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## The Voice of Saruman: Wizards and Rhetoric in *The Two Towers*

Jay Ruud

*University of Central Arkansas*

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### The Voice of Saruman: Wizards and Rhetoric in *The Two Towers*

#### Abstract

Examines one aspect of Tolkien's wizards—their skill in the art of rhetoric. Provides a useful exercise in recognizing fallacious reasoning in persuasive speech by defining and demonstrating classical rhetorical methods employed by Saruman and Gandalf.

#### Additional Keywords

Rhetoric; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Gandalf; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Use of rhetoric



THE VOICE OF SARUMAN:  
WIZARDS AND RHETORIC IN  
*The Two Towers*

JAY RUUD

TOLKIEN CONSIDERED HIMSELF FIRST AND FOREMOST a philologist in the primary sense of the term, a lover of words or a linguist. He often said that his chief impetus for creating Middle-earth was to provide a context for his invented Elvish languages, Quenya and Sindarin. Thus language was his deepest interest, and in this study I want to focus on Tolkien's use of language in *The Two Towers*, specifically in the discourse of the two Wizards, Gandalf and Saruman. Tolkien is very careful to differentiate the rhetorical choices of the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* [LoTR], so that, particularly in the case of Gandalf and Saruman, rhetoric is character.<sup>1</sup>

Tom Shippey is the only scholar I have come across who has commented on the language of either of these characters,<sup>2</sup> noting that Saruman's

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien was familiar with classical rhetoric and dialectic through both formal and informal study. He entered Exeter College in the fall of 1911 to read classics, and would have studied Cicero as well as Demosthenes in preparation for his "Honour Moderations"—his first exam—February 1913 (Scull and Hammond I.28). On that exam, he was asked to translate, among other things, passages from Demosthenes and Cicero's *Orations* (Scull and Hammond I.37). When he switched to reading English and specialized in medieval studies, he would have become familiar with the texts of the trivium—the study of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic that formed the curriculum of medieval universities.

But on a less formal level, Tolkien was interested in dialectic from an early age. He was an active member of the Debating Society at King Edward's School as a teenager (Carpenter, *Tolkien* 48), and at Oxford he immediately joined the Stapledon Society, Exeter College's debating organization. Further, one of the functions of the Apolausticks, the social club he organized in late 1911, was debate (Carpenter, *Tolkien* 53). Whether Tolkien applied his knowledge of classical rhetoric in his debating societies is unknown, but seems plausible.

<sup>2</sup> Nor have there been many articles that deal with Tolkien's use of rhetoric in *The Lord of the Rings*. Michael D.C. Drout has discussed the aesthetic effects of Tolkien's prose style, particularly in *The Two Towers*, in his article on "Tolkien's Prose Style." Drout does consider Tolkien's use of rhetoric in the sense of *persuasion* in his essay on "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," discussing the changes Tolkien made in revising his original lecture to be published in print form, and makes a good case for Tolkien's careful consideration of tone

use of rhetoric as Gandalf reports his speech in "The Council of Elrond" is similar to that of a modern politician. As Shippey asserts, Saruman uses the most modern-sounding language, and constantly equivocates, shifting from one view to another as he tries to persuade Gandalf to join him, ultimately resorting to abstractions that make it difficult to pin down what he means. "His message," Shippey argues, "is in any case one of compromise and calculation" (*J.R.R. Tolkien* 75), and Shippey quotes the following example of the voice of Saruman:

"We can bide our time, we can keep out thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish, hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends. There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our design, only in our means." (*LotR* II.2.253)

The word "real" may well be the key word in this passage, implying as it does a very subjective and equivocal notion of "reality" that seems far removed from its apparent synonym, "truth." Shippey sees in this speech "many of the things the modern world has learnt to dread most: the ditching of allies, the subordination of means to ends, the 'conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder'" (*The Road* 119). This is Machiavellian in the worst sense of the word, in which the end justifies the means, and it is sophistry in the way only a skilled modern politician can perform it, disguising a wrong cause in fair words. No wonder Shippey calls Saruman the "most contemporary figure in Middle-earth" (see Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien* 68-77).

It is clear that Tolkien wanted readers to focus on Saruman's use of language, since he entitles the chapter in which Saruman finally appears "The Voice of Saruman." Here, when the victorious forces of the West finally confront the beaten Saruman in his tower of Orthanc, Gandalf warns his companions that "Saruman has powers you do not guess. Beware of his voice!" (*LotR* III.10.563). While some readers have interpreted Gandalf's warning as an indication that Saruman is capable of casting a verbal spell that might hypnotize his listeners and so move them through supernatural powers, Tolkien very clearly rejected that view. In a 1958 letter to Forrest J. Ackerman concerning a proposed film treatment of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien asserted:

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and examples chosen to persuade particular audiences. It seems reasonable to assume that he would have thought of his Wizards as capable of making the same conscious decisions regarding their language.

Saruman's voice was not hypnotic but persuasive. Those who listened to him were not in danger of falling into a trance, but of agreeing with his arguments, while fully awake. It was always open to one to reject, *by free will and reason*, both his voice while speaking and its after-impressions. Saruman corrupted the reasoning powers. (*Letters* 276-277, italics in original)

It seems, then, that it is Saruman's rhetoric, rather than any magical powers, that makes him so dangerous.

This is not to say that the Wizards of Middle-earth are not powerful in other ways. Gandalf, of course, is the only one of the Fellowship of the Ring who can challenge the Balrog in Moria, and he stands alone against the Witch-king of Angbar, Lord of the Nazgûl, when all other defenders run in fear at the gates of Minas Tirith. As for Saruman, he was able to overpower and imprison Gandalf himself. Further, he has created his own race of beings, the Uruk-hai, by breeding men with Orcs, and has striven with Sauron himself through the seeing-stone, the *palantir*—a practice that ultimately seems to have led to his corruption. In effect, both Gandalf and Saruman are examples of the archetypal "wise old man" figure, like Merlin in the Arthurian legend.<sup>3</sup> Frank P. Riga has discussed how Tolkien used and transformed the Merlin legend in his characterization of Gandalf, noting how Merlin was, traditionally, an ambiguous figure whose power could be used for good or for evil. Tolkien, however, splits the traditional roles of Merlin between Gandalf and Saruman, who comes to represent "the darker aspect of the Merlin tradition" (Riga, "Gandalf and Merlin" 34).

In Tolkien's world, however, even from the beginning, the Wizards were intended to help the free peoples of Middle-earth to resist the Dark Lord through their own devices, rather than to dominate them. To give them their proper name, Gandalf and Saruman are *Istari*, which is to say angelic beings (*Maiar*—the same rank of being as Sauron himself). They were sent into Middle-

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<sup>3</sup>Aside from Merlin, another "Wise Old Man" figure that Tolkien clearly drew from in his depictions of both Gandalf and Saruman was Odin, the chief Norse god who wandered the earth as an old man with a cloak and wide-brimmed hat. Marjorie Burns has explored the influence of Odin on Tolkien's depiction of both Gandalf and Saruman (as well as Sauron and Manwë, the chief of the god-like Valar), and finds that, as with Merlin, Gandalf and Saruman display, respectively, many of the positive and negative aspects of the Norse god. Burns refers to one of Tolkien's notes from *Unfinished Tales* in which he seems to have toyed with the idea of making Gandalf the manifestation of Manwë, and Burns asserts that "Whatever else he is, Gandalf is a representative of Manwë; and when he travels through the world at Manwë's behest, dressed as Odin does, this reflects on Manwë as well" (229). This close connection with the chief Norse god—and with the chief angelic guardian of Middle-earth—strengthens Gandalf's connection with the realm of the supernaturally divine, and strengthens his role as a Christ figure discussed below.

earth by the Valar, the guardian beings, to deal specifically with the growing power of Sauron (Tolkien, *Letters* 202). In a draft of a letter to the Jesuit Robert Murray in 1954, Tolkien wrote that

At this point in the fabulous history the purpose was precisely to limit and hinder their [i.e., the Istari's] exhibition of "power" on the physical plane, and so that they should do what they were primarily sent for: train, advise, instruct, arouse the hearts and minds of those threatened by Sauron to a resistance with their own strengths; and not just to do the job for them. (*Letters* 202)

Thus both Gandalf and Saruman are required to develop their skills of persuasion, by which means they must seek to convince the various folk of Middle-earth that they are better off resisting the power of the Dark Lord than submitting to his sovereignty.

A key figure in the final struggle against Sauron is Théoden, King of the Mark of Rohan, whom Saruman has sought to neutralize through the twisted counsels of his spy, Gríma, known as Wormtongue. In effect, Théoden becomes the figure over whom Saruman and Gandalf wage a rhetorical battle, the outcome of which will decide the fate of Gondor, Rohan, and all the peoples of the West. An examination of the rhetorical strategies of the two Wizards in this contest may go far in revealing the character of each.

In his appeal to Théoden from his tower of Orthanc, Saruman uses the tools of rhetoric (*pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos*) as Aristotle had enumerated them, though in ways that Aristotle would not have recommended. There is, first, the use of *pathos*, as Saruman appeals to the emotions of the King, but the appeal is fallacious in that its intent is to win the King by flattery: "[Y]ou, Théoden, Lord of the Mark of Rohan, are declared by your noble devices, and still more by the fair countenance of the House of Eorl" (*LotR* III.10.564). Saruman follows with an *ad misericordiam* argument<sup>4</sup>—an appeal to pity, when he laments "the injuries that have been done to me, in which the men of Rohan, alas! have had some part"

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<sup>4</sup> I use the conventional Latin terms for logical fallacies in my text, rather than terms from Aristototele's Greek lexicon, since these are most commonly used today. Aristotelian logic had been preserved for Latin scholars through the translations of Boethius in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, and it was Boethius created a Latin terminology for the discussion of logic. Aristotle's chief work on logical fallacies was *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, which was made available to scholastic philosophers in Paris and Oxford in the Latin west through the intermediary of Arabic translations and commentaries in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. These medieval logicians began the expansion and refinement of Aristotle's list of informal fallacies that has continued into modern times. For a brief history of medieval philosophy, including logic, see, for example, John Marenbon's *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction*.

(III.10.565). Aside from sounding a good deal like the fellow who murdered both his parents and then appealed for clemency on the grounds that he was an orphan, this appeal is, like the earlier flattery, another fallacy of relevance. Finally, Saruman appeals to Théoden's fear and self interest: "still I would save you, and deliver you from the ruin that draws nigh inevitably, if you ride upon this road which you have taken. Indeed I alone can aid you now" (III.10.565). The words present a false dilemma: the Free Peoples must either submit to Saruman's authority or be enslaved by Sauron. This is Saruman's third fallacy.

The ending of that last appeal suggests, as well, Saruman's use of *ethos*, the second of Aristotle's tools of rhetoric: the "ethical proof" by which a speaker seeks to establish his own moral authority. "Will you have peace with me, and all the aid that my knowledge, founded in long years, can bring?" Saruman asks. "Shall we make our counsels together against evil days, and repair our injuries with such good will that our estates shall both come to fairer flower than ever before?" (III.10.565). It is difficult for Saruman to claim any moral authority when he has used those long years of knowledge to forge new tools of warfare, and when he has himself inflicted the injuries that need repairing. Saruman's ethical proof is logically unsustainable.

Yet many of Théoden's gathered supporters are moved by the Wizard's cajoling rhetoric: "The Riders stirred at first, murmuring with approval of the words of Saruman; and then they too were silent, as men spell-bound. It seemed to them that Gandalf had never spoken so fair and fittingly to their lord" (III.10.565). But the dwarf Gimli and the King's nephew Éomer see through the mendacity, and are moved to speak out against Saruman.

Responding to Éomer's charge that he deals in treachery and murder, Saruman now relies on *logos*, that is, *reason*, Aristotle's third recommended tool of rhetoric, as he speaks in his own defense:

But my lord of Rohan, am I to be called a murderer, because valiant men have fallen in battle? If you go to war, needlessly, for I did not desire it, then men will be slain. But if I am a murderer on that account, then all the House of Eorl is stained with murder; for they have fought many wars, and assailed many who defied them. Yet with some they have afterwards made peace, none the worse for being politic. I say, Théoden King: shall we have peace and friendship, you and I? It is ours to command. (III.10.566)

To summarize Saruman's construction of Éomer's charge briefly in the form of a deductive argument, he presents his version of Éomer's accusations thus:

*All those who cause the deaths of men through war are guilty of murder.  
Saruman has caused the deaths of valiant men by making war.  
Therefore, Saruman is guilty of murder.*

But Saruman has misstated Éomer's major premise: Éomer himself has waged war and doubtlessly caused the deaths of men as well as orcs in the recently-concluded battle at Helm's Deep, but seems not to view himself as a murderer. He is not likely to have said "all who make war are murderers," and most readers are likely to distinguish between offensive and defensive wars—a distinction that Saruman's formulation blurs. In his counter-argument, Saruman attacks first the minor premise: it is true that war has caused the deaths of valiant men, but the war was not Saruman's doing. Saruman wanted no war at all. In a sense this is probably true—Saruman wanted no war because he preferred to keep Théoden impotent through Gríma's false counsel. But surely in the context it is an equivocation. Saruman then slips in his own minor premise: Théoden, or Théoden's evil counselors—that is, Gandalf (whom he says he knows "too well to have much hope that he seeks help or counsel here" [III.10.564]) and Éomer (who he calls a "young serpent" [566])—have caused the deaths of these valiant men by enticing the King on to war. Saruman never states it, but the implication is that Gandalf, Éomer, and Théoden himself are the murderers, if the original syllogism holds. But those three, and the reader himself, must recognize that the problem with the argument is not with the minor premise, on which Saruman concentrates, but with the major: a defensive war is not the equivalent of murder. And Théoden is not fooled.

However having, he feels, demolished Éomer's charge, Saruman moves on to form a new argument from his newly created thesis:

*Some of those on whom the Rohirrim have made war have become useful  
allies in peace.  
Saruman is someone on whom the Rohirrim have made war.  
Therefore, Saruman will become a useful ally if the Rohirrim make peace with  
him.*

The sophistry of this argument is apparent in the conclusion, for as Saruman states in the major premise, only some alliances with former enemies have been beneficial. His argument illustrates what logicians call the fallacy of "illicit process": if a term is "distributed" (that is, applying universally to all members of a class) in the conclusion of a syllogism, then it must be distributed in the premises. Here, Saruman has said that only *some* of the Rohirrim's former enemies have become faithful allies. It cannot be stated that the Rohirrim can benefit by making peace with *everyone* they have made war on. There may be any



number of reasons why it would not be beneficial for Rohan to make peace with certain enemies, and Saruman, whose self interest and desire for dominance cannot be in Rohan's interests, is most certainly one of these kinds of enemies. Thus in this case, Saruman's deduction is invalid, whereas in the earlier argument it was the unsubstantiated generalization in his major premise that made his argument false.

Théoden finally rejects Saruman's offer of peace. Experience has enabled him to see through the flattery and to recognize that Saruman's "peace" means his desire to "rule me and mine for your own profit" (III.10.566). Smarting from Théoden's rebuke, Saruman turns his attentions to Gandalf, to whom he appeals on the basis of their kinship and old alliance as well as their shared goal of healing the world—another unconvincing use of *ethos*—and on the basis their shared superiority to men like the Riders of Rohan—another use of *pathos* in the form of flattery, coupled with an *ad hominem* argument against the Rohirrim and their allies:

Are we not both members of a high and ancient order, most excellent in Middle-earth? Our friendship would profit us both alike. Much we could still accomplish together, to heal the disorders of the world. Let us understand one another, and dismiss from thought these lesser folk! Let them wait on our decisions! For the common good I am willing to redress the past, and to receive you. (III.10.567)

In effect, the argument runs thus:

*The common good is best served when the wisest make the decisions.*

*You and I are the wisest.*

*Therefore, the common good is best served when you and I join to make the decisions.*

Calling on their common heritage as *Istari*, Saruman is this time absolutely correct in his minor premise: he and Gandalf are *Maiar*, heavenly beings whose wisdom and power are greater than any in Middle-earth save Sauron himself, and they have been sent into Middle-earth specifically to work for the common good in fomenting resistance to Sauron. His major premise, however, is completely wrong in terms of their avowed objectives. The prescribed method of operations for the *Istari* was specifically to work with those Saruman calls the "lesser folk," not to force them to obey their directives. Once again, the sophist is at work in Saruman's arguments, and Gandalf dismisses his request with no small irony, remembering his own imprisonment at Saruman's hands at their last meeting.

By contrast, Gandalf never uses rhetorical arguments, at least not in the sense that Saruman does. His speeches tend to be hortatory rather than persuasive. He imparts information and then demands action based on conclusions he considers self-evident. If he relies on traditional rhetoric at all, it is on the colors of rhetoric that Tolkien would have been familiar with through medieval treatises like Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* (ca. 1210), a text based on the classical first century Latin *Ad Herennium*, attributed to Cicero and the chief rhetorical textbook used in medieval schools. Geoffrey's text dealt with matters of style rather than persuasion (see especially Geoffrey 72-80). Thus when Gandalf exhorts Théoden to act, he first must rouse the king out of the despair into which he has sunk: "Gondor and Rohan do not stand alone. The enemy is strong beyond our reckoning, yet we have a hope at which he has not guessed" (III.6.505), he tells the King in contrasting clauses, using the figure that classical and medieval rhetoricians called *contentio*. "Doom hangs still on a thread. Yet hope there is still, if we can but stand unconquered for a little while" (III.6.505). There is some appeal to emotion here, with the exhortation that as long as there is hope they must fight. But there are also *translatio*—the metaphor of hope hanging on a thread, and *transgressio*—the transposition of words out of their normal order, in Gandalf's "hope there is still": two examples of medieval *ornatus difficilis*, the "difficult" ornaments of style. When Théoden asks Gandalf what his counsel is, the Wizard answers:

To put your trust in Éomer, rather than in a man of crooked mind. To cast aside regret and fear. To do the deed at hand. Every man that can ride should be sent west at once, as Éomer counseled you: we must first destroy the threat of Saruman, while we have time. If we fail, we fall. If we succeed—then we will face the next task. Meanwhile your people that are left, the women and the children and the old, should fly to the refuges that you have in the mountains. Were they not prepared against just such an evil day as this? (III.6.507)

Here Gandalf starts with repetitive parallel clauses beginning with infinitives, an example of *isocolon*, which also seems to be *auxesis*, the arrangement of sentences in a climactic order. He then utilizes *adnominatio*, a figure that plays on the sound and meaning of words by a slight change in the spelling, when he asserts "If we fail, we fall." Later he includes an *interrogatio* or rhetorical question ("Were they not prepared against such an evil day as this?"). Thus to say that Gandalf does not use an argumentative approach is not to say that he does not use rhetoric in the classical and medieval sense of the term as Tolkien would have understood it.

Gandalf's art of persuasion is based not on logic or argument, but on these rhetorical colors and on conclusions drawn from assumed shared values that he regards as self-evident: Life is a struggle against the forces of darkness.

As long as we are alive, we must continue the struggle even when things seem darkest. In effect, these values come from what Tolkien thought of as the Germanic heroic code—the “theory of courage, which is the great contribution of early Northern literature” that in that society meant courage in a losing cause. He found this concept expressed most completely in the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons that he studied and taught, and that he discussed most famously in his lecture on “*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*” (20). Further, Gandalf asserts as self-evident that the lives of those too weak to fight are precious—more precious than treasure—and must be protected. This is a moral precept Tolkien would have found support for in the Christian notion of the Just War, first proposed by St. Augustine of Hippo, who argued that the Church—pacifist up until his day—had an obligation to provide for the defense of those members of society (the weak, children, infants, invalids) unable to defend themselves.<sup>5</sup> But there is something else in Gandalf’s way of speaking: he does not attempt to prove his points because he knows they are self-evidently true (and as readers we *know* them to be true). We are reminded of the reaction of the crowds to Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7.28-29: “the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (RSV).

Gandalf speaks with this kind of authority, the authority reserved for a messenger of God. And this is no accident, for that is precisely what Gandalf is intended to be in *The Lord of the Rings*. I depart momentarily from my discussion of Gandalf’s language to his role because I believe that role is what prompts Tolkien to give Gandalf the kinds of speeches he does. For there is no question that Gandalf is not simply a divine messenger but even a Christ-figure.<sup>6</sup> He is,

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<sup>5</sup> In his essay “Working at the Crossroads: Tolkien, St. Augustine, and the *Beowulf*-poet,” Matthew A. Fisher concludes that Tolkien was essentially an “Augustine-Catholic,” accepting Augustine’s notion of the necessity for grace in a world where human beings fought a hopeless battle against sin in a manner paralleling the “Northern theory of courage” that applied to lost causes. There is, says Fisher, a “clear affinity between Tolkien’s thought and the theological tradition that originated with the Bishop of Hippo” (225). That tradition included Augustine’s concept of the “just war,” a theory that Thomas Aquinas later codified in the *Summa Theologica*:

Hence it is said to those who are in authority (Ps. 81:4): “Rescue the poor: and deliver the needy out of the hand of the sinner”; and for this reason Augustine says (Contra Faust. xxii, 75): “The natural order conducive to peace among mortals demands that the power to declare and counsel war should be in the hands of those who hold the supreme authority.” (ST 2.2, q. 40, art. 1)

<sup>6</sup> Frank P. Riga notes that Merlin, one of the likely sources of Tolkien’s conception of Gandalf, was an ambivalent figure in Arthurian tradition, but that in at least one major text, Robert de Boron’s early 13<sup>th</sup>-century Merlin, the mage is presented as “a Christ figure whose childhood parallels medieval legends about the childhood of Christ and whose aims

after all, a supernatural being incarnate in human form. In battle with the Balrog of Moria, where he sacrificed himself for the sake of his companions, he died and was resurrected as Gandalf the White Rider. He is tempted when Frodo offers him the Ring, but resists and rejects that talisman of power. Is there a clearer Christ-figure anywhere in literature? Since Saruman is himself a similar incarnate being, might we view him as what a supernatural being might become who fails to resist temptation? Certainly if Gandalf is a Christ figure, there is a close relationship between Saruman's mendacity and the devil, who is called the father of lies.

The divine aspects of Gandalf go even further. Gandalf has supernatural powers, demonstrated in his command of the great steed Shadowfax, in his forcing Wormtongue to grovel like a worm, and more fully in his later ability to command and cow Saruman and break his staff. But he cannot—or does not—make fire rain from the sky to destroy the Orcs at Helm's deep. His greatest strength is in his ability to lead and to persuade, as he does with Théoden. Thus while Gandalf *could* use his powers more often and more convincingly to aid the free peoples of Middle-earth, he *chooses* not to do so. Had he chosen to manifest his power without restraint, his reliance on that power may have subtly changed his will, until he could end up believing that he must do everything, and distrusting the people he has come to save. In this way he could become more like Saruman, determined that his allies are weak and that he must use his powers to shape things to his own will, to the way they should be. Indeed, from this point it is a very small step to desiring the Ring for himself. Certainly Gandalf's power is great—as great as any in Middle-earth, with the possible exception of Sauron himself. But Gandalf chooses not to use his powers except in the most dire of circumstances. Tolkien would probably have seen Gandalf as displaying what William of Ockham and other nominalist philosophers of the Middle Ages would have called his *potentia ordinata* as opposed to his *potentia absoluta*: the powers that he chose to use on the physical world as opposed to his absolute power. Of course, Ockham applied such terms to God.

But Gandalf is not God, nor is he a Christ fashioned exclusively for Middle-earth.<sup>7</sup> The orthodox Catholic Tolkien would not have created such a

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are fully reconciled with Christian teleology" ("Merlin, Prospero, Saruman and Gandalf" 198). Although Robert's heavy handed didacticism would have been quite distasteful to Tolkien, and although the precise parallels with Christ are quite different in Robert's story, Tolkien certainly would have known of the text. A direct influence seems unlikely, but certainly the Merlin tradition, including Robert's contribution, was instrumental in developing the Gandalf character.

<sup>7</sup> Verlyn Flieger has written convincingly that "There is no Christ" in Middle-earth: "Tolkien's myth has a number of saviours," she writes, but "it has no one redeemer" (12). She goes on to discuss several figures in Tolkien's legendarium, including Eärendil from

character. "The Incarnation of God is an *infinitely* greater thing than anything I would dare to write," he said in the draft of a 1956 letter to *New Republic* editor Michael Straight (*Letters* 237, italics in original). Gandalf cannot save souls; he can only help the Free Peoples of Middle-earth fight against evil in hope and faith. And although Théoden thinks that the forest that marches to Helm's Deep is the work of Gandalf, it is not. As Gandalf himself realizes, something higher is involved in the working out of events. Gandalf is not a God, but is the instrument of God. Saruman is the instrument of God who fails the test, and transforms himself instead into an instrument of evil. The "chief form" of temptation for beings like Saruman and Gandalf, according to Tolkien, must be impatience:

leading to the desire to force others to do their own good ends, and so inevitably at last to mere desire to make their own wills effective by any means. To this evil Saruman succumbed. Gandalf did not. (*Letters* 237)

We may have come a long way from the narrow topic of rhetoric at this point. But these implications are all suggested by the manner in which the two characters speak. Gandalf, with the power of certainty and of truth behind his words, may speak with authority in a style that inspires and moves men to virtuous action. Saruman, whose motives have come to include greed and power, intends by contrast to conceal the truth through his words, which in his case become a web of deceit glossed over by the appearance of truth. In our example, Théoden does indeed see through Saruman's lies, and one of the fascinating aspects of Saruman's exchange with Théoden is that Gandalf never says a word. He does not attempt to argue with Saruman, or feed Théoden a running commentary to dissuade him from accepting Saruman's words. He has told Théoden the truth. It is up to the King whether to stand firm behind the revealed truth, or be led from the path by polished words. When Théoden tells Saruman "We will have peace, when you and all your works have perished" (III.10.566), it is Gandalf's rhetoric, not Saruman's that has won. Would that it were that easy to spot the sophists in real life.

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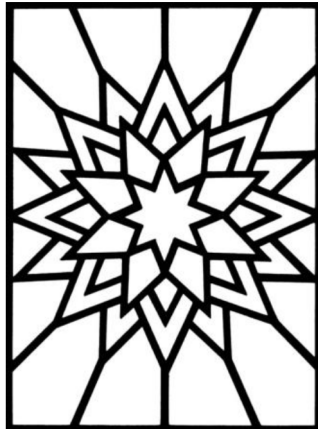
*The Silmarillion*, Aragorn, Frodo, and of course Gandalf. While each of these figures is able to save some portion of Middle-earth from evil, they do so only temporarily, Flieger argues (13). While she seems mistaken when she says that Gandalf is "wholly supernatural" and "not a mortal man" (13)—Tolkien writes in his essay on "The Istari" that they came "clad in bodies as of Men, real and not feigned, but subject to the fears and pains and weariness of earth, able to hunger and thirst and be slain" ("The Istari" 406), and Gandalf and the other *Istari* can clearly experience death, as both Gandalf and Saruman do in *The Lord of the Rings*—Flieger is quite correct in asserting that Gandalf's "function within the story is not to save, but to arouse" (13). As I argue in my paper, Gandalf's task is not to save the Free Peoples by his own actions, but rather to convince them to save themselves through their own courage and virtue.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAY RUUD is professor and Chair of the English department at the University of Central Arkansas, and was previously Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Northern State University. He has a Ph.D. in medieval literature from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and has previously published, chiefly on Chaucer and on Julian of Norwich, in journals like the *Chaucer Review*, *Mystics Quarterly*, *Modern Philology*, *Studia Mystica*, *Medieval Perspectives*, and *SMART*. He is the author of the book *"Many a Song and Many a Leccherous Lay": Tradition and Individuality in Chaucer's Lyric Poetry* (Garland, 1992) and, for Facts on File, the *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature* (2006) and the *Critical Companion to Dante* (2008). He published the article "Aslan's Sacrifice and the Doctrine of Atonement in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*." in *Mythlore* 23 (2001), and is currently working on a *Critical Companion to Tolkien*.





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