Tolkien's Prose Style and its Literary and Rhetorical Effects

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While J.R.R. Tolkien's prose style in *The Lord of the Rings* has been both attacked and defended, its details have seldom been analyzed in terms of specific aesthetic effects.[1] This lacuna in Tolkien criticism is certainly understandable, given the perceived necessity of first defending Tolkien's work as a worthy object of serious literary (rather than sociological or pop-cultural) study: critics have spent much effort countering ill-informed and even logically contradictory claims about Tolkien's work, and the discussion of writing style has had to be given short shrift in the effort to make the study of Tolkien academically respectable.[2] But the analytical neglect of Tolkien's prose style has had the unfortunate effect of ceding important ground to Tolkien's detractors, who, with simple, unanalyzed quotations, point to some word or turn of phrase and, in essence, sniff that such is not the stuff of good literature.[3] I would even contend that a reaction against Tolkien's non-Modernist prose style is just as influential in the rejection of Tolkien by traditional literary scholars as is Modernist antipathy to the themes of his work, the ostensible political content of *The Lord of the Rings*, the popularity of the books, or even Tolkien's position outside the literary mainstream of his day (all of which have been well documented and countered by recent critics).[4]

A complete analysis (or justification) of Tolkien's style is beyond the scope of any one essay, but in this paper I hope to make a start at a criticism of some of the passages most obviously unlike traditional Modernist literature: the battle of Éowyn against the Lord of the Nazgûl and Denethor's self-immolation. The style of these passages is not, contra some of Tolkien's most perceptive critics, over-wrought or archaic. Rather, Tolkien produces a tight interweaving of literary references—specifically, links to Shakespeare's *King Lear* in both style and thematic substance—with grammatical, syntactic, lexical, and even aural effects. His writing thus achieves a stylistic consistency and communicative economy that rivals his Modernist contemporaries. At the same time his treatment of *Lear* shows his engagement with ideas (in this case, the problem of pride and despair among the powerful) that have long been considered among the great themes of English literature.

Because the following analysis will repeatedly switch from sentence-level writing, to discussion of characters, to the themes of the book, it is necessary to quote the key passage:

> But lo! suddenly in the midst of the glory of the king his golden shield was dimmed. The new morning was blotted from the sky. Dark fell about him. Horses reared and screamed. Men cast from the saddle lay grovelling on the ground….
>
> The great shadow descended like a falling cloud. And behold! it was a winged creature: if bird, then greater than all other birds, and it was naked, and neither quill nor feather did it bear, and its vast pinions were as webs of hide between horned fingers; and it stank. . . .
>
> Upon it sat a shape, black-mantled, huge and threatening. A crown of steel he bore, but between rim and robe naught was there to see, save only a deadly gleam of eyes: the Lord of the Nazgûl. To the air he had returned, summoning his steed ere the darkness failed, and now he was come again, bringing ruin, turning hope to despair, and victory to death. A great black mace he wielded.
>
> But Théoden was not utterly forsaken . . . one stood there still: Dernhelm the young, faithful beyond fear; and he wept, for he had loved his lord as a father. Right through the charge Merry had been borne unharmed behind him, until the Shadow came; and then Windfola had thrown them in his terror, and now ran wild upon the plain. Merry crawled on all fours like a dazed beast. . . . Then out of the blackness in his mind he thought that he heard Dernhelm speaking….
>
> "Begone, foul dwimmerlaik, lord of carrion! Leave the dead in peace!"
>
> A cold voice answered: "Come not between the Nazgûl and his prey! Or he will not slay thee in thy turn. He will bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness, where thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy shrivelled mind be left naked to the Lidless Eye."
>
> A sword rang as it was drawn. "Do what you will; but I will hinder it, if I may."
>
> "Hinder me? Thou fool. No living man may hinder me!"
>
> Then Merry heard of all sounds in that hour the strangest. It seemed that Dernhelm laughed, and the clear voice was like the ring of steel. "But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn I am, Éomund's daughter. You

> stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him." (*RK*, V, vi, 114-117)

We begin our analysis with a subtle literary reference to *King Lear* that connects triangularly the Lord of the Nazgûl, Denethor, and Shakespeare's mad King.[5] This reference is the Lord of the Nazgûl's threat "Come not between the Nazgûl and his prey" which echoes King Lear's "Come not between the dragon and his wrath" (I, i, 122). The two passages are syntactically identical, relying on the fronting of the verb "come" in order to delete the dummy morpheme "do" (the effect of this grammatical shift will be discussed in detail below). While it is true that the *Lear* passage and the *RK* passage do not mean identical things (the Nazgûl is talking about something physical; Lear is more metaphorical), the similarity is significant: the passages can be transformed from one to another with the mere substitution of two nouns, one of these being the substitution of one monster for another (Nazgûl for dragon). This reference, then, connects the Lord of the Nazgûl to Lear and invokes, through the principle of metonymy, the greater, "more echoic" context of the referenced literary tradition,[6] creating a set of interconnecting references that can tell readers more about the characters involved than is explicit in the narrative. These links also provide some hints that can be used to understand better the complex interplay of ideas (aesthetic, political, moral, and religious) in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Now one mere turn of phrase would indeed be a lot to hang a comparison on, but there are additional similarities as well as other information that we can use to show Tolkien's knowledge of and interest in *Lear*. Both these similarities and the shared themes, moreover, connect Lear not only to the Lord of the Nazgûl, but also to Denethor. Examining, via the materials published by Christopher Tolkien in *The History of the Lord of the Rings*, the development of this passage and the description of Denethor's suicide suggests that an original connection with *Lear* in the Éowyn passage went on to shape further the development of the character and actions of Denethor. That is, what was at first a one-time stylistic invocation of *King Lear* ended up shaping a number of characters, making more complex Tolkien's discussion of kingship, and allowing a further analysis of the moral and religious problems associated not only with the phenomenon that Tolkien, following W. P. Ker and E. V. Gordon, called "northern courage," but also with the problems of kingship (legitimacy, authority, duty toward people) that are important components of *The Return of the King*.[7]

When Denethor finally descends into madness and attempts to burn himself and Faramir alive, he orders his servants (hitherto blocked by Beregond at the door of the tombs) to bring him a torch: "'Come hither!'

he cried to his servants. 'Come, if you are not all recreant!'" (*RK*, V, vii, 130). Similarly Lear calls Kent "recreant" after Kent has criticized Lear's treatment of Cordelia (I, i,170). "Recreant" is an unusual word even in such similar contexts.[8] While it appears in Chaucer, Malory, and also in Shakespeare's *Henry VI part II*, the *OED* lists no uses after 1897.[9] I have been unable to find it anywhere else in Tolkien's corpus of writings, suggesting that, although it is an anachronistic word, it is not a diagnostically Tolkienian anachronism (such as "pale" used as to describe a jewel or light, "fell" used both as an adjective and a noun, or, perhaps the infamous "eyot").[10] Thus its use bespeaks a connection with (although it does not prove a definite source in) *Lear* that is not contradicted by further parallels.

Additional scenes link *Lear* and *The Return of the King*. The scene in which Imrahil shows Éowyn to be alive by noting that her faint breath shows on his polished vambrace is similar to the scene in *Lear* where the King tries to determine if Cordelia still lives. Tolkien writes:

> Then the prince seeing her beauty, though her face was pale and cold, touched her hand as he bent to look more closely on her. "Men of Rohan!" he cried. "Are there no leeches among you? She is hurt to the death maybe, but I deem that she yet lives." And he held the bright-burnished vambrace that was upon his arm before her cold lips, and behold! a little mist was laid on it hardly to be seen. *(RK*, V, vi, 121)

Compare *Lear*:

> "Lend me a looking glass; / If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why, then she lives." (V, iii, 266-67)

The rage of Éomer upon finding Éowyn apparently dead is also similar to Lear's rage at the death of Cordelia:

> "Éowyn, Éowyn!" he cried at last: "Éowyn, how come you here? What madness or devilry is this? Death, death, death! Death take us all!"
>
> Then without taking counsel or waiting for the approach of the men of the City, he spurred headlong back to the front of the great host, and blew a horn, and cried aloud for the onset. Over the field rang his clear voice calling: "Death! Ride, ride to ruin and the world's ending!" (*RK*, V, vi, 119)

Compare *Lear:*

> "And my poor fool[11] is hanged! No, no, no life?
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,

And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more
Never, never, never, never, never!" (V, iii, 311-14)

While the lines themselves are not identical, the repetition is similar: first
the "no, no, no life?" parallel the "death, death, death! Death take us all!"
and then the repetitions of "never" and "death" (we can attribute the five
"never"s against the four "death"s to the requirements of pentameter).
Furthermore, there are similarities in the immediate situations: at the loss
of a beloved female relative, the protagonist goes mad—of course Lear
has been quite mad for some time before Cordelia's death, but her death
is the final straw. Lear himself dies, while Éomer only rides off "to ruin
and the world's ending," but the madness and grief are identical—and
the substantive differences between Lear's, Éomer's, and Denethor's
actions when faced with similar situations, which I discuss in detail below,
are actually emphasized by this initial similarity.

The Fool in *Lear* mentions seven stars (I, v, 35), as does the rhyme that
Gandalf recites to Pippin: "Seven stars and seven stones / And one white
tree," (*TT*, III, xi, 202).[12] And the tone of the passage when the Doctor
in *Lear* offers consolation to Cordelia: "Be comforted, good madam. The
great rage / You see, is killed in him" is similar to the scene in the Houses
of Healing at the conclusion of which Aragorn says, "The worst is now
over. Stay and be comforted" (*RK*, V, viii, 141). Finally, the scene in
which Denethor asks Pippin what services the hobbit can perform as
esquire (*RK*, V, iv, 79-80) is similar to the scene in which Lear asks Kent
what services he can perform (I, iv, 31).

No single one of these parallels is in itself entirely conclusive (though
note that I have presented them in descending order, from most probable
to least), but we have additional evidence that Tolkien had thought a
great deal about *King Lear*, its literary worth, and its position in English
literature. That Tolkien knew *King Lear* well, and that he admired the
play, seems clear from the following passages from *Beowulf and the Critics*:

On page xxvi, when everything seems going right, we hear
once again that "the main story of *Beowulf* is a wild folk-tale."
Quite true of course, as it is of <u>King Lear</u> except that *silly*
would in the latter case be a better adjective." (40)[13]

Are we to refuse "King Lear" either because it is founded on
a silly folk-tale (the old naif details of which still peep through
as they do in <u>Beowulf</u>) or because it is not "Macbeth"? Need
we even debate which is more valuable? (55)

Yet it is not—for it is a "folk-tale" used by a considerable
poet for the plot of a great poem, and that is quite a different
thing. As different as the <u>Lear</u> of Shakespeare from the same

tale recounted in the chronicle of Layamon—indeed the difference is greater, for already in Layamon we have a tale told with art, not a mere example of "story-motives." (97.)

And that plot is not perfect as the vehicle of the theme or themes that come to hidden life in the poet's mind as he makes his poem of the old material. As is true enough of Shakespeare's use of old material. <u>King Lear</u> is a specially clear example. (140 n.)

Tolkien's statement that he disliked Shakespeare has been much quoted,[14] though Shippey has shown the influence of *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on *The Lord of the Rings* (*Road* 133-44). That Tolkien uses *Lear* in *Beowulf and the Critics* as a rhetorical example of what is excellent in literature does not prove that he ascribed to this view, but it does show, I think, that he knew the play and its links to Layamon's *Brut* well enough. It seems no great logical leap, then, to deduce that when Tolkien began to grapple with issues of kingship,[15] madness, and succession in *The Lord of the Rings*, *King Lear* came to mind.[16]

Looking at the evolution of the key passages discussed above also supports this view. The first appearance of the idea that Éowyn will slay the Lord of the Nazgûl appears in one of the outline passages in *The War of the Ring*: "Théoden slain and Éowyn slays the King of the Nazgûl and is mortally wounded. They lie in state in the white tower" (*War* 255-56). This plan was then revised: "Charge of the Riders of Rohan breaks the siege. Death of Théoden and Éowyn in killing the Nazgûl King," and again revised to: "Final assault on Minas Tirith [added: [11 >] 10 night]. Nazgûl appear. Pelennor wall is taken. Sudden charge of Rohan breaks siege. Théoden and Éowyn destroy Nazgûl and Théoden falls [struck out: Feb 12]" (*War* 260). A later version describes the charge of Rohan and Théoden's death, but does not mention Éowyn. Christopher Tolkien notes that "in outlines I, II and III it is said that Théoden and Éowyn (who is not mentioned here) 'slew' or 'killed' or 'destroyed' the King of the Nazgûl" (*War* 267 n. 41). A further outline gives another method of bringing Éowyn into the battle:

Go back to Merry. Charge of Rohan. Orcs and Black Riders driven from the gate. Fall of Théoden wounded, but he is saved by a warrior of his household who falls on his body. Merry sits by them. Sortie saves King who is gravely wounded. Warrior found to be Éowyn. The Hosts of Morghul reform and drive them back to the gate. At that moment a wind rises, dark is rolled back. Black ships seen. Despair. Standard of Aragorn (and Elendil). Éomer's wrath. Morghul taken between 2 forces and defeated. Éomer and

Aragorn meet. (*War* 275)

These various outlines show that Tolkien was struggling with the shape of the narrative of the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. At this point in the composition of *RK* he had not yet developed the secondary line of conflict, Denethor's despair and madness. But now note the first well-realized draft of the scene:

> But Théoden was not alone. One had followed him: Éowyn daughter of Éomund, and all had feared the light of her face, shunning her as night fowl turn from the day. Now she leapt from her horse and stood before the shadow; her sword was in her hand.
>
> "*Come not between the Nazgûl and his prey*," said a cold voice, "or he will bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness where thy flesh shall be devoured and thy shrivelled mind be left naked."
>
> She stood still and did not blench. "I do not fear thee, Shadow," she said. "Nor him that devoured thee. Go back to him and report that his shadows and dwimor-lakes are powerless even to frighten women." (*War* 365-66, my emphasis)

Christopher Tolkien writes:

> I think that my father wrote this well before the period of composition we have now reached, and I would be inclined to associate it (very tentatively) with the outline sketches for Book V, where the event described here is several times referred to, and especially with the Outlines III and V. In these, in contrast to what is said in I and II (p. 256) there is no mention of Éowyn's wounding or death: "Théoden and Éowyn destroy the Nazgûl and Théoden falls" (III, p. 260); "Théoden is slain by Nazgûl; but he is unhorsed and the enemy is routed" (V, p. 263).
>
> Whatever its relative dating, the piece certainly gives an impression of having been composed in isolation, a draft for a scene that my father saw vividly before he reached this point in the actual writing of the story. When he did so, he evidently had it before him, as is suggested by the words of the Lord of the Nazgûl (cf. *RK* p. 116). (*War* 365-66)

It therefore seems possible to interpret the process of composition as follows: Tolkien was struggling with the details of the battle before Minas

Tirith (whether this is on the Pelennor Fields or at Osgiliath is still an open question). He determined that Théoden and Êowyn would somehow destroy the Lord of the Nazgûl. He then wrote the scene quoted above and used the phrase reminiscent of *Lear*, "Come not between the Nazgûl and his prey." This original reference to *Lear* (conscious or not) then went on to influence the rest of the narrative as Tolkien realized that the *Lear* parallel illuminated some of the complexities of the issues of kingly and stewardly responsibility and succession.

In the outline stages of composition Tolkien foresaw Denethor's grief and his potential conflict with Aragorn over the ending of his family's rule: "interview with Denethor and his grief at news of Boromir" (*War* 276) and then developed this idea further, as Christopher Tolkien notes, Denethor's "devastation is expressed as a surmise of Pippin's: 'Grief maybe had wrought it: grief at the harsh words he spoke when Faramir returned [>remorse for the harsh words he spoke that sent Faramir out into needless peril]. And the bitter thought that, whatever might now betide in war, woe or victory beyond all hope, his line too was ending" (*War* 337).

Denethor's anger at the ending of his line (in defeat or victory) then leads Tolkien to the analysis that there is likely to be conflict between Aragorn and Denethor:

> Words of Aragorn and Denethor. Denethor will not yield the Stewardship, yet; not until war is won or lost and all is made clear. He is cold and suspicious and ? mock-courteous. Aragorn grave and silent. But Denethor says that belike the Stewardship will run out anyway, since he seems like to lose both his sons. Faramir is sick of his wounds. If he dies then Gondor can take what new lord it likes. Aragorn says he will not be "taken," he will take, but asks to see Faramir. Faramir is brought out and Aragorn tends him all that night, and love springs between them. (*War* 360)

Denethor's madness is not yet established (and his grief is caused solely by Boromir's death and Faramir's apparent fatal sickness, not by the defeat he sees coming via the palantír, which has not yet entered the story), though his anger at the thought of the loss of the Stewardship is made clear. But the combination of grief and wrath does now enter the story, only it is attached to Éomer: "Théoden falls from horse sorely wounded; he is saved by Merry and Éowyn, but sortie from Gate does not reach them in time before Éowyn is slain. Grief and wrath of Éomer" (*War* 359).

It is at this point that Tolkien decided to introduce the madness of Denethor, the Steward's attempted burning of Faramir, and his self-

immolation. The additional reasons for his madness (via the visions Denethor has seen in the palantír) are also developed:

> Gandalf sweeps aside the men and goes in. He upbraids Denethor, but Denethor laughs at him. Denethor has a *palantír*! He has seen the coming of Aragorn. But he has also seen the vast forces still gathered in Mordor, and says that victory in arms is no longer possible. He will *not* yield up the Stewardship "to an upstart of the younger line: I am the Steward of the sons of Anárion." He wants things to be as they were—or not at all" (*War* 375).

This section is further developed thus:

> But Denethor laughed. And going back to the table he lifted from it the pillow that he had lain on. And lo! in his hand he bore a *palantír*. 'Pride and despair!' he said. 'Did you think that [the] eyes of the White Tower were blind?' he said. [Added in pencil, without direction for insertion: This the Stone of Minas Tirith has remained ever in the secret keeping of the Stewards in the topmost chamber.] Nay, nay, I see more than thou knowest, Grey Fool. (*War* 378)

We cannot be sure that the language from *King Lear* ("recreant") has yet entered the scene, though it seems likely, since Christopher Tolkien notes that "the page continues very close to the final text" of *The Return of the King*, citing the page (130) on which "recreant" appears (*War* 378). But the word either entered at this stage, or in the final manuscript, which is not far removed from this draft. Thus we see, I think, how the first elements of *Lear* language ("Come not between…") are expanded as Tolkien's understanding of the complexities of the madness of Denethor develops.

It is not necessary to pursue the detailed evolution of the more minor points of comparison (Pippin's service with Denethor, the misting of Prince Imrahil's vambrace by Éowyn's breath), since they merely substantiate the more significant evidence discussed above. Rather, I now want to turn to the artistic effects generated by Tolkien's linking to *Lear* via the metonymic device of stylistic similarity. We can use style and sources to create a syllogism: the Lord of the Nazgûl is to be compared to King Lear; Denethor is to be compared to King Lear;[17] therefore Denethor is to be compared to the Lord of the Nazgûl.[18] We can even ground this syllogism in the syntax of the most compelling similarity between *Lear* and *RK*: when Lear says "come not between the dragon and his wrath" he is speaking of himself; Lear is the "dragon" he is discussing. To begin to transform the *Lear* quotation into the Tolkien quotation we

substitute "Nazgûl" for "dragon." Thus if Lear = "the dragon," and "the dragon" = Nazgûl, then Lear = Nazgûl. And even if the above syllogisms are not convincing to all, it seems safe to say (even without the *Lear* comparison) that the Lord of the Nazgûl is what Denethor would have become had he somehow gained the One Ring: a mighty man with great abilities twisted into darkness.

Such a comparison is not as far-fetched as it might at first seem. Note that while Tolkien's original conception seems to have been that the Lord of the Nazgûl was a renegade member of the Istari—Gandalf reveals that the "W[izard] King . . . is a renegade of his own order . . . [?from] Númenor" (*War* 326)—he abandons this idea and makes the Black Captain a king of men rather than a wizard: "King of Angmar long ago" (*War* 334). In *The Silmarillion* we learn that "those [men] who used the Nine Rings became mighty in their day, kings, sorcerers, and warriors of old" and "among those [Sauron] ensnared with the Nine Rings three were great lords of Númenoran race" (*S* 289). It seems reasonable to infer that the Lord of the Nazgûl was one of these "Black Númenoreans" because he is the greatest of the Ringwraiths and the Númenoreans were greater than other Men. It is therefore worth noting Gandalf's comment to Pippin that Denethor "is not as other men of this time … and whatever be his descent from father to son, by some chance the blood of Westernesse runs nearly true in him" (*RK*, V, i, 32). Thus Denethor is closer in abilities—Gandalf says that he can perceive things far away if he uses his strong will—to a "pure-blooded" Númenorean (which, presumably, the Lord of the Nazgûl would be, since he would have taken up his ring before the Númenoreans mingled with "lesser" men) than other men of Gondor.[19] Seeing the present actions and character of Denethor, therefore, may allow us to infer something about the past of the Lord of the Nazgûl.

When we compare King Lear to both Denethor and the Lord of the Nazgûl, the resultant triangular relationship brings to the forefront several themes that Tolkien juggles throughout *The Lord of the Rings* but are particularly evident in this section of *The Return of the King*, most significantly the problem of, as Gandalf puts it, "pride and despair" among the great (*RK*, V, vii, 129). It is exactly "pride and despair" that drives Lear to madness and creates the wreckage of his (divided) kingdom. Madness and selfishness are of course evil things in general (see Boromir's temptation, Gollum's degradation), but in kings these failings are all the more dangerous because of the power focused in the person of the king. Kings are not permitted to despair; they must always hope for their people. Gandalf says essentially this to Denethor when he tells him that "your part is to go out to the battle of your City, where maybe death awaits you. This you know in your heart" (*RK*, V, vii, 129). This

productive use of pride and despair is in fact the path that Éomer takes in his madness and grief—which are temporary—turning his own personal pain into an instrument for the service of his people and his cause. Éomer avoids Lear's fate because his sense of responsibility toward his own people overcomes his individual grief (*RK*, V, vi, 122). Tolkien thus seems to be suggesting that madness and grief at the loss of loved ones, or at the probable loss of one's beloved city, are not *per se* irrational and evil responses, but to succumb to them by committing additional evil is indeed a sin. In a medieval context, this would be the sin of "wanhope," of abandoning faith in God and refusing to believe that one can be saved in even the darkest circumstances.[20] Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* discusses this sin and its cures in great detail.

Tolkien's treatment of kingly responsibility (in Denethor, Théoden, and Éomer) is yet another example of the complexities of his thought: it is a "democratic" virtue for kings to care more about their people than themselves; the king as servant of as well as ruler over his people is a standard trope of medieval and post-medieval discussions of kingship.[21] Yet Tolkien nowhere questions the authority of kings to rule based solely on their blood-lines. Théoden even describes the kingdom of Rohan as his personal property when he tells Saruman that the wizard would have no right to rule "me and mine for your own profit" even if Saruman were "ten times as wise" (*TT*, III, x, 185).

Further complicating the matter is the real damage that Denethor does to other people through his evil actions. The madness of kings is not like the madness of ordinary men, and through Denethor's behavior not only is his own life lost, but also those of Théoden and the porter whom Beregond slays at the entrance to the Hallows. This seems to me another clear link to *Lear*, where others suffer for the king's faults. The addition of the Lord of the Nazgûl into the equation, however, shows that there is an additional telos for the despair and madness of the powerful: the ultimate, active evil of the Witch King that we see as a parallel to Denethor's attempt to burn Faramir alive.

It is of course speculation to try to determine how the Black Captain fell to Sauron, but it seems to me that Tolkien, with the triangular connection of Denethor, Lear, and the Lord of the Nazgûl, suggests that it is through the despair of not being able to accomplish one's sworn and beloved duty to country that a man may be ensnared. Certainly Denethor had other motivations pushing him close to the edge of evil: his jealousy towards the disguised Aragorn (when Aragorn served Gondor as Thorongil) points out that Denethor too closely identifies his city's glory and survival with his own exalted position, and Tolkien says as much in Appendix A (*RK*, A, 335-37). But despair at the loss in the "long defeat" (to use Galadriel's words in *FR*, II, vii, 372), the very spiritual sickness

that Gandalf cures in Théoden (*TT*, III, vi, 119-23), can be seen as that which leads a good and powerful man to evil, rather than a desire for evil for its own sake—which would certainly be the default assumption for the Lord of the Nazgûl's original motivation for serving Sauron.

Thus if I am correct in noting the parallels between *Lear* and Tolkien, the hackneyed criticism that all of Tolkien's characters are either purely good or purely evil is even further shattered (not that it was very substantial to begin with).[22] Not only do readers of the *Lord of the Rings*, as Shippey and others have noted, see the good fall away into evil (Saruman, Boromir, Denethor),[23] but we may find the good that they once were in the backgrounds of those who have turned to evil. If the Lord of the Nazgûl was originally like Denethor, a great and powerful man driven to madness and enslavement by the sin of wanhope, a sin brought on by external circumstances, but nevertheless a sin, then more of the full complexity of Tolkien's thought is evident, for the evil character was not originally evil (as Elrond says of Sauron)[24] and the critics who see such characters as one-dimensionally evil thus miss the important discussion of free will and duty that undergirds Tolkien's moral philosophy for Middle-earth.[25] The dramatization of these themes in *Lear* is supposedly an example of the great genius of Shakespeare, a genius no one doubts. It is therefore significant, it seems to me, that Tolkien adds to the discussion not only the negative examples discussed above, but the positive examples of Éomer, Théoden, and, of course, Aragorn, the king in exile who has devoted his entire life to service before seeking rule. We might thus further extend this analysis to see parts of *The Return of the King* as a commentary on the themes brought forth by Shakespeare in *King Lear*. Lear might have avoided his madness, and he certainly would have avoided his tragedy, if from the beginning he, like Aragorn, had been focused upon his duty of service rather than the prerogatives of kingly (and fatherly) power. He might have pulled back from the brink, like Éomer, if he were able to see that his people at that moment desperately needed leadership.

The above discussion suggests links between *Lear* and *The Return of the King* at both the stylistic and the thematic levels. Although such links do not prove the aesthetic worth of Tolkien's work, they do show that *The Lord of the Rings* is not, as has sometimes been claimed,[26] completely separate from major currents of literary style and thought (although Tolkien was of course deliberately outside the fashionable currents of his day).[27] Furthermore, the literature so invoked is not the supposedly un-influential literature of the early Middle Ages, but that of Shakespeare, the very heart of the English literary tradition, whose invocation elsewhere in twentieth-century texts is often taken as a hallmark of authorial competence and seriousness. In pointing out this linkage of

The Return of the King to *King Lear*, I have shown how Tolkien was engaged directly in a continuing evaluation and elaboration of some of the great themes of English literature. In his presentation of the dangers, virtues, and duties of kingship, Tolkien has advanced Shakespeare's discussion and raised issues as important in the twenty-first century as they were in the seventeenth. Are we to dismiss *King Lear* because its source is a silly folktale? Obviously not. And we would be equally foolish to dismiss *The Return of the King* from a discussion of the treatment of politics by twenty-first-century writers, even though Tolkien's work resides fully within the fantasy genre.

I now return to the style as a thing in itself rather than merely as a means of invoking a larger, traditional context. As I have noted, the style of the passage in *The Return of the King* is metonymically linked to the passage in *Lear* through what can be called a "figure of grammar," the non-standard sentence structure used by both Tolkien and Shakespeare. But what if we did not have the Shakespearean parallel? Would the style of the key sentence, and that of the passage as a whole, be effective in achieving Tolkien's aesthetic purpose? Rosebury criticizes the battle of Éowyn and the Lord of the Nazgûl as "highly-wrought" with "risky heroic mannerisms" (Rosebury 67-68), but, as we shall see, I am not sure this judgment is entirely negative.[28]

It is worth making a brief linguistic analysis of the key sentence in the passage "Come not between the Nazgûl / dragon and his prey/ wrath." First, let us examine what can be called the "canonical form" of the sentence, which would be expressed "[You] do not come between the Nazgûl / dragon and his prey/ wrath" (see Figure 1).[29]

The NP of the sentence is simply "You," with the remainder of the sentence being composed of a VP inside of which is the auxilliary "do," the negative "not" and another VP that includes the main verb "come" and the prepositional phrase "between…." To get from this structure to Tolkien's (and Shakespeare's) surface structure, we apply several transformation rules. "'You' deletion" is a standard method of marking the imperative mood (although its deletion is not required and in fact using "you" in an imperative sentence can increase the urgency of the command). In this case "'you' deletion" removes the obvious subject of the sentence and in fact reduces the surface structure of the sentence to a type of VP called a V-bar. This deletion of the NP would move the VP "do not come between…" to the very beginning of the sentence. The next transformation is the deletion of the dummy morpheme "do" from the beginning of the sentence, leaving us with the ungrammatical *"not come between…" With the auxilliary "do" now missing from the leftmost slot in the sentence, the main verb "come" is permitted to move to this crucial location, and the PP nested within the VP now moves up to

a regular PP with two NPs and a conjunction beneath it (Figure 2).

    The non-canonical sentence allows the first word out of the Lord of the Nazgûl's mouth to be an imperative verb directed at Dernhelm / Éowyn. Given the power of all the Nazgûl to summon and command that we have seen elsewhere in *The Lord of the Rings*[30] the reader sensitive to the prose style will, for a brief moment, see the Lord of the Nazgûl's communication with Éowyn as of a piece with his manipulation of other individuals and as fitting with the Nazgûl's powers of domination and control. Deleting "do" also allows Tolkien to avoid even for an instant the reader's being distracted by the function word "do," instead beginning the dramatic confrontation with a verb of action. The use of the negative "not" immediately after "come" (permitted by the deletion of "do") then serves to refocus the scene on the Nazgûl's desire to destroy Theoden, not Dernhelm. One can in fact read the scene as explicating, in micro, the Nazgûl's ravening hunger to dominate and destroy living beings. Immediately upon seeing Dernhelm/Éowyn, the Nazgûl, for an instant, seeks to summon her. He then turns to his more pressing task. The grammar of the sentence gives us a brief look at the thought processes
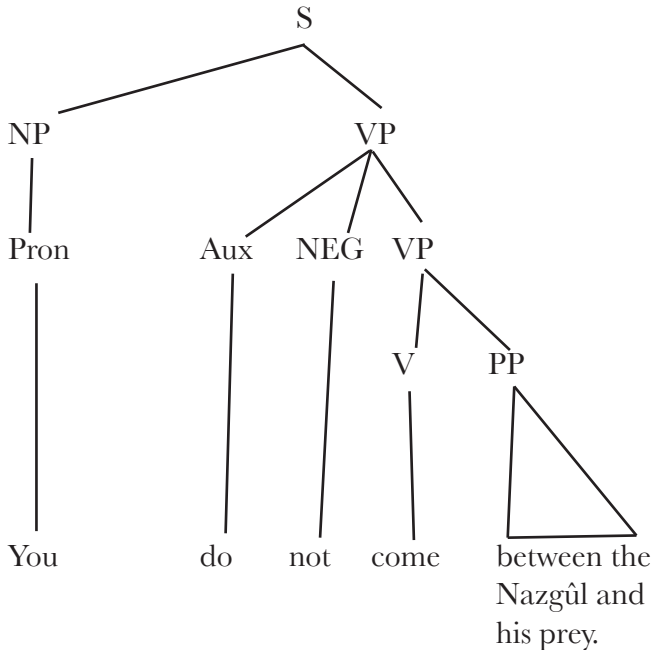

Figure 1

of the monster. The poetic term for this forced re-interpretation of the sentence is *apo koinu*.

 Continuing the analysis of this sentence illuminates the Nazgûl's character even more clearly. Dernhelm/Éowyn is commanded not to come "between the Nazgûl and *his* prey"; the Lord of the Nazgûl refers to himself in the third person, as a thing, but he also refers to Theoden's body as *his* prey, using the possessive adjective to mark ownership. This jarring contrast of speaking simultaneously about oneself in the third person and proclaiming ownership (i.e., the Lord of the Nazgûl does not own *himself*, but he believes that Theoden's body is *his*) illustrates the loss of selfhood but not loss of acquisitiveness that is perfectly in keeping with the Nazgûl's character as a Ringwraith: note that Gollum frequently uses both the self-referential third person and the possessive. The character of a Ringwraith is exactly to have lost self while becoming possessed by insatiable desire, or as Éowyn notes in the draft passage from *The War of the Ring* (quoted above), the Witch King has been "devoured" by Sauron (365-66).
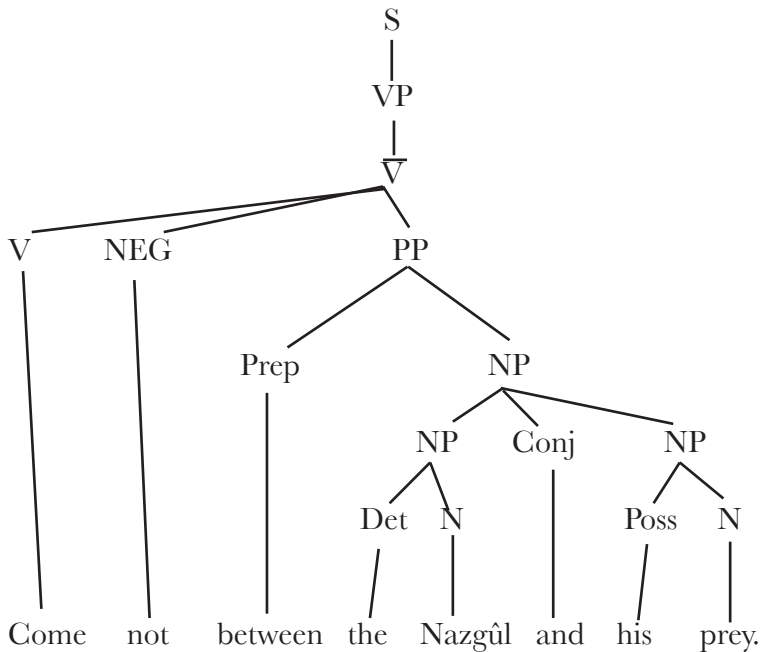

Figure 2

Immediately after commanding Dernhelm/Éowyn not to interfere, the Lord of the Nazgûl issues his threat, which returns to the first sense of the verb "come" with which the passage begins: "Or he will not slay thee in thy turn. He will bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness, where thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy shrivelled mind be left naked to the Lidless Eye." Now the summons that was implicit in "come" but which had been temporarily removed via "not" (thus leading to an *apo koinu* effect) is reinvoked and Dernhelm/Éowyn is indeed menaced with a horrible command. Note that the Nazgûl still continues to speak of himself in the third person but that his additional threat (beyond bearing Dernhelm/Éowyn away) is put into the passive voice. The Nazgûl works as the agent of the Lidless Eye and, master of power and terror or no, he lacks individual agency, even for evil. We should also respect Tolkien's horrific artistry in the passage, particularly in the use of the phrase "shrivelled mind." Here again Tolkien causes readers to hold two ideas simultaneously: it is Derhhelm/Éowyn's *mind* that will be devoured, but the word "shriveled" invokes an image of the brain, naked and disembodied. This image is more terrifying than the ghost-like existence that the literal text of the threat suggests (i.e., if all flesh is devoured, the brain would be also), but by stylistic conflation of mind and brain conveys an image of torture that is both mental and physical.[31]

This image of horror is abruptly interrupted by the sound of Dernhelm/Éowyn's sword. Tolkien's use of the passive voice focuses the reader's attention not on the agency of Éowyn/Dernhelm (an agency called into question by the hypnotic power of the Lord of the Nazgûl) but rather on Merry's perception of the scene though closed eyes. Using the active voice ("Dernhelm drew his sword") would have shattered the carefully established point of view. Éowyn's statement "Do what you will; but I will hinder it, if I may" then grammatically echoes the Lord of the Nazgûl's original command but turns the rhetorical tables on the monster. One "you" is deleted from the surface structure of her sentence to form the imperative, but this deletion also serves to show Éowyn's lack of respect for the Lord of the Nazgûl. She does not address him. Rather, her reference to him is a pronoun embedded in a VP so that the "you" comes almost at the end of the sentence. Éowyn's next words contrasts her own agency with the Nazgûl's lack of individual freedom; she uses the pronoun "I" twice (in this exchange the Lord of the Nazgûl never uses "I," only the object-case pronoun "me"),[32] and concludes her sentence with an "if"-clause that further emphasizes both the freedom that she possesses and her relative lack of power (in contrast to the Nazgûl, who possesses power but not freedom).

The Nazgûl's response, in the form of a rhetorical question, shows

that Éowyn has gotten the upper hand in the verbal duel, for the Nazgûl actually states the outcome threatened by Éowyn, and even though he phrases it as a question, he nevertheless brings the idea of being hindered into being from his own mouth in an echo of Éowyn's statement. The remainder of the scene is relatively straightforward action in standard English subject-verb-object order with one important exception, Éowyn's statement "But no living man am I." The transformation of "I am no living man" to "no living man am I" could be considered an archaism, since Tolkien's sentence is in object-verb-subject order, but in fact rather than mere archaism, this modification of traditional word order is absolutely essential for aesthetic effect of the sentence, since Éowyn is again echoing and mocking the Lord of the Nazgûl's statement "No living man may hinder me," a statement written in subject-verb- object order. If Éowyn were to say "I am no living man," the rhetorical effect would be lost.

The further non-standard constructions in the paragraph "Éowyn I am" and "if you be not deathless" are also not uncontrolled archaisms but rather stylistic necessities. "I am Éowyn Éomund's daughter" would place two similar names in too close proximity for the purposes of the rapidly moving paragraph (note that Tolkien does stack names in other places, but those are in moments of formal speech, not immediate combat); breaking them up with "I am" provides a pleasing aural effect. Furthermore, "if you be not deathless" is in fact grammatically accurate for the situation, though it is a subtlety of English grammar not often noted: "be," while not a pure subjunctive, indicates the progressive *aspect* of an action (Kaplan 177-84). In Anglo-Saxon, which lacks a specified future tense, "beo" is in fact a present subjunctive. Since Éowyn does not at this point know if the Lord of the Nazgûl is or is not deathless, her use of "be" is both grammatically and logically justified as well as being tied to Anglo-Saxon usage, which is consistent with her being of the people of Rohan.[33]

The only remaining non-standard usages in the scene are the use of the interjection "lo!," the verbs "smite" and "blench," and the word "naught" to describe the Nazgûl's invisible head.[34] Rosebury writes that "one might well wish away the 'lo!' and the 'behold!," calling the use of "lo!" "an admittedly crude note," although he then goes on to argue that the "exalted, as if it were scriptural style" of the passage "invites us to perceive the intervention of the Witch-king on his pterodactyl-like steed as an epiphany of the diabolic" and thus might be justified (68). This is effective criticism, and all the more valuable for actually bothering to pay attention to the interplay of subject and style. But I think Rosebury is mistaken in invoking Scripture as a stylistic model for the passage.[35] The use of "lo!," while it certainly may have Scriptural

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antecedents, has a much closer source (for Tolkien's writing, at least) in Anglo-Saxon literature, where the word "hwaet!" is used to mark not only the beginning of poems but also scenes of great import (the first word in *Beowulf* is "hwaet!").[36] Tolkien, in his translations of *Beowulf* rendered "hwaet" as "lo!" Likewise the words "smite" and "blench" both have immediate Anglo-Saxon antecedents, the Old English verbs "smitan" and "blencan." These words are completely appropriate for Éowyn (she uses "smite": "blench" is used by the narrator) because the Rohirrim speak Anglo-Saxon and thus a narrator who is associated with Éowyn would be creating a unity of affect (to use the Joycean term) by using words with Anglo-Saxon roots.[37]

The use of "naught" (from Old English "na" + "wiht" = no thing) serves as an additional link between the Lord of the Nazgûl and Denethor. Note that when Denethor is at the height of his rage, just before he burns himself, he tells Gandalf, "But if doom denies this to me, then I will have *naught*: neither life diminished, nor love halved, nor honour abated" (*RK*, V, vii, 130). The nothingness that Denethor, in his selfish despair, calls for is in fact the nothingness that is the Lord of the Nazgûl's current being.[38] Furthermore, Denethor's "I will have *naught*, neither…" phrasing is reminiscent of Lear's repeated negations, his "no"s and "never"s again reinforcing the triangle of Lear, Nazgûl, and Denethor.

Éowyn's final statement in the scene "I will smite you, if you touch him" is structurally parallel with her previous threat "I will hinder it, if I may," but this time the warning is made more pointed, directly at the Nazgûl. "I will smite you" is nearly as simple a sentence as can be formed in modern English (only the modal "will" makes the sentence even slightly complex) and her change from the subjunctive "if I may" to "if you touch him" gives Éowyn complete command of the situation even though both statements are if-clauses. Just as the sound of her ringing sword begins to cut through the haze of fear generated by the Lord of the Nazgûl, so too does the parallel "steel" of her voice shatter the supernatural malice of the monster as effectively as her eventual sword stroke.

This analysis, then, shows that Tolkien's style in this particular scene (one previously singled out for criticism) is anything but simply archaic. Rather, Tolkien has created precisely controlled stylistic and grammatical effects, with a rigorously maintained point of view that not only frames the scene in terms of Merry's presence but also links it, grammatically, metonymically, and lexically, with the rest of the world he has built and with the wider intertextual culture of which *The Lord of the Rings* is a part. After examining the scene in such detail it becomes clear that Tolkien's deliberate stylistic construct is in fact remarkably rich and successful not only in his own terms but also in terms of the stylistic canons of

Modernist Literature in which, supposedly, form follows function. The analysis also supports Ursula Le Guin's contention that the craftsmanship of *The Lord of the Rings* is consistent at all levels of construction, from the individual sentence to the macro structure of the journey, a repeated stress and release pattern (105). This tightly inter-connected series of aesthetic effects (one might even call the multi-level repetition a "fractal" structure) is one of the aspects of Tolkien's fiction that separates his from other fantasies, and other forms of literature, that are far less meticulously crafted.

The foregoing analysis has provided some suggestions, I hope, for how Tolkien's prose style might be approached without abandoning the productive research pathways of source study or thematic analysis. If I am correct, much of the great beauty and power of *The Lord of the Rings* comes in part from Tolkien's ability to produce aesthetic effects simultaneously on multiple levels, so that the effects created by, say, the use of Anglo-Saxon syntax and lexicon are connected with the themes of cultural interaction and individual morality that are integral to Tolkien's vision. Critics who have been embarrassed by the non-standard elements of Tolkien's style (and they are more common than they are likely to admit in print) might want to reconsider their defensiveness and instead try to determine why that style, as different as it is from canonical Modernism, works so effectively to achieve Tolkien's purposes. And critics who have focused solely on source or themes should note that the analysis of style may unearth new sources and shed new light on traditional themes as well.

NOTES

1   A conspicuous counterexample is Paul Edmund Thomas' exemplary "Some of Tolkien's Narrators," in Flieger and Hofstetter (161-81), but Thomas' analysis is only tangentially related to my own in this article since I am focusing more on dialogue than narrative voice.

2   For the most effective sustained argument about the academic respectability of the study of Tolkien's work, see Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. For a discussion of why many other "defenses" of Tolkien have fallen short, see Drout and Wynne (113-17).

3   For recent, particularly sad but entirely representative specimens of these complaints, see Turner (16) and Shulevitz. Shulevitz in fact appears willing to discount the entire *Lord of the Rings* because Tolkien uses the phrase "let us hasten." For effective defenses of Tolkien's

style, see Rosebury (54-80) and Shippey (*J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* 223-25). For a Modernist defense of Tolkien's craft see Kramer: "Now a grown-up reader, I found myself astonished by the unflagging quality of the prose, the range of Tolkien's descriptive powers, by how integrally the plot is integrated with the landscape. . . . How many writers can write 15 pages describing a trek through a sinister forest without repeating themselves?" It is also worth noting the contradiction between some criticisms of Tolkien's prose: on the one hand he is overly archaic and full of "wrench[ed] syntax" (Stimpson 25); on the other he writes in "transparent, workmanlike prose" (Attebery 21-23). Tolkien himself argued convincingly that his style was intentional and an essential aesthetic component of his writing (see Letter 171, *Letters* 225-26).

4   See Shippey (*J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* 305-28) and Timmons (1-10).

5   There are additional parallels with H. Rider Haggard's *Eric Brighteyes*, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this essay.

6   Here I am adopting John Miles Foley's definition of metonymy: within a traditional literature, use of traditional referents (which can be formulas, type-scenes, grammatical figures or stylistic idiosyncrasies) can invoke, *pars pro toto*, the larger and more echoic context of the tradition (Foley 7). Foley's work is focused on oral and oral-derived texts, but I think it can also be used to support intertextual references like this one.

7   The phrase "northern courage," which Tolkien uses in "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" is not entirely original with him but has antecedents in W. P. Ker, *The Dark Ages* 57-58 and E. V. Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse* xxviii-xxxv.

8   Although it may have appeared in adventure romance novels of the kind that Tolkien would have read as a boy.

9   With the exception of the passage quoted above, "recreant" is not found in electronic full-text searches of *H*, *LotR*, *S*, *UT*, *Farmer Giles*, *Smith*, *Roverandom*, and *The History of Middle-earth*, volumes I-V and X. See below for a discussion of the word in *History of Middle-earth* volumes VI-IX. *History of Middle-earth* volumes XI and XII were visually but not electronically searched. A more typically Tolkienian anachronistic word might be "blench" in the same passage (though not quoted above). This word (from Anglo-Saxon *blencan*), is found in Layamon, *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Owl and the Nightingale*, Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and would be

more likely than the etymologically French "recreant" to be used by Tolkien independently of a specific source such as *Lear*. A version of "recreant," the late Middle English "recrayed," appears in the York *Resurrection* play, where it is spoken by Pilate. This parallel is suggestive because Pilate calls the soldier "false recrayed knight" (415, l. 364) while Denethor (raging in the same way that Pilate rages in medieval tradition) first says to Gandalf "Now thou stealest the hearts of my knights also" immediately before saying "Come, if you are not all recreant!" (130). This is the only time that Denethor uses the word "knight" to describe an ordinary soldier of Gondor. Otherwise Tolkien reserves "knight" (up to this point) for the mounted men of Rohan and Dol Amroth.

10 Catherine Stimpson singles out "eyot" as an example of Tolkien's poor writing: "If we expect 'He came to an island in the middle of the river,' he will write 'to an eyot he came'"(25). This cavil is effectively demolished by Rosebury, who notes (among other errors by Stimpson) that the phrase "to an eyot he came" never appears in *LotR* (65-66).

11 Note that "fool" here is a term of endearment for Cordelia.

12 The "seven stars" *Lear* refers to are the Pleiades; to my knowledge the source of the "seven stars" in Tolkien's rhyme has not been completely explained, although the Valacirca, "the Sickle of the Valar and sign of doom" has seven stars (*S* 48). In the index entry under "Star, as emblem," Tolkien writes that the banners of the seven (of nine) of Elendil's ships which bore palantíri were adorned with stars (*RK*, Index, 440). See also Christopher Tolkien's discussion in *The War of the Ring* of what exactly J.R.R. Tolkien meant by "the star of the Dúnedain" that is said, in the Tale of Years (Appendix B) to have been given to Master Samwise (*War* 309 n. 8). Perhaps the "seven stars" of *Lear* insinuated themselves into Gandalf's rhyme or into the earlier mythology and are thus the ultimate source for the number of stars on Elendil's banner.

13 Tolkien is here referring to R. W. Chambers, "Beowulf and the Heroic Age," the introduction to Archibald Strong's *Beowulf Translated into Modern English Rhyming Verse.*

14 For Tolkien's comment that he "disliked cordially" Shakespeare's plays, see Carpenter's *Biography* (27).

15 I am using "kingship" for what could more properly be called "kingship and / or stewardship" because, in Denethor's mind at least, the two have become one.

16 In fact, it is hard to imagine that in a discussion of the madness of kings *King Lear* would not immediately come to mind for any student of English literature. Shakespeare's play is the *locus classicus* for the topic.

17 For just a moment we will set aside the Éomer / Lear comparison.

18 My contention is not completely inconsistent with Shippey's discussion of Denethor and Saruman in *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (169-74).

19 See *RK*, Appendix A for the blood of Númenoreans being mingled with "lesser Men" after the Kin-strife (328). See also Faramir's comments to Frodo (*TT*, IV, v, 286-87).

20 This is the sin that Sam seems constitutionally unable to commit; even though he has no objective hope, he refuses to give in to despair (*TT*, IV, iii, 246). For a good discussion see Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (152-55).

21 Not that Tolkien needed such sources, since the politics are obvious and important even in the twentieth century, but both *Piers Ploughman* (literature) and the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (philosophy) present rather extended medieval meditations upon the theme.

22 Summarized neatly and then effectively demolished in Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (147-48). See also Rosebury (33-34).

23 See Shippey, "Orcs, Wraiths, Wights" and "Tolkien as Post-War Writer."

24 "For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (*FR*, II, ii, 281).

25 For a more nuanced discussion see Ellison (21-29).

26 The criticism that there is no lineal connection between Tolkien and other important literature is the same cavil aimed at *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon literature by no less a literary luminary than Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (21-25).

27 See Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, 305-18.

28 Rosebury says that while the stylistic variation in the passage "could make for an unsightly patchwork . . . in fact the amplitude of the narrative is such as to allow gradual modulations between the exalted style and the plain" (68).

29 I have used standard tree diagrams and linguistic terminology. Abbreviations are: S = Sentence, NP = Noun Phrase, VP = Verb Phrase, PP = Prepositional Phrase, N = Noun, Prep = Preposition, Pron = Pronoun, Det = Determiner (sometimes called an article), Poss = Possessive Adjective. A canonical sentence is composed of an NP and a VP. For further explanations and discussion, see Kaplan (218-10, 230-32 and *passim*).

30 See *FR*, I, iii, 83; *FR*, I, xi, 207-208; *FR*, I, xii, 225-27; *FR*, II, ii, 258-59;*TT*, IV, viii, 315-16; *RK* V, iv, 92-94, 97, 102-103.

31 For a similar image of monstrosity see C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*.

32 The Lord of the Nazgûl uses the possessive pronoun "my" in his exchange with Gandalf (*RK*, V, iv, 103).

33 John Tinkler's "Old English in Rohan" notes the use of specific Anglo-Saxon words and phrases as part of the vocabulary of the Rohirrim, but he does not examine the embedding of Anglo-Saxon words in other contexts.

34 For an explanation of Tolkien's use of an expanded lexicon, see Flieger (*Splintered Light* 47).

35 Rosebury may be thinking of Luke 2:10, but there are other places in *The Return of the King* where the Biblical influence is far more pronounced, for example in the song of the eagle to the people of Minas Tirith after the fall of Sauron (*RK*, VI, v, 241). This parallel is noted by Shippey (*Road* 151-53).

36 "Hwaet" is literally "what," but the word is used to begin a number of poems, including *Beowulf*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *Andreas*, *Exodus*, and *Juliana*. Tolkien calls it a "genuine anacrucis," that is, an exclamation separate from the regular metrics of the line. Its purpose is to focus the reader's attention, which it does successfully in both Old English poetry and *The Return of the King*. Tolkien translated "hwæt" as "lo!" He also used "lo!" in his Túrin poem in *Lays*.

37 Éowyn's use of "dwimmerlaik" is also significant in establishing her as a "native speaker" of Old English (see Shippey, *Road* 224). Note that in his original drafts of the scene Tolkien was still struggling with the proper spelling for this word; he first tried "dwimor-lakes" (*War* 365 and see Christopher Tolkien's note 2 on page 372). While I believe that the parallel use of "lo!" in *RK* and *Beowulf* weakens the case for a Scriptural parallel, I do not in this case believe that the actual details of the battle between Éowyn and the Lord of the Nazgûl are

drawn from Anglo-Saxon sources (though there are some echoes of *Judith*). For a scene whose dramatic contours are almost certainly drawn from Old English, and which uses Old English syntax even more obviously, see the battle between Fingon and Gothmog, Lord of Balrogs, in the *Silmarillion* (193).

38 For a discussion of Denethor's "naught," see Shippey (*J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* 173-74).

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