

- Dictionary, Volume 2, edited by David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992: 831-833.
8. See Hans Ucko. "Full of Grace and Truth: Bible Study on John 1:14-18," *Ecumenical Review* 56 (2004): 342-347.
  9. In the same chapter in verses 42-45 Paul says that the body "is sown" and "is raised"; the chapter also includes explicit mention of God as agent; see also 2 Timothy 2:8.
  10. I have explored this topic more fully in "Concealing 'Religion,' Revealing Truth," a paper presented to the Tolkien 2006 Conference, University of Vermont at Burlington, April 2006.
  11. After mentioning "the Other Power" who is "the Writer of the Story" and "that one ever-present Person who is never absent and never named," Tolkien tells his correspondent to "See Vol. I, p. 65," which Carpenter notes is in fact this same passage (Letter 192), and see Tolkien's mention of "Gandalf's conversation with Frodo" (Letter 156), already referred to in Note 3 above.
  12. See also the narrator's description, shortly before this, of Gandalf looking out from the walls of Minas Tirith after the Battle of the Pelennor Fields: "And he beheld with the sight that was given to him all that was befallen."
  13. As in the Bible, not all of Tolkien's uses in *The Lord of the Rings* of the passive voice with an implied agent necessarily point to God as the doer. In Appendix A, Thorin says to Gandalf, "Master Gandalf, I know you only by sight, but now I should be glad to speak with you. You have often come into my thoughts of late, as if I were bidden to seek you." Gandalf's answer, "I have thought of you also," indicates that it is likely that Thorin's experience results from Gandalf's thinking of him and not from divine action. Another interesting example of ambiguity occurs when Eowyn says of Aragorn, "Fey I thought him, like one whom the dead call," and Theoden replies, "Maybe he was called," shifting the "call" away from "the dead" but leaving the caller unnamed.
  14. See Walton, Christina Ganong. "Bible," in J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment, edited by Michael D. C. Drout, New York: Routledge, 2007: 62-64.
  15. Carpenter, Humphrey. J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography, New York: Houghton Mifflin (2000 [1977]), p. 42.
  16. Scull, Christina and Wayne G. Hammond. *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion and Guide. Volume One, Chronology*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, see p. 19. Scull and Hammond also note that when Tolkien was at Oxford, University students had to take a compulsory examination in Holy Scripture which included the text of two of the Gospels. They surmise, "We have found no record of Tolkien having taken this examination; it may be that his passing mark in Scripture Knowledge...in 1910 fulfilled the requirement" (p. 777).
  17. Blass, F. and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. A Translation and Revision of the ninth-tenth German edition incorporating supplementary notes of A. Debrunner, by Robert W. Funk*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1961). See Sections 130.1, 313, 342.1.
  18. Dalman, Gustaf. *The Words of Jesus, Considered in the Light of Post-biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers (1997), [Die Worte Jesu I, 1898, trans. D. M. Kay, 1902], pp. 224-226. As already noted, this particular term for such use of the passive did not come into use until seven decades later, when it was created by Jeremias.

## Ending the dualism of nature and industry in *The Lord of the Rings*

SARAH J SPROUSE

Tolkien's world relies upon the intertwining threads of nature and industry, although they cannot function merely as two opposing forces. A Buddhist reading of the text demonstrates the balancing act inherent in *The Lord of the Rings* as well as the importance of stewardship over dominion. It is clear in the text that overwhelming attachment to industrial power leads to suffering, not just for the individual but for the whole of Middle-earth. Here I attempt to demonstrate through a close reading that *The Lord of the Rings* contains major tenets of Buddhist philosophy through its contemporary and relevant examination of industrial power and its effects on Middle-earth as a whole. Previous scholarship has examined Buddhist figures in the text, but I have not seen any articles that specifically examine the sweep of *samsāra* and suffering as it relates to the imbalance of nature and industry.

A simplistic reading of *The Lord of the Rings* might entail a study of the binaries good and evil or the dualism between nature and industry. However, these perspectives cast the text into basic black-and-white terms. Rather than seeing nature and industry as dual and opposing threads, they need to be perceived as a careful balancing act. Saruman disturbs this balance by means of his ongoing search for power through heavy industry. The disruptive characters of the novel attempt to dominate their environments, and in

this act of seeking extreme power they alienate themselves and further instigate dualities.

"Sauron and Saruman, like Gollum," write Loy and Goodhew<sup>1</sup>, "no longer have any goal but power itself — the power that is the Ring. With them Tolkien shows the suffering that results from a quest for power lacking a moral dimension."

The two major ideologies in conjunction with nature in Middle-earth are the advocacies of stewardship and, conversely, dominion. Michael Brisbois writes:

Tolkien advocates stewardship over dominion in LotR. The tree-herd Ents, the Elves, and the Hobbits all live in a relationship of stewardship with nature. (ref. 2)

In arguing that the evils of Middle-earth cling to power, Tolkien wrote an epic Zen novel. Zen, a form of Buddhism derived from the Indian Dhyana tradition, is practised in accordance with nature by attempting to let go of attachments and prevent harm. Attachment causes harm because all things are impermanent and changing.

Zen stone gardens seem very simple — just a few stones and raked gravel. But ... the more we explore and sit with them, watching the light change, the more we see how all the elements are constantly changing. (ref. 3)

If one attaches to an object, one will be harmed when it changes.

This continuously changing nature of the world can be expressed by the Zen aesthetic term *yūgen*. *Yūgen* means ‘mystery’ or ‘cloudy impenetrability’ in Japanese<sup>3</sup>. This term in Zen art is meant to demonstrate the difficulty in grasping at an impermanent object. Curiously<sup>4</sup>, “Ent is an Old English word for ... ‘mysterious being’. Roman ruins in the landscape were described as *eald enta geweorc* ‘old works of the Ents’”. Tolkien’s Ents reflect the age of Middle-earth because, like Tom Bombadil, they have lived so long and seen so much. This sense of archaism reminds the reader that the war of the Second Age is being repeated. Although these ‘mysterious beings’ are representative of change in Middle-earth, their attachments to those around them blinded them to the evils at Isengard. Treebeard explains this attachment as “growing sleepy, going treeish” (*The Two Towers*: Treebeard).

Tolkien wrote to Fr Douglas Carter about the hope in Middle-earth that “they were not bound for ever to the circles of the world” (*Letters* 338). This concept is reminiscent of the Buddhist understanding of *samsāra* or reincarnation. It could also refer to a cyclic quality of history: the war of Middle-earth’s Second Age is returning. Tom Bombadil, the elves, and ents such as Treebeard seem to be ageless and separate from the circular motions of the world. Treebeard describes the Elvish land of Lothlórien as “fading” or simply “not growing” (*The Two Towers*: Treebeard).

There is something exceedingly otherworldly about Lothlórien. Boromir insisted that “few come out who once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed” (*The Fellowship of the Ring*: Lothlórien). However, Aragorn corrects the word “unscathed” with “unchanged.” Whether or not Tolkien intended Lothlórien to be a symbol of heaven or nirvana, it is implied that not even Lothlórien is exempt from change. This realm of golden woods is simply another community of Middle-earth and has a part in its future. “The Whole exists within each significant fragment ... because every significant fragment reproduces the Whole.”<sup>5</sup> Each community has a stake in Middle-earth’s sustainability because the entirety of the world is built upon these interconnected realms.

When asked about symbolism in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien responded in a letter to Herbert Schiro that “the tale is not really about Power and Dominion: that only sets the wheels going; it is about Death and the desire for deathlessness” (*Letters* 203). Elves are plagued with “limitless serial longevity” rather than simplistic immortality (*Letters* 208). The fate of the world is also their fate; so protecting nature from the destruction of domineering industry becomes a necessity. Unaffected by the delusions of the Ring, elves can perceive the balance between nature and industry rather than concede to pressing oppositions. Seeking an end to strife for the sake of all living creatures (even the trees, rocks and animals seem to have sentience in Middle-earth) is the very definition of a *bodhisattva*. This Buddhist is usually a monk who meditates on enlightenment, dedicating every

action of their day to the welfare of all beings in all worlds.

As first explained by Loy and Goodhew<sup>1</sup>, the best examples of *bodhisattvas* in Middle-earth are Frodo and Sam: “The task of socially engaged bodhisattvas is not to unravel the mystery that is our world, but to do what we can to succor its sufferings in this time of crisis.” These two hobbits are struggling to let go of the Ring for the salvation of all the creatures of Middle-earth, which by the very definition makes them *bodhisattvas*. When the power of the Ring overcomes Sam in a moment of delusion, his vision is of filling the vale of Gorgoroth with gardens and trees. Sam realizes the difference between the illusion and reality more quickly than most who encounter the Ring and understands that the vision is a “mere cheat to betray him” (*The Return of the King*: The Tower of Cirith Ungol). He chooses reality because “one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command”. This becomes one of the most important choices in the novel because it is the decision to leave delusions behind and continue on the quest to let go. “The goal is not another world but another way of living in this one, even as nirvana is not another place but a liberated way of experiencing this one.”<sup>1</sup> Sam is able to penetrate the Ring’s delusions in order to seek access to a better path of living for all beings in Middle-earth. On the other hand, Frodo becomes blinded by these delusions.

Industry does not have to equate dominion over nature, which most of the races of Middle-earth understand. The hobbits understand this and work in accordance with nature. “By advocating stewardship rather than dominion, Tolkien puts his villains on the other side of the coin.”<sup>2</sup> The Shire is perverted towards the end of the novel when Saruman introduces heavy industry to their previously green and sustainable realm. In ‘Concerning Hobbits’, Tolkien describes hobbits as “unobtrusive” (*The Lord of the Rings*: Prologue). Hobbits are not particularly interested in machines that are “more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom” and have a “close friendship with the earth”. This love of nature keeps the hobbits from willingly leaving major imprints upon it through destruction.

Elves and men live in accordance with nature rather than separating themselves from it, like the hobbits. “They feel no need to dominate or commodify Middle-earth. It is enough to be a part of it, because it is home to all of them.”<sup>1</sup> This is the expression of *pratītya samutpāda*, a Sanskrit term for inter-connectedness or inter-relatedness. All beings are part of the whole that is Middle-earth. “If we look at the universe, we find that everything in it exists only in relation to something else.”<sup>6</sup> By believing in stewardship rather than dominion, these races of Middle-earth refute separation from their environment. The elves are as much a part of the environment as are the trees.

In an interview<sup>7</sup>, Bill Moyers asked Joseph Campbell (regarding a pygmy legend about a little boy and a bird), “Isn’t that a story about what happens when human beings destroy their environment? Destroy their world? Destroy



nature and the revelations of nature?” Campbell responded by saying “They destroy their own nature, too.” The evils of Middle-earth exploit the natural resources to perpetuate a web of delusions that have already ensnared them. This dominion over nature not only destroys the environment, but could also in the long run lead to the destruction of all the creatures in Middle-earth. It is an act of denying interconnectedness because a sentient being would not work to destroy something to which they are connected or dependent upon. That goes against the psychology of survival. According to Buddhist philosophy, this kind of ignorance is not simply not knowing, but actively believing in that which is not true. In other words, delusions are at play.

Sauron’s rise to power began “slowly, beginning with fair motives: the reorganizing and rehabilitation of the ruin of Middle-earth, ‘neglected by the gods,’ he becomes a reincarnation of evil” and is “thus ‘Lord of magic and machines,’ who favours ‘machinery’ — with destructive and evil effects.”<sup>8</sup> Saruman too favours machinery in the pursuit of absolute power. “The Old English *isen geard* ‘iron yard’ [is a] place where metalworking takes place.”<sup>4</sup> He develops a “mind of metal and wheels” (*The Two Towers*: Treebeard). When Saruman escapes to the Shire and again dominates those that are around him, destruction ensues. “Even Sam’s vision in the Mirror had not prepared him for what they saw” (*The Return of the King*: The Scouring of the Shire). The Shire had been completely polluted with trees uprooted and huts erected.

After Saruman’s downfall at Isengard, he is delusional and dangerous. All of the toil put into industry at the expense

of neighbouring Fangorn would have been for nothing if he was to be locked up in Orthanc and prevented from obtaining the one thing he truly desired. It is at this point that the reader can see similarities to Gollum. Saruman feels betrayed by others and his own delusions, “for ‘disenchanted’ people will fall for the first rationalization for exploiting and destroying, and a disenchanted world doesn’t feel worth defending”<sup>5</sup>. Even as he has lost, Saruman is still trying to wheedle himself out of captivity to seek the Ring in vain. He tries desperately to convince Gandalf of his good intentions:

“Our friendship would profit us both alike. Much we could still accomplish together, to heal the disorders of the world. Let us understand one another, and dismiss from thought these lesser folk! Let them wait on our decisions! For the common good I am willing to redress the past, and to receive you. Will you not consult with me? Will you not come up?”

(*The Two Towers*: The Voice of Saruman)

The Ring has so corrupted Saruman’s mind that he seems to almost believe his own false words. He would again seek to dominate his environment for the sake of his own selfish gains. Rather than abandoning his tower, “Saruman remains to nurse his hatred and weave again such webs as he can” (*The Two Towers*: The Voice of Saruman).

According to Tolkien, *nazg* means ‘ring’ in the Black Speech (*Letters* 297). The Nazgûl are extreme examples of attachment to the Ring. These creatures are the walking dead and ancient kings of Middle-earth. The Ring took

such a strong hold over their minds that, like the elves, they walk forever though they are not necessarily immortal. They are agents of evil and leave pollution in their wake. Early in the novel at the River Bruinen, the Nazgûl “defile its pure waters with Sauron’s essence”<sup>9</sup>. Attachment again leads to perceiving nature and industry as dualistic rather than inter-connected. These creatures were caught in the clutches of the Ring’s delusional power long ago and it still holds its sway. Aragorn said that “their power is in terror” and “in dark and loneliness they are strongest” (*The Fellowship of the Ring*: Strider). The Nazgûl are akin to shadows in the world; their power of terror is stronger than their own physical bodies.

Bilbo fell prey to the same phenomenon that allowed the Nazgûl to live through the Ages. It is the power of the Ring that extends mortality. However, this extension is not one of life, but rather a stretching of time. Bilbo describes the feeling as “sort of stretched, ... like butter that has been scraped over too much bread” and he realizes that that “can’t be right”, acknowledging that he “need[s] a change” (*The Fellowship of the Ring*: A Long Expected Party). Like the Nazgûl, Bilbo has grown attached to the delusional power of the Ring despite the consequences of suffering that follow along with it. The other lesser rings have a similar power. “It is the three rings the elves possess that preserve their enchanted enclaves of peace, where time seems to stand still — which is why the destruction of the ruling Ring marks the end of their world.”<sup>11</sup> It is a poisoned taste of immortality that gives the impression of preventing change. This is akin to the major Buddhist pitfall of believing that one has achieved enlightenment when in fact they have not.

When faced with a Zen reading of Tom Bombadil, it rapidly becomes apparent that he is a Buddha figure. The Ring has no effect on him; Tom does not desire or attach to it. He is amused by it, although he has no particular interest in this potential for extreme power. Instead, he tells Frodo: “Tom must teach the right road, and keep your feet from wandering” (*The Fellowship of the Ring*: In the House of Tom Bombadil). His compassionate instruction echoes the buddhist goal of helping others achieve enlightenment. After all, the hobbits are on their way to let go of the Ring, although they do not yet know how far they will have to go to do this. Tolkien describes this in a letter to Naomi Mitchison as a “natural pacifist view” and goes on to say “only the victory of the West will allow Bombadil to continue, or even to survive. Nothing would be left for him in the world of Sauron” (*Letters* 144). He is an enigma who has no real impact on Middle-earth except through the guidance he gives to others. Tom understands the impermanence of this world and does not see a dualism between nature and industry because he is so much a part of nature while using rudimentary industrial tools such as lamps and cooking fires. The hobbits’ time spent in Bombadil’s house is explained further in the chapter as a span that could have been “one day or of many days”. Time had no control over them while with Bombadil, which again is indicative of his Buddha-nature.

Sauron’s Ring is the ultimate temptation that works against the beings of Middle-earth and threatens, not Buddha figures like Tom Bombadil, but those that Tom seeks to commune with (nature) and aid (the hobbits). Saruman is caught up in this poisonous desire and “there comes a time when the machine begins to dictate to you”<sup>7</sup>. The ‘machine’ in this case is that temptation of power. Saruman wants to use the Ring or attempt to create his own, but that very desire controls him through delusion. Gandalf recognizes the difference of being in control and being controlled when he says that he does not “wish for mastery” (*The Two Towers*: The Voice of Saruman). One cannot master the Ring. It has a life or will of its own. At Mount Doom, it seems to speak through Frodo in the last attempt to save itself.

Saruman’s delusion is that he can control the Ring and through it control the entirety of Middle-earth. His wisdom is dulled under the power of this illusion and he can no longer appreciate the natural environment around him. Saruman’s industrial revolution in the Shire threatens the same wasteland that he has inflicted upon Isengard. Tolkien asked in a letter to Stanley Unwin, “Do you think Tom Bombadil, the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside, could be made into the hero of a story?” (*Letters* 19). If Tom is a hero of Middle-earth, it is because of his peaceful interactions with the environment and his Buddha-like guidance of the other heroes of *The Lord of the Rings*. He understands what many races have understood and that some have forgotten: seeing nature and industry as binaries rather than two parts of a whole can have devastating effects. In separating himself from his environment, Saruman destroys the nature around him.

The Men of Gondor might have forgotten this for a time too. Denethor, like Saruman, was under the spell of a Palantir. He allowed delusions to carry his mind away from reality. Similar to stewardship or dominion over nature, Denethor confused his own role as a Steward: “and the rule of Gondor, my lord, is mine and no other man’s, unless the king should come again” (*The Return of the King*: Minas Tirith). Gandalf tells him that the king has indeed returned, which greatly angers Denethor. He fell under the delusion of his own power and sees himself as kingly. It is further explained that in his control, Minas Tirith was “falling year by year into decay” and the white tree had all but died in his care. After he becomes king, Aragorn replaces the dead tree with a sapling that is a “scion of the Eldest of Trees” (*The Return of the King*: The Steward and the King). Therein begins the healing process of all that Denethor had damaged.

Evil is not so easily categorized in black-and-white terms. However, it is spread in Middle-earth through extreme attachment to the desire for power. All of the races experience the temptation in one way or another, but those who fail the test separate themselves from all others. By rejecting the notion that all beings are connected and are all related parts of a single whole, they bring destruction down upon Middle-earth and ultimately destroy themselves. In this way,

Tolkien advocated the stewardship of nature and not the domination of it. "Tolkien meant to convey a harmonious relationship between humankind and nature" by writing it as an "inseparable relationship"<sup>8</sup>. The beings of Middle-earth must eliminate the perception of nature and industry as a duality in order to preserve it.

**Sarah J. Sprouse** is a master's student in English literature at George Mason University in Annandale, Virginia.

1. Loy, D. R. & Goodhew, L. *The Dharma of Dragons and Daemons* pp. 28, 39, 42, 44 (Wisdom Publications, 2004).

2. Brisbois, M. J. Tolkien's Imaginary Nature. *Tolkien Studies* 2, 197–216 (2005).
3. Loori, J. D. *The Zen of Creativity* pp. 192, 200 (Ballantine Books, 2004).
4. Wainwright, E. *Tolkien's Mythology for England* pp. 44, 57 (Anglo Saxon Books, 2004).
5. Eliade, M. *Patterns in Comparative Religion* pp. 69, 70 (Sheed & Ward, 1958).
6. Abe, M. *Zen and Comparative Studies* 43 (University of Hawaii Press, 1996).
7. Campbell, J. *The Power of Myth* pp. 24, 27 (Anchor Books Random House, 1991).
8. Curry, P. *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* pp. 63, 74 (St Martin's Press, 1997).
9. Petty, A. C. *Tolkien in the Land of Heroes* 238 (Cold Spring Press, 2003).

# Tolkien's use of free will versus predestination in *The Lord of the Rings*

BUD SCOTT

**T**olkien's use of free will versus predestination is the cornerstone of *The Lord of the Rings*. Without it, would there be a story at all? Or would it be much like a tapestry on a wall with a single loose thread?

Apparently at first glance this thread is a flaw, a mistake of the weaver but the greater mistake still is to try to resolve this flaw. In doing so you will find, for all of your good intentions, a pile of thread on the floor where once had hung a tapestry. Even though the pile of thread is the same material as the tapestry it no longer forms a coherent picture. Much the same thing happens to *The Lord of the Rings* if you 'pull' out the free will. You are left with two-dimensional characters doing their parts out of obedience to some unknown power.

The concepts of good and evil also suffer from the removal of free will. Until Eve bit from the apple there was no concept of evil or wrong. If you have no evil, how can good be compared to a nonexistent idea? Therefore if you remove free will, you also remove good and evil.

Most examples of free will have a counterpart of predestination. It is a double-edged sword. Tolkien throughout *The Lord of the Rings* makes his characters choose one thing or another. This is always backed up with the idea that the choice they make is somehow tied into the big scheme of things. Also, had they made a choice other than the appropriate ones, disastrous things would occur. For example, about Bilbo finding the Ring, Gandalf says: "Bilbo's arrival just at that time and putting his hand on it, blindly, in the dark", which leads us to believe no choice was made here. On the contrary, the choice was made by Bilbo to pick up this 'thing'; he could have let it lie. Also, it is out of ignorance that he picks it up, as Tolkien points out by his use of the words "blindly" and "in the dark". Had Bilbo the least inkling of what the Ring was about and all the trouble it would cause he would never have picked it up. Was it fate that put Bilbo there at that time or was it Tolkien? Aren't they one and the

same within the context of *The Lord of the Rings*? The fact that Tolkien worked on these books for 17 years<sup>1</sup> means there was nothing left to chance, but he skilfully manoeuvres the reader to think that there is a choice. He also leaves some issues unresolved to make the reader ponder.

If *The Lord of the Rings* is read, as it was supposedly written, a narrative history of Middle-earth prior to, during and just after the War of the Ring, the reader is caught up in questions such as: had Bilbo killed Gollum would Frodo have had the resolve to cast the Ring into the Cracks of Doom? Or if Bilbo had started his ownership of the Ring with an act of violence instead of mercy, wouldn't the Ring have gained control of him? And wouldn't this have made the first question academic? The variety of questions is endless.

Most readers also find themselves relating to the hero (Frodo), and asking themselves whether or not they would have made the same decisions under the same circumstances. This is where Tolkien's true ability shines through. He draws on real life and the fine line between fate and free will, whereby people say 'if I had my life to live over I would do things differently'. They think this may change events. In the context of *The Lord of the Rings* this would not hold true, because the events would be carried out only with different characters.

Some characters no longer have any free will because a stronger will has been exerted on them. This is the case with Saruman, his will has been consumed by Sauron. Here I must take the opposite view from James Robinson, who says of Saruman "he is the only character who, when faced with the choice of good and evil, consciously chooses evil. He was under no compulsion to make such a choice"<sup>2</sup>. From the time Saruman took up residence in Orthanc, and began to use its palantír, he gave up his free will. Had Sauron not had another palantír the one Saruman used would have been relatively harmless. But because Sauron did have one,