Bombadil given at Elrond's Council: 'Last as he was First; and then Night will come' (I, 279). This is the same as the quoted 'oncoming of a wall of night at the last end of the world'. Hobbits do not so despair, but it is a measure of the restorative effect of the final chapter that Frodo can claim, after seeing Arwen Evenstar:

This is the ending. Now not day only shall be beloved,
but night too shall be beautiful and blessed and all its
fears pass away! (III, 251)

No longer is night the cover for evil doings, or protection for those struggling against the evil forces. But, coming after many elemental usages, Frodo's words have more force. They indicate acceptance of death and of the transience of the world.

A similar effect is given by the last page of the work. Frodo, Gandalf and the elves have departed and Sam remains surrounded by 'darkness' (III, 311), looking at a 'grey sea' and seeing 'only a shadow on the waters'. He stands there 'far into the night'. Eventually 'the long grey road' is taken and home is reached the following evening without any mention of the light of the intervening day. All is darkness save for the small 'yellow light' of home. Within this illumination are the pleasures and achievements of life: warmth, food, chair, wife and child. It all seems so small compared with the vastness of the darkness, yet it is the best Sam can do with the life he has:

He drew a deep breath. 'Well, I'm back,' he said.

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So far this study has considered the use of light and dark to be mainly a presentation of Manichaeian evil. The work's imaginative impact depends upon the clash of the two adversaries: the projection of vast evil, and of its seemingly weaker opposite, the good. At some points Boethian evil has been suggested in the imagery, but with no regularity in the structure. Thus the word 'shadow' can be viewed in two ways. Usually we are encouraged to think of it as tactile, possessing shape and motion, and, when large enough, an awe-inspiring foe, the image of evil. Yet shadow is also merely the absence of light, and, no matter how large, is insignificant in comparison with the vast light behind and beyond it. Tolkien suggests this meaning through his many uses of the word 'shadow', and this reinforces the emerging view of evil as contingent and able to be resisted.

A similar mixture of motifs occurs in the apparent inconsistencies in the use of light and dark imagery. In descriptive passages in particular, Tolkien frequently relieves the effect of the dominant image, be it light or dark, through one mention of the opposite. These contrary uses give balance and prevent the whole from becoming overpowering. Since Tolkien's words have metaphysical weight there is also an effect upon the whole moral schema.

On entering Tom Bombadil's house (I, 134) the dominant impression is the brilliance of the many candles. This reflects the relief of sanctuary after the horrors of the Old Forest, and also the moral quality of Bombadil. Yet within this description the previously malign word 'dark' appears: 'the table of dark polished wood'. This ever so slightly modifies the strong aura of light. A similar usage is that of leaves 'dark and polished' (II, 73) in a friendly setting near Treebeard's ent-house. The same muted effect is gained through the many references to Aragorn's dark hair in the midst of descriptions involving light words. On a symbolic level, the black and silver livery and standard of Gondor incorporate the more subtly heraldic 'black' for many occurrences in the second half of the work.

The nett effect of these and many similar usages is to remind one of evil even in the midst of the greatest brightness and goodness. No matter how slightly, evil is always a potential in any situation. This adds to the feeling of Boethian evil, slowly varying the initial (pessimistic) moral framework. Late in the work there is enough confidence with the mixture of the imagery for an inversion, whereby the heroes Frodo and Sam are described in the distance as 'two small dark figures' (III, 229). This is after Frodo's failure at the Cracks of Doom to reject the Ring, as is witnessed by Sam who is too loyal to mention it. While around them the Third Age ends, 'small' typifies the individual's place in the great sweep of history, and 'dark' suggests the possibility of evil again emerging.

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There are two minor uses of light and dark, and both unsettle the earlier duality of good and evil. Firstly, eyes are usually described in terms of light/glitter whether or not the character's intentions are good or evil. This is best evidenced in the change in Gollum's eyes from 'shining' (II, 296) to a 'green light... flickering' (II, 297), from Smeagol to Gollum. Here 'green' indicates evil. Secondly, weapons frequently glint menacingly and the effect is a little unsettling, although the words for goodness are used for resistance. When a weapon glows to simply warn of imminent danger, light is again associated with good. These subtle uses of light and dark assist in conveying the impression of an inter-relationship between good and evil, beyond the earlier duality. Furthermore, these uses add to the total of light/dark words in the text and underline the author's concern with this imagery.

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As mentioned earlier, imagery of light and dark occurs widely throughout ancient literature. There is a dignified simplicity in the usage, but modern writers who attempt to use it often fail. Tolkien's successful 'light' imagery is a result of his many years' study of the ancient literature in which man perceived his world in terms of light and dark – of the classical but also Old English periods.

Fleiger correctly stresses the metaphysical and moral to Tolkien's professional life as:

a voyage to recover meaning and from that meaning to recapture the imagination and perception of those for whom the word was current [and that] his scholarship, combined with imagination, is the matrix of his fiction.¹⁰

Further, one may note that consideration is given to light and dark in Tolkien's essay 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics'¹¹. However, the original literature needs to be examined for its important effect. Teaching Old English every day must have worked strongly in guiding Tolkien's imagination. His part in the reform of the English syllabus in 1931¹² made practical criticisms of Beowulf and other Old English works compulsory for Literature as well as Language students. In these, the formative years of Tolkien's major creative writings, the atmosphere of the Oxford school must have been heavy with Old English.

As a philologist Tolkien would have been aware of what Grimm called the 'interlacing of the notions "day, sky, god"'¹³ in 'Teutonic' and many related

10. Fleiger, op. cit., p. 9.

11. J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', in Lewis E. Nicholson (ed.), An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, Notre Dame, 1963.

12. J.R.R. Tolkien, 'The Oxford English School', The Oxford Magazine, Vol. 48, No. 21, 29 May 1930, pp. 778-782.

13. Jacob Grimm, Teutonic Mythology, J.S. Stallybrass (trans.), 4 vols., Vol. II, 1883 (1st pub. 1835), pp. 735-736. Additionally Tolkien would have been familiar with O.E. leoht (light) also meaning 'world'. See Alan S.C. Ross, 'O.E. leoht 'world'', Notes and Queries, No. 220, May 1975, p. 196.

languages. Similarly we are told that 'Mueller's analysis of light as religious phenomenon would... have been familiar to Tolkien.'¹⁴ To use 'light' and related words in this way indicates a contemporary writer/reader community which sees the numinous all around them, much as did the Old English poets. Few such moments are without some light reference and therefore all conversion time Germanic Christian life would have had in its 'light' passages the possible equivalence of near continuous prayer. This is the source for the cohesive world view of The Lord of the Rings.

Furthermore, Grimm showed that in many expressions in Teutonic languages:

'Night is regarded as a hostile, evil power, in contrast to the kindly character of Day [and that] between Day and Night there is perennial strife.'¹⁵

As shown in the previous analysis this is clearly the world of The Lord of the Rings. Old Norse and Old English have separate words for the deeper stillness of night. In both the meaning is the 'killing' or the 'felling' of the day¹⁶. Tolkien recaptures some of this perception of violent cosmic struggle in his use of the words.

* * * *

Tolkien's extensive use of imagery of light and dark also has its parallel in much of Old English poetry. Mead has calculated that of all surviving 30,000 lines there is one word referring to light or brightness on an average in every thirty seven lines¹⁷. Lexical items expressing darkness are about half as frequent, with

14. J.S. Ryan, 'Mueller, Sayce, Lang and Tolkien', Proceedings, Mythopoeic Literature Society, Brisbane (1985), p. 37.

15. Grimm, op. cit., p. 752.

16. ibid., p. 739.

17. W.E. Mead, 'Colour in Old English Poetry', P.M.L.A., New Series Vol. VII, No. 2, 1899, p. 175.

the most common word being niht (night). The occurrence is greater in the religious poetry, which Mead describes as 'a series of studies in black and white, or, rather darkness and light'¹⁸. The qualification is needed since darkness is referred to three times more often than blackness, and light six times more often than white¹⁹.

Allowing for the difference of compressed expression between poetry and prose, Tolkien's use of light and dark is greater than the above average. In fact it would approach that of the religious poetry. After years of teaching these works Tolkien must have been well aware that he was writing 'modern' Dark Age (Ælfrician) religious prose. The major difference is Tolkien's inversion of the proportions of light and dark. His fictional field is of the pre-Christian era, hence the darkness, but still with intensity, hence the frequent clash of light and dark. Further Tolkien exhibits the same interest in the brooding presence of night. Thus one could paraphrase Mead and call The Lord of the Rings an extended study in darkness and light.

That the Anglo-Saxons had a different perception of light and dark is most clearly presented by Lerner²⁰. Briefly, real problems are encountered in translating Old English colour words. For example, the word brun which has developed into our 'brown' was also used for the waves of the sea, a sword edge and a helmet. A more consistent translation would be a 'flash in the sunlight' or 'brilliance'²¹. By contrast, modern colour words are mostly concerned with hue, and this change of focus has been recent²², and:

18. ibid..

19. ibid., pp. 174-175, 178.

20. L.D. Lerner, 'Colour Words in Anglo-Saxon', M.L.R., Vol. 46, 1951, pp. 246-249. This article builds upon Mead's earlier work.

21. ibid., p. 247.

22. ibid., p. 246.

we have moved further from experience. Anglo-Saxon colour words probably describe more truly what are actually the commonest colour sensations²³

Tolkien the Old English scholar, considering his dissatisfaction with modern life evidenced in his letters²⁴, would have enjoyed this description and probably agreed with it. For his creative work he has recaptured this earlier way of seeing, and with it the concomitant moral stance.

Beowulf, the major Old English work, is recognised in several studies as an important influence upon Tolkien's fictional work²⁵, and many of the details already noted for The Lord of the Rings have their analogues in Beowulf, whose descriptions make much use of light and dark. Thus, Heorot is:

the most famous of buildings under heaven; - in this
the ruler dwelt, - its radiance gleamed o'er many
lands.²⁶

Weapons, armour and treasure 'are seen almost exclusively in terms of light'²⁷, not only in Beowulf but in all Old English literature. Importantly placed at the beginning of a long speech one finds:

23. ibid., p. 248.

24. Letters, passim. See also J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Prefatory Remarks' to John R. Clark Hall (trans.), Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment, 1980 (first appearing in rev. ed. 1940), p. xi.

25. Bonniejean McGuire Christensen, 'Beowulf and The Hobbit: Elegy into Fantasy in J.R.R. Tolkien's Creative Technique', Ph.D. thesis, University of Southern California, 1969. William Howard Green, 'The Hobbit and Other Fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien: Their Roots in Medieval Heroic Literature and Language', Ph.D. thesis, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1969. Verlyn Brown Flieger, 'Medieval Epic and Romance Motifs in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings', Ph.D. thesis, The Catholic University of America, 1977. These studies cover more general links than those treated herein.

26. Clark Hall, op. cit., ll. 308-311. This edition of Beowulf is used throughout as Tolkien would have had some input (See H. Carpenter, J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography, London, 1978 (1st pub. 1977), pp. 184, 196.). Further references to Beowulf will be incorporated in the text thus (Beo, 308-311). For the Old English the source is Michael Swanton, Beowulf, New York, 1978.

27. Jean Ritzke-Rutherford, Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing, Frankfurt, 1979, p. 195.

Beowulf spoke, the corslet on him shone, the armour
cunningly linked by the skill of the smith
(Beo, 405-407).

These examples show more than the Anglo-Saxons' different visual perception. Heorot's 'radiance' underlines the fame of the place, and by extension, the quality of the kingship of its ruler. Beowulf's shining armour indicates his confident and dignified manner. Similarly, light and dark are used as obvious metaphysical indicators. Grendel is called a sceadugenga or 'creature of the shadows' (Beo, 703), as well as deorc deapscua or 'dark death-shadow' (Beo, 159). Furthermore, he inhabits 'the endless night' (Beo, 161), which gives the landscape and the poem its 'general impression of blackness'²⁸. In literal terms, the night is not endless in the poem and the phrase is a metaphysical comment similar to Tolkien's 'night'. Although goodness may prevail for a period, evil and night will return.

Light is varied with dark throughout to give an impression of the variations in the balance between good and evil. So Beowulf's arrival in Denmark 'is the signal for the irradiation of the scene with a flood of brilliant light.'²⁹ Goodness and courage are to the fore, while darkness and evil are a brooding background presence. Subsequently, Beowulf's battle with the sea-monsters in the Breca episode takes place in the night. In the morning light the results are seen and Beowulf is advised to journey to relieve Hrothgar. After Beowulf's recounting of this story and Hrothgar's acceptance of help, night has fallen. This vast night in which Grendel rules makes the hall seem quite small, although 'gleaming with plated gold' (Beo, 715-716). The image is one of slight hope similar to Sam's return to his hearth out of the night at the end of The Lord of the Rings.

28. Herbert G. Wright, 'Good and Evil; Light and Darkness; Joy and Sorrow in Beowulf', Review of English Studies, New Series Vol. 8, 1957, p. 4.

29. ibid., p. 5.

As Grendel enters the hall 'from his eyes there came a horrible light, most like a flame' (Beo, 726-727). This is the same perversion of light imagery seen in Tolkien's Nazgul (I, 208), Balrog (I, 344), Gollum (II, 297) and Shelob (II, 334). Following the battle and Grendel's departure, daylight returns and with it:

a repeated emphasis on gold – in the tapestry hanging on the walls, in the weapons, the banner, and the trappings of the steeds presented to Beowulf by Hrothgar, and in the armour, arm-rings, and collar handed to the hero by Wealhtheow as she moves through the hall, wearing her golden crown.³⁰

This wealth of benign light detail is only matched by Tolkien in the chapter 'In the House of Tom Bombadil' with its similar feeling of spiritual safety heightened by the release from the evil force.

After the attack by Grendel's mother, the poem is concerned with the darkness of her mere where 'even in the broad daylight the wood overshadows the dark pool.'³¹ Beowulf is only able to see because of 'a fiery light... a glaring flame [that does] shine brightly.' (Beo, 1517-1518) This is reminiscent of Tolkien's description of the Cracks of Doom (III, 222). There all is 'stifling dark' until 'all at once there came a flash of red that leaped upward'. Further on, the characters see the fissure 'out of which the red glare came, now leaping up, now dying down into darkness.' The perversion of light imagery in fire gives both settings their atmosphere of struggle against ultimate evil. Tolkien also uses a similar setting for Gandalf's testing by dire evil in Moria (I, 342-345). Here all is 'darkness' except for pillars 'smooth and black', with a 'red glow'. When closer up, a fissure can be seen out of which comes 'a fierce red light'. However, in this setting Tolkien takes the imagery a step further in Gandalf's speech to the Balrog:

I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame

30. ibid., p. 6.

31. ibid..

of Annor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail
you, flame of Udun. Go back to the Shadow! (I, 344)

Tolkien is thus reclaiming the imagery of light, for the presenting of moral goodness. Evil can pervert light for its own purposes, just as it can pervert good, but there is an ultimate goodness which it cannot turn, which Tolkien here calls 'the Secret Fire'. The Balrog's reaction reinforces its evil but limited nature: 'The fire in it seemed to die, but the darkness grew.' (I, 345) When confronted with the ultimate good, evil is less able to influence others and its true nature becomes more obvious.

In the last section of Beowulf, Herbert Wright claims that 'darkness in a metaphorical sense is transferred to the mind of Beowulf'³², the cause of his 'gloomy thoughts' (Beo, 2332). Furthermore, the 'light that shone so freely in the narration of his youthful exploits has vanished'³³. Similarly, Frodo has been weakened through his struggle with evil and claims, mysteriously for those around him: 'and now all is dark and empty.' (III, 304) The darkness which surrounds the end of The Lord of the Rings has already been noted and has its parallel in the end of Beowulf.

* * * *

With Beowulf we do not have a master form which Tolkien has simply followed in slavish fashion. Rather is it that he had evolved and presented us with a cosmological philosophy similar to that exemplified in this pre-eminent Old English poem. Many distinct details in it may appear to be sources or at least analogues for The Lord of the Rings. Tolkien's achievement however is that he is able to capture the moral force of the original imagery and to express it in a prose acceptable to a modern audience.

32. ibid., pp. 6-7.

33. ibid., p. 7.

CHAPTER II

LIGHT AND DARK - II

from [Grendel's] eyes there came a horrible light,
most like a flame.' (Beo, 726-727)

* * * *

On turning to The Hobbit its overlaps with The Lord of the Rings would lead one to expect that its treatment of good and evil would be expressed in similar imagery of light and dark. Close examination of the text shows that the imagery is indeed used for this purpose, but without the later intensity of meaning. The effect of reading The Hobbit after The Lord of the Rings is of reading a less metaphysical text. The light and dark of the Germanic world is important for the story's moral order but it is not yet given full expression. Although his private mythologies used light and dark in a stylized symbolic fashion one can see Tolkien exploring the limits of this imagery in more conventional narrative.

Only two chapter headings contain this imagery: 'Riddles in the Dark' and 'A Thief in the Night'. Both provide opportunities for descriptions that imply that the darkness is more than natural. The goblins and Gollum live in the first darkness, and it provides the background for sudden rescue, firstly by Gandalf with fire and light¹, then later by leaping over another and squeezing through a

1. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit, (4th edition), London, 1983 (1st pub. 1937), p. 62. Subsequent references will be incorporated in the text thus (H, 62).

doorway. In the latter chapter the 'Night' is mainly naturalistic. However, it sets the scene for moral risks, being a time for reflection, decision and necessary secrecy. Tolkien underlines the particular lack of light through use of the more extreme description: 'The sky was black and moonless.' (H, 226)

There are no formal terms for past ages and this opportunity to underscore the light imagery is forgone. Similarly the proper names for places do not include any of the charged light and dark terms from the later continuum. Instead we have the related terms 'Mirkwood' and 'Misty Mountains'. Yet in the actual descriptions of the settings, the charged terms are crucial to the effect and take on some metaphysical meaning. Before looking at this in some detail it should be noted that the main incidents of the story take place in the night or in darkness: Bilbo becomes entranced with the dwarves' story at night in Bag End; all are attracted to the troll's fire at night; the storm on the Misty Mountains and their capture by goblins are at night; they are surrounded by wolves at night; there are suspicious night sounds around Beorn's; they are attracted to the elves' lights in Mirkwood's darkness; it is dark under the Lonely Mountain; and finally the Arkenstone is handed over at night. In each case the darkness is vast and the individuals tiny. There is a feeling that the individual could be easily overwhelmed by the darkness itself or by whatever lives in it. Countering the darkness the only opposing forces are: on the dwarves' part, their desire for treasure, revenge and survival; and on Bilbo's part, desire for the respect of others, adventure and survival. The struggle between the two aspects, therefore, does not have the selfless service of a higher good that one finds with Frodo. From this difference one can see that The Hobbit is working on a lesser level, and that the characters are simpler. Nevertheless, the light imagery is consistent and can actually indicate the imminent fall of a character. Thus, although The Hobbit

does not attempt to reflect the all-embracing metaphysical struggle of Beowulf, it does employ the light imagery of the Old English poetry in a consistent way.

The use of light imagery is readily shown through an examination of the first chapter 'An Unexpected Party'. Hobbits are noted for their 'bright colours (chiefly green and yellow)... warm brown hair... and clever brown fingers' (H, 12). The description is positive, unambiguous, and sets the pattern for the description of good throughout. Not until after the meal is an indication given of the terms to be used to describe evil. A cloud of smoke rings is over Gandalf's head 'and in the dim light it made him look strange and sorcerous' (H, 20). Beauty is described with the same imagery as good, and so Thorin's 'beautiful golden harp 'is wrapped in a green cloth.' Once the music starts Bilbo is overcome and 'swept away into dark lands under strange moons' (H, 21). The description uses darkness for an exciting unknown, but in the following paragraphs it becomes threateningly metaphysical:

The dark came into the room... the firelight flickered...
the shadow of Gandalf's beard wagged against the
wall.

Darkness is here described by pathetic fallacy, giving the impression of an active force. Furthermore the description sets the pattern for great darkness surrounding a little light, which is developed throughout Tolkien's works, based on its powerful seminal use in Beowulf. The description also includes the shadow image for Gandalf's possibly ambivalent nature. Active darkness then 'filled all the room, and the fire died down, and the shadows were lost', thus intensifying the image.

The dwarves' song next contrasts 'gleaming', 'light' and 'gold' with 'dark', 'night', 'dim' and the red fire (H, 21-22). This inspires Bilbo who looks out at stars 'in a dark sky', thinks of jewels 'shining in dark caverns' as Tolkien reinforces the image of vast darkness and small central goodness. A sudden flame beyond 'The Water' jolts Bilbo into fear of dragons, and the pattern of fire being

an agent of either good or evil is set. In this situation it is no surprise that when he is the centre of attention, surrounded by 'eyes shining in the dark', Bilbo would dare to consider fetching 'the lamp' for 'a little light'. Nor is it surprising that he is so crushed by the reply:

'We like the dark,' said all the dwarves. 'Dark for dark business!' (H, 23)

The dwarves mean secrecy, but to Bilbo the reply would also suggest some (vast) evil. From this point he feels possessed, an uncomprehending tool of those around him, until he utters an involuntary shriek. The light imagery is reclaimed for goodness when Gandalf 'struck a blue light on the end of his magic staff', with 'its firework glare', and when Bilbo called out 'struck by lightning, struck by lightning!' The most powerful character wields a light in the rare colour, for goodness, blue. The effect is clearer if one considers the opposite. If at this point Gandalf struck a red light with Bilbo crying 'struck by fire', then the possession by evil would seem complete. As put, it is another image of goodness small in comparison to the vast darkness, and this is sufficient for Bilbo's worst fears to now be over.

After Bilbo decides to go with the dwarves the imagery is mixed. Gandalf calls for 'a little light' for the map, thus picking up Bilbo's earlier plea. Yet he is given a 'big lamp with a red shade'; they see 'a dragon marked in red' (H, 26); the narrator tells the reader about 'runes in red'; and finally Bilbo has a 'map with all his favourite walks marked on it in red ink.' Four uses of red within one page have an impact on the reader. Red is often used to indicate the danger of unknown places, perhaps evil, but the two familiar uses suggest that one can confront this evil and survive, which, on the metaphysical level is the major theme of the work. The chapter continues for several more pages and concludes without further references to light, having already established a framework of known and unknown, safety and danger, and good and evil. Before the chapter ends several of

the moral topics of Tolkien's work are introduced: draconitas (or lust for possessions), determinism and free will, knowing and understanding, and the role of service and kingship.

Keeping in mind that the moral intensity of the imagery in The Hobbit does not approach that in the trilogy, it can be readily seen that Tolkien uses his earlier imagery in generally similar ways to guide the reader's response. Throughout The Hobbit, the choice of dark settings is accompanied by descriptions in light and dark with spiritual significance. On the first page of description of the journey from the Shire, the travellers are approaching 'dreary hills, rising higher and higher, dark with trees.' (H, 34) Here 'dark' denotes the colour of the trees as 'approaching black in hue' (O.E.D. adj. sense 3). Due to the nature of the journey the word also has connotations of the unknown and the possible danger ahead, thereby taking on O.E.D. adj. sense 5, 'Devoid of that which brightens or cheers; gloomy, cheerless, dismal, sad.' The sentence immediately following adds to this scene 'old castles with an evil look, as if they had been built by wicked people', and by reflexion 'dark' takes on O.E.D. adj. sense 4, 'absence of moral or spiritual light; evil, wicked'. In the following sentence Tolkien adds the word 'gloomy', underlining the sense 5 meaning. The total impact is that the reader is guided from natural, to emotional, to spiritual meanings, and thereby becomes a little more ready to see the potential for the morally symbolic in the natural.

Other descriptions in The Hobbit cover the same range as that of the longer work. Bilbo looks up at stars 'burning bright and blue' (H, 48) just before the elves' laughter can be heard, thereby underlining the link between light, blue and goodness. The pattern of goodness emerging surprisingly from seemingly all-embracing evil is continued with the description of the first sight of the elves: 'soon Bilbo caught glimpses of them as the darkness deepened' (H, 49). Later, when rescued by the eagles, Bilbo sees below him 'the dark lands... touched

here and there with the light of the moon' and, ahead, the mountains as 'moonlit spikes of rock sticking out of black shadows.' (H, 96) In the four examples above the light/goodness is tiny, while the darkness/evil is vast, - another of Tolkien's common descriptive methods. One description in the work calls for a vast expanse of light, that is when Bilbo climbs up and out of the darkness of Mirkwood into the brilliant sunlight above. For some balance it would first appear, Tolkien describes the treetops as 'a sea of dark green' (H, 129) But then he adds a reference to the hundreds of butterflies of 'a dark dark velvety black' (H, 130). The suggestion of evil comes to dominate the scene when the butterflies are called 'black emperors', perhaps reminiscent of the powerful Necromancer, called 'that black sorcerer' only nine pages earlier, and in the northern parts of whose forest they are journeying. The total impression is that Tolkien does not wish to dwell on light/goodness, as though that would be an ultimate, beyond the struggles of his characters, and that the reader's attention must be kept on the darkness/evil aspect of the forest with only momentary relief afforded.

As well as the Necromancer, other characterization is given a spiritual aspect by the use of light/dark. Gollum's essentially evil nature is made clear from his first description 'as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes' (H, 67). Trolls and goblins operate best in the darkness, and daylight is actually fatal to the former. Because of the large number of settlers, wargs dare not attack in 'the bright day' (H, 91). Blackness is so important to the portrayal of the giant spiders that it extends to their physical insides. After slaying one, Bilbo's 'sword-blade was stained black.' (H, 135) This prefigures the trilogy's Shelob, who would 'vomit darkness.' (II, 332) The same idea is applied to the goblins when during the battle we are told that the 'rocks were stained black with goblin blood.' (H, 187) In the trilogy the idea is extended: 'Black drops dripped from the blade and smoked on the floor.' (I, 339)

Associated with light imagery is the use of colour for characterization. Thus Smaug is characterized by 'a red light', the 'glow of Smaug!' (H, 184) And as if in demonic worship 'black rock-shadows danced.' (H, 187) The nature of differing nations is reflected in their banners of war: goblins have black and red (H, 238), elves have green and the Lakemen blue (H, 222). Hobbits are introduced through the colours of vegetation and earth: green, brown and yellow (H, 12).

Tolkien's use of eyes to indicate good and evil is clearer in The Hobbit than in the trilogy. When eyes are said to shine we mean reflected light, such as Gandalf's 'eyes gleaming in the moon as he peeped out.' (H, 90) Further, to indicate ferocity, we have idiomatic expressions which suggest the emission of inner light, such as the wolves 'with eyes blazing and tongues hanging out.' (H, 90) However, Tolkien makes this idiom a literal means of portraying evil. In the darkness of the underground lake Gollum's eyes actually emit light. Bilbo can see 'two small points of light peering at him' (H, 76). As suspicion grows so does the light, and 'his eyes burned with a pale flame' becoming eventually 'a green fire'. In the confused pursuit, even from behind, Bilbo can see the light from Gollum's eyes 'palely shining' (H, 77), and the varying directions of Gollum's gaze indicated by 'the faint glimmer on the walls.' From here on, idiomatic uses, much as that above for the wolves, take on more power, and even more so when Tolkien lingers on the description: [the wolves'] eyes shining as red and fierce as the flames.' (H, 94) Smaug's eyes also emit light, a 'thin and piercing ray of red' (H, 189), this warning Bilbo just in time that the dragon was only feigning sleep. These uses underscore the differences between the good and evil characters, but they also hint at the difference in nature between good and evil. The eyes of some characters reflect the light and goodness around them, while the eyes of the evil characters are measures of their spiritual power, misdirected to the loss of their own life force. This type of description has an analogue in Beowulf. The

first time we see Grendel, entering the hall with murderous intent, we are told that 'from his eyes there came a horrible light, most like a flame.' (Beo, 726-727) Again we see Tolkien attempting to recapture the (pagan) moral worldview of the Germanic peoples in his descriptions.

At several further points in The Hobbit the author makes clear metaphysical use of light and dark. For example, the rescue from the trolls is brought about by the coming of light (H, 42), Gandalf merely delays the trolls. The lasting impression is one of light as an undefined but awesome power for good. In the riddle competition the answer to Gollum's third riddle is 'Dark', but the clues go beyond the requirements of natural darkness. As is common in riddles, the subject is personified and made to sound like an active being:

It lies behind stars and under hills,
And empty holes it fills. (H, 70)

This lightly underscores the earlier description of darkness as an active agent (H, 21), and helps to reinforce similar later uses (H, 112, 181, 237). However, the last two lines of the riddle go much further:

It comes first and follows after,
Ends life, kills laughter.

This is the pagan world of Beowulf, and that which Bede records in the famous image of life being like a sparrow flying swiftly through a warm lit hall and then back out into the vast dark beyond². The image is delivered by one of the King's chief men advising that they all accept the new religion, Christianity. Tolkien's usage here foreshadows the trilogy's 'wall of night at the last end of the world' (III, 212). In The Hobbit it is quickly passed over as Bilbo finds the expressions commonplace. Yet the impression of a pagan world remains, and with it a hint that

2. Bede, A History of the English Church and People, Leo Sherley-Price (trans.), Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 127, [II. 13].

the sufferings of Gollum have given him some painful wisdom as yet to be gained by the comparatively comfortable hobbit. With the discovery of the doorway into the dragon's mountain, light is described in such a way as to make it also seem like an active agent of goodness (H, 179). Bilbo has a feeling of expectancy, and the last of the sun and the first of the new moon are in conjunction, before a sudden gleam of light reveals the keyhole, and is gone (H, 180). The impression is of goodness being able to pierce through evil unexpectedly, and so assist those who need it.

Weapons and jewels are described in a similar fashion to that used in the trilogy. The ancient elvish swords glow when evil forces are near. Gandalf's staff operates as a weapon for goodness through its various uses of light. In the mountain cave, Gandalf is saved from the goblins due to its 'terrific flash like lightning' (H, 58), and later in their main hall it is presumably through the staff that Gandalf raises:

a tower of blue gleaming smoke, right up to the roof,
that scattered piercing white sparks among the
goblins. (H, 62)

The first use, coming just after the description of the storm made by the 'stone-giants', indicates elemental power and reminds us that goodness is not merely passive and weak. In the second use, white and the colour blue underline the goodness, while the unexpectedness and the size indicate power. At this point there is a feeling that whatsoever befalls the group, they are safe whilst under Gandalf's protection.

The traditional morally neutral description of weapons is also present, such as 'the glint of the moon on goblin spears and helmets' (H, 93). A similar description is that of Bard's black arrow which kills the dragon. To readers unaware of this tradition both examples would appear to contradict the previous explicitly moral use of this imagery. Goblins are clearly evil and even a glimpse

of their weapons is foreboding. Bard's arrow is so old and true that it appears a most fitting agent for effectiveness. The word 'black' is overwhelmed by the arrow's pedigree, the dragon's death, and by the subsequent 'vast steam [which] leaped up, white in the sudden dark under the moon.' (H, 212)

Other contradictory uses, which, at the very least, add balance to individual passages of description, are: the attractive tall bright flowers growing in treacherous bogs (H, 47); the dangerously misleading lights of the forest elves (H, 131-134); Mirkwood described as 'blue' and 'darkly green' (H, 248); and finally, the good man Bard's black hair (H, 213, 223). To some extent these few contradictory uses make the imagery less predictable and, in the pattern of the trilogy, suggest that good and evil are more complex than such simple opposites. Structural uses of light/dark are few, but they are found across the ends of sentences, paragraphs and chapters. In the longer work Tolkien puts more weight upon the imagery through this type of usage.

Although light/dark imagery does not reach its later artistic frequency and dramatic placement in The Hobbit, it is important in giving this text its taut moral structure, which becomes a framework for the other moral themes.

* * * *

Of Tolkien's shorter fiction, only 'Leaf by Niggle'³ tries for more meaning from this imagery. This story was written in the period 1933-39:

when The Lord of the Rings was beginning to unroll itself and to unfold prospects of labour and exploration (T&L, 9).

3. J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Leaf by Niggle', most accessible in his collection Tree and Leaf, London, 1975. All references to this edition will be incorporated within the text thus: (T&L, 9).

Tolkien, the student, would agree that much of this labour was in finding an idiom to best define this created country. In 'Leaf by Niggle' Tolkien thus explores and increases the use of light/dark terminology and finds that it is a vocabulary which may carry much meaning. In this short text, 'light' is used to suggest that the ultimate aim of art is illumination. Thus when Niggle paints a leaf, he is trying to capture 'its shape, and its sheen, and the glistening of dewdrops on its edges.' (T&L, 81) He ascends a ladder 'trying to catch the gleam of the westering sun on the peak of a snow-mountain' (T&L, 83), and he later discovers the exact way in which to paint the 'shining spray' (T&L, 85). The artist's perception contrasts with that of the ordinary man, Parish, who can see 'only green and grey patches and black lines' (T&L, 83), the whole for him being 'nonsensical'.

With the interruption to Niggle's work, the emphasis moves towards darkness for both Niggle and the reader. First 'daylight was waning' (T&L, 85). Next, the Driver arrives 'dressed all in black' (T&L, 87), and an elaborate (neo-medieval) allegory for death develops as Niggle drops off to sleep travelling into 'a dark tunnel' (T&L, 88), and on waking finds himself at a 'dim' railway station. He then undergoes a form of purgatory through being kept 'in the dark for hours at a stretch' (T&L, 89), and through necessary hard labour, without there being any mention of even the artificial light necessary for this work. Punishment through deprivation and restriction is heightened for the former artist in that his labour now includes painting in 'all one plain colour.' (T&L, 83)

After some form of judgement/assessment he moves on to the next stage, first indicated by drawn blinds and a cell 'full of sunshine.' (T&L, 93) Like the punishment stage this is a transitional step, being a preparation for the beauty and bliss of the heaven to come. This station/stage is a world irradiated by rich light words. Outside, now the sun 'was very bright', and from the 'green' hill on which he was standing he saw 'the roof of the station shining.' (T&L, 93) The

engine and coach were both 'very bright', and the rails 'shone'. That this stage is not heaven itself is partly suggested by the mention of the 'black' (T&L, 94) letters forming his name on the sign, and the surprising 'shadow' of the Tree. Also, towards the end of this part, a 'shadow fell between Niggle and Parish' (T&L, 98), as they realise they will soon part. This intermediate world is a joyful purgatory, where the leaves are 'as he had imagined them rather than as he had made them' (T&L, 95). The light which he had earlier striven to render is here perfectly apprehended and now transformed into reality.

The final step, the mountains or heaven, is beyond even the imaginings of artists, for they are kept distant and mysterious, 'glimmering far away' (T&L, 95), until Niggle has filled in all the detail of the intermediate stage. As he begins his journey into the mountains the narrator does not follow, and the approaching (Bunyanesque) mountains are given no further description, because 'what they are really like, and what lies beyond them only those can say who have climbed them.' (T&L, 100) However, light imagery gives an indirect indication of the nature of the mountains for, as Niggle is about to depart, the 'blossom on the Great Tree was shining like flame.' (T&L, 99) By this reflection, it is suggested that heaven is a perfection of transfiguring light and transforming fire, of which the artist's imagination can gain glimpses. This is the metaphysical core to Tolkien's use of 'light' here and throughout his work.

* * * *

By contrast with the three previous texts, Farmer Giles of Ham⁴ is notable for its lack of light imagery. The result is that the work lacks the close feeling of

4. J.R.R. Tolkien, Farmer Giles of Ham, London, 1975 (1st pub. 1949). The enlarged text was completed about Sep. 1938 (See Letters, p. 42, 2 Feb. 1939). References to this edition will be incorporated in the text thus: (FG, 9).

man being part of an ordered moral scheme, as one feels in the other works. Rather, is this text concerned with the possibilities of ordinary (economic) man grubbing his living from the earth. Still, there is a certain use of light/dark, to indicate lack of knowledge, 'a dark period' (FG, 9), and knowledge itself, with 'the light that it throws' (FG, 9). The marauding giant comes by night, and his confrontation with Giles (seminal to the action of the story) is described in a more usual Tolkienian manner. First, Giles can see 'nothing worse than the long black shadows of bushes and trees' (FG, 17), a suitably ominous description. Next, the giant's face is 'pale in the moonlight, which glittered in his large round eyes'. Although the giant is a powerful force, here the use of light gives the impression that the opposing power is limited and may be repulsed. More significantly now, it is light which protects Giles, for the moon 'dazzled the giant and he did not see the farmer'. This help is a grace that is combined with Giles' blind fear as he pulls the trigger.

Other uses of light are less important in the moral scheme. There is exploration of the use of slang in 'Giles was a just man according to his lights' (FG, 23), repeated later (FG, 39). Here, 'lights' is the slang expression for 'eyes', but it is also suggestive of 'lungs' as in 'liver and lights', used in the same manner as Tolkien more commonly uses 'heart'. The total impression given is the medieval view of personal character being based in the organs of the body. This now adds to the earthy feel of the character under scrutiny.

Giles' sword, Tailbiter, despite the conventional use of 'light' for weapons, is clearly a force for good. It would leap from its sheath to confront the threat of evil, and is described as acting 'in a flash' (FG, 32). When confronting the dragon it is 'so bright and aggressive' (FG, 44), 'so bright and sharp' (FG, 61), and 'very bright and threatening.' (FG, 63) Similarly, defensive armour is described in terms of light: 'bright hauberks' (FG, 36) and 'polished mail and... shining helmets'

(FG, 55). However, only Tailbiter is an unambiguous agent of goodness. The knights merely maintain the outward form of their ancient defensive role.

The dragon is described as 'a gust of red lightning' (FG, 58), and later, in the midst of a thick fog, one could see only 'the red eyes of the dragon' (FG, 70). His abode is in a cave 'black and forbidding' (FG, 61), in 'the dark mountains' (FG, 56). Evidence of his passing is the 'blackened grass' (FG, 39) and the 'heather and gorse [which] stood up black amid wide patches of ash' (FG, 57). By contrast, Giles' wits 'seemed to have become brighter' (FG, 61).

Although the imagery is spread over the sixty eight pages of the text in this edition, one can still see 'light' operating in the same general ways as in the other works. Written during the formative years of The Lord of the Rings, with its metaphysics of light/dark imagery, it is not surprising that in Farmer Giles of Ham his major attentions should be elsewhere.

* * * *

Smith of Wootton Major⁵ shows a return to the use of densely packed light imagery as it explores the possibilities of ordinary village man in the realm of art and of the imagination, the world of Faery. This theme permits much use of light imagery in the manner of 'Leaf by Niggle', but in the social setting of another England, as in Farmer Giles of Ham, and so it reads like a combination of the two previous short works.

Characterization is partly achieved through light imagery. The Master Cook, almost a priest of Faery, is twice referred to by the symbol of his 'white hat' (T&L, 109). Later, in a Transfiguration scene, Alf 'was dressed like a Master Cook

5. Most accessible in J.R.R. Tolkien, Tree and Leaf, London, 1975 (Smith of Wootton Major 1st pub. 1967). References will be incorporated in the text thus: (T&L, 109).

at a Feast, but his white garments shimmered and glinted' (T&L, 143). Nokes admires the 'tall white hat' (T&L, 110), the symbol of the respected office. The Queen is anticipated and prepared for by the model at the summit of the first Great Cake:

a tiny white figure on one foot like a snow-maiden
dancing, and in her hand was a minute wand of ice
sparkling with light. (T&L, 113)

At her later first appearance she does not reveal her identity⁶, but is found dancing 'beside a river bright with lilies'. At the end of the meeting, she sets in Smith's hair 'a white flower' (T&L, 126), which, on his return home, gives off a light 'that cast shadows on the walls of the room' (T&L, 128). The whole is an indirect characterization of the Queen. When she does choose to be revealed, the imagery is powerful and direct. After being earlier 'blindfolded by mist or by shadow' (T&L, 129) Smith emerges to 'a night-sky of innumerable stars', and he now sees the Queen in the midst of 'a great host shimmering and glittering like the stars above'. In Tolkien's work, stars always mean goodness, and in this description, fairies and stars are almost equated. Finally, to complete the effect, upon the Queen's head 'there burned a white flame.' This image is reminiscent of the Christian Pentecost, but also, within Tolkien's fictional world, of 'the Secret Fire' (I, 344) which Gandalf serves. Unlike Pentecost, Smith does not equally share in the fire; he must return to his village and pass on his gift.

Light is again used in the Old English manner for weapons. The elven mariners are fearsome, largely because 'their swords shone and their spears glinted and a

⁶. This detail is similar to the reappearance of the unrecognised child in 'Pearl', a scene which has the climax of the early light/dark imagery in that poem. See J.R.R. Tolkien (trans.), C. Tolkien (ed.), Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo, London, 1981 (1st pub. 1975), p. 85. 'Pearl' had been first translated by Tolkien by 1945, but there were many revisions in later years (See p. v).

piercing light was in their eyes.' (T&L, 120) In this description the eyes are almost weapons in themselves, rather than a simple index of good or evil. Of course, eyes have been described in complex imagery throughout, as with those of Aragorn and Gollum. After cutting the first Great Cake, Alf Prentice looks at the Cook 'with dark eyes and did not smile at all.' (T&L, 116) Here the description gives the impression of seriousness and of disapproval for Nokes' lack of respect for the world of Faery. Light is important in the description of Alf's eyes, and years later Smith remembers Alf on that day:

holding the bright knife for the cutting of the cake,
and his eyes had gleamed in the light of the candles.
(T&L, 131)

The memory focuses Smith's attention back on Alf's face, where the 'eyes gleamed as if they reflected a light' - surely the light from the star on Smith's brow. These links add to the portrayal of Alf's goodness.

The star which is on Smith's brow is the most significant use of light imagery in the story. Coming from Faery, the star is unexpected, and bestows some of the skill of Faery on the recipient/wearer and permits him to wander in spirit in the realm of Faery itself. Some of this light has passed into Smith's eyes. Usually the star can be hidden from all but his immediate family and, of course, from Alf. When Smith, or presumably other recipients, are in the world of Faery the 'Lesser Evils avoided the star, and from the Greater Evils he was guarded.' (T&L, 118) It is a badge, which, like a Christian's Faith, offers limited power but great protection. On Smith's return to his home, the star would continue to shine for some time, but dimming as he crossed the threshold. After his meeting the Queen of Faery, the shining star causes villagers to stare in wonder, and his daughter cries 'Your star is shining bright!' (T&L, 126) As Smith is about to return the star to its box so that it can be passed on, it 'shone brightly again as it lay in his

hand' (T&L, 136). This free relinquishing is the climax of the goodness of all his selfless acts.

As might be expected, Faery itself is largely defined in terms of light. At first Smith travels past:

the bright waters in which at night strange stars
shone and at dawn the gleaming peaks of far
mountains were mirrored. (T&L, 120)

The light words dominate, and the 'gleaming peaks' of a northern landscape are reminiscent of Niggle's mountains. However, the description includes mystery and peril with its 'strange stars' and 'night'. Next he sees 'blue waves like snow-clad hills' which repeats the mountain motif, and he then, like Niggle, 'turned his mind towards the mountains, desiring to come to the heart of the Kingdom.' (T&L, 123)

On one occasion grey mist overtakes him, emerging from which there was:

a great hill of shadow, and out of that shadow, which
was its root, [and] he saw the King's Tree springing
up, tower upon tower, into the sky, and its light was
like the sun at noon .

In this description we again see goodness being stronger for actually arising anew from evil. Successive journeys are undertaken in a vain attempt to find this tree again, for this striking image combining light and shadow is 'the heart of the Kingdom'. The brilliance of 'the sun at noon' is in stark contrast with the outside realm of 'Unlight' (T&L, 120), where great evil is held at bay in grim battles.

Once the climax is past, the further description of Faery involves greater reliance on colours, rather than purely light/dark. So, in one dale 'the light was like a red sunset, but the light came up from the lake.' (T&L, 123) In the lake he could see:

strange shapes of flame bending and branching and
wavering like great weeds in a sea-dingle, and fiery
creatures went to and fro among them.

The echo here is Grendel's mere, and it is certainly an abode of some form of evil, more contained than that dwelling in Unlight.

On reaching the Vale of Evermorn, Smith sees a land where

the green surpasses the green of the meads of Outer
Faery as they surpass ours in our springtime.
(T&L, 124)

The clarity of the air is such that one can see even 'the red tongues of birds as they sing' far away. On a later visit to Outer Faery the scene is autumn: 'Golden leaves were on the boughs and red leaves were on the ground.' (T&L, 128) This correlates with Smith taking his last journeys into Faery, before the gift is to be passed on. To reinforce this feeling of mutability, Smith's return to the Hall is described in similar colours:

The sun was now setting and a red light was in the
windows. The gilded carvings on the great door glowed
(T&L, 135).

Smith's time with the gift has almost concluded.

Structural usages giving emphasis to light and dark words are frequent. Several paragraphs conclude with a light/dark word, while many sentences end thus. As well, the naming adds emphasis as in 'All the way from Daybreak to Evening.' (T&L, 137) This sentence also ends its paragraph.

In this story the star has been used as a symbol for the skill, imagination and ability of the inspired and assisted artist to create beauty. Unlike Niggle, whose striving for beauty and light comes more from within, Smith receives his skill from without as a bounteous gift. In both cases it is a preparation for that recipient to approach the other world, and this would appear to be Tolkien's creative purpose in using this moral imagery throughout all his work.

* * * *

Light and dark are appealing images for good and evil because they are familiar, emotive and obvious opposites. Much of the emotive power comes from the imagery's long use throughout religious thought and literary history. Most

often the imagery has been used in a Manichaeian way, indicating a cosmos of warring opposites, the outcome of which can determine man's fate, and upon which individual man may have little influence. This dichotomy is a way of simplifying moral choice, putting as it does the emphasis on the cosmos rather than on man. Foolish man can thereby feel less responsible for the outcome of his choices.

After the model of the Old English texts which he taught daily, Tolkien's fictional world has these large warring opposites described in light/dark imagery. However, the close and more subtle detail of this imagery is given to descriptions of men, or hobbits, and the immediate world around them, capturing the complexities of a world with apparent contradictions and imminent peril, in which choices must be continually made. The moral emphasis is firmly on individual and responsible man, his perceptions and potential. One of these possibilities is for him to be an artist, or sub-creator, and to 'build Gods and their houses out of dark and light' (T&L, 56). By his own tales of this sort, Tolkien has reinvigorated the ancient imagery and made it available again for a new age.

CHAPTER III

DRACONITAS

Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself.¹

Radix malorum est Cupiditas.²

* * * *

Evil is seen at several levels in the world of Middle-earth - at the lowest level there is the simple self-interest of some of the hobbits, at the highest, is Sauron's lust for ultimate and universal power. At the lowest level this manifests itself in a desire for material goods, while at the highest - where people are treated like things - supreme power over others becomes the final covetousness. At intermediate levels, there is some transition from covetousness for objects to covetousness for power. Furthermore, there is a shift in emphasis towards the lust for dominance in the whole of The Lord of the Rings, when compared with the slighter concerns in The Hobbit.

Tolkien focuses this moral theme around recurring vocabulary and concepts: thief, gold, dragon, precious, ring, hoard, mathom, and power. The words are powerful because of their repetition within the text at moments of moral crisis,

1. C.S. Lewis, The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader', London, 1952, p. 87.

2. G. Chaucer, The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, A.C. Spearing (ed.), Cambridge, 1980 (1st pub. 1965), l. 48.

often with light/dark imagery as a further referent. Additional power comes to these images from the precision of stylistic features, which the reader learns to expect from Tolkien, and the absence of more abstract phraseology. In this last way, Tolkien's use of the key words is similar to their emphasis in Old and Middle English. For this theme, Tolkien drew further inspiration from those texts which formed the basis of his teaching career. This chapter will draw upon Beowulf, Pearl, and particularly The Pardoner's Tale for support and further illustration of the theme.

Further, it appears that avarice, or cupiditas in the Pardoner's classical (and theological) usage, and draconitas (the quality of being a dragon), as used by Tolkien in his work are essentially the same thing. Avarice, or cupiditas, has so far received slight attention in critical studies. The characters Smaug and Thorin have been widely commented on, but in little depth. Most importantly, Thorin's crucial role in the moral structure of The Hobbit has not been examined. Nitzsche³ gives the most detailed treatment of avaritia, cupiditas and draconitas to be found in the criticism, but her conclusion is unsatisfying. The Seven Deadly Sins are the model for her study and as a consequence emphasis is put on the 'higher sins', especially pride, leaving avarice to be treated almost incidentally⁴. Power has received greater attention⁵, as one would expect for the text which

3. Jane Chance Nitzsche, Tolkien's Art, London, 1980 (1st pub. 1979)

4. This organization of themes appears out of keeping with the emphasis of Tolkien's text, for example, the suggestion that Shelob's lechery is 'perhaps appropriately and symbolically quelled by Sam's penetration of her belly with his sword', ibid., p. 113. Rather, the interest here is on Sam's quiet courage. See J.S. Ryan, 'Death by Self-Implantation - the Prudentious example', Minas Tirith Evening Star, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 5-9.

5. See: C.S. Lewis, 'The Dethronement of Power' and Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Power and Meaning in The Lord of the Rings', both in Isaacs, Tolkien and the Critics; Agnes Perkins and Helen Hill, 'The Corruption of Power', in Jared Lobdell (ed.), A Tolkien Compass, La Salle (Illinois), 1975; and J.S. Ryan, 'The Quest and Nature of Power', Chpt. XI in his Tolkien: Cult or Culture?, Armidale, 1969.

comes more and more to focus on the awesome strength of Sauron. The patterning of the theme on recurring vocabulary has not been examined, and hence the link between attitudes to possessions and avarice has not been clear.

* * * *

In The Hobbit several levels of avarice are presented. Some of the hobbits are at the lowest phase, those who will not return 'specially good bargains' (H, 254), in particular the sale's furniture and spoons. The Sackville-Bagginses with their overpowering desire to live in Bilbo's hobbit-hole are on the next level of avarice. It leads them never to admit 'that the returned Baggins was genuine'. At the next level is the Elvenking who is aware of and seems to regret the greed manifest in his actions: 'Long will I tarry, ere I begin this war for gold.' (H, 236) At the next level is Bard, who is anxious because of the need of his people to begin this same war (H, 236). Although Bard presses his claim as just, he avoids answering Thorin's question:

what share of their inheritance [would you] have paid
to our Kindred, had you found the hoard unguarded and
us slain (H, 224).

At a further level are the dwarves in general. They have long prepared for their assault on the lost mountain, and are prepared to keep all of the treasure. This is largely because of the avaricious nature of their race: 'a fierce and jealous love, the desire of the hearts of dwarves.' (H, 22) Next are the people of Lake-town, whose thoughts readily turn to gold. The gleam of light at the northern end of the lake is sufficient to set them crying: 'The river is running gold from the Mountain!' (H, 209) After the dragon's attack there was 'talk running like fire among the people concerning the vast treasure that was now unguarded.' (H, 214)

Next are the trolls who hoard the possessions of their mangled victims in their cave (H, 44). Their collection of goods is also a larder, with a nasty smell, i.e., it contains putrefying human remains. At the next level is Gollum and his 'precious'. He is more obviously dragonlike, for he 'had brooded for ages on this one thing, and he was always afraid of its being stolen.' (H, 76) Thorin has similarly given much thought to the treasure of Smaug, and is at the next level of avarice. His seeming intransigence throughout the narrative is merely dragonlike, but once his behaviour is described in the same terms used for the dragon, his moral fall is all but final. He becomes, for all moral purposes, a dragon. The Master of Lake-town seems to have reached the same state. Unlike Thorin, he is described from a distance, and it is therefore uncertain exactly how similar the two were in their spiritual fall. At the final level, of course, there is Smaug, the living, fire-breathing, bejewelled dragon, who wreaks havoc after the loss of only one cup from his vast hoard.

Beorn and various others do not appear in this list, for their treatment of possessions or objects does not reach the level of avarice. Bilbo, too has been omitted because he seems to be especially protected from avarice, as is shown by his handing over of the Arkenstone (H, 229-230). Those who look back to The Hobbit, after reading The Lord of the Rings⁶, will see the power of the Ring at work in Bilbo's otherwise innocent account of his escape. Here, however, this incident is treated solely within its context in The Hobbit. When Bilbo omits mention of the ring, the tone is one of protective secrecy of his new but fragile self-confidence. Considering his previous ineptitude, and the fact that he is being

6. Indeed, Tolkien himself did this in order to make revisions to the earlier text for the second hardback edition (1951), to make The Hobbit more consistent with the later text. For details see Bonniejean Christensen, 'Gollum's Character Transformation in The Hobbit', in Lobdell, *op. cit.*. Changes were only made to Chapter V. See Letters, p. 124, 21 Sep. 1947.

swept along by circumstances, it is with some relief that the reader sees this emerging strength in his character. Furthermore, as a ring of invisibility confers great power⁷, it is a measure of Bilbo's moral integrity that he uses it so sparingly. To those who look back from the longer work, it is suggested that Bilbo's secrecy is, in this present work, more akin to Frodo's later silence over his mithril mail. Both are defensive devices, which if revealed may cause avarice in others, or dissension in the group, and at the very least, not all one's defences should be known to others.

Further evidence of Bilbo's strength of spirit is that the vocabulary signifying avarice or draconitas is not applied to him by the author. Gollum's cry of 'Thief, thief, thief! Baggins! We hates it' (H, 80) is inappropriate, considering that Bilbo is barely escaping with his life after a hardly won riddle contest. At this point, the development of the avarice/draconitas theme, and in particular the use of the recurring concepts, should be traced throughout The Hobbit

Wealth is mentioned on the very first page, with a near equation being made between money and respectability. This is soon modified: 'the Took's were not as respectable as the Bagginses, though they were undoubtedly richer.' (H, 12) Wealth here causes unease for the reader: the Bagginses are a kind of unattractive flabby gentry, while the Took's have gained their wealth through strange and heroic deeds. That Bilbo Baggins is overly attached to the objects of domestic life is shown in the later dwarves' song, where he is teased by threats of kitchen chaos: 'Chip the glasses and crack the plates!// Blunt the knives

7. Consider the myth of the ring of Gyges, in Plato, The Republic, Harmondsworth, 1955, 359D. The power of invisibility conferred by this ring quickly leads to seduction, murder and usurpation. Plato's argument is that both a just and an unjust man would behave similarly, if given such power. Tolkien's Ring can be seen as an extended answer to Plato, agreeing with the inevitability of the effect, but putting the emphasis on the varying degrees of struggle put up by different individuals in trying to cope with this power.

and bend the forks!' (H, 19) This is all innocent pride in his possessions, certainly not at the level of avarice. It focuses attention on attitudes to objects, preparing us for the increase in this theme that is about to come.

Thorin uncovers his 'golden harp' (H, 20), and its sound is seductive, drawing one 'away into dark lands' (H, 21). The detailed description of the darkness in this scene was discussed in the second chapter, and one effect of the imagery is to link evil with the word 'gold'. The latter is the main concept in the dwarves' song (H, 21-22), occurring once as 'golden' and four times as 'gold'. The word 'hoard' is linked in as the noun after 'golden', and there is a contrary use of the light imagery in 'gleaming'. Another contrasting usage is the dragon-fire, after which: 'The trees like torches blazed with light.' However, the most disturbing description, in the dwarves' song, is that of the making of gems and jewellery:

and light they caught
To hide in gems on hilt of sword.

On silver necklaces they strung
The flowering stars, on crowns they hung
The dragon-fire, in twisted wire
They meshed the light of moon and sun.

The common account of the light in gems is here menacing and suggestive, well beyond details of beauty. The process of their making is tortuous, and the total impact of the traditional song exceeds mere avarice, and is almost blasphemous. This is not obvious on a first reading, but the passage must help to establish a feeling that all is not quite right with the dwarves' attitude to treasure. By contrast, burglars' attitudes are quite modest, expecting merely a 'reasonable Reward' (H, 25).

As we are told by Thorin, the main characteristics of dragons are to do with their avarice:

Dragons steal gold and jewels... wherever they can find them; and they guard their plunder as long as they live... and never enjoy a brass ring of it... and they can't make a thing for themselves (H, 28).

Further he presumes that the dragon has piled up the treasure 'and sleeps on it for a bed.' (H, 29) Indeed, Thorin's own main concern is the treasure, not revenge as such, and certainly not the desire to rid the world of an evil. His own avarice is suggested here, when he 'stroked the gold chain round his neck' (H, 29), finding pleasure in the close touch of gold, just like a dragon. He is concerned with all possessions, not merely gold, and is disturbed that the map did not come directly to him, accusing Gandalf of '[getting] hold of it' (H, 30), a phrase which Gandalf rebuts indignantly.

From this point until Bilbo meets Gollum, the theme of avarice is further developed, covering trolls, dwarves and goblins. The contents of the trolls' cave form a hoard of the possessions and bodies of their victims. Pots of 'gold' coins and jewelled weapons are the items more usually associated with hoards, but these are only a part of this troll hoard. The bulk of the contents comprises useless tiny garments, assorted plunder such as brass buttons, and 'a good deal of food jumbled carelessly on shelves and on the ground' (H, 44). One gains the impression that the gold is little understood by the trolls, and is automatically hoarded like the clothes, whereas their real lust is for food. This indiscriminate acquisitiveness means that trolls fall short of the avarice of sheer draconitas. On the other hand, dwarves are shown to be increasingly vulnerable to gold. First they secretly bury the pots of gold, and later we are told directly that Elrond 'did not altogether approve of dwarves and their love of gold' (H, 52). The word 'gold' is being used solely of dwarves and of dragons, and inevitably the effect is to link the two in their avarice.

In common with the trolls, the goblins' attitude towards things is not avarice in the moral sense. We are told that they 'make no beautiful things, but they make many clever ones.' (H, 60) They are best with weapons, tools, primitive machines, and instruments of torture, in fact, things which give them power over others.

Still, goblins are overly concerned to hold what they have, and the accusation of 'Thieves' (H, 61) comes all too easily. Theft is the greatest fear of those with draconitas, and the accusation is used here for the first time. Furthermore, the goblins have a particular hatred for the 'orderly and prosperous' (H, 60). So, by reflection, in the moral schema of Tolkien's (hobbit) world, material prosperity is considered 'proper', provided it is orderly. This is the case with hobbits as will be shown below.

The chapter, 'Riddles in the Dark', is a major development in the theme of avarice. Most startling is the frequent use of the word 'precious' by Gollum, seemingly referring to himself. The meaning is later shifted to the ring: the 'birthday-present' (H, 75) becomes 'our precious present' (H, 78), and from then on the entanglement of selfhood and object is added to the theme of avarice. Variant spellings indicate not merely Gollum's sibilance, but also his lingering over the word as if to savour the association. The punctuation which follows most occurrences of the word, aids this effect.

The ring itself is actually called a 'ring of power' (H, 75), and the description of Gollum's use of it shows just how much brutal power it can confer on one of his small imagination. As some balance to this power, we are also told of the wearing of the ring actually tiring Gollum, and that even carrying it in a pouch 'galled him'. Thus, possession of treasure is shown to be an uneasy way of life, most painfully seen in the loss of the ring, 'the only thing he had ever cared for, his precious.' (H, 80) The 'blood-curling shriek, filled with hatred and despair' of 'Thief, thief, thief! Baggins! We hates it, we hates it, we hates it for ever!' reflects on the anguish of frustrated avarice of the speaker. Another element in the description of treasure is introduced immediately before Bilbo escapes. Just as darkness was earlier described as an active agent (H, 21), so now is the ring described. Bilbo is revealed to the goblins either by an accident, or by 'a last

trick of the ring before it took a new master' (H, 81). So the moral world here is one in which treasure can have an evil will of its own.

Gollum's burgeoning avarice will not be matched until we meet Smaug himself. Prior to this there is incidental detail on the theme, and reinforcement of the concepts. Gandalf is offered 'dragon-gold and silver and jewels' (H, 102) by the dwarves as the ultimate inducement for him to stay with them. His easy refusal shows that he is on a higher moral plane, and the whole offer underlines the dwarves' love of gold. Hence, when the dwarves need cheering up, Gandalf suggests that they 'think of the treasure at the end' (H, 120). Unlike the secretive Gollum, Bilbo will reveal the existence and nature of the ring to his companions. Thus he rises in their estimation 'for they saw that he had some wits, as well as luck and a magic ring' (H, 143).

The Wood-elves still carry a resentment based on an ancient battle fought over treasure. In particular, the elf-king is singled out for avarice bordering on draconitas:

though his hoard was rich, he was ever eager for more,
since he had not yet as great a treasure as other
elf-lords of old. (H, 145)

When Thorin presents himself at Lake-town he is an impressive figure because of his voice, because the 'gold gleamed on his neck and waist', and because 'his eyes were dark and deep.' (H, 167) Again gold is strongly associated with Thorin, almost being an objective correlative for him. Its treacherous nature is suggested by:

there is no knowing what a dwarf will not dare and do
for revenge or the recovery of his own. (H, 171)

Smaug's treasure provides a great temptation to avarice for each of the characters in the story. Asleep on the mound, Smaug is almost a part of the treasure. He is a 'red-golden dragon' (H, 184), and his underside is 'crusted with gems and fragments of gold'. Weapons, jewels and silver are in the hoard, but it

is mainly comprised of 'gold wrought and unwrought' (H, 184), 'the gold beyond price and count.' (H, 185) The power of this 'dragon-hoard' on Bilbo is overwhelming: 'the splendour, the lust, the glory of such treasure'. We are told that his heart 'was filled and pierced with enchantment and the desire of dwarves', and, it would seem, that Bilbo has succumbed to dragon-sickness. However, after grasping a great cup and rushing back with it, Bilbo's one concern is not the treasure, but rather, how he has now proved himself to his fellows. On reflection, he is able to resist its influence, and so pass the treasure over to the dwarves, for he has passed the test of gold.

Smaug responds to the loss with outrage: 'Thieves! Fire! Murder!' (H, 186) He later addresses Bilbo with the same word: 'Thief Barrel-rider' (H, 191), but his tone has changed to one of persuasive reasonableness. Bilbo must now confront the false 'dragon-talk' (H, 192) and risk falling under 'the dragon-spell' (H, 191). The dragon uses his mellifluous voice as a means of gaining confidentiality, information, and finally, total power over others⁸. Smaug subtly interrogates him - as in a demonic confessional - on the detail of arrangements for the transport and disposal of the treasure. Bilbo's thoughts have been so little on the gold that he has not previously considered these aspects. In an effort to be loyal, Bilbo replies 'that gold was only an afterthought with us. We came... for Revenge.' (H, 192) This is total loyalty, since the descriptions of Thorin show that his main motive is always the gold. Nevertheless, this tact helps Bilbo to retain his presence of mind, and thereby to gain the vital information of the dragon's weak spot, and also to escape from the deadly encounter.

8. The dragon's speech is similar to that of the seemingly eminently reasonable devil in C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, London, 1979 (1st pub. 1942), a work in fact dedicated to Tolkien.

The next trial of avarice is presented around the Arkenstone, the great white gem also known as the 'Heart of the Mountain' (H, 197). Mere thought of the gem is enough to set Thorin to repeatedly murmur its name 'in the dark, half dreaming', while in the hoard Bilbo himself was drawn to the gem by the shine of 'its own inner light' (H, 201). As with the ring and the darkness, this description indicates an independent evil purpose actively working, heightened here through a perversion of light imagery. Bilbo tries to rationalize his taking of the gem, but this time his secrecy suggests that he has fallen under its spell. In the dwarves' thoughts in exploring the hoard, the word 'gold' occurs several times, but not once in Bilbo's mind. Even the cup he had previously taken was not thought of as being of 'gold'. It was merely 'heavy' (H, 185). Now, as they dress themselves in armour, Thorin wears a coat of 'gold-plated rings', while Bilbo is given (rather than takes) a small coat of the useful 'silver-steel' or mithril (H, 203). Furthermore, it is Bilbo who draws the dwarves' attention away from the gold and back to their real task: 'We are not looking for gold yet, but for a way of escape' (H, 204). That he can keep his head 'more clear of the bewitchment of the hoard' suggests that he is well able to survive this trial of avarice. However, he now has the Arkenstone in his possession, as well as the ring of power, and he has as yet to shed these dangerous, malign talismans of darkness.

Nevertheless, the dwarves have not succumbed to complete avarice. The description of the departure of the whole company is in terms of light/dark and suggests their confused thought. The dwarves cover their newly acquired 'glittering mail' and 'bright helms' with their 'tattered hoods', and, torches in hand, form 'a line of little lights in the darkness that halted often'. Avarice and self-importance have given way to uncertain awareness of their smallness in the great struggle against darkness and evil.

The brief description of the people of Laketown (H, 204) condemns them for their greed. The words 'gold' and 'golden' are repeated, and when coupled with their cries and hurrying in excitement, the whole effect is idolatrous⁹. Even Bard comes partly under the spell, although his reasoning appears to be of selfless service: use of 'the fabled treasure' (H, 214) to rebuild Dale, so that it should be 'filled with golden bells'. Without the word 'golden', this would be an effective expression of service, but its inclusion taints Bard with avarice.

He therefore, is able to match Thorin in the argument over the treasure, which takes place at the Gate to the Mountain. Both are armed, will not yield, and press their claims with aggressive and seemingly legalistic detail. This is a situation similar to those preserved in the Icelandic sagas¹⁰. As well, the presence of the elves, and the claims of the men of Laketown, complicate matters, and fortunately Bilbo's crucial role in the death of the dragon is not added¹¹. It is indicative of Bilbo's lack of avarice that he does not speak up, and is even relieved that others do not do so on his behalf (H, 223). A peaceful solution appears hopeless, and the description is aided by the increase in the vocabulary of avarice. So as Bard and Thorin argue, they refer to the object of their desire as 'hoard', 'wealth' and 'treasure', but not by what has emerged as the most powerful word, 'gold', as though the characters cannot admit their moral failing. However, in the narrator's interpolated commentary, the full power of the greed involved is indicated by its use. Bilbo 'did not reckon with the power that gold has upon which a dragon has

9. The incident and its description are analogous to the singing and dancing around the golden calf, which greeted Moses as he came down from Sinai. Exodus (32).

10. The sagas reveal an elemental society of primitive quarrels. See Jesse L. Brock, Feud in the Icelandic Saga, Berkeley, 1982.

11. Paul H. Kocher, Master of Middle-earth, London, 1973, p. 23, examines the detail of the claims, concluding that a 'Solomon might well pick his way gingerly among these claims and counterclaims'.

long brooded'. As well, this Beowulfian description appears to give some primitive life to the gold itself. Thorin's avarice is now described in strong emotive terms: 'the lust of it was heavy on him.'

Only after the insult of the arrow fired at the messenger does Bard use the word 'gold', in effect, returning the insult (H, 224). He concludes this speech with: 'You may eat that [gold] if you will!', reminiscent of the ancient Greek motif, and perhaps more importantly for Tolkien, the Northern example of Frothi spreading ground gold on his food¹². In either case, the notion is appropriate here for Thorin's increasing avarice. Despite his 'grim' intimidation of most dwarves, three of them clearly disapprove, which indicates that Thorin has moved beyond usual dwarvish avarice. Bilbo makes the shrewdest observation on Thorin's state, and indeed summarises the chapter with his trenchant - 'The whole place still stinks of dragon' (H, 225). It still 'stinks' because a new dragon spirit is forming in the metamorphosing of Thorin.

The greatest fear of those possessing treasure, already seen in the anguish of Gollum's loss, and the wrath of Smaug, is the fear of theft. Next, Thorin too uses the word 'thieves' (H, 232), afraid that the Arkenstone has been lost or stolen, and lusting after it to the exclusion of all else. To him, ominously, the stone 'is worth more than a river of gold in itself' (H, 226), which invites a comparison with the people of Laketown, showing his avarice surpasses theirs. In a dragon-type description, Bilbo perceives that Thorin now 'is quite ready to sit on a heap of gold and starve' (H, 229), adding later that the stone has become 'the heart of Thorin'. However, Bilbo himself displays the opposite of draconitas, divesting himself of treasure, possibly his whole share, and even risking his life.

12. This and other links are explored in J.S. Ryan, 'Frothi, Frodo - and Dodo and Odo', Orana, Vol. 16, No. 2, May 1980, pp. 35-38.

In contrast to the selfishness of dragons, Bilbo surrenders the Arkenstone to relieve the distress of others. At this act Bilbo is regarded with wonder by the Elvenking, is honoured by Bard, and congratulated by the newly returned Gandalf. Hence, it is with considerable authorial irony that the chapter has been titled 'A Thief in the Night'. Rather than exceeding the greed of the dwarves, Bilbo sacrifices himself to ransom them.

When confronted with the missing Arkenstone, Thorin's lust for it is in complete contrast to Bilbo's sacrifice. He feels compelled to buy it back, even at enormous price, and is consumed with wrath, almost throwing Bilbo on to the rocks, and cursing Gandalf vehemently. The concession that he finally makes is a miserable attempt to keep his word, in fact underscoring Bilbo's suspicions 'that dwarves are sometimes politer in word than in deed.' (H, 233) We have already seen the dragon Smaug display these same characteristics, although more violently. Thorin is becoming more dragon-like, particularly when we are told that, in spite of his word, he contemplates the use of force to regain the Arkenstone, 'so strong was the bewilderment of the treasure upon him' (H, 234). The climax of this aspect of Thorin is given in the description of his entry in to the battle. As he and his companions join the fray, 'red light leapt from their eyes. In the gloom the great dwarf gleamed like gold in a dying fire.' (H, 239) His red eyes are like those of the Green Knight from Gawain¹³, and if previously the Arkenstone had been the heart of Thorin, now, his body and gold are almost one - the main impression given is of a dragon fiercely defending its hoard.

However, Thorin's atonement is at hand, beginning with a slight undercutting of the above damning detail. There is 'gloom' and a 'dying' fire, as well as an

13. Robert B. White Jr., 'A Note on the Green Knight's Red Eyes', in Donald R. Howard and Christian Zacher (eds.), Critical Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Notre Dame, 1970, (1st pub. 1968).

element of sacrifice. After all, thirteen dwarves no matter how fierce will not tip the balance in this vast conflict. His heroic assault results in his receiving mortal wounds, and for this dragon-like King on his deathbed redemption comes in his modifying the use of 'thieves' earlier, by now calling Bilbo 'good thief' (H, 243), then wisely and virtuously renouncing his winnings. He realises that he cannot take his gold and silver with him, and in his final speech shows a sensitive understanding of Bilbo's character, as well as expressing true regret for his own failing. Unlike Eustace in C.S. Lewis's The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, Thorin has not been fully transformed into a dragon, since his qualities of nobility and honour have led to his salvation, which incident is the climax to the moral theme of draconitas in The Hobbit.

The strand is concluded with several other instances of it. His successor, Dain, is unlikely to make the same mistakes. Whereas Thorin lusted after gold, Dain is generous: with the eagles, he 'crowned their chief with gold' (H, 245); with the other dwarves, he 'dealt his treasure well'; to Bard he delivered up 'a fourteenth share of all the silver and gold'; while to Bilbo he offers to reward 'most richly of all' (H, 246), although Bilbo can only be persuaded to take two compact chests of silver and gold. This is reminiscent of the ancient idea of avoiding the curse of a large treasure by leaving much of it behind, a curse which Thorin could not avoid.

During Bilbo's journey home, the first of the elves' celebratory songs compares gems, silver and gold with things of more permanent value - goodness: the light of the stars; the moon; and the fire on the hearth (H, 249) - all are affirmed in this song. On Bilbo's arrival home, however, we see the untravelled hobbits unwilling to part with bargains dubiously gained at the auction. After the serious theme, as explored in Thorin, these hobbits seem dangerously greedy rather than thrifty. Bilbo soon divests himself of most of his treasure in gifts,

thus showing, as does Dain, that treasure has no hold over him. These examples remind us that avarice will be a continuing theme but, for the time being, all seems well. However, immediately before the work concludes, the predictable fate of the Master of Laketown is revealed, for:

being of the kind that easily catches such disease he fell under the dragon-sickness, and took most of the gold and fled with it, and died of starvation in the Waste, deserted by his companions. (H, 255)

This is a chilling description of the effects of draconitas, and it is a disturbing conclusion to this moral theme in The Hobbit - covetousness of objects, possession of treasure, particularly gold, leads to alienation from one's fellows, a consuming suspicion of everyone, and ultimately a lonely death.

CHAPTER IV

DRACONITAS AND POWER

Are they men [that Saruman] has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be a black evil! (II, 77)

* * * *

In The Lord of the Rings the concept of greed is broadened through its speculations as to gifts, and developed through a detailed study of the nature of power. As there is no Smaug in this story, the word 'dragon' and its compounds do not appear; however, the concept of draconitas continues throughout in the moral choices and the presentation of evil.

The concept is stressed in the Prologue, with the introduction of the term, 'mathom', to describe harmless possessions/gifts. A more sinister element is added in the recapitulation of the earlier story of Gollum and the ring:

It was the one thing he loved, his 'precious', and he talked to it, even when it was not with him. (I, 20)

The narrowing of his feelings to one single precious object, as seen previously with Thorin, is equally damning.

Bilbo is here characterized with a tension between avarice and generosity. He has described the ring as 'a present', when it obviously is not (I, 22). His revelation that the guests were chosen to make up the talismanic number, one hundred and forty four, in the foolish play on 'gross', is insulting. Some guests feel that they are being treated 'like goods in a package' (I, 38). [Treating people

as things is the most damning sin of those with power, and Tolkien often shows this sin as being the result of the self-absorption which comes from avarice.] On the other hand, Bilbo is described as 'generous' (I, 67), and we are told that he 'gave away presents to all and sundry' (I, 35). Perhaps these contradictions in Bilbo are best indicated in his description at the party as he is about to speak:

The light of the lanterns fell on his beaming face; the golden buttons shone on his embroidered silk waistcoat. (I, 37)

The 'light' suggests his goodness, while the 'gold' suggests his display of wealth, the two aspects neatly juxtaposed by the semi-colon.

The danger of riches possessing one is seen in its treacherous work when Bilbo attempts to leave the Shire and the ring behind. He puts the ring in his pocket inadvertently (I, 40-41) and is surprised to find it there, then defensively argues that he has a right to it, despite agreeing earlier to leave it behind. Bilbo's voice becomes 'sharp with suspicion and annoyance' as he accuses Gandalf of excessive interest in the object, concern justified by Bilbo's very outburst. As Bilbo becomes angrier, he starts to call the ring 'precious', echoing Gollum's word for it three times (I, 42). As well, the accusation of 'thief' is still a great bother to Bilbo, for it undermines what he would like to regard as his right to the treasure. The parallel with Gollum is disturbing, and Bilbo is now obviously not the same innocent hobbit seen in the earlier work.

Still, with the help of Gandalf, he is able to leave the ring behind, while Gollum and Thorin were not able to abandon their treasures. It is implied that hobbits have a corrective to acquisitiveness in their custom of giving mathoms, especially Bilbo himself does. After his departure, the next focus of interest in the narrative are the gifts which Bilbo has left behind, and the mathoms in general (I, 45-47). The messages going with six of the parting presents are quoted in full, and each is a corrective to a minor vice, three of the six being

tendencies to avarice. Instead of receiving presents on one's birthday, the hobbit custom of giving them away to others (I, 35) has helped to build a community where the human message is more important than the mere object. However, the needier hobbits 'did very well', at least with Bilbo's more generous gifts.

Gollum's later story of how he first gained the ring, offers a possible source for this hobbit custom. Smeagol, as he was then known, murdered his friend so that he may take the 'beautiful golden ring' (I, 62) as a birthday present. He was cursed by these early hobbits and expelled, for he had become 'crooked and malicious' (I, 63) in the use of his strange and terrible power. After Smeagol's example one can imagine ancient change to the custom of birthday presents. A reversal in the custom could perhaps prevent its potential for evil. Tolkien develops this idea of liberal gift-giving in Appendix F (III, 414-415) where he links 'mathom' with kast. The latter is the same form as the Old Norse kasta, the origin of our 'cast'. In this context, the mathom custom is reminiscent of: 'Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.' (Ecclesiastes 11:1) Generosity provides rewards different in kind but greater than does narrow avarice. The reward in The Lord of the Rings is the cataclysmic turning back of well nigh cosmic evil, that is accomplished through Frodo being able to bear the Ring to its site of destruction.

In order to show the evil in this longer work as more threatening, Tolkien has developed its potency from the simple draconitas of The Hobbit. Instead of 'treasure', 'hoards' and 'dragons', the emphasis moves to 'power'. The link is in Bilbo's gold ring, foremost of 'the Great Rings, the Rings of Power' (I, 56). Not only does this treasure give one the possibility of great dominion over others, but its use or possession eventually betrays the user to a greater force: 'the dark power will devour him' as Gandalf says. Although the possession of treasure may give one the illusion of great power, the wielder has really sacrificed himself to

a greater evil force. When viewed from the opposite perspective, the new behaviour is to treat people as things, a higher form of draconitas, with 'miserable slaves' (I, 58) instead of gold and gems. Throughout, the evil force is described as 'power', and sometimes capitalized in the phrase 'the Dark Power'. Once Bilbo's ring is recognised for what it is, it is called 'the Ring' or 'the One', after the Elvish verses inscribed upon it have been read (I, 59-60). Thereafter, all three phrases indicate malign evil.

Despite this new emphasis on power as a moral theme, the more familiar notions as to avarice do not disappear. Bombadil's description of the Barrow-wights and their gold is chilling (I, 141), adding to the guardians of mounds of treasure, unquiet malign spirits. Bill Ferny of Bree is condemned thus: 'he would sell anything to anybody' (I, 177). For balance there is folk phrase contradicting the familiar pattern: 'All that is gold does not glitter' (I, 182), here used figuratively to indicate Strider's moral goodness. Also, the idea that treasure is an active evil agent continues: the ring 'did not seem always of the same size or weight' (I, 56) and later it felt heavy as though 'reluctant for Gandalf to touch it.' (I, 58) After unexpectedly finding the Ring on his finger at Bree, Frodo senses that 'perhaps it had tried to reveal itself in response to some wish or command that was felt in the room.' (I, 173) We are even told of hobbits stealing mushrooms, with a passion for them 'surpassing even the greediest likings of Big People' (I, 112). Amongst these more familiar and innocuous uses, the change of emphasis to manipulative power seems like a natural revelation of a further step in evil.

The strong desire for the Ring is indicated by use of the word 'precious'. Just as Gollum and then Bilbo condemn themselves through the use of this term, so do Isildur and Saruman. It is reported at the Council of Elrond that Isildur 'took [the Ring] to treasure it. But soon he was betrayed by it to his death' (I, 256). Isildur

had recorded a description of the Ring on a scroll, concluding with: 'It is precious to me, though I buy it with great pain.' (I, 266) His history provides a salutary lesson of the treacherous power of the Ring to all who will hear it, save Boromir. The nature of Saruman's change is confirmed when he calls the Ring: 'this precious thing' (I, 273). His fall is worse than Isildur's because the latter did not have full knowledge of the Ring's power. Yet even the wise and enlightened Saruman can be seduced by the desire for power: 'we must have power, power to order all things as we will, for that good which only the Wise can see.' (I, 272)

Those who have a desire for power themselves fall easily under the sway of the Ring itself. Boromir is desperate for some aid that will help to relieve the assault on his homeland, and is doubtful when given the reasons why the Ring cannot be used: 'It belongs to Sauron, and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil' (I, 281), as he is told by Elrond. Further, he is informed that it can only be used by one who has 'already a great power' of his own, but that the 'very desire of it corrupts the heart.' Through its use the wielder might well become 'another Dark Lord', for 'nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so.' Elrond's speech contains here the clearest statement of the metaphysics of power to be found in Tolkien's works. Those who have less power or desire, of course, do not become the ultimate Dark Lords. Frodo feels the more subtle effects of the Ring, such as a 'great reluctance to reveal the Ring' to the Council, his mood also embracing a 'loathing of [the Ring's] touch.' (I, 260) He has earlier felt a similar 'strange reluctance' (I, 244) to show it when Bilbo asked to see the Ring. On that occasion, his hesitation caused:

a shadow... to have fallen between them, and through it he found himself eying a little wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony groping hands. He felt a desire to strike him.

The Ring has given Frodo a demonic vision of avarice, and of a possible thief, but by reflection it simply mirrors Frodo's own fierce possession of the Ring.

The evil nature of the talisman is also shown by contrast with the powers of the lesser rings. The elves who wrought these:

did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, or to preserve all things unstained. (I, 282)

Here the punctuation, marking off each of the good qualities, gives the impression that these are great absolutes, while the opposites are all too familiar and can be rushed. The lesser rings provide a slight corrective balance to the depiction of the Ring.

Another check is provided by Bilbo's handing over the bejewelled mail coat to Frodo (I, 290-291). The emphasis with this gift is on utility; it is a coat which is light, and may 'turn even the knives of the Black Riders'. This protection is reassuring as Frodo is ironically still recovering from just such a wound. He is embarrassed with the rich appearance of the treasure and prefers to keep it secret, unlike those worn by the dwarves and dragon in The Hobbit. Later, the full value of mithril is revealed: instead of being accorded ten times the value of gold, then 'it is beyond price' (I, 331), 'a kingly gift', and 'greater than the value of the whole Shire and everything in it.' Frodo is then amazed at the priceless gift, but soon his thoughts turn back to the giver, Bilbo, and their happy days together in the Shire. As seen previously with mathoms, the purpose can be more important than the gift, and understanding the thought behind the bestowal is a way to avoid any concomitant draconitas.

Similarly, the gifts of the Lady Galadriel are more important for their purpose. The sheath and jewel given to Aragorn are representative and symbolic of his noble history, and are encouragements to continue on his task. The small box of earth presented to Sam is a tribute to his love of plants and gardens. The crystal phial given to Frodo is to be a reminder of goodness and hence to grant hope when he is surrounded by evil: 'It will shine brighter when night is about

you.' (I, 393) The three strands of her hair given to Gimli are a pledge of good will between dwarves and elves. Gimli has redeemed the traditional acquisitiveness of his race through his reverence of the Lady, shown first in his refusal to name a gift. Yet, when pressed to name a desire, he speaks eloquently, and receives his desire threefold. His own personal redemption is most clear in the Lady's words which go with the gift:

your hands shall flow with gold, and yet over you gold
shall have no dominion.

Her other gifts are treated briefly, with only Boromir's belt of gold having moral referent, suggesting his elemental and even avaricious nature.

Before the end of this first volume, the Ring, that potent object of avarice, is returned to central place in the narrative. Galadriel has been offered it to relieve the burden on Frodo, but she passes the severe test. This is the climax of the Lothlorien section, not only because otherwise Galadriel has seemed all-powerful, but also since additional information is now revealed as to the Ring's power. To use it most potently, one must 'train your will to the domination of others.' (I, 381) It has already made Frodo's sight 'keener' (I, 382) in the darkening world; he can see the Eye of Sauron, and perceive the thoughts of Galadriel and the lesser ring upon her finger. Furthermore, the Ring if taken up would 'make some folk pay for their dirty work', as Sam puts it, but 'it would not stop with that' Galadriel replies. The use of the Ring is corrupting; if Galadriel should take it up, as she says: 'All shall love me and despair!' (I, 381)¹

If Galadriel is severely tested by the Ring it is little wonder that Boromir fails, since he desires immediate power and lacks any insight into the nature of

1. This is reminiscent of Shelley's 'Ozymandias', with the King's arrogant attitude to empire: 'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'. Oscar Williams (ed.), Major British Poets, New York, 1963, pp. 166-167.

the Ring or of the power of cosmic evil. He even fails to comprehend the age-old taboos on the use of gifts:

It is a gift, I say; a gift to the foes of Mordor. It is mad not to use it, to use the power of the Enemy against him. The fearless, the ruthless, these alone will achieve victory. (I, 414)

He has not understood that the Ring is wholly evil, and that if it is a gift its intent is also wholly evil. Significantly for the theme of avarice/power, Boromir's attempt to take the Ring by force will lead to the breaking of the Fellowship, the climax of the first volume.

In the second volume the theme of power intensifies, and is seen affecting a wide range of differing characters. For the Riders of Rohan there are no illusions as to Sauron's sway. For the first time in the narrative it is presented capitalized: 'We do not serve the Power of the Black Land' (II, 35). The most numerous of the tools of this Power are the orcs, and they are suitably described like machines: 'up and down, unresting, as if they were made of wire and horn' (II, 55). It is likely that Sauron has produced them through miscegenation, and he is imitated by Saruman who has 'blended the races of Orcs and Men' (II, 77), both actions being blasphemous perversions of nature². There are several suggestions of this misbreeding. At Bree, Frodo thinks that the 'southerner... looks more than half like a goblin.' (I, 193) Later, Frodo expands on his suspicions:

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 (III, 190)

2. The miscegenation of orcs is also suggested by the similarity of their name to the Greek word for 'testes', still used for 'orchidectomy' and 'orchitis'.

Finally, on their return to the Shire, the hobbits see the familiar 'squint-eyed and sallowed-faced' (III, 283) features on the ruffians. This is the worst use of power in a physical sense to be found in Tolkien's works.

As if to prepare us for the intensity of meaning to be given to the concept 'precious', we first meet four mild uses of the term. The word has already developed some power, for through its use Pippin can easily trick the orc Grishnakh into thinking that he has the Ring (II, 59). Aragorn judges that the orcs tried 'to slip out with their precious prisoners before the battle.' (II, 93) Of course, he is here using the term of the way in which the orcs would regard their prisoners. Later, when returning the two Knives and brooch to Merry and Pippin, he describes the objects as 'treasures' (II, 169), and the latter as 'a very precious thing.' The usages are a little unsettling, but the substance of Aragorn's advice belies his vocabulary: 'One who cannot cast away a treasure at need is in fetters.' Later, Frodo's phrasing is, on the surface, the most innocuous: 'Every day that passes is a precious day lost.' (II, 210) However, for the Ringbearer to use this word, even casually, is somewhat ominous.

There is a hint of potential salvation in the (proper) use of 'power' to describe Gandalf returned: 'holding a power beyond the strength of Kings.' (II, 104) Another positive use of this otherwise evil word is in Gandalf's description of Ents:

a power far older... that walked the earth, ere elf sang
or hammer rang. (II, 149)

Again, as with all Tolkien's ambivalent contexts, disturbing echoes are set up, and one can sense that the potential for timeless evil, or its demiurge, is again abroad.

* * * *

Clearer moral signals are given us as to the flawed natures of Wormtongue and Saruman. The former is prone to theft, hiding the proceeds in his chest, and

as well as Theoden's jewelled sword, 'Many other things are there which men have missed.' (II, 123) When Saruman is confronted by the victorious Gandalf, the former's rage, with 'a red light' (II, 188) (of draconitas) in his eyes, assumes the same lust for possessions and power in others that he feels. Evil cannot perceive the reasons behind goodness. When Pippin has been frightened by a vision in the palantir, Gandalf declares 'So this is the thief!' (II, 197). But the use of 'thief' is playful here, as if to reassure after the evil vision. Aragorn's taking up of this treasure, although by right, is in marked contrast to the acrimonious argument on the rights to ancient heirlooms – already depicted in The Hobbit. Aragorn waits until his hereditary talisman (the palantir) is offered to him since it is too dangerous to others, – and then declares his right to hold and use it, in Kingly language (II, 199).

However, all this is but preparation for the great struggle for power and dominion, as opposed to renunciation and service, – that involving Frodo, Sam, Gollum and Sauron. Gollum's reappearance is marked by medieval type repetition of certain words, the concepts of which rule his life: 'precious' and 'Precious' (seven times), and 'thieves' (three times) (II, 220). It is soon revealed that Gollum's character has been split by the force of the Ring. The better half, Smeagol, has long departed – 'he went away long ago. They took his Precious, and he's lost now' (II, 223), as Gollum puts it. Frodo, too, shows that he is all too aware of the effect of the Ring, when he will not allow Gollum to swear on it:

No! not on it... All you wish is to see it and touch it,
if you can, though you know it would drive you mad.
Not on it. Swear by it if you will. (II, 225)

There has been no-one to tell Frodo this; he is learning it from his own experience of the Ring and its increasing influence over him. Gollum feels 'the terrible call of the Ring' (II, 241) much more strongly, and in his Smeagol/Gollum dialogue reveals the delusions of power into which he has been led:

Perhaps we grows very strong, stronger than Wraiths.
 Lord Smeagol? Gollum the Great? The Gollum! Eat fish
 every day, three times a day, fresh from the sea. Most
 Precious Gollum!

The self-deception sounds grandiose, but the aim is so mild as to be pitiable. Yet Sam feels no pity, having earlier referred to Gollum as an object: 'what's to be done with it?... Tie it up, so as it can't come sneaking' (II, 221). Now his thoughts are more violent: 'Curse him! I wish he was choked!' (II, 242) Even Sam, we see, has the potential for evil.

Gollum is in no doubt as to what Sauron would do with the Ring, even if he phrases it in his own imagery: 'He'll eat us all, if he gets it, eat all the world.' (II, 245) Frodo declares that Gollum will never get it back, but that the desire of it may betray [him] to a bitter end.' (II, 248), and even foreshadows Gollum's end: 'cast yourself into the fire.' Such is the insight granted by the Ring.

In this section, only Faramir seems unaffected by the Ring. After the tragic example of his brother, Faramir declares that he 'would not take this thing, if it lay by the highway.' (II, 280) When he realises that Frodo is in fact carrying the Ring, Faramir's reaction shows philosophic insight into the nature of evil:

I do not wish to see it, or touch it, or know more of it
 than I know (which is enough), lest peril perchance
 waylay me and I fall lower in the test than Frodo son
 of Drogo. (II, 290)

He perceives evil as providing a test which must be overcome. Galadriel has earlier used the same word: 'I pass the test' (I, 381) when she renounces the Ring's blandishments outright.

After leaving Faramir, Frodo is tested again by it. He 'knew that the Ring would only betray him' (II, 315-316) and is hence inclined to give way to it. Further, as already seen with Gollum, the ring is working on Frodo's sense of reputation and self worth:

All is lost. Even if my errand is performed, no one will ever know. There will be no one I can tell. It will be in vain.

Just as dragons are concerned about their reputations, so too are those who perform heroic deeds, or who have power. For Frodo the quest is beginning to seem hopeless.

By contrast, Shelob is a more elemental form of evil. She has no concern with reputation or dominion but rather her lust is different, even primeval:

death for all others, mind and body, and for herself a glut of life, alone swollen (II, 333)

She is similar to the Balrog and the Old Man Willow, all being forms of great malice of a kind surviving from a long past age. Each operates within a very limited domain, and the implication is that later forms of life and more evolved nationalities should pass by these ancient enclaves.

Some indication of the more mysterious power of goodness is given, however, before the second volume ends. As Sam draws out the phial for the final confrontation with Shelob, it suddenly blazed out with light, as if 'his indomitable spirit had set its potency in motion' (II, 339). Nevertheless, the evil to be confronted is also intensifying. The Ring itself 'had grown greatly in power as it approached the places of its forging' (II, 344), and finally Frodo is held by the orcs, the chief of whom observes ominously: 'He's precious.' (II, 351)

The final volume reveals Denethor lusting to use the Ring. In his attempt to explain the nature of this evil, Gandalf gives a grim account of its action: 'it would burn your mind away.' (III, 87) Contemplation of evil is already doing this to Denethor, and will result in his suicidal pyre. Such a process has long ago consumed Sauron, and all his attention is centred on the Ring. If the Ring is destroyed, as Gandalf announces in 'The Last Debate', Sauron:

will lose the best part of the strength that was native to him in his beginning, and all that was made or begun

with that power will crumble, and he will be maimed
for ever' (III, 155)

Once Sauron knows 'this precious thing which he lost has been found again' (III, 156), he will attack 'in hope and in greed' (III, 156). Sauron's lust here goes beyond avarice to awful megalomania. Denethor understands Sauron because the two are similar: [Sauron] 'uses others as his weapons. So do all great lords, if they are wise' (III, 92), he says. Avarice has gone to the level of regarding people as things, although not to the extent with Denethor as it has with Sauron.

Further uses of 'precious' occur in preparation for the major climax of the trilogy. The orcs are berated as 'two precious captains... fighting over the swag.' (III, 182) This is the usage of the word to mean 'worthless' (O.E.D. sense 4). Tolkien thus gives the impression of making the epithet cover the whole semantic range. As well as the orc, Shagrat, conventionally 'bearing his precious burden' (III, 184), Sam is described as giving Frodo 'a whole wafer of their precious waybread' (III, 210). The latter description evokes the idea of a Eucharist, with 'wafer', 'bread' and 'precious'³. Lastly, Sam cuts his elven-rope and discards his (idolatrously) esteemed 'precious pans' (III, 215).

The movement towards Mount Doom now involves a putting off of all objects inessential to the quest. Weapons and mail are of little value when the Ring is becoming well nigh impossibly heavier each mile closer to their destination. For the evil will of the Ring itself is reaching its peak, and Frodo's 'heart and will' are finally only aroused by 'an attack, an attempt to wrest his treasure from him by force.' (III, 220) Gollum fails in the first attempt, backing away in terror from a transformed and awesome Frodo, yet himself still possessed of 'insatiable

3. The word is used in two associated phrases: 'precious blood' and 'precious body' [of Christ] (O.E.D. sense 2). The Feast of the Most Precious Blood is celebrated on the first Sunday in July.

desire' (III, 221).

At the very Crack of Doom, Frodo chooses dominion and power instead of completion of the quest, and claims them in a voice 'more powerful' (III, 223) than ever before. At this point the evil has won; Frodo could not have kept the Ring because from the moment of claiming it Sauron was aware of him, and then the Ringwraiths were hurtling towards Mount Doom. It is only the desperate avarice of Gollum that indirectly completes the quest. The Ring has not only given Gollum a purpose in the past, but also kept his body alive through many life spans. Without it: 'We're lost. And when Precious goes we'll die, yes die into the dust' (III, 221). And so despair leads Gollum into his final successful assault. In his mad dance of total union, he cries out 'precious' six times, the final utterance being 'his last wail Precious, and he was gone.' (III, 224) In his own lust and desire for sway, Frodo has failed, but these same failings in Gollum have resulted, by grace, in the triumph of Frodo's goodness. Possibly no other in Middle-earth could have got as close as did Frodo to such a renunciation, but the final glory of the quest's success belongs elsewhere.

* * * *

After this climax comes the time for honour, gifts and parting. Frodo has gone far beyond draconitas and, purged of much sensation, is even reluctant to wear a sword and armour. Queen Arwen's gift to Frodo is important for its healing, rather than its material worth. Further, he may take Arwen's place, if he desires, when the elves pass into the West. Also he is given a white gem, which will help him 'When the memory of the fear and the darkness troubles' (III, 253). Later, it does bring relief from 'the fit' (III, 304), but the sense of irreparable loss remains: 'now all is dark and empty.'

Theoden's burial mound is a reminder of Germanic tradition, since Theoden is buried 'with his arms and many fair things that he had possessed' (III, 254). The custom is a mix of an attempt to take the treasure with one (avarice), and of unselfish tribute to the noble dead. Eomer's valuable gift to Merry, a finely wrought silver horn, is pressed upon him only after he will not accept a whole wagon-load of gifts. Eomer, too, is prepared to continue the old tradition of rewards of treasure for heroic deeds on the battlefield, but through Merry's reaction one can see the old ways changing. The silver horn is important as a memorial to the Mark, as an heirloom, and as a rouser of friends:

He that blows it at need shall set fear in the hearts
of his enemies and joy in the hearts of his friends,
and they shall hear him and come to him. (III, 256)

With these qualities, it is a gift that Merry can not refuse.

Saruman still has his earlier draconitas, when encountered on the road. He twice accuses Merry of being a 'thief' (III, 262). It is unjust because the hobbits have a far greater claim upon him for their abduction on his orders. One is reminded of Frodo snatching the Ring back from Sam, unjustly crying 'No you won't, you thief!' (III, 188), the climactic use of this word and concept. However, Frodo quickly realises that it is 'the horrible power of the Ring.' Not so Saruman, who now justifies for himself a further theft and then rudely departs.

Bilbo's gifts are also more important for their symbolic meaning than for their intrinsic worth. He again gives the sword Sting and the mithril-coat to Frodo, forgetting that he had already passed these on much earlier. The dominant concept is of his generosity. As well, he gives Frodo his three books of translations, in effect the work of the second half of his life, while Sam is presented with 'a little bag of gold.' (III, 265) The evil normally inherent in gold is relieved by the smallness, but also by the directive: 'May come in useful, if you think of getting married, Sam.' Merry and Pippin are given 'good advice', and as an

afterthought 'two beautiful pipes with pearl mouth-pieces and bound with fine-wrought silver', Bilbo's thought being 'Think of me when you smoke them!'

The last forces of manipulative power have retreated to the Shire, and the now familiar words and concepts recur for the last time. Barliman describes the men newcomers as 'bad men, full o' thievery and mischief.' (III, 271) There are two occurrences of 'precious' with the sense of 'worthless': the ruffians ask 'And where are those precious Shirriffs?' (III, 284); while Frodo retorts that their 'precious master is a beggar in the wilderness.' The theme concludes with Saruman and Frodo, the former warning the hobbits: 'But do not think that when I lost all my goods I lost all my power!' (III, 298) Frodo again has the answer:

Do not believe him! He has lost all power save his voice that can still daunt you and deceive you, if you let it.

The exchange is a last reminder of the link between greed and cold-hearted manipulation.

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As might be expected, Tolkien's three short works also have evidence of a theme of draconitas. 'Leaf by Niggle' explores the theme as the temptation experienced by an artist, and also through the transitions and passage at death. Niggle has generally neglected the material world, and finds its intrusions bothersome. However, intrude it does. The greatest crisis is neighbour Parish's request for wood and canvas: 'Now did he look at the picture.' (T&L, 84) Not only do those around him not appreciate his art, but they would destroy it for use as building materials.

In the allegory of sudden and inevitable death, the Driver does not give Niggle adequate time to pack, just enough to grab a small bag containing two of his most treasured possessions: a paint-box and his sketch-book. However, it seems that he wishes to take his art with him, and at the Station he finds that he has left

even this bag behind. Like Everyman he must leave all behind, except for his good deeds, and these have been half-hearted.

His place of healing is the world of his painting, and as he looks around in amazement he exclaims:

‘It’s a gift!’ [referring to] his art, and also to the result; but he was using the word quite literally. (T&L, 94)

In this early work Tolkien appears to be struggling to capture the metaphysical force of the word ‘gift’ as equivalent to ‘Grace’. Nevertheless, the artist’s generous attempt to communicate beauty seems to protect him from avarice. Niggle realises that he needs Parish, because ‘This place cannot be left just as my private park.’ (T&L, 96) Ultimately Niggle is able to leave the world of his (assisted) painting and go on to the next stage.

Meanwhile, back in the original world from which Niggle was taken, only a fragment of his art is appreciated, the ‘Leaf: by Niggle’. However, even this relic is destroyed, and with it all trace of Niggle’s (sub-)creation, and all memory of the artist. It is a salutary reminder of the impermanence of objects, even great art, and even man himself.

* * * *

Farmer Giles of Ham has a dragon as one of its characters and is of course – albeit whimsically – concerned with draconitas. Avarice is seen in most characters, except Giles himself. He exemplifies the peasant-like respect for the objects necessary for the maintenance of life. Although reluctant to confront the noisy intruder at night, he declares: ‘Still, property is property’ (FG, 16), and is prepared to be bold in its defence. One feels, indeed, that he was more anxious about his property than his skin’ (FG, 17), because at this level of basic survival,

possessions and skin may well be synonymous, a link seen in its demonic form with Smaug and Thorin in The Hobbit.

In contrast to the villager's simple attitude to belongings, the avarice of the King is shown in the seemingly worthless gift which he sends to Giles:

Plain heavy swords of that kind were out of fashion at court just then, so the King thought it the very thing for a present to a rustic. (FG, 22)

Here avarice is associated with the desire to maintain one's appearances, both in fashion at the court, and to one's subjects, while giving the minimum, preferably the useless or worthless, to discharge his kingly duty. If this fact had been understood at the receipt of the sword, Giles would not have been 'delighted', as he was.

After the dragon has been caught, and is bargaining for its life, the material greed of all involved is revealed. Only the blacksmith emerges slightly better than the others. By its nature, the dragon offers bad bargains, but is somewhat comical in stating this:

I will pay for all the damage I have done. I will pay for all the funerals of all the people I have killed' (FG, 46)

However, the greedy crowd is vicious in its lust for treasure. They are impatient, wanting to kill the dragon if it offers anything less than its full hoard. Just like Thorin, the thought of the treasure has won control of them. Most disturbing is the way the people are described as answering with one voice:

'Make up your mind!' the people cried, getting bolder and drawing nearer. (FG, 47)

Giles appears to be drawn along by the crowd's wishes, and yet his voice is not part of their unison. He is still feeling his way in his new status as leader. The contributions of the dog are comical, but also a little disturbing. Is the dog acting like the people, or are they acting like animals? The real problem is that there is no one 'who had any actual experience in dealing with dragons and their tricks', or

treasure. Those designated to confront such evil, the Knights, are loath to act out their role, preferring the indolence and finery of court.

This is a ferocious dragon, and when tracked down:

filled with a great wrath; for he was fighting at his own gate, as it were, and with all his treasure to defend. (FG, 58)

Yet the dragon respects greater force than his own, and he meets it at first not so much in the person of Giles but in his weapon, the gift-sword Caudimorax or Tailbiter, an active agent of goodness. It 'will not stay sheathed if a dragon is within five miles' (FG, 34), as the scholarly parson reports. Furthermore, when the dragon leaps to attack, the sword assumes a threatening posture even more quickly. After the sword (in the hands of Giles) twice defeats the dragon, Giles finally routs the enemy by his bargaining skills, and his 'discretion'. In a community concerned primarily with survival, bargaining is a necessary and praiseworthy art, and 'few had ever outlasted Farmer Giles at a bargaining.' (FG, 60) Still, Giles does not exhibit the greed that is the keynote of the other villagers, but accepts the dragon's final offer, permitting it to keep some treasure, a wisdom motif regularly used by Tolkien. The narrator says: 'A knight would have stood out for the whole hoard and got a curse laid upon it.' (FG, 63) As it is, Giles got transport and a guardian for the treasure.

The dragon respects Giles, but not the King, sensing the latter's greed. Possession of treasure has not turned Giles towards evil; he is still able to remember the parson 'with gratitude' (FG, 63) for the simple rope he gave. The King shows his lack of worth when he demands the return of his previously unwanted gift. Needless to say, when Giles becomes King, he rewards generously and wisely. The only hint of draconitas in this conclusion is the previously cowardly dog, Garm, who with his 'gold collar... roamed at his will, a proud and

happy dog, insufferable to his fellows' (FG, 73). This is the only use of 'gold' in this section, and most importantly, Giles is not associated with it.

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Smith of Wootton Major develops an idea from 'Leaf by Niggle', that of artistic skill being a gift. Here it is a star from Faery which comes to one unexpectedly as a child, gives great 'cunning', is a passport to the realm of Faery, and finally should be handed on. Smith respects this and all lesser treasures, particularly those of nature; so when he returns from Faery with a flower which 'did not wither nor grow dim... they kept it as a secret and a treasure.' (T&L, 128)

Smith did not realise that the star was lent, coming unexpectedly and without a message as it did. When asked later if it were not time to give it up, Smith answers with a hint of draconitas:

And why should I do so? Isn't it mine? It came to me,
and may not a man keep things that come to him so, at
the least as a remembrance? (T&L)

When told that the star is not a free gift and that someone else may need it:

The smith was troubled, for he was a generous man,
and remembered with gratitude all that the star had
brought to him.

Alf realises the difficulty which Smith may have with the act of passing the star over to another, and suggests that it be placed in the box in the store-room⁴. Because he hands it over freely he is given information about its history.

Alf later tries to ease the aging Nokes' mind about the missing star, but the latter's reply is virtually an accusation of theft:

4. This speech echoes Bilbo's argument with Gandalf over leaving the Ring behind for Frodo (I, 42)

you nipped it out... and kept it for another time...
 always a tricky fellow: nimble one might say.
 (T&L, 142)

(Here Tolkien plays with the Old English azmel 'quick to seize'.) The accusation is repeated, and intensified by being linked with 'artful' – crafty or deceitful:

I never liked him [Alf]. He was artful. Too nimble, you
 might say. (T&L, 146)

This is a gross distortion of Alf's generous art. Again, common throughout all of Tolkien's works, the accusation, 'thief', reflects primarily on the accuser. In this case it is also one who is 'vain old fraud, fat, idle and sly.' (T&L, 142)

From the evidence presented as to the artists in these separate stories, it would appear that they are somewhat immured from avarice, due to their concentration on their otherworlds. If there is a weakness here it is in excessive yearning for that otherworld, for even at the moment of passing it on Smith asks:

'Should I give it to the King?' And as he said a hope
 sprang in his heart that on such an errand he might
 once more enter Faery. (T&L, 134)

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Turning to Old and Middle English texts one can easily find sources for Tolkien's use of this morality. The Beowulf is notable for its frequent use of 'gold'⁵, which early criticism often dismissed as 'poetic exaggeration or folk memories of an age of gold before the Anglo-Saxons came to England'⁶. Presumably these were memories of trade with the Middle East, for little gold occurred naturally in Western Europe. However, the rich treasures discovered in the Sutton Hoo burial in 1939 suggested more gold in England than was formerly

5. There are fifty five occurrences, i.e., on average one occurrence in every fifty eight lines.

6. Rosemary J. Cramp, 'Beowulf and Archaeology', Medieval Archaeology, Vol. I, 1957, p. 57.

believed. The excitement that this find caused can be glimpsed from the comments of C.L. Wrenn, Tolkien's assistant, then successor to the Chair of Anglo-Saxon⁷. Despite this revaluation, the full implications of which would take some years to be appreciated⁸, Tolkien's creative work appears to be based on the earlier notion that gold was scarce, often associated with a curse, and an evil to be avoided. If there is less gold in the world, the moral theme would be further underscored, 'poetic exaggeration' or not.

One can imagine Tolkien and Wrenn, as philologists, working over textual difficulties in Beowulf together, and immersing themselves in the morality of avarice, for in fact, several of the famous difficulties with the text concern this theme. For example, the longest of Wrenn's notes⁹ are concerned with treasure, gifts and ownership. A half page examination of ll. 3074-3075 produces:

The general sense seems clearly to be that Beowulf had not committed the sin of gazing avariciously on the treasure and thus did not merit the curse¹⁰.

The argument justifies the emendation of the text to form a hitherto unknown compound: goldhwæte, an adjective to mean 'pertaining to gold with a curse on it'.

Another note concerns a half-dozen illegible lines of the manuscript:

apparently to the effect that the man took some of the monster's hoard while he was asleep, and roused his anger¹¹.

7. His standard text, A Study of Old English Literature, London, 1983 (1st pub. 1967), is introduced with seven pages on Sutton Hoo.

8. See Cramp, op. cit., p. 73, for an argument accepting the description in Beowulf of Heorot being of gold, or gold-plated.

9. Notes to Clark Hall, op. cit..

10. ibid., p. 193. See also the chapter by Tolkien's student, A.J. Bliss, 'Beowulf Lines 3074-3075' in Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (eds.), J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller - Essays 'In Memoriam', New York, 1979, pp. 41-63.

11. Clark Hall, op. cit., p. 132, (Beo, 2214 ff.).

The accompanying comment adds that 'much fascinating speculation has resulted.'¹² A further note accepts the expression 'twisted gold' (Beo., 1382), which is used almost as a bribe for Beowulf, but is quickly parried by him. The concept suggests links with the (immoral?) Middle East. Tolkien's use of 'twisted wire' (H., 21), in the legendary and morally disturbing dwarves' song, hints at a similar shadowy past. Another note refers to Beowulf ll. 168-169 as 'this awkward passage'¹³, it being an imprecise link between maþum and 'precious', and of course Tolkien has made much fictional use of these two words.

In Tolkien's fictional world 'treasure hoard' and 'Ring of Power' both have this traditional quality of 'gold with a curse on it'. In their respective texts both: embody the climactic and damnation-bringing use of gold; are described as having malevolent action; and provide severe moral tests for those who encounter them. Bilbo and Frodo are both reminiscent of Beowulf in that they do not gaze 'avariciously on the treasure', at least not at first. Both hobbits are worn down by being near to the evil object over a long period. Bilbo has the Ring for some time, during which he uses it wisely, as a tool. Only in parting with the Ring in the trilogy does he visibly weaken. Still, just as Beowulf's gazing on the treasure contributes to his death, so Bilbo's contributes to his slow lingering fading. Frodo is more strongly defended against avarice, being early aware of the malign nature of the Ring. However, in his failure at Mount Doom, he openly gazes so on the treasure, and this necessarily leads to his slow death-like fading.

The influence of Pearl can also be felt in Tolkien's writings. The most noticeable characteristic in common is the frequent use of 'precious', here almost as a refrain: 'that precious pearl' or 'My precious pearl'¹⁴. Although pearl was a

12. ibid., p. 192. One can see the portrayal of Smaug's wrath as a fictional exploration of this section.

13. ibid., p. 184.

symbol of purity, and may even have been the child's Christian name as Margarita (Latin) or Margery (English)¹⁵, the use of a gem-like name¹⁶, combined with the poet's attempt to hold onto the child after death implies spiritual cupiditas. Occurring even more frequently in Pearl is 'price' which comes, like 'precious', from the Latin pretium. Together they heavily underscore the suggestion of possible avarice in mortals. The daughter (as Christ bride) seems to be truculantly manipulated and offensively manipulated, just as in the creative writing are the hoard, the Arkenstone and the Ring.

The Pardoner's Tale, with its stated theme Radix malorum est cupiditas, is another influence that can be felt in Tolkien's fictional work. I have been told by J.S. Ryan that Tolkien, in lectures on the Pardoner's Tale¹⁷, which involved analysis of Carleton Brown's edition¹⁸, spent an inordinate amount of time on the linked concepts of old age, death and gold, as well as the development of the story over time. Not so much attacking Chaucer as thinking aloud he claimed that Chaucer had used a traditional story but had not understood that there had been a change. Somewhere on its journey west, the person who was the enemy turned into Death, whereas originally gold was Death. There was confusion in Chaucer's mind on the role of the old man, who is paradoxically seeking death, but afraid to die. This raises the metaphysical question of what is the nature of death.

14. J.R.R. Tolkien, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo, p. 82.

15. ibid., p. 10.

16. W.H. Schofield, 'The Pearl', P.M.L.A., XXIV, 1909, pp. 615-616, discusses the lack of identification of the child with pearl before l. 161.

17. Tolkien gave these lectures from the late 1940's until his retirement, i.e., the period of his holding of the Merton Chair and hence able to lecture on Middle English texts. He kept this text on the course for its importance as a metaphysical text, an exemplum.

18. Carleton Brown (ed.), The Pardoner's Tale, Oxford, 1935. This edition considers the source of the story, and its European language variants.

In his creative writing Tolkien is trying to recapture the old motif that gold=death, a (literary) motif possibly older than the Sanskrit¹⁹, a motif clearest in The Hobbit before its later elaboration into power. The Chaucerian old man tapping the earth with his stick and calling for it to let him in, is similar to the legendary Tithonus, who was granted immortality but not perpetual youth. Once Tithonus became immobile one could occasionally hear his feeble voice pleading from his chamber. Both old men are fading, and are analogues, explored by Tolkien in his descriptions of the effect of the Ring. Bilbo describes the unsettling effect in his own homely way:

Well preserved indeed!... Why, I feel all thin, sort of stretched, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much bread. (I, 41)

Similarly, Gollum has been fading or stretched over centuries, eventually realising that without the Ring he is nothing but 'Dusst!' The same process is occurring with Frodo, but in his case the memory of failure dominates his attenuated life.

The rioters found a hoard of gold which was totally evil, and they gazed avariciously on it:

But ech of hem so glad was of that sighte,
For that the florins been so faire and brighte,
That doun they sette hem by this precious hoard.²⁰

19. Although there are Oriental analogues to the story, they lack several striking features found in Chaucer's and other Western versions. The story is not only ancient, but has struck a particular chord in the Western imagination. See Frederick Tupper, 'The Pardoner's Tale' in W.F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (eds.), Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, London, 1958 (1st ed. 1941), p. 415.

20. A.C. Spearing (ed.), The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, Cambridge, 1980 (1st pub. 1965), p. 70, ll. 487-489.

By now one should not be surprised if for significant situations and moral concepts, similar vocabulary is used. Furthermore, instead of attempting to avoid the curse by only taking some of the treasure, the rioters endeavour to take all:

(For wel ye woot that al this gold is oures)²¹,

even going so far as to kill each other, in the futile hope that the treasure will not have to be shared.

Tolkien is exploring both these motifs in his creative writing, in particular, developing the idea that possession actually leads to a loss of self. Owning and controlling lead to lack of respect, then to a mindless totality where the object takes the place of self, and theft leaves one with nothing, 'Dusst!' In this way 'the power of Smaug's treasure is greater after his fall than before.'²² Unlike his professional work, where the keynote had to be caution²³, in his fictional 'sub-creation' a situation, moral concept or word could be explored to the limits of his imagination. In sum, Tolkien is able to recapture ancient moral associations blunted by lapsed time.

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Finally, consideration should be given to the history of some of the common nouns which have given Tolkien's creative work such moral force. The Greek origin of the word 'dragon' indicates an ancient concept for evil. In Christian times it was extended to become an appellation of Satan (O.E.D. sense 4), although this is now rare. It was also an appellation of Death (O.E.D. sense 5), but this has

21. *ibid.*, p. 71, l. 500.

22. N.S. Hedges, 'The Fable and the Fabulous: The Use of Traditional Forms in Children's Literature', Ph.D. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1968, p. 205.

23. I have been told by J.S. Ryan that the phrase 'speculative etymology' was used openly in Oxford in the 1950's to criticize Tolkien for overstepping the evidence in his philological work.

become archaic. Furthermore, there are now in the language many innocuous compounds, such as architecture's 'dragon-beam'. Altogether, the word is losing its moral strength. It is regained in Tolkien's stories, and the concept of vast evil reinvigorated.

If dragon is old, then gold is even older, being postulated as 'pre-Teutonic'. Since the sixteenth century there has been an increase in figurative uses, and presumably a weakening of its moral aspect. This latter is probably best indicated by the fate of the compound 'gold-ward'. It is now obsolete, being last noted in the fourteenth century.

Also very old (Indo-E) is the word thief. The importance our culture has placed on possessions is clear. In the light of its use by Tolkien, theft of possessions becomes a cry that rings down through the millennia, as the sin of avarice recurs in its several forms. One imagines that Tolkien would have enjoyed its use in Scottish dialect as 'Auld Thief' for the Devil, an appellation which would have well suited Smaug. However, once the characterization of evil moves into the realm of power, the word 'thief' becomes insufficient for such usurpation. In addition, those who are 'stolen' to the evil side, have actually 'given' themselves, through despair.

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In Tolkien's fictional world one sees avarice and self-interest as the main motivation for many characters, be they high and powerful, or low and not-so-humble. In such a world, those who are capable of selfless action are the means of protection for the whole community against expanding and total evil. The free giving of gifts affords some protection against avarice, but few can offer the greatest gift, themselves: in humility, faith and love.