

# splintered darkness

by ALEX LEWIS



*n the same way* that light was an essential force within Arda and was split into gradually lesser forms, becoming diluted, according to Verlyn Flieger's Splintered Light, so also I propose that Darkness and its manifestations were similarly split. Thus the balance of power between good and evil, light and dark were maintained. It is not sufficient merely to consider Light alone, for it cannot paint the whole picture. Flieger herself proposed that the most interesting of Tolkien's creations in The Silmarillion were the Noldor, who were Elves of the light who had turned towards the darkness and had a measure of both in them.

Yet I would add that to see Tolkien's work in a full context with the world he lived in, one must consider the analogous splintering of Darkness. For it was stated in the Ainulindalë: "To Melkor among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren." And "Ilúvatar said: 'Mighty are the Ainur, and mightiest of all is Melkor.'" Yet one can trace how this mightiest of them all fell so very low in the end:

In the First Age, the struggles were titanic, and the shape of Arda was marred by Melkor who was at that time very mighty: the peer of Manwë, but no longer mightier than all the others. He overthrew the Two Lamps and scoured the lands. But all the Valar combined managed to contain the wrath and turmoil of Arda and, in the end, imprisoned Melkor with the chain Angainor. So just as none were greater than Melkor at that time, and only Manwë was his equal, no light was greater than that of the Two Lamps that he had single-handedly destroyed, a light too great for mortal kind.

When the Two Trees were raised, their light was lesser than that of the Lamps. It is interesting to note that when Melkor was released he had lost some of his powers of persuasion, for the Elves scorned him now and did not do his direct bidding. He had to resort to cunning instead and indeed, when he came to steal the Silmarils he brought with him Ungoliant to cloak them in secrecy and to sap and kill the Two Trees, for he was no longer able to do this alone. And at the end he was overmastered by her, frightened by her bloated powers and almost eaten himself, had it not been for the timely intervention of his Balrogs. This would simply not have been possible before the destruction of the Lamps. Could Manwë, his peer of the olden times for instance have been bested by a monstrous spider? It doubt this very much indeed, for the light of the Glass of Galadriel (a diluted form of the light of Eärendil's Silmaril shining from the heavens) managed to stop Shelob in her tracks. Therefore Manwë whose spouse was Varda, Kindler of the Stars, is hardly likely to have been too bothered by Ungoliant. If she had been that strong, she would have lain in wait and killed off the Valar as they each came nigh to her, but in fact she hid from them far in the South and was frightened

of them, as was her erstwhile Master. It is indicative that the Eagles certainly did not seem to be unduly worried by her or her brood in Nan Dungortheb, and they were Manwë's messengers.

Indeed in IS, Ch.9 "Of the Flight of the Noldor", Tolkien says: "But Ungoliant had grown great and he less by the power that had gone out of him." Then we see Melkor return to Angband and Middle-earth. The Noldor chase after him and fight his armies. But an important change has come about this Vala. And this change, for Tolkien, is measured in a change of name; not Melkor anymore, but Morgoth. Not "He who arises in Might", but "The Black Foe of the World". It is important to realise this, for Middle-earth is based on linguistic causal philosophy, and it is to be expected that such name changes herald actual change also.

For, not only is he unable to change shape anymore but, when Fingolfin in his great bravery challenged Morgoth to a duel, he came forth (though he felt fear - alone of the Valar) and was cut seven times and his face was marred by Thorondor, and he felt the pain of these wounds ever after; hardly the result he should have expected of such a combat if he had not dwindled and his darkness splintered. But what is the cause of this? That I shall come to in the final section.

Let us examine the history of Beleriand further:

Then Beren and Lúthien came to Angband, and Lúthien danced before him and sang a song that made him fall asleep; this in itself is remarkable evidence of how drastically Morgoth had dwindled. So they were able to cut a Silmaril from his Iron Crown. Yet another remarkable instance is in the steadfastness of Húrin when captured by Morgoth. He sneered at him and was not cowed at all; nor did Morgoth ever gain what knowledge he needed from that mere mortal by force. In the end he released Húrin unbowed, though embittered.

Even Maedhros realised the change, I think, for upon hearing of the prowess of Beren and Lúthien he formed the Union of Maedhros, and so brought about the Nirnaeth, when Elves hammered at the very Doors of Angband. Before, in their first strength, they had not come to its Gates, let alone through them in all the years of the siege. Morgoth's salvation came from the evil Men in his service, as is told in Ch.20 of IS: "... even then the Eldar might have won the day, had all their hosts proved faithful; yet neither by wolf, nor by Balrog, nor by Dragon, would Morgoth have achieved his end, but for the treachery of Men."

If one examines this statement, it is most definitive and unequivocal, and from such an exacting linguist as Tolkien one would expect it to mean what is said, namely that Morgoth plus all his hosts might have fallen had it not been for Men.

From then onwards Morgoth did not dare come forth beyond the Gates of Angband - a virtual prisoner of his own making - and he was recaptured after the War of Wrath and thrown through the Door of Night, to dwell beyond until the End of days.

This neatly parallels the splintering of light in the Ages of the Sun and Moon.

And what of Ungoliant? Such a powerful demon of darkness, but she too "consumed herself in her last misery", or so it was told. In her place, in the Third Age of the Sun, we have the lesser Shelob and the ridiculous, though numerous, spiders of Mirkwood, which even a 'mere' Hobbit like Bilbo can draw circles round. Splintered darkness at work once more.

Then we have the case of Sauron, Morgoth's lieutenant in Tol-in-Gaurhoth in Northern Beleriand: a being of great powers, able to shift his shape at will from bat to wolf to serpent to vampire and so on, as when Huan fought with him, able to fly and cast great spells. Yet, in Númenor he was unable to withstand the forces of nature and fly off to escape the drowning and destruction of his physical form. Only his spirit returned to Middle-earth to seek out his Rings.

There are sure signs also of revolt amongst his minions in The Lord of the Rings, just as in his lackey Saruman. See the talk amongst the Orcs in the Tower of Cirith Ungol, which Sam searched for Frodo, and the talk of the Orc-folk on their way through Mordor: they all speak of setting up on their own. Then the Dragons did not respond to his commands, as Gandalf obviously feared, as was explained more fully in Unfinished Tales. For there was not only Smaug in the North of the world: the withered Heath spawned many

more dragons, yet all so puny that none would be able to melt the Ring, as they might have done in days of old. Sauron's nine Ringwraiths were at the limit of their power when in the far land of the Shire and they failed him. Also Shelob was not under Sauron's control - paralleling the situation with Morgoth and Ungoliant. See the end of The Two Towers, when Shelob is finally introduced to us: his 'pet', he calls her but he owns her not, to paraphrase the description given us in 'Shelob's Lair'.

And just as with Morgoth and his duel with Fingolfin, Sauron fought in armed combat with Gil-galad and Elendil, and his son Isildur. Two heroes died but Isildur cut the Ring from Sauron's finger for unlike Morgoth Sauron was bested. This is another sign of how the darkness was splintering, losing its potency. Sauron fell when the Ring was destroyed, and his darkness was replaced by the lesser darkness of Saruman, who had tried to copy Mordor in Orthanc, and now tried once again on an even smaller scale in the Shire.

Note how Saruman fell to the knife stroke of a common Man. Yet Gandalf told Gimli, Legolas and Aragorn that he was as Saruman ought to have been and that normal weapons could no longer do him harm when he met them as Gandalf the White near Fangorn Forest. How the mighty had fallen, as Frodo commented himself. His cure was beyond the Hobbits, but Frodo hoped that perhaps he would rise out of the depths into which he had sunk.

As Light had splintered into ordinariness, from the deathless Godlike Light of Aman to the Middle-earth humanity of the Sun and Moon, so too Darkness and evil had come down from being a supernatural powerful and horrific thing into a skirmish between a gangster and his thugs on the one hand and the authorities of the order-loving, peace-seeking Shire and its Hobbits on the other. Without help they conquered Saruman, who had required the combined forces of the Ents, the Huorns and the Riders of the Mark to be vanquished before, during the War of the Ring. His darkness was diluted and splintered. His voice that had enthralled the Riders of Rohan could not hold the Hobbits, nor even Wormtongue, any longer.

So why was Darkness splintered thus?

It is my belief that, apart from the keeping of the balance of power of good and evil within the tale, the operating mechanism was that Darkness squandered its own strengths trying to create: a task far beyond its powers in reality, just as Ilúvatar had intimated in the Ainulindalë right at the very beginning. Let us for this purpose examine the so-called 'creative' processes indulged in by the forces of Darkness:

Morgoth formed the spirits of underworld into Balrogs, he twisted Elves into Orcs, made Trolls in mockery of Ents. He built Utumno, rebuilt Thangorodrim twice, and he nourished the evil spirit of Sauron and perhaps also of Ungoliant in the beginning. This must have sapped him of much of his native strength. Indeed Tolkien says as much in IS, Ch.9, Of the Flight of the Noldor: "For now more than in the days of Utumno ere his pride was humbled, his hatred devoured him, and in the domination of his servants and the inspiring of them with lust of evil he spent his spirit."

If one looks at the time before the battle with Fingolfin, Morgoth had spent hundreds of years fashioning Glaurung out of a fell spirit of his following, which was afterwards called Father of Dragons, and I believe that a lot of his native power went into this effort, as well as those required in multiplying the Orc races and building the Dragon monsters for the siege of Gondolin.

For Ilúvatar, such things as creation are easy to achieve, though much time and love go into their being, for all creative power stems from him. For the Powers of Darkness, it required a sacrifice of their own essential force to bring about the changes needed: a parting with some of their native strength, as is told of Sauron and the Ring.

Both Morgoth and Sauron showed the same signs of weakening. They were not able to alter their forms and shapes any longer towards the end. Power and time was running out for them both.

Examining Sauron in the same way as we did Morgoth, we see that:

He created the power of the Rings, held the Ringwraiths and many other minions, rebuilt Barad-dûr twice,

singlehandedly fought with Gil-galad and Elendil, killing them and being killed himself, after which Isildur cut the Ring off his finger. He fed and nourished the winged steeds of the Wraith-king, and also controlled the Watcher in the Water before the Gate of Khazad-dûm. He evidently tried to control the Balrog in Moria too. And all the time he tried to pierce the cloak of secrecy between him and his foes, the wielders of the Three. He had built Dol Guldur and then abandoned it. He used his power of persuasion upon Ar-Pharazôn to steer the Númenóreans towards destruction, but by that time found that some Men were not susceptible to his coercions, just as Melkor before him had found with the Elves.

He literally wore himself out in the end. The very same can be said of Saruman who called himself Ringmaker, and controlled a host of his own, with the Uruks a terrible new breed of bold and cunning Orc but, in the end, could not even control Hobbits.

In the final analysis, Tolkien realised better than many that, to create a world which is a precursor of our own, with larger than life forces at work, he had to scale down the terror to manageable levels for our own times towards the end of his chronology. That is, to humanise the fantasy and bring it down to a natural

man-to-man level. No more Dragons and Rings and ghost-like Wraiths for Middle-earth. Just gangsters and mean folk who would attempt to run the lives of others as in the real world; much as he had seen himself through two World Wars, and the horrors of daily living in this century.

Myth and reality meeting and merging into one, his seamless stitch created the English Mythos in one masterful stroke.

### Bibliographical Note

In this essay I have freely used information to be found in the following books:

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