

Perspectives on reality

in *The Lord of the Rings*

Part II – Nature, beauty, and death

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*Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.*
(JRR Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*)

In *The Lord of the Rings*, nature and beauty fuse themselves many times. For Tolkien, beautiful places are always those close to nature, an unspoiled and healthy nature. For, of course, nature can be ugly too. For Tolkien, when evil has corrupted nature, it becomes ugly. Mirkwood, the forest of *The Hobbit* where Bilbo fights some giant spiders, is ugly because evil has corrupted it. Its contrast, Lothlórien, is beautiful because there is goodness in it. Shelob's lair is ugly while Bag End is beautiful. Those areas where nature has been destroyed are, obviously, ugly: Mordor, and the Shire while it was corrupted by Saruman's doings.

Nature is everything that God has created, not only our planet and its creatures but everything that exists. Our world is part of the universe. As Saint Francis of Assisi states, nature is alive and "all creatures, separate in functions, worth, desires, and beauty, are bound together in a harmonious interdependence ensured and presided over by the just and benevolent eye of God" (Sorrell 133). St Francis has such a "deep acceptance of the natural world" (141) that he accepts "the creatures into his spiritual family as brothers and sisters" (127). Though, his "conceptions of them were rooted soundly in Christian doctrine" (128), which means that humans are at the top of the list of species of the world and that the pagan animistic view is avoided. St. Francis wants people to appreciate all the creatures that God has created, and to "feel their kinship with them" (128).

Even when, as in St. Francis' *Canticle of Brother Sun*, he seems to provide each creature with a soul, the Church's official view argues that he is not doing so. The Bible says that only humans are made "in the image of God. Man and Woman both, he created them" (Genesis 1:27), which implies that nature and its creatures do not possess souls. The Roman Catholic doctrine says that soul "signifies the *spiritual principle in man*" (*Catechism* 83). Despite all this, Tolkien does present us with an animistic nature, "a natural world that is literally alive. ... For example Caradhras shows his displeasure by snowing heavily to block the Company's way; the herb *athelas* makes the air sparkle with joy (Curry 110); Frodo feels "the delight of the living tree itself" (*LOR-I* 455);

Legolas hears the stones lamenting the elves departure: "deep they delved us, fair they wrought us" (371).

Tolkien's view of nature is similar to that of St. Francis', but perhaps more tinged with paganism. Nature is alive, but despite its animism humans and other sentient creatures are the most valuable part of creation. The different Orders of Beings are part of the nature of Middle-earth but they are superior to it. What sets "people apart from nature? . . . for Christians it has traditionally been spirit" (Coates 7). Tolkien believes that because each Level of Being – spirits, humans, elves, dwarves and so on – has been created by Eru, then they are at the top of the hierarchical system of Middle-earth. Nature was created for "the Children of Ilúvatar" (*Silmarillion* 18). Middle-earth is "the habitation that was prepared for them" (18). Elves and humans are Eru's children, but the other Levels of Being share their place in the hierarchy of Middle-earth. They all use nature in order to build their abodes, get food and clothing, and fulfill all their needs. This is why Yavanna – Aulë's wife and "the Giver of Fruits – the lover of all things that grow in the earth" (27) – protests against this hierarchy: "Shall nothing that I have devised be free from the dominion of others?" (45). She knows that her beautiful creatures are helpless.

Nature can be very beautiful but to have common meaning for us beauty must be defined. The philosopher David Hume defined it as "such an order and construction of parts, as either by the *primary constitution* of our nature, by *custom*, or by *caprice*, is fitted to give a pleasure and satisfaction to the soul" (299). Nevertheless, it is necessary to have an ideal beauty in order to be able to have a notion of beauty. Plato, talking about art and measurement, says that "the greater and less are not only to be measured with one another, but also have to do with the production of the mean" (6). The mean is the "ideal standard" (6). As "arts are on the watch against excess and defect ... the excellence of beauty of every work of art is due to this observance of measure" (6). So, "the very existence of the arts must be held to depend on the possibility of measuring more or less, not only with one another, but also with a view to the attainment of the mean" (7).

Beauty exists only when something derives from or takes its formal order from the Ideal. Those who are close to the Ideal will be called "beautiful" and those who are far from it will be called "ugly". How does that something become established as beautiful? People will name as beautiful that which pleases them.

As Hume and the moderns state, beauty is subjective. That which can give pleasure to one may provide no satisfaction to another. Besides, standards of beauty depend on cultural – sometimes personal – views, so that they emerge from custom or caprice. However, the philosopher Plotinus talks about an objective ideal beauty. He says that beauty comes

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from a “Primal Good”:

What is beyond the Intellectual-Principle we affirm to be the nature of Good radiating Beauty before it. So that, treating the Intellectual cosmos as one, the first is the Beautiful: if we make distinction there, the Realm of Ideas constitutes the Beauty of the Intellectual Sphere; and the Good that lies beyond, is the Fountain at once and Principle of Beauty: the Primal Good and the Primal Beauty have the one dwelling-place and, thus, always, Beauty’s seat is There. (150)

Plotinus explains that there is a “Principle that bestows beauty on material things” (142). This Principle of beauty is governed by an Ideal-Form: “all the loveliness of this world comes by communion in Ideal-Form” (143). This Ideal-Form, which is beautiful because it conveys unity (143), is patterned by Reason: “an ugly thing is something that has not been entirely mastered by pattern, that is by Reason, the Matter not yielding at all points and in all respects to Ideal-Form” (143). And, finally, Idea and Reason are found within the Intellectual-Principle – what frees the soul from the body (147) – which is derived from The Good (147). This Good is beauty because what is evil is ugly; and as a consequence what is good is beautiful (147). As evil is a corruption of good, ugliness is a corruption of beauty. Such a notion exists in *LOR*. An orc’s delight is to “slash and beat down growing things that are not even in their way” (*LOR-II* 20). Orcs corrupt the statue near the cross-roads: its “head was gone, and in its place was set in mockery a round rough-hewn stone, rudely painted by savage hands in the likeness of a grinning face with one large red eye in the midst of its forehead” (390).

Plotinus tells us that we can recognise the ideal beauty because the soul affirms “the Beautiful where it finds something accordant with the Ideal-Form within itself, using this idea as a canon of accuracy in its decision” (143). But this ideal beauty can be seen only by those who are worthy: “never can the Soul have vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful” (150), which means to “become godlike ... so, mounting, the Soul will come first to the Intellectual-Principle and survey all the beautiful Ideas in the Supreme and will avow that this is Beauty, that the Ideas are Beauty” (150). Obviously, orcs – due to their corrupted origins – are unable to perceive real beauty, its Ideal-Form, and, therefore, unhesitatingly spoil that which other races may consider beautiful. Tolkien bases his notion of beauty on the Virgin Mary because she is very close to the Ideal-Form of beauty – which is goodness – but she is humble too. It follows then, that the more a person approaches the good and humble, the more one casts off arrogance, the more beautiful that person will be. Galadriel is beautiful because she is good and humble. She is proud but not arrogant. Saruman, by contrast, is simply arrogant.

Elves can see beauty’s Ideal-Form because they are close to *Eru, who is The Good*. Therefore, they are Tolkien’s symbol of beauty and goodness. If Elves acknowledge something as beautiful, then it is beautiful. Their perception of nature is alike to a Greek one; they think that it is a living being – in an animistic way – and that it can be very beautiful. Elves are always close to it because their perception of beauty allows them to realize that what is close to nature is beautiful. They weave their beauty together with nature’s beauty. Inevitably they see it as something that should be permanent, something that should not change. Rivendell and Lothlórien are perfect

examples of the elves’ views of beauty and nature. Through the elves’ art, enchantment, both spots are kept unchanged, in their state of beauty, as long as the elven rings have power, but when the One Ring is destroyed Rivendell and Lothlórien are left to the action of time. The elves are unable to prevent change and decay, which are what they regret most: “They wanted the peace and bliss and perfect memory of ‘The West’, and yet to remain on the ordinary earth where their prestige as the highest people, above wild elves, dwarves and men, was greater than at the bottom of the hierarchy of Valinor. They thus became obsessed with ‘fading’” (*Letters* 151).

Elves possess such a deep perception of nature’s life that they teach ents to talk, and not just between themselves; ents “learned of the elves and spoke with the trees” (*LOR-II* 93). Why do elves use enchantment rather than magic in order to preserve their abodes? First of all, they do not think of ‘magic’ in the same way that other peoples use the term, for as Galadriel tells Sam: “‘For this is what your folk call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean; and they seem also to use the same words for the deceits of the Enemy’” (*LOR-I* 468). Their perception of nature is such that they see their own “magic”, or qualities, as normal. Their “‘magic’ is Art, delivered from many of its human limitations ... And its object is Art not Power, sub-creation not domination and tyrannous re-forming of Creation” (*Letters* 146).

Secondly, to work magic is to impose one’s power on the “primary world”, but elves use their power to create a “secondary world” through enchantment. ‘Magic’ implies a certain kind of domination, thus elves would not use it; that would mean to modify nature too much. Elves do not want to modify nature except in what is necessary: building their homes, making food and clothes.

Lothlórien is not a garden but a forest, a place that has not been artificially shaped. The elves perceive reality as something outside them – as Locke argues – from which they can learn. If they modify nature they would be destroying its beauty and the opportunity to learn from it. In Lothlórien Frodo can have a communion with the tree because elvish enchantment has not modified the tree but created a link with it. Elves perceive nature’s own beauty; and because their perception of beauty is to appreciate the world as it is, when they create something beautiful they blend their beauty of art with the beauty of nature. By blending art and nature they create a symbiotic relationship on an artistic level between themselves and nature. The result is: ‘enchantment’.

On the contrary, magic *imposes* its form on nature. That is why Legolas tells Gimli that dwarves would spoil the caverns of Helm’s Deep. Dwarves impose their perception of beauty on nature: “we should open up new ways, and display far chambers that are still dark, glimpsed only as a void beyond fissures in the rock” (*LOR-II* 189). Elves respect nature’s free creation. Dwarves and elves can build homes or carve rock, but only elves will respect the rock’s ‘will’, its natural beauty – according to Middle-earth’s hierarchy. Elves love nature’s beauty as much as they love the beauty that they create. Dwarves love far more and “first the things made by their own hands” (*Silmarillion* 45).

For those Levels of Beings which are human-like, there is an Ideal-Form of beauty that is shared by all, the elves are closest to this Ideal-Form. They, and all they do, are beautiful. Their closeness to God, the Fountain of Beauty – The Good – bestows on them such a skill in their crafts that when they blend their perception of beauty with nature’s beauty the

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The End Of All Things

Karin Kunde

result is the closest one gets to beauty's Ideal-Form. In Middle-earth, when humans blend the beauty of art and nature, or enter into nature in spirit, the result is not as beautiful as that which elves achieve. Even if dwarves love their own crafts more than nature, still they recognise the elves' proximity to the Ideal-Form of beauty. Gimli admits it: "'Yet more fair is the living land of Lórien, and the Lady Galadriel is above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth!" (LOR-I 461). He will even fight to defend this claim.

I have hoped to show how elves hold a particular perspective on reality which no other Level of Being shares. The elvish power of enchantment modifies only the "secondary world". They create something artistic by linking nature's beauty with theirs, but they never modify their "primary world". What they do is a kind of tangible illusion. If the enchantment is taken off, then the "primary world" remains untouched. In contrast, Tom Bombadil's "earth magic is part of the very fabric of Nature" (Jeffs 27). Instead of modifying the "secondary world" he modifies the "primary world". The Orders of Beings have such distinct perspectives on reality because they "are inextricably in and of their geographical locales: the elves and 'their' woods and forests, the dwarves and mountains, hobbits and the domesticated nature of field and garden" (Curry 28).

Those Orders of Beings that are human-like perceive an Ideal-Form of beauty, but the ents' perception of beauty is very

different. Ents do not share this sense of connection with beauty's Ideal-Form. For example, their perspective on physical beauty is so distinct that Treebeard, while Merry and Pippin are enjoying the sun on a hill, mistakes the hobbits for orcs: "if I had seen you before I heard you, I should have just trodden on you, taking you for little orcs, and found my mistake afterwards" (LOR-II 78). How could this be? Physically, orcs are very different from hobbits. Orcs are far uglier!

Orcs are a corrupted form of elves. Can we accuse Tolkien of racism for saying that there are no good orcs? Of course not! Orcs are similar to demons, who are angels that decided to follow Satan and abandon God. These angels fell, ie corrupted themselves, and became demons. The tragedy is that orcs, and trolls, did not decide to be evil, Melkor forced them to become so.

Hume's definition of beauty fits the ents in that their perception of beauty is compared to that of the human-like races. Treebeard likes the hobbits' voices: "I heard your voices – I liked them: nice little voices; they reminded me of ... something I cannot remember" (78). However, if he can mistake a hobbit for an orc, it is probable that all human-like creatures are very alike for him. He can distinguish an elf from a human or dwarf, but that is because he has prior knowledge of them and has learned their differences. Nevertheless, these differences for ents are so vague that instead of thinking that the hobbits are dwarves, Treebeard thinks they are orcs. This

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points to the possibility that Ents cannot find pleasure in the physical beauty of the Ideal-Form of human-like races in the same way these human-like races do, even in the case of Galadriel.

Ents perceive beauty in a distinct way. If ents accepted the Ideal-Form of the body's beauty as it appears in human-like species, then ents would not be able to find entwives beautiful other than in the way an elf, or any person, feels when he or she sees, for example, a tree. In order to find entwives beautiful, ents need to perceive entwives according to an ent view of beauty: "desire came over me to see Fimbrethil again. Very fair she was still in my eyes, when I had last seen her, though little like the entmaiden of old. . . . We crossed over Anduin and came to their land; but we found a desert" (94)

For ents, nature is a living being which should be free. Ents rebel against the hierarchical order that exists in nature. The only change that ents like is the normal mutability of nature, free from any intervention by any of the Levels of Beings. That is why, in Fangorn, Gimli says: "I will keep my axe loose in my belt. Not for use on trees," he added hastily, looking up at the tree under which they stood" (114). Moreover, Treebeard explains this rebellious view: "I am not altogether on anybody's *side*, because nobody is altogether on my *side*, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them, not even elves nowadays" (89). Treebeard is the voice of Yavanna's protest against the hierarchy of Middle-earth.

How will people get wood for their fires if they cannot cut trees? Where will everybody live if they cannot build houses? Despite nature's precious being, Eru has decreed that people may use it in order to fulfill their needs. Nature, then, has to agree to be used by people. Yavanna loves her works, all the creatures she helped Ilúvatar to create, and although she tries to protect them ("Would that the trees may speak on behalf of all things that have roots, and punish those that wrong them!" (*Silmarillion* 45)) she has to accept the hierarchical order of Middle-earth: "'Eru is bountiful,' she said. 'Now let thy children beware! For there shall walk a power in the forests whose wrath they will arouse at their peril.' / 'Nonetheless they will have need of wood,' said Aulë" (46). Yavanna's 'power' is the ents, who are obliged to accept Middle-earth's hierarchy even if they do not agree with it.

Treebeard is angry that trees have been cut: "Down on the borders they are felling trees – good trees. ... There is always a smoke rising from Isengard these days" (*LOR-II* 91). Nevertheless, Saruman needs wood. Even Elves needed wood to construct Lothlórien and Rivendell. According to Middle-earth's hierarchy, people are allowed to cut trees and use their wood, despite the fact that this kills trees. So, when Treebeard curses Saruman he is also raising his voice against this established order of Middle-earth:

'Curse him, root and branch! Many of those trees were my friends, creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost for ever now. And there are wastes of stump and bramble where once there were singing groves. I have been idle. I have let things slip. It must stop!'

Treebeard raised himself from his bed with a jerk, stood up, and thumped his hand on the table. The vessels of light trembled and sent up two jets of flame. There was a flicker like green fire in his eyes, and his beard stood out stiff as a great besom. (91)

It is not only Treebeard who rebels against Middle-earth's hierarchy. In *The Hobbit*, Beorn – a human who can change himself into a bear – does the same. He treats his animals as his equals; they are his sons and daughters: "he keeps cattle and horses. ... They work for him and talk to him. He does not eat them; neither does he hunt or eat wild animals" (116). As a human, Beorn has the possibility of eating cattle but he does not; yet, Beorn is not a simple vegetarian. He "loves his animals as his children" (135), and he would kill anyone who would try to eat any of them, despite Middle-earth's hierarchy that allows people to eat animals. As we can see, Beorn and Treebeard do not share exactly the same view towards nature. Beorn cares for animals, not trees. In contrast, although trees are Treebeard's main concern, he cares for all nature. He cannot keep Saruman captive because he cares for all beings' freedom. His and Beorn's disagreements with Middle-earth's hierarchy once again suggest the polyphonic character of Tolkien's text.

The nature of death

I hope to have demonstrated in the text so far Tolkien's polyphonic grasp of power, beauty and nature. It is time now to consider the idea of death. Thus, we ask ourselves: what is death? Death is change, whether toward enlightenment, truth, freedom, extinction, or something else, whether part of life or its continuation, death is always an irreversible change in the person, isolating him or her from all those who are alive.

Tolkien's Roman Catholic ideas about death influence *LOR*. As a Catholic, he believed that when someone dies he or she goes to heaven, purgatory or hell. The Bible states that the moment people die, they are judged and if they are judged good they go to heaven: "the kingdom which has been prepared for you since the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). If they are judged evil they go to hell: "that eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (25:41). Or else they go to purgatory. This takes place if they are judged good but they still have some sins to expiate: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven" (*Catechism* 221).

For Christians, as the Bible explains, death exists because humans sinned: "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). Before death came everything was perfect and eternal. However, humans sinned and fell from that condition; then death appeared. After death there comes resurrection. Catholic belief holds that the soul is eternal but also that the body "will come to life again" (*Catechism* 212), a perfect body: when "the dead rise again ... they are as the angels in heaven are" (Matthew 22:30).

These notions of the spirit as something immortal that carries on, as well as that of the fear of a place of torment, probably inhabited by evil spirits, impinge on the *LOR* when Legolas, Aragorn and the humans with them follow the Paths of the Dead. To lead an immortal life in Middle-earth means that the elves perceive ghosts – the spirits of those who have died – differently to humans. For "the elves . . . the ghosts of men have no terror" (*LOR-III* 70), but humans are terrified of phantoms. When the dead appeared, humans "cried in terror and ran wild like hunted deer. Ever there rose the same cry in the gathering night: 'The King of the Dead! The King of the Dead is come upon us!'" (73). These dead scare humans because instead of abiding in a peaceful place with their loved

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ones they are trapped within the world, suffering and not at peace at all. Echoes of the purgatory run through this place where souls cannot find bliss after death, but they are not condemned either. These ghosts remind the living humans of the possibility of finding affliction after dying, after the travail that they will have to undergo. As Lovecraft states: "uncertainty and danger are always closely allied; thus making any kind of an unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities" (349). The mystery of death, with its possible malign implications, horrifies humans, in part because there is no way back. The longing for heaven and its promises of rest and bliss, as well as the possibility to lose it and go to hell, definitely influence the kind of fear these humans show. Moreover, Théoden reveals, while dying, the human desire to die and join the ancestors in a blissful place (*LOR-III* 143). While humans fear ghosts, elves, who do not die, are not afraid of them at all. Phantoms cannot scare elves because they do not have any relation with them and cannot kill them. The polyphony in the text is evident.

Humans, elves and each Level of Being experience death, but while it can give comfort to humans it does not give any to elves. Humans may perceive death as a sorrowful, frightening event that throws them onto a path towards the unknown – it is the gate to another level of existence – but there they have the opportunity to find peace and their loved ones who have died already. The ghosts of the Paths of the Dead who follow Aragorn do it because they cannot get the ease that death offers. They want to "fulfill their oath and have *peace*" (74; my italics). For those humans who remain alive, death can be a sad event too, but they also know it can be a relief from old age and sickness. In sharp contrast, elves perceive death as a regretful event which will never provide them with comfort. Those elves who are dead did not escape old age's burdens or the pain of sickness, they were killed. Only in such a way can an elf die. Those who still linger in Middle-earth must remain alive and unable to join their loved ones who have been slain. The only way to see them again is to forsake Middle-earth and sail to the Undying Lands. But how to do this while Middle-earth is still so beautiful and they have not the burdens of illness or old age? Death and life offer elves only different ways of being parted from their loved ones for a very, very long time – either those in the Undying Lands or those that remain in Middle-earth. On the other hand, death offers humans the possibility to leave Middle-earth, but completely restored: illness and old age's pains are left behind, while those left behind in Middle-earth will join them after some years, and meanwhile they will see join their friends and family who have died before them. No wonder Tolkien considers death a "special gift from God" (*Letters*, footnote 189).

If elves are immortal, how can they be killed? When elves are slain they come to life again. They keep their memories and are granted a new body, identical to the one they had before, although they must dwell in the Undying Lands (Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring* 365). Nevertheless, Tolkien specifies that elves are immortal within "the limits of the world (in space and time)" (*Letters* 325). As we can see, the elves' resurrection of the body is an echo of Catholicism. Moreover, elves do not die within the world because they are not fallen beings. Death is a consequence of sin, a consequence of the fall, "not a punishment for a Fall" (*Letters*, footnote 189) and

elves do not have to bear it. Their immortality is another sign of their closeness to God. Humans fell much lower than elves, and humans have to suffer death within the world.

The other Levels of Beings see elves as immortal because elves live far longer than they do. Thus, Tolkien tells us that for elves, the knowledge that they could remain in Arda, the Undying Lands, and "continue their experience of Arda, made death to the elves a totally different thing from death as it appeared to Men" (*Morgoth's Ring* 365). When compared to the creatures of the world, elves feel the burden of an almost immortal life: "For the elves the world moves, and it moves both very swift and very slow. Swift, because they themselves change little, and all else fleets by: it is a grief to them. Slow, because ... The passing seasons are but ripples ever repeated in the long long stream" (*LOR-I* 503). The sorrow of loss is a continuous and heavy burden to elves, and is behind their desire to keep things unchanged. Elves have to bear the sorrow of death without being able to reach it and find consolation. This makes them "so old and young, and so gay and sad" (127). Even if Elrond dies, he will come back to life. He will miss Aragorn and Arwen, his own daughter. The place where they will go is unreachable for him. Though, perhaps after the world ends, he will see them again.

When Théoden dies, despite his sadness for leaving what he has in Middle-earth, he finds ease at the moment of his death: "My body is broken. I go to my fathers. And even in their mighty company I shall not now be ashamed" (*LOR-III* 143). He is certain that he will join his ancestors, and that he will see again all those whom he loves, when they in their turn die. All of them will go to heaven, where peace reigns.

Conclusions and criticisms

With Tolkien's ideology in view, we can examine what his critics have said about aspects of good and evil in Middle-earth and in his work in general. Brian W. Aldiss, for example, accuses Tolkien of simplifying the relation between good and evil, making his heroes good and denying that evil can exist even within a good person (262). To say this is to call *LOR* a monophonic work where all different Levels of Beings are very alike. This is not so. Each Level of Being deals with evil in a different way and evil is always potential. Each must deal with temptation in a distinct manner.

Michael Moorcock agrees with Fritz Leiber's notion that Tolkien does not have any interest in exploring the minds of his principal villains (45). Again this is doubtful. Tolkien does do so, but in Sauron's case he does it through other characters. Moorcock implies that all Tolkien's evil characters can be labelled as 'bad guys' and can be all treated in the same way because readers do not know their thinking process (125). However, the villains in the *LOR* are, in fact, understood polyphonically. Each one has a different way of behaving and his or her actions depend on his or her personal perspective on reality.

Catharine Stimpson also argues that Tolkien simplifies things into good and evil, that what is good cannot be tinged by evil and vice versa. She says that he 'divides the ambiguous world into two unambiguous halves: good and evil, nice and nasty' (18). However, Tolkien's 'good' characters can do evil deeds and vice versa. The voice of the corrupted Saruman can be amazingly seductive; the beautiful forest of Fangorn

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can be deadly. Robert Giddings says that evil for Tolkien is 'evil, pure and simple' (13) and it cannot be fought, then, 'there is no need for change ... all ... things which make up the very fabric of a society, are perceived by Tolkien as totally beyond any need or possibility of change' (13). Nevertheless, evil is fought in *LOR* and changes are made. The point is that Tolkien knows that evil is within each Being and despite social or political changes it will always exist. All 'one can do is combat evil when and where one is, and there is no permanent solution' (Curry 101).

These attempts to make *LOR* monophonic do not stand up to a careful reading of the text. Gollum, Denethor and Saruman, for example, are not the same. Tolkien is aware that corruption and temptation vary for each being and will be conditioned both by the nature of the individual and the individual's personal experiences.

In fact, Tolkien shows us a polyphonic world, where each race conceives reality in a particular way, which is always changing.

One of Giddings' accusations is that, in *LOR*, it is pointless to fight evil and that it is pure malevolence. By saying this he implies that evil in *LOR* cannot be fought because what is utterly malignant cannot be changed and, as it will be always coming back, in *LOR* there is no hope to win the final battle against it. This means that he desires malevolence to be completely overthrown and destroyed. Now a problem arises. We live in a fallen world, not Paradise. A solution for evil will be found and it will be driven out, but only for a while. Then, a new solution will have to be found. The world behaves like this, and Tolkien is writing about an imaginary past of this world we live in; therefore, evil in *LOR* behaves as it does in this world. If Giddings says it is pointless to fight malevolence in *LOR*, then he is saying that same thing to all the people of the real world fighting evil in their own lands.

Furthermore, wickedness in the *LOR* is not pure and simple. Gollum is not completely evil; he has traits of goodness and undergoes an inner battle when tempted to break his promise and take the Ring from Frodo (*LOR-II* 298-99), whom he even calls "nice" and starts to like: "We hates Bagginses." / "No, not this Baggins'" (298). The troops of Sauron are not purely evil either. They join Sauron due to an old hate against Gondor and the whole West – and very probably a promise of wealth too, which all mercenaries look for – not just because they wish to hurt and kill (*LOR-III* 280). Hate is not a defining characteristic of the purely evil. When those who hate the West, the people from "Rhûn and Harad, Easterling and Southron" (280), give themselves up Aragorn releases them and makes peace with them (305). He knows that in spite of their hate they are not purely evil beings, that the relation between his kingdom and theirs can be amended and become a good one. Orcs, on the other hand, are always malevolent because they are corrupted elves, which means that they had goodness in them but it was perverted. Trolls have no option to change either. Nonetheless, the evil in both is not pure but a corruption of a former good.

Giddings' next accusation is tied to his first one. Thinking of evil as a changeless thing in *LOR*, he argues that Tolkien regards the elements of a society as "totally beyond any need or possibility of change" (13). This is a mistaken notion; Aragorn is able to make peace with his former enemies because they can change. Tolkien is so aware that the elements forming a society must change in order to achieve certain goals that he dedicates a full chapter, the Scouring of the

Shire, to talk about changes in precisely those elements that form a society. Hobbits want their Shire back to how it was before and to reach such a goal they have to change the social, political and economical elements of the Shire.

One of Tolkien's chief interests is precisely this kind of change. *LOR* recounts only a segment of the full history of Middle-earth taking place during the third age, which finishes at the Grey Havens when the carriers of the three elven rings – Gandalf, Galadriel and Elrond – depart from Middle-earth, as Tolkien records in Appendix A of the third part of *LOR* (387). Since Eru created existence there has never been a fixed order in Middle-earth. Peoples and kingdoms have come and gone, good and bad kings have ruled, heroes have struggled for peace and justice, and it will be always so. Gildor explains it to Frodo: others "dwelt here before Hobbits were; and others will dwell here again when hobbits are no more. The wide world is all about you; you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot forever fence it out" (*LOR-I* 123). An attained peace will not remain as it is. On the contrary, change is inevitable.

Along with these historical changes there come social changes as well. If history moves on, societies in the *LOR* must change too, reshaping those elements that construct society. Accusing Tolkien of pessimism, arguing that he sees change as pointless and denies the possibility of a better society, is an error. The Shire is the best example of this. In order to expunge the evil Saruman had made grow in the hobbits' society hobbits must change their social, political and economical practices. Before Saruman started altering the Shire – manipulating Lotho – hobbits lived in a pastoral world, taking care of their own needs and almost isolated from the outside world. In Frodo's times, after Bilbo's departure, their main sources "of news from distant parts—if they wanted any" (72) were migrating dwarves crossing the Shire in their way to the Blue Mountains. The situation changed radically when Lotho, or Pimple, started to trade with the outside world, in the shape of Isengard – Saruman bought the pipe-weed from the Shire (*LOR-II* 207). Lotho increased his wealth and introduced humans into the Shire until he took control of it and imposed a dictatorship on his fellow hobbits. Then he was murdered and Saruman took control of the hobbits' country, initiating an industrial development that damaged The Shire (*LOR-III* 360-61).

The three aforementioned aspects of The Shire undergo a deep alteration under Lotho and Saruman's imposition of an evil regime. Even hobbits change. Instead of being the merry folk of old times, now they are afraid and follow orders they do not like. Ted Sandyman becomes very corrupted, taking advantage of the situation: "A laugh put an end to them. There was a surly hobbit lounging over the low wall of the mill-yard. 'Don't 'ee like it, Sam? ... We've work to do in the Shire now.' ... 'You can't touch me. I'm a friend o' the Boss's. But he'll touch you all right'" (366). Frodo and his friends do not stay idle but decide to fight back against evil, realising that this must be done by changing back the social, political and economical elements in their society. They make a revolution. Frodo knows this change must be complete, at outer and inner levels: "'I hope there are not many more hobbits that have become like this. It would be a worse trouble than all the damage the men have done'" (366). He is worried about Sandyman because he knows that the only way to find a solution against evil is through change, but a social change takes longer than a material one. If there are others who think as Sandyman does, hobbits will have to work hard for effective social change in

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order to fight that evil.

In this essay I have argued that in Tolkien's world each Order of Being has his or her own perspective on reality. This is not mere accident or a device to make a better plot in the *LOR*. The author, in fact, is deeply committed to a polyphonic view of reality. What is more, he is conscious

of the implications of such a view. Tolkien does not deserve the strictures of his hostile critics that he is monophonic. His works show a universe of "God's plenty" but it is also a universe of mystery, diversity and transformation, a universe where change is inevitable and progress sometimes necessary.

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