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The Character of the Ring

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

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Abstract

The Lord of the Rings is in essence a story about good against evil, and how good people can resist and be influenced by evil. The story is littered with evil characters and dangerous situations manufactured by those evil characters. The protagonists need to interact and deal with those characters and situations. A big part of the protagonists' hardships involve the One Ring. The Ring is a large part of the story and is an evil force that threatens to destroy all that is good. The Ring was created by Sauron, the ultimate evil antagonist because he wanted more power and control.

Sauron needed to put some of his own power into the Ring to have it be able to control the other Rings of Power. The Ring and its maker are then separated and the reader is told that Sauron then becomes less than he was before he created the Ring. The Ring has then become something more than just an object. The question that then arises is how much more than an object has the Ring become. Has it, perhaps, even become an independent person which can be treated in literary terms as a character?

This essay will discuss the Ring in the context of whether it can be defined as a character, and then what kind of character it is. The first chapter will define characters in a literary sense and analyze whether the Ring falls within the dimensions of a literary character. The second chapter will then examine what kind of character it is within a narrative context.

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Introduction.

The Lord of the Rings was written during a tumultuous time. People did not have to look far to find evil in the world around them. Many critics of the book have said that it is a metaphor or even allegory of the Great War or the Second World War. Tolkien, however, said:

“I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse ‘applicability’ with ‘allegory’; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.” (FR p.12)

A writer writes what he knows and Tolkien is not exempt from that rule. So the world he lived in must have infected his work to some degree. Many of his friends died in both Wars and he and his family fought in them too. Sam Gamgee was based, to some degree, on batsmen he met during the Great War.

The story is really centred on one thing, a ring. If not for that ring there would not really be a story to tell. That ring is not just any old object; it is made by the most evil entity of the time. It is a thing of great power, so much so that the Maker of the ring had to put much of him into the object to increase its potency. He made the Ring so mighty that he perhaps made the Ring intelligent.

This thesis will claim that the Ring does have the general qualities of a fully-fledged character. I will argue in the first chapter in this thesis that it has thoughts, actions, speech, experiences, and personality. A character with depth must also undergo inner development. The Ring seems to lack that quality. That may also be true with the other antagonists in the story. Therefore I will compare the other evil characters to the Ring in the second chapter, with emphasis on inner character development.

1. The One Ring: Literary Character.

1.1. *Thoughts.*

The fact that Frodo needs to use every ounce of his willpower to battle the desire to claim the Ring is not really evidence that the Ring is thinking. An object could be imbued by the power to prey on people's minds and compel them to use it. However, the way the Ring tries to compel people to claim it suggests that the Ring needs to think. It searches for what people want most and then twists that desire to make them do as it wants. There are many examples of that. Gandalf is tempted by pity (FR p.91), Galadriel is tempted by the preservation of beauty (FR p.474), and Boromir is tempted by the protection of his subjects (FR p.517-8). Even lowly Sam, who has no dreams of greatness, is tempted. The Ring searches his mind for his desire and finds it in his desire for the beauty in nature. It tempts him by showing him how he can use the Ring to change the land of Mordor into a bountiful land (RK p.216). Tom Shippey says that it "remains an object which cannot move itself or save itself from destruction. It has to work through the agency of its possessors, and especially by picking out the weak points of their characters" (Shippey p.161). This suggests to the reader that the Ring is a like a Catholic tempter, one that speaks aloud the person's darkest desires.

The tendency of the Ring to slip off its possessor is also an indication of thought. There are two occasions where the Ring must be planning and finding the worst opportunity to be removed. First is when Isildur wears the Ring, and the Ring betrays him at the worst moment dooming Isildur. He becomes visible and is killed by arrows (FR p.79). The other is when Gollum loses it (FR p.84). The Ring apparently is trying to go back out into the world and reunite with its creator. The fact that Bilbo is the one to find it, the Ring did not plan for (p.84).

There is even an occasion when the Ring decides to slip on its wearer's finger. The Ring slips on Frodo's finger and makes his presence known when the hobbits are enjoying themselves in the tavern in Bree. The reader is even told that perhaps the Ring had decided to be worn in response to some desire of people in the room (FR p.217-8). The suggestion is that the Ring makes Frodo unconsciously handle the Ring and then creates an opportunity to be worn. This theme of the Ring trying to manipulate the wearer, as evil calls to the Ring and it tries to have Frodo put it on, occurs often throughout the story, and is most obvious in the Morgul Vale (TT p.400-1). The ambivalence is that it is never explained whether the Ring is thinking this or whether it is Frodo's own dark thoughts.

1.2. Actions.

The reader is never told whether the Ring actually is acting. There are, however, many instances where the Ring becomes the object of people's desire. Whether that is because the Ring actively tries to draw people to it or whether people have a desire for the power is never explained. There is an instance, though, where the reason behind people's desire becomes rather clearer.

As the fellowship is about to break, Boromir confronts Frodo and tries to take the Ring from Frodo. Frodo escapes and Boromir stops being influenced by the Ring (FR p.519). The change is sudden. It becomes very likely that some outside force had been influencing Boromir. His desire for the Ring was so intense that even if he had seen the error of his actions, he would not have changed his mind so suddenly. This suggests that the Ring does have power of direct manipulation. This explains the reactions of most of the people that come into contact with the Ring. It pushes its will onto every being it can use to further its own ends.

By choosing the weakest of the fellowship the Ring is acting on knowledge gained by probing the willpower of the people around it. By choosing the weakest, it is acting on knowledge gained.

There are many examples of the Ring acting in another way. Most of those are when Frodo travels closer and closer to Mount Doom. The Ring increases in weight as he draws nearer (RK p.261), and when he approaches Mount Doom the physical strain has become so much for him that he can only crawl up the slopes of the volcano (RK p.268). The reader finds out whether the Ring actually changes weight or whether it is only manipulating the minds of the wearer. When Frodo and Sam approach Mount Doom Sam carries Frodo up the slopes of the mountain. He is surprised at how light Frodo is, even though the burden is destroying Frodo (RK p.268). The Ring acts to make the journey harder on the one that carries it and plans to destroy it. Frodo is not alone in experiencing the burden. As Sam decides to carry on with the quest after he thinks Frodo has died, the increase in weight is instantaneous. As soon as the chain is around his neck the Ring drags him towards the ground, he feels that the Ring weighs as much as a great big stone (RK p.434). However, the Ring reacts to the new wearer. Shortly after the Ring weighs Sam down the burden lessens. It is as if the Ring reacts differently to Sam than to Frodo. Perhaps it is trying to influence Sam in another way.

1.3. Speech.

The first time that the Ring appears to speak is when Frodo sits on the Seat of Seeing, on Amon Hen (FR p.521). This is an object of great power and the reader is given the impression that the Seat and the Ring are bestowing upon Frodo a gift of far-seeing. Since Frodo is wearing the Ring he must be letting it in, not resisting it as he usually does. Therefore, the Ring must also be strengthened by using Frodo as a vessel and conduit, however stealthily. Perhaps because of this addition of power the Ring is able to manipulate Frodo's actions. Then, the Ring must be influencing Frodo and what he looks at. He only focuses on war and strife. He somehow does not see the forces of good mustering their strength against the gathering evil. The Ring is also moving Frodo's vision towards Mordor and the Ring's maker. As the Ring finds its maker, Sauron senses the Ring and searches for it. As they are about to find each other these words are spoken: 'Verily I come, I come to you.' (p.521). This is something that Frodo would never say. The sentence has biblical undertones, and is in a style jarringly different from what Frodo would normally say. The reader is even left to wonder whether they were actually spoken, one might go so far as to wonder at whether the sentence comes from Frodo's dark side, if not from the Ring. The quandary is not enough to erase the fact that either the words were spoken out loud, or that they were spoken in Frodo's mind.

There Tolkien continues the uncertainty between whether the Ring is empowered with thought, or whether the Ring is merely some sort of psychic amplifier (Shippey p.161). Either these actions are a response of the wearer's soul, the darkest part of their soul, or the Ring is in fact sentient and a character at that.

The second time that the Ring appears to speak is when Frodo and Sam encounter Gollum on the slopes of Mount Doom (RK p.272). Gollum assaults Frodo and tries to wrest the Ring from him. Frodo, greatly empowered by the Ring, is the victor and throws Gollum down. Sam then sees a vision of them. Whether the vision is induced by the Ring or some other force, or even whether Sam just imagines it, the reader is not told directly. Sam sees two figures, one crouching ruined creature and one standing robed in white. The figure in white, who must be Frodo, has a wheel of fire at his breast. That must only be the Ring. The Ring has indeed on other occasions been referred to as a wheel of fire. The Ring then speaks: 'Begone, and trouble me no more!

If you touch me ever again, you shall be cast yourself into the Fire of Doom.’(p.272). This sentence again registers strong in a biblical sense. The content is even strikingly similar to a passage in the Bible. The structure is archaic and unlike anything Frodo normally says. There is no doubt that the vision depicts the Ring speaking and not Frodo as the voice comes out of the wheel of fire. The reader is kept guessing as to whether the vision is true but there are clues given that leave the reader with little doubt. When the vision passes Sam sees Frodo and Gollum in much the same positions as the figures in the vision, thus implying the validity of the vision. How Frodo and Gollum react after the vision is also quite important. Frodo looks like he has exerted himself, and when Sam encourages him to go on he has become mentally distant from the scene. Gollum’s reaction is even more conclusive. He is completely crushed, a destroyed thing. He tells Sam that the Ring is lost to him now and he begs for his life because he is doomed to die soon anyway. The reaction of Frodo and Gollum clearly show that the vision either actually happened, or that they both experienced the vision. Either way, Sam did not just imagine it. Whether it was a vision or a real event is not important because the outcome is the same. The Ring spoke.

If the Ring is a character then these events happen at a time when the Ring is experiencing very strong feelings. The first is when it and its maker are about to meet after centuries of separation. The second is when it is under extreme strain. It is close to its destruction. It must fear Gollum because of what it says. It has a forewarning of the future as it describes how Gollum will die.

1.4. Personality

Mannerisms, attitudes, and appearance all contribute to the Ring’s personality. The personality’s attributes are subtle but visible.

1.4.1. Appearance.

The Ring looks quite different from what it is. It looks like a simple object, and it never really changes in appearance. There are a few changes though, but those that do occur are subtle in nature. The Ring grows and shrinks to fit its wearer. It can easily be worn by both Sauron and Frodo, two very differently sized characters, and one must assume they have different size fingers. This change is useful for it so as to be able to be worn by anyone who it wants. It must be able to do this to be able to tempt anyone who

possesses it so as to manipulate them on their own terms. This is very symbolic of a Catholic view of a personal tempter or devil in a sense that the Ring analyzes its victim and then accommodates itself to the victim's psyche.

The Ring is betrayed by heat though. As the Ring is heated foul language appear on its surface (FR p.76). This may not be a big change in appearance but it is the only one that even hints at its true self.

The fact that the Ring looks so reservedly simple is also a reference to the Holy Grail. The Grail is not a gaudy thing, much like the Ring. The Grail is made of wood, a substance that is an indication of humility or lowly origin. Yet both items are infinitely powerful in their own ways. Both are also greatly sought after, yet because one is benign in nature and the other is malign in nature they are wanted for very different purposes. One is for preservation and the other is for destruction.

The Ring's true identity is only ever revealed in the possessor's mind. Its mental appearance is only revealed when Frodo and Sam are travelling across Mordor. As the Ring gets closer to its point of creation, or its creator, it greatly grows in power. This is perhaps the reason that the Ring is being viewed in their minds. Perhaps the Ring is getting so powerful that it can not hide in the mind of the person it is trying to manipulate. There the Ring is depicted as a great wheel of fire (RK p.240). The Ring finally has an appearance that can be tied to its actions, not as a simple object but as an entity that fits all that it has done to all the people that have come into contact with it.

1.4.2. Attitudes

Power and control are what the Ring wants, perhaps because that is in essence of what it is. How the reader is informed of that is only through the other characters. The reader is never told whether the Ring has feelings. These urges, for power and control, are felt by the people who possess and have any contact with it. Those feelings never change, the Ring never wants anything else and it never wants power and control any less. All it does is to try to further those goals. The Ring tempts the powerful to use it because it hopes it can eventually control the person and then be the ruler using the person as a puppet. The only exception to the rule is its desire to be reunited with its maker. The Ring's desire to be reunited with Sauron are never construed as any desire to be with Sauron, much like a son wants to be with his father. Perhaps the only reason for this

desire is because Sauron will not resist the Ring and together they will rule over Middle-Earth. The Ring's desires seem to be tiered, where its reunion with Sauron ranks highest, its desire to control and dominate any person with which it comes into contact with is second, and its desire to prevent Frodo and the fellowship to fulfil their mission comes third.

1.4.3. Mannerisms

The Ring's desire to fight Frodo as he travels to Mount Doom must stem from self preservation. It must be afraid, like most intelligent creatures, of dying. However, this fear is never expressed and is only subtly implied. The fact that the Ring constantly tries to be free of Frodo might suggest two things. The first thing is that it wants a person more powerful to fulfil its desire for control and power, perhaps because Frodo is not powerful enough to rule or conquer much. The second thing is that since Frodo is too resistant to its power of manipulation, at least for a while, the Ring might be afraid to be cast back into the fires of Mount Doom. Examples of the Ring trying to be rid of Frodo are evident. The most obvious one is when Frodo, Sam, and Gollum are travelling past Minas Morgul (TT p.397-400). As they are going off the path that travels up to the citadel the Ring tries to possess Frodo and make him go to the citadel to be captured. The Ring then tries a second time to have Frodo captured when the Wraith-King senses something in his valley. He doesn't know it is the Ring but if Frodo were to wear it, the king would know that the Ring is within his reach and would be his within minutes. It can be argued that the Ring wants to go to the Wraith-King because the king is a slave to the Ring and would most likely give it directly to Sauron, but it is also possible that self preservation plays a part in these actions.

The Ring also expresses anger. When Gollum attacks Frodo on the slopes of Mount Doom and the Ring speaks to Gollum and casts him away: it is furious that Gollum is there (RK p.272). The words that the Ring speaks predict Gollum's destruction, but in the words are premonitions of its own demise. This might indicate that the Ring knows that it might be undone because of Gollum's presence there. It might be furious that it had made a mistake in so completely controlling and dominating Gollum to the extent that Gollum is unable to stay away from it. It must be angry that Gollum can't obey and stay away from it. Since it must be angry at Gollum it must also

be afraid of its prophesized destruction. There must be self preservation behind those feelings of anger and fear. Self preservation is a fundamental quality for life, something every living creature is imbued with and therefore every literary character must have.

1.5. Experiences

The Ring does not experience anything the way other characters do. It has none of the five senses. However, it feels or senses a great deal; it senses people it is close to, and it senses a great deal about the people that are close to it. When the characters become the possessors of the Ring, it knows their heart and their desires. It is able to tempt them with what they want most. Sam takes the Ring in Mordor to carry on the quest. There he is tempted by the Ring (RK p.436). The temptation is not instantaneous, so perhaps the Ring does not know everything straightaway, or perhaps the Ring is biding its time, waiting for the perfect time to strike. This suggests that the Ring has learned how best to attack the mind of its prey, whether by learning it by trial and error, or whether coming by from being taught it by Sauron as part of the process of creation.

The Ring doesn't even have to be possessed by its intended target. When the fellowship is sailing down the Anduin, travelling to Eryn Muil (FR p.494-512), it uses its powers of seduction on Boromir. Boromir, who never touches or even sees the Ring falls completely under its seductive influences. Boromir is even completely enthralled by the Ring on top of Amon Hen (FR p.519). The Ring has corrupted his mind from afar, and done it so well that he is being controlled by the Ring's influences. Only when Frodo has escaped does the Ring release him.

If the Ring were merely an object then the Ring would not first learn from its intended victim their weaknesses. It would merely attack with ferocity and mindlessness, never varying in how this attack would be shaped and directed. There are many examples of these varying attacks. The Ring tempts Gandalf with justice (FR p.91), Galadriel with beauty and preservation (FR p.474), and Boromir with command and the protection of his realm (FR p.517-8). The only common threads through these desires are the desire for power and control. These are, of course, the chief desires of the Ring that it infects people around it with. These desires are, in essence, the Ring at its core: the Ring's character.

There are also variations in the Ring's mental attacks on individual persons. Frodo is the best example of this. It seems that the Ring takes extreme caution when it deals with Hobbits. Both Bilbo and Frodo do not experience attacks on their desires and minds, perhaps because the Ring has not encountered hobbits before, with the exception of Sméagol. Sméagol though may have been different because of his moral character. He is undoubtedly not as righteous and noble as Frodo and Bilbo. He has evil in him where Frodo and Bilbo do not. Regardless, the Ring waited and watched and learned. Then when Frodo starts his journey the only thing that the Ring tries to do is trying to have Frodo wear it at inopportune moments, perhaps to try to escape Frodo. As the Ring is carried closer and closer to Orodruin and Sauron it grows in power and also tries more and more to influence and manipulate Frodo. It tires him by getting heavier, sapping his physical strength. It isolates Frodo, by making him have doubts and distrust for his friends and people who might help him. This is quite evident. It begins as the fellowship breaks. Frodo, perhaps with good cause, distrusts his friends after Boromir attacks him (FR p.519). He even distrusts Aragorn. When Frodo and Sam encounter Faramir Frodo's mistrust is completely unfounded and quite unnatural (TT p.355). But the most compelling evidence for Frodo's mistrust being manufactured by the Ring is revealed when he even stops trusting Sam. Sam is about to hand Frodo the Ring back after he finds him in the Tower of Cirith Ungol (RK p.230). Frodo even calls Sam a thief for carrying the Ring. For Frodo to stop trusting Sam is so out of his character that the only way to justify his actions and not question the skills of the writer is to lay the blame on the Ring.

Then when the Ring is in sight of Orodruin it has come to the point in its assault on Frodo's mind that he can remember nothing goodly or kind. He says: "No taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of wind, no memory of tree or grass or flower, no image of moon or star are left to me. I am naked in the dark, Sam" (RK p.264). This is either because the Ring changes tactics as it approaches Mordor, or that it gains power as it approaches Sauron or Orodruin. Most likely answer is the combination of the two. Regardless, the Ring changes tactics as its environment and situation changes.

1.6. Inner Development

There is really not much inner development that happens in the character of the Ring. It doesn't change its views or desires. Its lust for power consumes it wholly and completely. This desire never changes throughout the development of the story. It may change tactics in fulfilling its desires but those desires stay the same. This fact does not contribute to the argument that the Ring is written as a character. On the contrary, inner development is fundamental in a fully realized three dimensional character. Inner development comes, most of the time from inner conflict. The Ring is never conflicted in its views. Its mind is set and its goals are set, they never waver.

There are, however, many other characters in the story that lack inner development, just like the Ring. Those characters are all evil. The next chapter will discuss them in more detail.

2. The One Ring: Character in Context

If the Ring is a real character in the story, the question arises what kind of character it is. It is actually noted in the story, Elrond says: “[The Ring] is altogether evil” (FR p.350). The story depicts the Ring as exactly that: a completely evil entity, which never wavers or has doubts as all of the protagonists do. This can be applied to all the other chief antagonists with the notable exceptions of Saruman, and to a lesser extent Sauron. Sauron is the chief antagonist and has doubts that the reader is informed about only through secondary sources. The reader never sees into the mind of Sauron, we are only told what he must be thinking through other characters such as Gandalf’s musing about what Sauron is thinking. Saruman, the other exception, is the only antagonist who is given a choice of salvation after he is ruined. When his army is destroyed, he has lost his power and stands alone against the wrath of Sauron he is given a choice to be redeemed and join the ranks of the protagonists. He comes within a hairs breath of accepting (TT p.239). This may be because he began as a good wizard, and was tempted to evil. All the other arch enemies are unwavering in their zeal. The mythology of Middle-Earth encompasses many more arch enemies, but since this essay only deals with the story of the Lord of the Rings I will contain my scope to only those evil characters that are mentioned in the story. Those characters include Shelob, the Ring, the Gollum part of Sméagol’s mind, the Nazgûl, and the Balrog. These characters are older than the story being told and changed the world before the story began.

2.1. Antagonists

Shelob differs from the others in one way because she survives, but she stands apart in other ways as well. She is described as an elder evil, or a proto evil. She is feral, vicious, and cunning, and is driven only by hunger. Her only actions are to eat. If not for her gruesome and evil description the reader could think of her as only an animal, but her malice and her sin of gluttony is described so as to convince us of her immorality. She is made evil and survives the story to continue to prey on the good and the wicked alike. Perhaps Tolkien has her survive because her kind of evil, this proto evil, has always survived and will always survive in some form all over the world. This point is also implied to the reader by the way Sauron begins as an underling, grows in power, becomes the ultimate evil, and is destroyed. As he is destroyed the suggestion is made

that another will inevitably rise later. I will not go further into an analysis of Shelob because she is an essay topic in herself.

The Balrog may not be featured greatly in the story but it is a major evil entity in the Middle-Earth mythos and it did change the narrative so therefore it needs to be included in the list of antagonists. It is not created evil and its origin is not explained in the story. The Balrogs were originally Maiar who were corrupted by Morgoth (Silmarillion, p.23). Their power is not described either, but only that they are stronger than any of the fellowship members save perhaps Gandalf (FR p.429). The Balrog are only mentioned in the story with dread, and although they are described as being at least a few, no further mention is given. This being seems to be an unmentionable, the unknown evil, the beast lurking in the shadows.

Saruman is more than a man: he is one of the Istari, a Wizard like Gandalf. He was sent from the West (Silmarillion p.359-60). He, like Gandalf, is very powerful. His unique power lies in his voice (TT p.234); he is able to ensnare people who hear his voice to do his bidding willingly and gladly. When Gandalf challenges him on the steps of Orthanc he is almost able to charm Gandalf's companions to betray themselves and serve Saruman (TT p.237-9). His evils seem to be twofold: seduction, and destruction of Nature. Seduction seems to be what he is, because stripped of everything he is still able to seduce people to do his bidding. Destruction of Nature seems to be what he does, because all he does leads to the rise of industry and at the same time destruction of the countryside and forests. He is stripped of most of his power when Gandalf casts him from the order and the Council of Wizards. He also shatters his staff which seems to also diminish the power of Wizards (TT p.241). He gets many chances to redeem himself, to reject evil. All of them he spurns. Therefore he falls and changes in various ways. He becomes petty and vindictive, revelling in the small misfortunes of those who he believes are his enemies. This is a substantial change from noble goals, then grand schemes, and down to spiteful destruction of property.

Gollum, or Sméagol, was of hobbit-kind, and strong, quick, and sharp-eyed. The Ring found an easy mark to corrupt, perhaps because he had an evil streak to begin with. He used the Ring for thieving and other malign purposes and for it was expelled from society. His loneliness and the Ring festered his malicious spirit, and in the end he became a slave to the Ring (FR p.80-83). Gollum was in essence born of Sméagol and

the Ring. He came into being as Sméagol's mind split in two as a result of the Ring's corrupting power twisting and breaking his mind. Gollum eventually assumed complete control over Sméagol. The Gollum side is one of the evil entities in the story and therefore never doubts himself. The Sméagol side, however, is a three dimensional character because he is not evil in and of himself. He has doubts and questions his chosen path. He inevitably loses to the Gollum side because he is weakened by his long years of solitude and the Ring's overwhelming influence.

The Nazgûl begin by being very strong men, and capable warriors. Their souls become twisted by the corruption of the Rings that they wore. They become almost invulnerable fighters (Silmarillion p.346), but their most effective weapon seems to be their ability to instil terror in their enemies (FR p.235). They are forceful and unwavering in their zeal to serve their Lord. They are Sauron's best servants and report directly to him. They sometimes seem to be used in the narrative to remind the reader of Sauron's evil power, and are sometimes Sauron's danger manifested.

Sauron is the ultimate evil, the dreaded enemy, the threat of the destruction of everything that is good and pure. He is the evil from afar, something that is never really present but looms just around the corner if you are not careful. He is never seen and seldom felt, and yet the characters know that if they slip ever so slightly from their path, he will come to ruin the world. However, he is not evil to begin with, but as Elrond says "nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so." (FR p.350). He may be the chief antagonist but he is something of an anomaly. He may be a direct and well felt influence on the story, but his power and destruction is always felt through vassals. All the minions of Sauron do his bidding; he never manifests himself throughout the narrative. Were the reader to superimpose "evil will" on top of "Sauron" the story would not change a great deal. The Ring would then have to be protected, not from one evil super-being but from the evil that resides in the hearts of men and orcs, as well as all the other creatures. Sauron may therefore, in some sense, be a personification of evil. He is all the evil people that might be out to corrupt goodness made manifest in one fell enemy. This seems to confirm Adam Roberts' statement that "A better way to think of *The Lord of the Rings* is not as allegory but as a sub-creative materialization – an incarnation, in a manner of speaking – of (what Tolkien took to be) certain spiritual realities" (Roberts p.65). The character structure of Sauron, when viewed beside the

Ring, is very interesting. The Ring is created by Sauron and he drains himself of power and bestows it upon the Ring. This makes him somehow lesser, but the sum of them together is more powerful than Sauron on his own used to be. This suggests that the Ring becomes an entity in its own right. The reader is told of Sauron the evil character but the Ring is not defined at all. The narrative, however, suggests a great deal more about the Ring and leaves Sauron lacking much structure. The Ring is structured much more than Sauron is.

Finally, the Ring is the manifestation of Sauron's corrupting power. The Ring is created by the combination of two things that did were not evil to begin with but were corrupted and twisted to become what they are. Sauron was not evil in the beginning but has become evil when he creates the Ring from his own essence. The essence that he wrests from himself, therefore, must have been good in the beginning too. The process he uses is stolen from the elves and twisted to his evil plans. The art of creating magical Rings of Power is essentially 'good' but is made 'evil' by Sauron. This fuses together in a sort of sub-creation to form the One Ring. The Ring may be created evil, or it may be a fusion of twisted good forces. Regardless of how it is made the Ring is extremely powerful and would grant its user and owner immense power, a power to rule the world. Its power, however, is unattainable because of how much power it has (FR p.91). Its power would corrupt any person who uses it or desires it. Shippey defines the reason for the Ring's danger quite well. It is a drug, and people who use it or desire it become addicted (Shippey p.158). The drug is absolute power. 'Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' Shippey states, rightly, that this maxim "is the core of *The Lord of the Rings*, and it is reinforced by all that Gandalf says about the way Ringbearers fade," (Shippey p.155). The Ring's evil is Power, and the Rings control is Addiction. This may be the reason why Frodo can resist the Ring for so long; he has very little desire for power. This may also be why Tom Bombadil and the Ring seem to inhabit different worlds and don't have any effect on each other, because Tom is Nature and Nature lives in balance where power in an aberration.

2.2. Manifestations of Evil.

The reason why Tolkien writes all his antagonists in this way may be how he wanted to depict evil in the story. The antagonists are characters, of course, but they may also be

viewed as manifestations of evil. Shippey believes that Tolkien is trying to find a middle ground between two views of evil. He believes that the reconciliation between these two views of evils is necessary to be able to realize the full scope of the novel (Shippey p.159).

The first one is the Boethian view. That philosophy is based around the idea that evil does not really exist; that evil is just an absence of good. As Shippey says: “that evil cannot itself create, that it was not in itself created but sprang from a voluntary exercise of free will by Satan, Adam and Eve, to separate themselves from God)” (Shippey p.159). Tolkien undoubtedly alludes to this view many times. Orcs are evil and are only twisted creations, a repugnant caricature of elves (TT p.113). Frodo states that Sauron can not make anything, it can only create gruesome counterfeits (RK p.233). Even Elrond states that “nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so” (FR p.350). There are some discrepancies though. Shelob was never corrupted from good, she never fell from grace, and she is evil with the absence of good. Another discrepancy is that evil does create. Sauron creates the Ring, and the Ring is also wholly evil from the moment of creation with complete absence of good.

The second view is the Manichaeian view. Shippey defines it very well. He says that: “This says that while it may be all very well to make philosophical statements about evil, evil nevertheless is real, and not merely an absence; and what’s more it can be resisted, and what’s more still, not resisting it (in the belief that one day Omnipotence will cure all ills) is a dereliction of duty” (Shippey p.160). This second view is reinforced most clearly in the premise of the story itself. This premise is determined in the chapter *The Shadow of the Past*. It can be boiled down to this: if the Ring is not destroyed by good people, the Enemy will have it eventually and evil will prevail. This can be simplified in a general sense to say that people must resist evil or evil will conquer all that is good. If this premise were not a narrative truth then the story crumbles on its foundations. If this were not true they could bury it under a hill and no one could ever find it and use it.

The question then arises what kind of evil the Ring is: whether it is a Manichaeian evil or a Boethian evil. Shippey believes it may be a combination of both. He rightly suggests that the Ring is never defined directly as an object or as a character.

The Ring is described either as a real character and a sentient creature, or as something that the characters that handle it are tempted by their own weaknesses and fears.

“These two possible views of the Ring are kept up throughout the three volumes: sentient creature, or psychic amplifier. They correspond respectively to the ‘heroic’ view of evil as something external to be resisted and the Boethian opinion that evil is essentially internal, psychological, negative” (Shippey p.161).

Conclusion.

The depth, scope and many nuances of the story make it very interesting to read. What this essay has tried to accomplish is only to interpret and analyze a very small but integral part of the story, a part of the story that has been rather neglected in academic reviews. The story revolves around the One Ring. It can even be argued whether the title of the story would refer to Sauron or even to the Ring itself. This thesis has tried to analyze how evolved the Ring is described in a literary sense.

The Ring must be a character because it falls within the criteria of being a literary character. The only criterion it fails to fulfil is the one that most other antagonists fail to fulfil. Inner development and inner conflict is either missing or very subtle in most of Tolkien's evil characters.

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