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Tolkien's Linguistic Application of the Seventh Deadly Sin: Lust

Abstract

A look at how Tolkien developed the concept of the sin of lust in Middle-earth, giving it his own unique but linguistically-based interpretation as an intensifier of other sins, rather than using its more common, purely sexual, modern interpretation.

Additional Keywords

Lust (Sin); Seven deadly sins in The Lord of the Rings; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Use of language

TOLKIEN'S LINGUISTIC APPLICATION OF THE SEVENTH DEADLY SIN: LUST

EMMA B. HAWKINS

IN A LETTER TO NAOMI DITCHISON, J.R.R. Tolkien complained that “[s]ome reviewers have called the whole thing [*The Lord of the Rings*] simple-minded, just a plain fight between Good and Evil, with all the good just good, and the bad just bad” (*Letters* 197). However, most critics realize that Tolkien’s idea of evil is far from simple-minded. On the surface, when the time comes to assign a name or an origin to the evil, it may seem simple, but evil, as a concept, is just as complex and complicated for Tolkien’s characters to deal with as it has been for people of the world from the beginning of recorded history. Tolkien himself confirms that he does “not deal in Absolute Evil,” but neither does he deal in a general, nebulous, or abstract evil (*Letters* 243). He increases reader interest by exploring evil through very specific and familiar channels, such as the Seven Deadly Sins, religious concepts that have been around since before Christian times and which were prominent in Roman Catholic theology during the Middle Ages and onwards. Moreover, whether consciously or unconsciously, Tolkien singles out one of the Seven Deadly Sins, *lust*, for a purpose that is neither ordinary, simple, nor conventional.

The Seven Deadly Sins (mortal), early confused with the Cardinal Sins (chief, capital), have a long history (Bloomfield, viii, 43). Although by the “fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” a “general merging” of the two had occurred (157) in the minds of “individual theologians” and “laymen” alike (143), “they arose, in proto-form at least, in Gnostic speculations and Hellenistic astral science, in the centuries immediately preceding and following Christ” and were frequently countered by the Seven Cardinal Virtues (xiii).¹ Varying in number, order, and name, eventually the Seven Deadly Sins were incorporated into Roman Catholic theology where the number, seven, the order, Gregorian, and the name, Cardinal Sins, “finally won out” (46, 72, 74).² Still, the classification of

¹ According to Bloomfield (66) humility, generosity, meekness, zeal, liberality, temperance and chastity, the Seven Cardinal Virtues, represent a combination of the four cardinal virtues of fortitude, prudence, temperance, and justice borrowed from Cicero and ultimately Plato, plus the three Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

² The Seven Deadly Sins are *superbia* (pride), *invidia* (envy), *ira* (anger/wrath), *acedia* (sloth), *avaritia* (avarice/greed), *gula* (gluttony), and *luxuria* (lust).

“Deadly” remained a “popular preference” and often is a “more familiar [...] designation” (viii, 43, 157). According to the Gregorian order, *luxuria* (lechery, lust) claimed the number seven position, but “there has been a tendency in modern times to advance Lust in the order” (Fairlie 34). To support his claim, Fairlie cites *Moral and Pastoral Theology* by Henry Davis, a Jesuit, in which lust is moved to third in order.³

Unlike the order, the nature of the Sins has changed very little over time. Tolkien was likely well aware of them. He was reared in the Catholic faith, received instruction from the Church, and, following his mother’s death, was guided by his guardian Father Francis Morgan. Regarding his own scholarly projects, by 1950 Tolkien had translated into modern English the medieval poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The story of Gawain focuses specifically on the insidious and destructive nature of sin, especially of some of the Seven Deadly Sins, in the life of an exemplary young knight of King Arthur’s court, one who is esteemed highly as the perfect Christian knight. In addition, Tolkien admired and studied Chaucer and the *Canterbury Tales*, which contains the “Parson’s Tale,” a lengthy and detailed examination of the Seven Deadly Sins and the virtues that can remedy them (*Letters* 39-40). Therefore, Tolkien’s studies in Old and Middle English literature, as well as his own Catholic upbringing, brought him into contact with the Seven Deadly Sins, both the medieval and the modern interpretations.

In book and article, Thomas A. Shippey has delved into the specific images via which Tolkien portrays the concept of evil. After briefly considering several sources of evil such as the One Ruling Ring (*Author* 135-36) and a couple of what he dubs “generic evil[s]” (“Orcs” 185), including orcs and wights, Shippey eventually concludes that Tolkien’s “central image of evil” is the “wraith” (*Author* xxxi). Nevertheless, the Seven Deadly Sins play a far more prevalent and foundational role in demonstrating evil. They supply motive and promote action. They provide the impetus for the corruption of many of the main characters, some more extensively than others, bringing dire consequences down on the heads of the victimizers as well as the victims.

Concerning the relation between evil and character development, Hugh Keenan claims that Tolkien “traces the perversity of his creatures—in the Shire and outside it—to their own twisted natures” (65). Seemingly, Tolkien rejects the notion that such perversity occurs simply by accident or strictly through pressure imposed from some vague, unstated exterior evil force: “I am impressed by the degree in which the development of ‘character’ *can* be a product of conscious intention, the will to modify innate tendencies in desired directions” (*Letters* 240).

³ *The Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, edited by John Macquarrie, the textbook used in my protestant seminary ethics class in the 1970s, also lists lust in the number three position.

Man cannot pretend that he is just an unsuspecting, innocent victim. Through the choices he makes, he is complicit in his own ruin, or as Tolkien so quaintly phrases it, "a man is both a seed and in some degree also a gardener, for good or ill" (240). Furthermore, the nature of the evil in Tolkien's works does not go unnamed. The Seven Deadly Sins are the means via which Tolkien most often chooses to designate and examine the process whereby human nature is ruined or twisted from within and without. In "The Sins of Middle-earth," Charles Nelson goes so far as to suggest that Tolkien may have portrayed several characters of *The Lord of the Rings* [*LotR*] as "personified figures of the [...] Seven Deadly Sins" (84).

Furthermore, based on other investigations, Shippey concludes that "Tolkien believed [...] that modern sins had ancient origins" (*Road* 180). Clearly, Tolkien's works and personal correspondence to his sons indicate a thorough understanding of their meanings and implications in the lives of men, in his own time and the ancient/medieval times depicted in *LotR*. For Tolkien, the philologist and student of words and languages, the Sins provide a specific point of reference and a familiar framework for exploring the nature of evil. In his fantasy novels, the old Sins lend a sense of credibility and reality to the medieval-like setting and the characters—hobbits, wizards, dwarfs, and elves—who are beyond the realm of normal. He makes these characters humanlike in form and nature and subject to familiar human foibles. When the natures of the *LotR* characters become twisted, they are twisted, then, not through some mysterious, outlandish, or shocking science-fiction, fantasy, or black-magic formula, but through the same ordinary corruption by sin that has twisted and perverted human nature since ancient times.

Indeed, while the Seven Deadly Sins appear early in *The Silmarillion* and continue through *The Hobbit*, they feature prominently in *LotR*. And, of the Seven Deadly Sins, lust is perhaps the most intriguing and dangerous, not as a literal sin but as a modifier of words (other sins in particular) that conveys the idea of the greatest degree of severity. In his arsenal of descriptive words and phrases, the word *lust* performs a non-traditional function—a linguistic one. Unfortunately, readers will limit their comprehension, and possibly miss the linguistic purpose for its inclusion, if they confine the interpretation of *lust* solely to the prominent contemporary definition, such as that offered by R.E.C. Browne. "Nowadays 'lust' has always a bad meaning, that of uncontrolled sexual passion seen and understood only in terms of its physical expression" (Macquarrie 200).

Although her initial judgment about the nature of lust echoes Browne's, Dorothy L. Sayers also offers another opinion, one more in harmony with Tolkien's view. In "The Other Six Deadly Sins," Sayers treats *luxuria* first, giving it short shrift and only two of twenty-two pages. In a single sentence of this brief but witty explication, she argues that the increase in popularity of lust in the

twentieth century “may have its root cause not in luxuria at all, but in some other of the sins of society” (159). Tolkien does not usually employ lust as a designator of the strong or unbridled sexual passion that the word currently and prominently denotes. Instead, he links it to “some other sins” in order to connote the utmost measure of those other sins. For Tolkien, *lust* serves as the adjectival suffix *-est*, a double comparative, a superlative of sorts, a marker/indicator of magnification to suggest the extreme degree of some other sin, much like the grammatically awkward phrase “most strongest” anger = angriest.

With the exception of lust, Tolkien’s characters are generally tempted by the traditional interpretation of the Seven Deadly Sins. As for the sin of lust specifically, only once or twice in *LotR* are sexual implications called to mind. In the clearest reference, Gandalf accuses Wormtongue of selling out to Saruman in hopes of possessing the woman he desires and whose steps he has haunted—Éowyn. In this one instance where lust could have been appropriately employed, lust is not even named, just strongly implied (520). Gandalf applies the word “desire,” prompting Nelson to concisely sum up Tolkien’s coverage as a “sketchy treatment” that focuses not so much on the sin as on Wormtongue’s refusal to repent (92). If readers accept Brenda Partridge’s feminist reading of the ninth chapter of Book Four, Frodo and Sam are victims of Shelob’s sexual lust. On a figurative level and using “traditional images” and “symbolism,” in the episode involving Frodo, Sam, and Shelob in the tunnel of Torech Ungol, Partridge sees “underlying sexual overtones” (188) that point to a “violent sexual struggle between man and woman” (190). The male hobbits are, at times, overwhelmed (raped) by the female (190).

However, the word *lust* actually appears in *LotR* and Tolkien’s other works. In the instances when *lust* does appear in print, it deviates from the expected sexual association—uncontrolled sexual passion, rape, infidelity, promiscuity, or sexual perversion. Instead, Tolkien’s interpretation of lust is a bit like, but by no means synonymous with, greed or strong desire. It echoes an older, Middle-English meaning. Per the *OED*, the earliest literary references from the years 888 and 900 employ lust to signify pleasure or desire. Not until approximately 1000 was lust equated with sensuous or sexual desires and often linked to sin. In his own works, Tolkien seldom alludes to the older meaning alone nor does he use greed and lust interchangeably. Distinctly and separately he refers to the strong desire to possess things, especially concrete, material objects, as greed. But, just as the interpretation of lust is inadequate if confined to sexual parameters, so, too, an interpretation of lust as desire, even strong desire, is also insufficient. When lust is introduced, it suggests a peculiarly Tolkienian bent and intent. “Lust” implies that not only is there a tremendously strong desire for some thing, but, regardless of whatever is desired, abstract as often as concrete, the level of desire surpasses the limitation of strong, careens over the

edge of ultimate, and soars to the heights of above all else. In other words, it is inordinate, overwhelming, overmastering in nature.

In Peter Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the elf queen Galadriel voices a sentiment that quite appropriately captures Tolkien's interpretation of *lust*. In offering a brief history of the Rings of Power, Galadriel explains that men were given nine rings which they promptly misused because "above all else" they desired power (Scene 1: Prologue). Actually, Galadriel's speech consists mostly of a conglomeration of information supplied to Frodo by Gandalf in the book in the chapter "The Shadow of the Past," except she supplies the motive. Wanting something "above all else" seems to encapsulate the idea that Tolkien, the philologist, is trying to convey when he employs the word *lust*. It serves more as an adjective than a noun, is used in relation to some other sin (including greed), and functions as a sign of magnification or accentuation. Whenever the word *lust* is employed, it confirms that self-control has slipped or been entirely relinquished, and the sinner has been mastered by some other sin. *Lust* connotes a level or degree of intensity that surpasses the normal bounds of a sin and serves as a marker to indicate that some sin other than lust has come to dominate the sinner's thoughts and actions.

Many of Tolkien's characters are subjected to and subjugated by excessive sinful tendencies. When a sin grows so powerful that it virtually consumes or destroys the character, then Tolkien applies *lust* as an adjectival signifier of the quality or extent of the desire/sin and the severity of the twisting of nature that has occurred. For example, early in Book V, after having already experienced the devastation inflicted by Saruman's orcs on his own land and people, Éomer realizes that the forces of Mordor are equally intent upon destroying Gondor. They are "lusting to destroy Gondor and throw it down stone from stone" (V.5.816). Here, lust could be interpreted as merely strong desire, but, when the desire to kill and destroy is so extreme that the orcs aim to tear down Gondor completely, not leaving one stone upon another, "strong" just is not adequate to capture the extent of the malevolence of the intent.

In several other cases, lust is associated with exorbitant wrath or anger. During the battle on the Pelennor Fields, the armies of Mordor are "filled" with "lust and fury" (V.6.829) when the arrival of the ships of the Corsairs of Umbar reinforces the expectation of victory. They have already inflicted such extensive damage that the "last hope" of the armies fighting for Gondor "has left them" (828). Modified by *lust*, the fury of the Mordor army carries it beyond all expectations, even strong ones. Similarly, when Éomer realizes that the ships do not contain the Corsairs of Umbar but, instead, Aragorn and the army from the Paths of the Dead, the "lust of battle" seizes him (829). Again, an interpretation of strong desire does not suffice. Éomer takes on aspects of the *berserker*, laughing at despair and in the face of death and fighting beyond normal human limitations.

His mood is “stern,” and he intends “to fight there on foot till all [fall], and do deeds of song [...], though no man should be left [...] to remember” (829). However, in addition to these very limited explorations of lust as a modifier, Tolkien singles out three sins for lengthier examination and special modification by the signifier *lust*: gluttony, greed, and pride.

Gluttony, visually the most thoroughly disgusting Sin to distinguish any of the evil creatures in *LotR*, receives the least attention. Only in the character of the horrifyingly grotesque Shelob is the extreme side of gluttony explored. In Shelob, gluttony grows so powerful that Tolkien finally applies his special adjectival modifier *lust*, and in so doing verifies that gluttony has twisted the nature of the monster spider to the utmost possible, until she is totally depraved. Over time and with some encouragement from Sauron, Shelob grows to epitomize gluttony. Tolkien describes her “huge swollen body” (IV.9.709) as having grown “bloated” (709, 707) and “fat” (707) with drinking the blood and eating the flesh of other living beings. What is more, she will continue gorging until she is so “swollen” the mountains will no longer be able to “hold her up” (707). In the non-food realm, she only desires death for others and “for herself a glut of life” (709). Michael Stanton labels Shelob’s constant desire to consume the lives of others as “greed,” but since her target is edible and living beings as a food source, primarily it constitutes gluttony, and cannibalism to boot (69). For Jane Chance Nitzsche, by demanding “that others bring her food,” Shelob adds the sin of sloth to her repertoire (93). Still, the basic sin is gluttony, not greed or sloth. Ironically, when readers first meet her, the misshapen Shelob already figuratively represents gluttony; she serves as a hideous symbol of the very sin she practices to excess.

On the two occasions in *LotR* when Tolkien applies the word *lust* in association with Shelob’s gluttony, it carries no sexual implication. True, the monster spider has previously slain and presumably eaten her own offspring, the culmination of the sexual procreation cycle, but the act of cannibalizing her own descendants and mate is the primary focus. Having eaten her own family members, for some time she has delighted in feasting on the prisoners that Sauron sends her way. Although she prefers Elves and Men as the main course, if the food supply is scarce she will accept less tasty fare, even nasty Orcs. By applying his modifier *lust*, Tolkien emphasizes that *none* of this food quenches Shelob’s insatiable appetite. Her gluttony is magnified. Her appetite knows no bounds; she is obsessed with food; she has been mastered by the desire to consume other living beings. She has savored every type of meat available, yet “she lusted for sweeter meat” (IV.9.708). Tolkien clearly differentiates Shelob’s lust from Gollum’s: “Her lust was not his lust” (707); instead, Gollum’s lust accommodates Shelob’s lust. To alleviate his own overwhelming desire to regain

the Ring, Gollum offers to satiate Shelob's extreme desire for a new and tasty menu delight—Frodo, the Ring-bearer and ultimate entrée.

A more prominent sin, Greed, affects men, wizards, Ents, and dwarfs alike, and in *LotR* the most destructive greed focuses primarily on either material possessions or the power to control others. In contrast to Shippey, Paul Kocher argues that Tolkien's personal philosophy for living in society as well as his philosophy of evil focuses on greed, the human desire to possess/hoard people and things as "property" (66), concluding that greed is "at the core of all the evil underlying the War of the Ring" (24). Tolkien generally handles greed seriously. On only one occasion in *LotR* does he deal with greed in a humorous manner. After Frodo arrives at Crickhollow with a basket of mushrooms and his hobbit friends are anxiously awaiting their portion, Frodo teasingly exclaims, "Take your greedy hands away, and I'll serve them." The narrator joins in the joke by pointing out that the hobbit passion for mushrooms surpasses "even the greediest likings of Big People" (I.5.100). In all other instances, greed is portrayed as a serious defect that incurs the most destructive consequences.

More often than not, greed provokes more heinous crimes, those involving physical violence and murder. Greed for the Ring is definitely the source of Gollum's crimes and ruination and eventually colludes with a second sin, wrath/anger. Patricia Spacks dubs the motive for Gollum's treachery as "lust" for the Ring (94). Since Gollum is ravaged by the desire to possess the Ring, he condones lies, deceit, betrayal and even murder in the inventory of evil deeds he will commit in order to repossess it. Indeed, his initial violent act occurs within a few minutes of his having first seen the Ring. Almost immediately he falls under its malevolent influence and strangles Déagol, the hobbit friend who had just discovered the Ring on the muddy river bottom. Sixty years after the loss of the Ring to Bilbo, obsessive desire (lust) compels Gollum to follow the nine companions of the Ring on a perilous journey into the heart of the Mines of Moria, pursue Frodo to the very edge of the Crack of Doom, and literally bite off the hobbit's finger. Eventually, he becomes "scarcely more than the shadow of a living thing, a creature [...] wholly ruined and defeated, [...] filled with a hideous lust and rage" (VI.3.922). Verlyn Flieger describes Gollum as the "twisted, broken outcast hobbit" whose "dragonlike greed" destroys him (57). In both Gollum and Frodo, the "growing, overpowering desire for the Ring [...] becomes all-consuming and sweeps [them] away" (59).

For Gollum, the sweeping away is permanent and fatal. After much suffering and frustration, he finally regains possession of the "Precious," but only for a few moments before it betrays him to death in the fires of Mount Doom. Early in the first book of *LotR*, Gandalf succinctly summarizes the process of corruption that Gollum has experienced: the Ring "devoured" Gollum, and when it could make "no further use" of him, it abandoned him to death (I.2.54).

Fortunately for Frodo, the sweeping away is less thorough, and with the unintentional but saving aid of Gollum, he manages to survive. True, his hand is forever mutilated and his spirit is seriously wounded, but he is still among the living. More importantly, he has hope. To Frodo, Arwen offers passage to the Grey Havens in her stead. There, in the West, Frodo may remain “until all [his] wounds and weariness are healed” (VI.6.953).

Likewise, excessive greed for *mithril* (true-silver) and gold corrupts and brings doom to the dwarfs. Greed found them early, and they were powerless to control it. According to *The Silmarillion*, eventually “wrath and an overmastering greed of gold” spurred the dwarfs to kill the King of Doriath (288-89). Their “lust” for the Silmarils overpowered their sound judgment and “was kindled to rage” and murder (233). Again, Tolkien stresses the extent of corruption by modifying greed with the word *lust*. As Appendix A of *LotR* explicitly confirms, the power of the Seven Rings given to the dwarf lords in *The Silmarillion* was compounded by the malevolent power of the one Ring of Power to “inflame their hearts with a greed of gold and precious things, so that if they lacked them all other good things seemed profitless, and they were filled with wrath and desire for vengeance on all who deprived them” (App.A.1051). The dwarfs’ greed consumed and destroyed not only others, but eventually the dwarfs themselves. Mining for *mithril* “was their destruction: they delved too greedily and too deep, and disturbed [...] Durin’s Bane” (II.4.309). The Balrog not only destroys the dwarfs, but later kills Gandalf. Notwithstanding, at least one dwarf will escape the curse of his race—Gimli. Lady Galadriel predicts that his “hands shall flow with gold, and yet over [him] gold shall have no dominion” (II.8.367).

If uncontrolled greed were not destructive enough when it alone incites hatred and violence, if it partners with Pride, another popular sin in Tolkien’s grab bag, and is aimed at securing power, it can threaten the very existence of Middle-earth. W. H. Auden suggests that those who “are avid for power” tend to be more devoid of the physical weaknesses of “gluttony, sexual lust, and sloth” because these weaknesses might “interfere with their ambition” (141). Saruman and Sauron are prime examples. In all of Tolkien’s works, these two old hate-mongers and war-wranglers stand out as procurers of evil. They are representatives of greed and pride combining to twist the nature of living beings, including themselves. Both are overly proud and greedy and for the same thing. If they can secure the One Ring, they will be able to exert absolute control over all Middle-earth: over peoples, creatures, plants, and even the environment. And the appearance of the word *lust* informs readers of the extent—to the utmost.

Early in *LotR*, Gandalf informs Frodo that Saruman’s “knowledge is deep, but his pride has grown with it” (I.2.47). Saruman’s pride, and the arrogance and disdain it engenders, convinces him that he alone is capable of utterly controlling and dictating the lives of things, even the wizards of his own

order (especially Gandalf), and members of the natural world, such as Ents, birds and animals. Once Saruman learns that Gandalf knows of the whereabouts of the Ring, he unmask himself and openly declares his greed. To Gandalf he cries, "We must have power, power to order all things as we will, for the good which only the Wise [of which he certainly thinks he is a member, if not the leader] can see" and "as the Power grows [...] you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it" (II.2.252-53).

In quick succession, Tolkien twice adds his superlative modifier, his linguistic stamp of supreme excess. As Saruman is making an appeal for Gandalf's alliance, "a lust" which he cannot conceal suddenly shines "in his eyes" (253). Similarly, at the Council of Elrond, Glorfindel suggests that at an earlier council meeting Saruman must have begun "to lust" for the Ring for himself and has been working diligently ever since to secure it (259). Above all else, Saruman is determined to gain possession of the Ruling Ring. Like Gollum, Saruman pays a high price for allowing his lust to undermine his self-control and master him. He forfeits his own soul, as implied in the chapter "Scouring of the Shire." "About the body of Saruman a grey mist gathered [...] like smoke from a fire," and "for a moment it wavered, looking to the West; but out of the West came a cold wind, and it bent away, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing" (VI.8.997).

Also like Gollum, Saruman goes to any length to possess the Ring. He does not hesitate to kill, imprison, torture, or even tamper with the natural order of living things (crossbreeding races). In an unplaced marginal note in *Unfinished Tales*, Tolkien notes that Saruman's integrity has "been undermined by purely personal pride and lust for the domination of his own will." His pride convinces him that he and Sauron are probably the only two who are strong enough to wield the power that the Ring bestows "in defiance of any other will," and, thus, he must ensure that he gains possession of it before Sauron does (413n14). Not only is Saruman diagnosed with having too much pride and greed, but in the above description Tolkien again applies the special adjectival modifier *lust* to emphasize the degree to which Saruman has subjugated his will to his desire. He has been mastered and enslaved. His pride justifies his intent to dominate the whole world, and his obsessive greed centers on the means of accomplishing that goal. There is no limit to the evil he devises and commits in order to obtain the prize he values more than his own being. His conscience and actions are not tempered by any moderating influence. His overwhelming, passionate desire (*lust*) to totally control others devours him, and in the end he loses himself.

As evil as he is, Saruman must take second place to Sauron, the most powerful of Tolkien's villains. Greater than mortal man—"a spirit, a minor one but still an 'angelic spirit'"—Sauron displays perhaps the most destructive pride and greed (*Letters* 259). From his creation, Sauron was never satisfied with his

own limited powers. He was filled with envy of the Creator's power to create; disdain for all the other "godlike" Valar; and hatred of the elves, the favored ones who had resisted his dominance for so long (*Silmarillion* 301). His desire for power completely consumes him. Over time, Sauron's pride in his ability to thwart the plans of the Creator and subvert the works of the other Valar increases until his "lust and pride" knows "no bounds." He is determined to "make himself master of all things in Middle-earth" (289). Once more, Tolkien uses *lust* in relation to another sin, pride, and no sexual innuendo is suggested. In Sauron's case, as in Saruman's, *lust* emphasizes the lengths to which Sauron's pride and desire for power have driven him. At whatever cost, he intends to regain possession of the Ring he lost years earlier and re-establish his rule on Middle-earth.

In *LotR* the powerful warriors for good, Gandalf, Elrond, Galadriel and Aragorn, are certainly cognizant that "the only measure that [Sauron] knows is desire, desire for power" (II.2.262). In response to Auden's review of *LotR*, Tolkien comments that Sauron "went further than human tyrants in pride and the lust for domination" (*Letters* 243). Note that Tolkien applies the *lust* phrase, "lust for domination," to Sauron, as he does to Saruman, and with the same intention: to accentuate the nature and extent of the consumption of self by the overpowering desire to control others. Sauron's ultimate goal is to become a "God-King," to be more powerful than his own creator (243). In another letter Tolkien informs Milton Waldman that Sauron evolved into "a thing lusting for Complete Power" during the Second Age (151). Just as it does to Saruman, the unquenchable desire for power to exercise total control brings destruction to Sauron. His nature is twisted through and through and predictably so.

Gandalf warns the members of Aragorn's confederation that their sole hope for victory rests in their offering themselves as bait, thereby tempting Sauron to call out his remaining strength and forces "in hope and in greed" of crushing them in a final confrontation (*LotR* V.9.862). Only in their willingness to sacrifice themselves to Sauron's lustful, overmastering desire to achieve salvation for others, and with considerable help from Frodo, do the members of the alliance finally succeed in countering Sauron's greed and evil. Indeed, Gandalf knows the enemy well. The members must turn Sauron's all-consuming lust to control upon himself. Together they must confront Sauron's driving pride and overconfidence; they must play on his major weakness, doubt; and they must attack from his blind side, ignorance. Too late, Sauron learns that they intend to destroy the Ring, and, in turn, him. They succeed.

In *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien creates a new history and a new world with new countries, new languages, and new races. But the Evil is familiar. More often than not, the weaknesses and shortcomings that Tolkien's characters must either rise above or to which they succumb are the Seven Deadly Sins. In a

fantasy world, Tolkien relies upon these familiar Seven to provide a structure or skeleton for examining Evil and its devastating consequences to self, others, and the world. Basically, Tolkien follows the standard definitions of the Sins, with the exception of lust. Lust, he tweaks a bit and, in so doing, no doubt fulfills a pleasure he mentions in a letter to Father Murray. "[B]eing a philologist" he loved word-play and admitted that he derived much "aesthetic pleasure [...] from the *form* of words (and especially from the *fresh* association of word-form with word-sense)" (*Letters* 172). To lust, he assigned a new, a supportive role, a *fresh* association. If used in conjunction with another sin, *lust* fulfills a fresh linguistic function. It serves as a signal of magnification that focuses attention on the intensity or severity of that other sin, confirming the ultimate twisting of human nature by sin.

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