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The Name of the Ring; Or, There and Back Again

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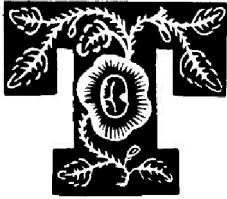
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Abstract

Deals with the decline in power of evil through the ages of Arda, and how this is connected with phases of the development of language (metaphoric, metonymic, and demotic) as described by Northrop Frye and Owen Barfield.

Additional Keywords

Evil, nature of, in J.R.R. Tolkien; Frye, Northrop. *The Anatomy of Criticism*; Frye, Northrop. *The Great Code*; Language development; Names in J.R.R. Tolkien; Onomastics; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Gollum; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Morgoth; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Saruman; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Sauron; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Use of language; Barfield, Owen. *History in English Words*



THE NAME OF THE RING: OR, THERE AND BACK AGAIN

JANET BRENNAN CROFT

“The whole of ‘MIDDLE-EARTH’ WAS MORGOTH’S RING” (*Morgoth’s Ring* [MR] 400). What did Tolkien mean by this somewhat cryptic statement, which appears in an unpublished essay titled “Notes on motives in *The Silmarillion*” and nowhere else, and from which the tenth volume of *The History of Middle-earth* takes its title? Tolkien goes on to explain that Morgoth’s power was “disseminated” throughout Middle-earth; that it was “nowhere absent” though “nowhere absolute,” and was a prerequisite for using any sort of matter towards an evil magical end. If Arda is Morgoth’s Ring, with his power infusing the whole world, and Sauron’s “relatively smaller” power is, in comparison, “concentrated” in the Ring of his own making (MR 400), what might this imply if we follow this thread to the tangled knot at its end?

In Middle-earth, it seems that evil suffers a steady decline from the cosmic to the petty over the course of “the long defeat” of Arda, in the same way that Verlyn Flieger demonstrates that Light in the legendarium appears in “progressively lessening intensities [e]ach light [...] dimmer than the one before it, splintered by Tolkien’s sub-creators” (*Splintered Light*, 60). Taking a cue from B.S.W. Barootes’s essay on the decline of the power of language through the ages of Arda, this paper will use terms describing phases of language from Northrop Frye’s *The Great Code—metaphoric, metonymic, demotic, and ricorso*—to examine the path of the Ring/evil/power/naming complex through its extended diminution as the Ring moves from mythic-level metaphor, through magic, to degradation and destruction—from Morgoth’s Ring of all Arda, through Sauron’s Ruling Ring, to Saruman’s pale imitation of Sauron, and finally to Gollum’s sad struggle for mere subsistence. The hobbit Ringbearers—Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam—form a coda to the Ring’s diminishment, deflecting the attempted *ricorso* or return to the start of the ring-shaped cycle, and bringing about the Ring’s destruction.

Words and language are at the very heart of Tolkien’s legendarium, and as Tolkien’s fellow Inklings Owen Barfield puts it in *History in English Words*, language “reveals the evolution of consciousness” (14). Flieger explains in *Splintered Light* that Barfield’s “theory of the ancient semantic unity” (39) of literal and metaphoric uses of words, of the “interdependence of myth and

language" (xxi), was an immense influence on Tolkien's thoughts about the evolution of language and underpin the development of both language and racial history in his legendarium. Names are a particularly powerful class of words, and naming is, in Middle-earth, a correspondingly powerful linguistic act. To give ourselves a basic framework to examine the relation of evil and naming as a specific use of language in Arda, let's first explore Frye's linguistic model.

FRYE'S MODEL

Northrop Frye's classification of story types in *Anatomy of Criticism* [AC] has frequently been used in Tolkien scholarship.¹ Frye organizes literary forms in a cycle: myth, romance, high mimetic, low mimetic, and ironic, returning to myth again, based primarily on the types of characters in the story, their relation to us as readers, and their "power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" (33).

In *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* [GC], Frye borrows a schema from Giambattista Vico that closely parallels this cycle of literary forms, and applies it to how language evolves (5). This sequence neatly echoes what Barfield called the "vast, age-long metamorphosis from the kind of outlook which we loosely describe as 'mythological' to the kind we may describe equally loosely as 'intellectual thought'" (84). The terms Frye uses for the phases of language development are *metaphoric*, *metonymic*, and *demotic*; a fourth term, *ricorso*, marks a return to the beginning. In brief, metaphoric language is mythic and poetic; metonymic is allegorical and analogical; demotic is descriptive and scientific (5); we will examine these terms in more detail below, and then apply them to Tolkien's legendarium.

In the *metaphoric* phase, "subject and object are linked by a common power or energy" and there is little distinction between them; there is "potential magic in any use of words" (GC 6). This is the phase of spells, boasts, oaths, and name magic; "[a]ll words in this phase of language are concrete" (6). This identity of word and thing, word and will, may be expressed most simply as "this is that" (7). "Let these things Be," said Ilúvatar, and the word of creation, Eä, and the name of the World that Is are one and the same (*Silmarillion* [*Silm.*] 20). Barfield observed that "the farther back language as a whole is traced, the more poetical and animated do its sources appear, until at last it seems to dissolve into a kind of mist of myth" (83-84). "[E]verything is potentially identical with everything else" (AC 136). The world is "performed by language,"

¹ See Hirsch, Burdge and Burke, Shippey, and my own *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Additionally, Paul Fussell makes extensive use of this classification scheme in *The Great War and Modern Memory*.

as Ernst Cassirer put it; language is the “creator of phenomena” (Flieger, “The Mind, the Tongue, and the Tale” 243).

In the *metonymic* phase, “abstraction becomes possible” as “subject and object are becoming more consistently separated” (GC 7). “This is put for that”: language becomes “a verbal imitation of a reality beyond itself” (8) rather than a generator of reality. It becomes prose, typified by dialectic and logic and analogy: if this, then that. As Barfield might characterize this phase, “man was not yet felt, either physically or psychically, to be isolated from his surroundings in the way that he is today” (136). Words can “work spells of building and of razing, of disguise and of release” (Barootes 115). Names can be “performative,” like the names Bilbo gives himself in his riddling game with Smaug: web-cutter, Barrel-rider, clue-finder, Luckwearer: what he does, rather than what he is (Flieger, “Mind” 246).

We would not be far off in thinking of the *demotic* phase of language as a product of the Renaissance, Reformation, and scientific revolution (GC 13), at least in so far as it becomes culturally dominant over the other forms—as the term *demotic* (from the Greek *δημιος*, people) implies, it has always been used at a basic, concrete, everyday level. Subject and object are clearly separated; words become “primarily descriptive of an objective natural order” (13). There is a “distinction” between “things that appear” and “that which makes things appear” (Flieger, *Splintered* 46). “[A]strology has changed to astronomy; alchemy to chemistry” (Barfield 138), and man comes to see himself “purely as a solid object situated among solid objects” (140), and is “conscious of himself [as an] observer” (167). “A verbal structure is set up beside what it describes, and is called ‘true’ if it seems to provide a satisfactory correspondence to it. [...] [A] true verbal structure is one that is *like* what it describes” (GC 13). This phase, then, is descriptive; “the thing evokes the word” (15), and “the word has no power to be anything but a word” (19). We can see examples of the process of the “diminishment” of the power of language in Treebeard’s long and metonymic story-name for his home (*a-lalla-lalla-rumba-kamanda-lind-or-burúnë*) reduced to Pippin’s short, classificatory suggestion of “hill,” or the fading progression from *Laurelinórenan* to *Lóthlorien* to *Lórién* indicating the land’s “regressively receding relationship to Time and Change” (Flieger, “Mind” 247-248).

Ricorso, finally, is a return to the beginning, a restarting of the cycle. Frye uses Einstein’s famous theory as a marker that points in this direction; with the “new realization that matter [is] an illusion of energy,” we begin to lose that “clear separation of subject and object” essential to the demotic phase and find science leading us back to the mythical and to the necessity of metaphor for true understanding (GC 14-15). Barfield notes a parallel trend in literature and art where terms like *romantic*, *enthusiastic*, *extravagant*, used in the Age of Reason to

disparage that which was outside of the realm of reason (204-205), started being used with “an undertone of reluctant approval” (206) and eventually were outright embraced by the Romantic and Gothic movements (207), with the imaginative sensibility fully rehabilitated as “*creative* in the full religious sense of the word” (213).

A concept from Tolkien’s “On Fairy-Stories” can provide a bit of needed nuance here. Tolkien refers to *Recovery* as an essential function of the fairy-story, as the “regaining of a clear view” of objects as “things apart from ourselves.” Yet he is not referring here to using language in a demotic sense to scientifically describe things that are totally separate from our own bodies and inner life, but to draw us back to deeper, metaphorical meanings at the heart of these things, where language once again creates phenomena—to see the metaphorical Pegasus ennobling the everyday horse, the Trees of the Sun and Moon inherent in everyday trees. The *ricorso*, the re-turning from *demotic* to *metaphoric* language, will “open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds, [...] and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild” (OFS 67-68).

MORGOOTH AND METAPHOR

How does Arda become Morgoth’s Ring? Through an act of naming. Shortly after the Valar “entered into” the newly-created Eä, Morgoth, who was then still known as Melkor, announced to them “This shall be my own kingdom; and I name it unto myself!” (*Silm.* 20-21). Thwarted by his “desire to imitate Ilúvatar and [...] claim the ultimate prerogative of Eru, which is the capacity to create” (Head 141), Melkor turns instead to a desire to possess and ultimately destroy the matter of Eä. “He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness” (*Silm.* 31). As Tolkien further explains in the unpublished “Note on motives,” “[t]o gain domination over Arda, Morgoth had to let most of his power pass into the *physical* constituents of the Earth” (394, emphasis in original). Gergely Nagy interprets this by saying that Morgoth “desire[ed] to produce [his] own meaning, not just interpretations of Ilúvatar’s,” though “this is an impossibility”: in order to attempt this, he must “become involved *corporeally*, and intend to affect the *bodies* of others” (122, emphasis in original).

This linguistic act of naming is extraordinarily metaphoric, for as Morgoth names Arda to himself, it becomes both a physical extension of his own power, and inseparably a part of himself. Note how pure and unadorned the act is—no spells, no complicated formulae, simply “I name it unto myself.” Melkor says it is his, and so it is. Later in the essay, Tolkien explains that Morgoth

“attempted to identify himself with [Arda]” (MR 399) in order to control the “physical matter” of the world. “Melkor ‘incarnated’ himself (as Morgoth) permanently”—and thus incarnated himself as part of the physical world, becoming identical with it through a metaphorically powerful speech act. “This is that,” as Frye describes the action of metaphoric language. Tolkien continues:

Thus, outside the Blessed Realm, all ‘matter’ was likely to have a ‘Melkor ingredient’, and those who had bodies [...] had as it were a tendency, small or great, towards Melkor: they were none of them wholly free of him in their incarnate form [...].

[...] in this way Melkor lost (or exchanged, or transmuted) the greater part of his original ‘angelic’ powers, of mind and spirit, while gaining a terrible grip upon the physical world. [...] Morgoth’s vast power was *disseminated*. (MR 400, emphasis in original)

While this is material perhaps never meant for publication, it is supported by the more polished stories included in *The Silmarillion*. This identification with matter is why Morgoth must be combatted physically, and why his power can never be completely eradicated while the matter of Arda exists. As Morgoth states in *The Children of Húrin*, “The shadow of my purpose lies upon Arda” (64). The drawback of this identification with matter, however, is profound; as Christopher Tolkien explains in the Introduction to *The Children of Húrin*,

[B]eing incarnate, Morgoth was afraid. My father wrote of him: ‘As he grew in malice, and sent forth from himself the evil that he conceived in lies and creatures of wickedness, his power passed into them and was dispersed, and he himself became ever more earth-bound, unwilling to issue forth from his dark strongholds.’ (*Narn I Chîn Húrin: The Tale of the Children of Húrin* [CoH] 15; the quotation is from *Silm.* 101)

Thus, even though he is a Vala, he can be physically challenged and defeated: wounded and made permanently lame by Fingolfin’s final blow, or enspelled and made senseless by Lúthien’s song (CoH 16). His hands can be burned black, and his iron crown become a weary weight (*Silm.* 81).

Morgoth’s own name history has a metaphoric component. His original name, Melkor, means “He Who Arises in Might,” but Tolkien describes Melkor as having “forfeited” the right to his original name (*Silm.* 31). He was renamed by Fëanor, the most powerful of the Noldorian Elves, after Melkor and Ungoliant destroyed the Two Trees of Valinor and stole the Silmarils, three jewels created by Fëanor which contained light from the trees. At the moment the theft was known,

Fëanor rose, and lifting up his hand before Manwë [the chief of the Valar] he cursed Melkor, naming him *Morgoth*, the Black Foe of the World; and by that name only was he known to the Eldar ever after. (*Silm.* 79)

The Noldorian elves, at a time when language still holds its metaphoric power, use naming to redefine Melkor in relation to themselves and to Arda (Croft, "Naming" 153). His exile "through the Door of Night and beyond the Walls of the World" (*Silm.* 254) can itself be read as a metaphor for the way the power of metaphoric language and naming wanes in Arda; removed from his physical connection to and identification with the material world, his metaphoric, "this is that" power loses its immediacy and is replaced by the metonymic.

SAURON AND METONYM

Sauron's Ring, in contrast to Morgoth's, represents a concentration of power into an object separate from, and significantly, *separable* from, its creator. In the metonymic phase, word becomes increasingly separate from concept, though still linked: "This is put for that"; thus, "One Ring to rule them all" rather than "I name it unto myself." The Ring can be lost, taken, or stolen; it can be separated from its creator in a way that Morgoth's Ring cannot. Its power does not depend on its creator, though its power is at its greatest when he wields it, and in fact he "is wedded to a physical reality" if he is to be able to use its power (Kisor 20). He cannot even be sure exactly where it is until Frodo puts it on almost in his direct line of sight: "The Dark Lord was suddenly aware of him, and his Eye piercing all shadows looked across the plain to the door that he had made" (*The Lord of the Rings [LotR]* VI.3.946).

How is Sauron's Ring made? He creates an object and empowers it through an act of naming, letting much but not all of his power pass into it. The Ring verse, the spell intoned when the Ring is given its power and engraved on the object itself, treats the words "One Ring" as a proper name, states the purpose for which it was made, and names it the master of all the other rings. "Out of the Black Years came the words that the Smiths of Eregion heard, and knew that they had been betrayed" (*LotR* II.2.254):

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

The linguistic phase of this spell is metonymic: it logically rather than poetically states its argument. Frye points out that verbal magic in this phase “aris[es] from a sense of an energy common to words and things, though embodied and controlled in words”; we can see that the Ring verse depends on “a quasi-magic inherent in sequence or linear ordering” (GC 11). The Rings to be ruled are precisely itemized, in the ancient and metaphoric lore-verse form, and what the One Ring will do in ruling them is clearly described in more active and modern iambic pentameter.²

Note that this concentration of power into an object means there is *not* a Sauron-element in all matter, not even his orcs. The orcs have the freedom to contemplate a life separate from their master: “What d’you say?—if we get a chance, you and me’ll slip off and set up somewhere on our own with a few trusty lads, somewhere where there’s good loot nice and handy, and no big bosses” says Gorbag to Shagrat (*LotR* IV.10.738). But because Sauron “inherited the ‘corruption’ of Arda” (*MR* 395), he already had Morgoth’s base to build on, that bit of Morgoth in all matter (*MR* 400).

As Tolkien elaborated in his notes, Sauron’s motive for seeking power is on a lower level than the metaphoric; Morgoth represented “sheer nihilism,” hatred of anything outside himself; but Sauron “did not object to the existence of the world, so long as he could do what he liked with it” (*MR* 396). His desire was for domination, not annihilation. The metonymic separation of object and subject is evident here as well: Sauron wants subjects, other beings under his control, and in order to dominate them, they must be separate from him.

In this, Tolkien suggests, Sauron was “wiser than Melkor-Morgoth” (*MR* 395). Melkor’s power was in a way impotent (396); it was strongest “in the physical beginnings of the World” (395) but “his only notion of dealing with [other wills and intelligences] was by physical force” (395) and his only desire was their destruction. Implied here is the fact that while all matter held a “Melkor ingredient” it also therefore had to include what we might call an Eru element, in that the Valar and the inhabitants of Arda could find something even in matter corrupted by Melkor or Sauron to heal or make beautiful. And even where that was not possible, the matter itself still existed. Melkor could never entirely win; neither could he ever be entirely defeated. Metaphoric magic works both ways; Melkor put his power into matter, and matter had power over him; destroying all matter would mean destroying himself. *THIS* is, indeed, *THAT*.

² My thanks to Corey Olson for pointing out the two very distinct verse-forms in the Ring rhyme when this paper was read at MidMoot 3. Wodzak and Holtz Wodzak note that “very few incantations, other than the doggerel of Tom Bombadil, seem to be uttered in any of the stories” (137), listing instead the many spells that seem to be cast by a powerful character’s eyes, but this is certainly one of the most obvious linguistic spells.

Sauron, as Tolkien points out, “never reached this stage of nihilistic madness” (*MR* 396), in large part through holding himself apart, in metonymic fashion, from what he sought to dominate. While this was wiser in a way, Tolkien does reiterate that he was “evil, and therefore stupid” (397). Separation of his power into a physically embodied outside object, as we have seen, meant that it *was* separate from him and therefore separable, parallel to what he sought to dominate. But through the metonymic link, through “this is put for that,” the destruction of the Ring still meant the destruction of his power; as Nagy observes, in a way “the Ring functions as Sauron’s body” (129), and his ability to manifest physically, as well as the means of destroying him, are bound up in the metonymic object he has created as separate from himself.

Naming patterns associated with Sauron also exhibit characteristics of the metonymic phase. In keeping with the growing but not complete separation of subject and object, Men and Hobbits in particular exhibit a pattern of name-avoidance when referring to Sauron (Croft, “Naming” 154), instead calling him *The Dark Lord* or *The Enemy*. These evasions hark back to the metaphoric phase, in which the name and the thing named are in essence equivalent, and using the true name summons the named being—“this is that”; but in using an avoidance name, a “this is put for that,” the user metonymically relies on a separation of the name from the essence—hoping that using the avoidance-name will *not* summon the being referred to.³

THE DEMOTIC: SARUMAN AND GOLLUM

Demotic speech is descriptive and scientific. Its essence lies in how close it hews to reality and truth—“the thing evokes the word” (*GC* 15). A central concern is “[t]he problem of illusion and reality” (14), the tension between metaphorical speech elements or thought patterns and objective reality; for

³ Like Melkor, Sauron had an original name which was changed when he turned to evil: *Mairon*, meaning Admirable. However, this name change is not treated as an essential part of his story anywhere in the *Silmarillion* or *History of Middle-earth*, appearing only in the notes collected in *Words, Phrases, and Passages in Various Tongues in The Lord of the Rings* (183, 201), though there is the statement by Aragorn in *The Two Towers* that Sauron does not “use his right name, nor permit it to be spelt or spoken” (*LotR* III.1.416). Like Voldemort in the Harry Potter books, Sauron metaphorically denies his prior name and existence, burying it under his new name—though it could be argued that Voldemort does this at a more metonymic level, as his new name is merely an anagrammatic gloss on his birth name (Croft, “Naming” 158). Still, name-avoidance by those who refer to Sauron is treated as far more important to the tale than his name change, particularly when we take into consideration Gergely Nagy’s observation that “Ilúvatar, Morgoth, Sauron and the rest of them are mainly narrated through others”—the “fictional authors, translators, [and] compilers” who tell the tales (120) and decide what they think is essential to pass on to the audience.

example, the shorthand metaphor “sunset” stands in for the accident of our perspective on the position of the sun relative to the rotation of the earth, a more scientific and objective way of looking at it.⁴

Saruman’s speech habits particularly embody a failure to negotiate this gap between illusion and demotic reality. Ensnared by his obsession with a being of metonymic power, in a Girardian case of “imitative desire”⁵ he tries to replicate Sauron’s success in “putting this for that.” But demotic language, the political language of “compromise and calculation,” as Tom Shippey calls it (75), has no magic in it. Tolkien made it clear that “Saruman’s voice was not hypnotic but persuasive,” that his use of rhetoric was an attempt to “[corrupt] the reasoning powers” and that he could be countered “*by free will and reason*” (*Letters* 276-77, emphasis in original; see also Ruud). In the chapter “The Voice of Saruman,” the wizard’s attempt to persuade Théoden to his position fails utterly because his assertions do not match reality; his lies revealed, his voice becomes “shrill and cold,” he sneers and mocks, and finally “crawl[s] away” (*LotR* III.10.582-83).

Saruman also reveals a parallel between Frye’s demotic phase of language and ironic phase of story; while in origin a semi-divine character who should be at home in myth, and embodied in a physical form that should at least place him at the romance level, his inability to deal appropriately with the demotic and its built-in preference for true words makes him “inferior in power or intelligence,” at least to his own conception of himself, and thus places him firmly at the ironic level (*AC* 34). Saruman claims the title of Ring-maker, in imitation of Sauron and out of his jealousy over Gandalf’s possession of Narya (*Unfinished Tales* 389-90, 392); though Gandalf sees a ring on Saruman’s finger (*LotR* II.2.258), we do not learn its name or its powers, find out how or when it was forged, or see it in action. It seems powerless. The Ring of Isengard itself, impressive though it may be, is a tiny thing in comparison to Morgoth’s Ring of Arda or even the ring of mountains surrounding Mordor. He fails even at self-naming; he may call himself “Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colours!” (*LotR* II.2.259), but no one else ever does (Croft, “Naming” 156) because the names have little relation to the truth, and in the end he does not even understand the truth of the nick-name “Sharkey” given to him by his band of ruffians (*LotR* V.8.994-95). His desire for power is petty, driven by resentment

⁴ As Clyde S. Kilby points out, both C.S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers remarked that “it is as difficult for the scientist as the poet to escape metaphoric concepts in his thought” (268), echoing Frye’s comments on Einstein. Even the most dedicated student of celestial mechanics is unlikely to say ‘the earth rotated in such a way that a direct line of sight to the sun from a particular point on the planet’s surface was blocked by the curvature of its horizon.’

⁵ See Head.

and revenge alone in the end—"mischief [...] in a small mean way" only (*LotR* VI.6.984).

Gollum, too, exhibits this confusion in naming that places him in a problematic relationship with demotic speech: in addition to the obvious Gollum/Sméagol doubling of name and personality, does his catch-phrase "my precious" refer to himself or the Ring? As Douglas A. Anderson explains, "In the first edition of *The Hobbit* (1937), Gollum used the phrase 'my precious' to refer only to himself. In the second edition (1951), in which Gollum's role was significantly altered [...], the phrase might be taken to refer to the ring, as is often the case in *The Lord of the Rings*" (Tolkien, *Annotated Hobbit* V.120n8). This ambiguity makes sense at a metaphoric or metonymic level, underscoring how intertwined Gollum and the Ring have become over the centuries. But when Gollum loses the Ring to Bilbo, it becomes entirely separate from him, and his subsequent use of "my precious" refers nearly exclusively to the Ring, the "thing evoking the word." Yet calling it his Precious never makes it truly his.

Gollum is evil at its most trifling level: hardly even really evil, simply scrabbling for survival by any means with no concern for morality. Consumed by his desire for the Ring, he does not possess the ability to think at a metonymic level that would allow him to even conceive of using the Ring to control others. The Ring, while precious to him personally, is more importantly a device he can use to turn himself invisible, to make *himself* uncontrollable by being unwitnessed and unnamed.

Gollum is forced into the demotic, into a clear separation of subject and object, by his loss, but he longs to return to the identification of himself with his precious Ring. This is how a *ricorso* might begin—with a hunger for the return to a unity between object and subject. At Gollum's level, with his power, this could never result in much more than a return to his former lifestyle, except perhaps with the addition of "fish every day, three times a day, fresh from the sea" and trivial revenge on Sam (*LotR* IV.2.633).

RICORSO AVERTED: THREE HOBBITS AND THE RING

An interesting characteristic shared by Gollum and Saruman is that they are survivors of an earlier metaphoric or metonymic age. When we turn to the hobbits, however, we find a race that is native to the demotic age, and about as solidly grounded in reality as their hairy feet on the earth can make them. And yet in our three hobbit heroes, Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam, we can see a yearning for an age of poetry and magic and elves—a yearning for the language of the metaphoric phase.

Bilbo makes no attempt to name or really understand the Ring; the Ring is firmly separate from him. As with Gollum, he may have a great desire to possess the Ring and keep it secret, but it is a device to use for his own

convenience; on adventures in his younger days, or to escape unwanted guests on his return to the Shire. There is no metaphor or metonym or merging of person and object in Bilbo's possession of the Ring.

As far as Frodo and Sam, Gandalf basically names the Ring for them; the word and its referent are so disconnected that the wizard must devise tests to see if this is indeed the Ring. His method is thoroughly demotic: though research in the archives at Minas Tirith and experimentation with the fire in Bag End, the proper word can finally be used to refer to the thing at hand: The Ring evokes its name. Reading the Ring spell aloud, in this phase, does nothing but make the hearers uneasy; while a shadow may seem to cross the sun and the elves stop their ears in Rivendell, the spell has no further power (*LotR* II.2.254). And no words are necessary for Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, or Gollum to activate the powers of the Ring; the power is in the object, not in the words. In spite of the uses both Frodo and Sam make of the Ring within the confines of Mordor, where it is at its strongest, it remains firmly separate from them nearly to the end and they are not tempted to merge with it.

It is on the slopes of Mount Doom that the categories begin to slip. Frodo reveals that "there is no veil between me and the wheel of fire," using a metaphorical phrase; the Ring now appears even before his "waking eyes" (*LotR* VI.3.938), becoming more and more a part of him and he more and more a part of it. When Sam and Frodo are attacked by Gollum, there is a suggestion of ambiguity in who exactly orders the creature "Down, down! [...] Down, you creeping thing, and out of my path!"—the voice, to Sam, seems to come out of the "wheel of fire" positioned in front of his vision of Frodo, and the words would be equally appropriate coming from Frodo or the Ring, or some merger of both (VI.3.943-4). Compare this to the scene where Smeágol is initially tamed; in Sam's vision then, while Frodo may seem equally "tall and stern," there is no wheel of fire and it is clearly and only Frodo speaking, directing Gollum to swear by the Precious, a thing separate from both of them (IV.1.618).

At the Cracks of Doom, when Frodo makes his decision to claim the Ring for his own, he puts it on his finger, physically erasing the separation of subject and object. "The Ring is mine!" (*LotR* VI.3.945) he declares, recasting the doubtful words he spoke at Rivendell—"I will take the Ring, though I do not know the way" (II.2.270)—into a form of prophecy. But is he not as much the Ring's? There is an echo here of Melkor's act naming Eä unto himself and disseminating his power into matter; similarly, Frodo and the Ring are merging into one thing.

Gollum severs the connection, returning Frodo abruptly to the individual and the real, a wounded hobbit nearly destroyed by the breaking of his connection with the Ring, "fallen upon his knees at the chasm's edge" (*LotR* VI.3.946). Frodo has returned finally to a demotic, clearly demarcated

relationship with the object. "Precious, precious, precious!" Gollum cries out—but does he mean himself or the Ring as he topples into the fire (946), reunited both physically and metaphorically?

Without the Ring, Frodo is "himself again," his burden gone (*LotR* VI.3.947), and Sam, the most hobbitish of hobbits, in firm practicality leads him from the conflagration and sighs over the imaginary future telling of their tale, in which "Nine-fingered Frodo" is as clearly separate from "the Ring of Doom" as "Beren One-hand" is from "the Great Jewel" (VI.4.950)—they are objects in adventures, not metaphors. Sam, while appreciating the metaphors of the great tales, remains demotic, and these heroes' losses of their bodily integrity, of finger and hand and their associated powers of making and doing, to metaphorically powerful objects means nothing symbolic to him. Frodo, without the Ring's power to make a *ricorso* so potentially dangerous, sails into the metaphor of the West with Bilbo.

CONCLUSION

But is this the end? It may be the end of the Ring as a metaphor and object both, but Morgoth's essence still makes all matter apt to evil, stained, and corrupted. Frye points out that

[I]t is the primary function of literature, more particularly of poetry, to keep re-creating the first or metaphorical phase of language during the domination of the later phases, to keep presenting it to us as a mode of language that we must never be allowed to underestimate, much less lose sight of. (*GC* 23)

Metaphor can be dangerous in this way, a vast power for good or evil; yet, as Barfield makes clear in *Poetic Diction*, "it is in and by words that we feel and express a sense of separation and [...] it will be through the creative power of words that we can return" (Flieger, *Splintered* 47). The "Morgoth ingredient" that makes all of Arda Morgoth's Ring, then, is a danger ever present in language itself and the temptation of an unwary *ricorso* to the magical, metaphoric stage—balanced, however, in *The Lord of the Rings* by the ability of the Hobbits to yearn for and love the metaphoric level of language while keeping their demotic feet firmly on the ground.

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