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Tolkien and Dogs, Just Dogs: in Metaphor and Simile

Abstract

Examines dogs in Tolkien's fiction; not just the actual dogs that appear in a wide range of his works, but also the use of dog-imagery in simile, metaphor, and character description, particularly the complex pattern of references and allusions Tolkien uses in the depictions of Sam, Gollum, and Wormtongue.

Additional Keywords

Dogs in J.R.R. Tolkien; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characterization—Technique; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Gollum; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Sam Gamgee; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Wormtongue

TOLKIEN AND DOGS, JUST DOGS: IN METAPHOR AND SIMILE

ECODDA HAWKINS

ONE CRITIC OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN, Sandra Miesel, concludes that the “identification of prototypes and analogies is, at best, a limited accomplishment” (43). And so it is with one of Tolkien's simple and favorite subjects—dogs. In a make-believe world, time, and place filled with fantastic creatures (some supernatural, some just plain bizarre), Tolkien depends on dogs to achieve a variety of literary goals. Dogs certainly appear as real dogs in the novels, but they also provide a basis for numerous analogies, both metaphor and simile. Understanding how extensively and for what explicit purpose(s) Tolkien employs dog references in *The Lord of the Rings*, perhaps the greatest fantasy-fiction work of the twentieth-century, will not only increase the appeal of the work and foster a greater appreciation of the author's writing skills, but will also allow readers to more easily grasp Tolkien's intent. Aware of the familiarity with and affection for dogs on the part of the people of the Middle Ages, as well as of his own contemporary reading audience, not to mention of himself and his children, Tolkien alludes to dogs several times. They help make a very long, grandiose six-book novel more palatable.

Dogs play both literal and figurative roles. Literally, they open and close the story, thereby focusing reader-attention on the ordinary, everyday life in the rural communities of the Shire and Bree. Though dogs have only a minor physical presence in the medieval-like setting of *The Lord of the Rings*, they usher hobbits and readers alike into and back from the fantastical splendors of Rivendell and Lóthlorien, lands of the Elves; and of Rohan and Gondor, lands of the horse-lords and kings of old. The juxtaposition of one of the lowliest and most commonplace creatures of everyday life against the fantastic, “outlandish” (*The Lord of the Rings* [LotR] I.1.24), “strange” and “queer” (I.2.43) denizens of a fictional world grounds readers in the mundane setting from which Frodo and Sam depart and to which they gratefully return. However, in the hands of Tolkien, the language-*meister*, figurative language involving dogs accomplishes much more.

Library shelves are filled with books that explore the major themes, mythological and legendary sources, nature and purposes of the supernatural and non-human creatures, geographical and chronological settings, and linguistic/language peculiarities in Tolkien's works. Likewise, whether derived from mythology, legend, or real life, or intended for simple or complex purposes, Tolkien's symbols and imagery have attracted numerous scholars. Regarding the sources of and purposes for the particular subjects that Tolkien converts into imagery, Thomas A. Shippey argues that Tolkien reserves "greatest weight and longest consideration to single poems, tales, phrases, [and] images," to aid in the "portrayals" of individuals as well as "whole races and species," including the elves and dwarves (*Road* 48). Based on his own analysis of various images that appear specifically in *The Lord of the Rings*, Shippey focuses on the wraith, claiming that it functions as a "central image of evil" (*Author* xxxi). In another work he notes that the shadow also reflects "a distinctive image of evil" (*Road* 111).¹

While a great deal of attention has been showered on Tolkien's mythological and legendary prototypes and allusions, the objects derived from everyday, mundane life have drawn far less attention. Notwithstanding, a few critics have examined some of these ordinary objects. For example, Paul Kocher suggests that in Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories" and the short story "Leaf by Niggle," both the leaf and the tree are used "figuratively" to refer to literary concerns such as the creation of "human wonder" or a "single story" in a writer's portfolio (162). David and Carol Stevens are convinced that in *The Hobbit* the lowly pocket handkerchief is a "recurring motif" or a "prosaic element" that creates a sense of reality and "tie[s] the action of the story to the here-and-now" (62). By these standards, Galadriel's gift of a box of earth to Sam would serve the same purpose (*LotR* II.8.366). Dogs have barely received any attention. Robert Foster's *Complete Guide to Middle-earth* contains no entries for dogs or hounds. David Day's *A Tolkien Bestiary*, which lists and briefly describes many of Tolkien's creatures, does include wolfhounds, particularly Huan, the greatest of wolfhounds that played a part in the story of the Silmarils (270). Still, since the book is a bestiary, coverage of any given animal must be severely curtailed. Thus, the description of the wolfhound is limited to a single-page entry, and plain, common dogs are not considered at all.

¹ In addition to the works by Sandra Miesel and T.A. Shippey, for further investigation of Tolkien's use of archetypes, figurative language, imagery and symbols, readers may consult *The Song of Middle-earth: J.R.R. Tolkien's Themes, Symbols and Myths* by David Harvey; *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances*, edited by George Clark and Daniel Timmons; *The Mythology of Middle Earth* by Ruth S. Noel; or Patrick Grant's "Tolkien: Archetypes and Word" in *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives* edited by Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbaro.

Dogs initially make an appearance in Tolkien's earliest works. For instance, the most extensive and glorious coverage for any dog in Tolkien's repertoire is reserved for Huan. Huan is the supernatural wolfhound given to Celegorm, a Deep Elf (Noldor), by one of the Valar. This amazing wonder-hound was born in the Blessed Realm, not in Middle-earth. His "sight and scent" are so sharp that "nothing could escape" his detection; he does not require sleep; he is impervious to evil charms/spells; he possesses the ability to understand the speech "of all things with voice"; he is capable of devising secret, stealthy plans; and, upon three occasions, he is granted the ability to speak human speech (*Silmarillion* 173). Although Huan himself is mortally wounded in the battle, his greatest feat is the killing of Carcharoth, Morgoth's supernatural wolf. Without doubt, Huan is Tolkien's masterpiece, heroic dog. No other dog in Tolkien's works, including *The Lord of the Rings*, ever surpasses Huan in abilities or deeds.

In contrast to Huan the super dog, Tolkien also creates a number of other more typical dogs in his poetry and short stories, dogs that demonstrate lovable canine-natures and engage in affectionate, playful behaviors, rather than aggressive, ferocious behaviors. For example, in "The Man in the Moon Stayed up Too Late," a poem included in the collection entitled *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, an unnamed dog owned by the landlord of a merry old inn displays the disposition of a common, friendly, affectionate, happy dog. The innkeeper's delightful little dog is "fond of jokes" (31), laughs "until he chokes," (31) and upon occasion, playfully chases "his tail" (32).

The quite ordinary dogs in *Mr. Bliss* belong to the Dorkins family and are three in number, provided that Tolkien's hand-drawn sketches are accurate (21). These dogs live in a yard with gates; take a ride in Mr. Bliss's bright yellow motor-car because they cannot "be trusted not to go off after rabbits" (25); chase bears out of the family garden (27); and smell, snuffle, and track bears in the Three Bears Wood (28, 30). If confronted by a frightful adversary such as "bogies, or ghosts, or goblins," or the bears painted with iridescent paint to resemble "enormous glowworms" (30), the dogs respond much like Mr. Maggot's dog Grip or the dogs of Bree when the Black Riders appear in *The Lord of the Rings*. Grip lets "out a yelp," puts "down his tail," and bolts off "howling" (I.4.92). Similarly, the Dorkins' dogs issue "dreadful howls" of fear and run away "with their tails between their legs and their hair on end" (*Mr. Bliss* 29). And, based on the narrator's claims, they are also capable of doing a bit of thinking and missing their "nice comfy kennels" (27).

In the early days of Britain as depicted in *Farmer Giles of Ham*, when giants and dragons still roamed the land, the dog belonging to Farmer Giles plays the conventional role of man's faithful and loyal friend. This dog is assigned a proper name—Garm—and demonstrates typical doglike behavior: he barks, howls, and walks on four legs. On the other hand, he is also un-ordinary.

Like a fairy-tale dog, he can talk the “vernacular” (otherwise known as the “vulgar tongue”), “as could most dogs of his day”; bully, brag, and wheedle (9); and turn “somersaults” like a circus dog that has received a bit of training (67). Dylan Pugh thinks that the name *Garm* most likely derives from the Welsh language and means “a shout or cry” (17). Indeed, from his post near the master’s window, he does raise the alarm, similar to Maggot’s dogs in *The Lord of the Rings*. Since he is such a “special dog,” Pugh concludes that his incorporation into the story suggests that Farmer Giles is not ordinary either. He is “a truly Celtic hero awaiting the call to action,” a cry of alarm from Garm (18).

The most lovable and personable of Tolkien’s dogs is Rover/Roverandom of the children’s book *Roverandom*. According to Christina Scull, the editor of the posthumous edition of *Roverandom*, Tolkien probably composed this story to comfort his “heartbroken” son Michael (ix). On a family vacation at Filey near the sea and beach, Michael had lost his favorite toy dog, one “made of lead and painted black and white”(ix). In the story, this frisky, silly pup also has a proper name (3, 23). Coincidentally, he belongs to a grandmother and/or little boy called Two and is inadvertently lost on the beach, just like Michael Tolkien’s little toy dog. One day Rover bites and rips the trouser leg of a gruff old Wizard (a Gandalf-like character) who refuses to return his ball and must suffer the consequences of such rash behavior (3). The little “idiot” is shrunk to toy size (4). Afterwards, he experiences a multitude of exciting and dangerous adventures and has a “great deal of fun” (29). First, the “tiny tot” (24) is carried to the moon by a gull, meets the Man-in-the-Moon and his supernatural moon dog, is renamed Roverandom, grows wings, gets lost, and is chased and gets his tail “singed” by the Great White Dragon (35). Next, Roverandom meets a second supernatural dog, a mer-dog; causes a shark to bite the tail of the giant Sea-serpent (76); and rides on a whale’s back all the way home. Finally, the pup is restored to his normal size by the Wizard, Artaxerxes; rejoins his original human family (85); grows “to be very wise”; and enjoys “an immense local reputation,” much as Sam does after he returns home to the Shire (89).

In *The Hobbit* dogs fulfill more of a fairy-tale role than a realistic one. They are personified to perform human-like chores that require hands that can clutch and/or carry and the ability to stand upright. In the house of Beorn, himself a magical creature and a shape-shifter, “large long-bodied grey dogs” converse in a strange language of “animal noises”; stand and walk erect on their hind legs; light torches from the fire in the fireplace, and carry and insert them into wall brackets on pillars; carry things with their forefeet; and set bowls, platters and knives and spoons on the table after having first “got out” and “set up” boards and trestles to serve as tables (VII:135-36). Obviously, Beorn’s dogs are far from ordinary, but their behavior, which is so uncharacteristic of dogs, more closely resembles that of house servants who wait on guests than of heroic

and ferocious watch- or guard-dogs. No fierce barking, no biting, no ripping to pieces.

All the dogs and dog imagery in *The Lord of the Rings* exemplify behavior and traits that are attributed to plain, ordinary dogs, with no magical features at all. Tolkien depends on just ordinary dogs to serve several different literary functions. One of the simplest functions is to emphasize the “surpassing ordinariness” of hobbit life (Stanton 22). In this role, dogs literally show up three times, and each time they display behavior typical of large dogs of medieval times as well as contemporary life: they act as guard- or watch-dogs. In Book One, Pippin warns Sam and Merry that Farmer Maggot of Buckland keeps ferocious dogs in order to protect his family and property from thieves and trespassers. The three dogs, appropriately named Grip, Fang and Wolf, are quite capable of frightening outsiders; they certainly terrify Frodo (*LotR* I.4.90). Huge, wolfish and snarling, the dogs bark fiercely at all strangers, except the Black Rider in whose presence they quail, yelping in fear, tucking their tails, and bolting away howling (I.4.92).

In spite of the occasional lapse in courage, the dogs belonging to the Maggots are held in fairly high esteem. They have been given proper names, and the family treats them as valued pets. The dogs are allowed to remain indoors, in the homey kitchen, in front of the fire even, where they contentedly chew and chomp their snacks while family members, hired hands, and guests eat supper (*LotR* I.4.93). Much like the handkerchief mentioned earlier in *The Hobbit*, the dogs of the Shire and Bree, their genuine dog behavior, and the familial affection for them as pets lend a sense of credibility, ordinariness, and normalcy to a scene in which hobbits (a fictional race) are pursued by Black Riders (supernatural and deadly foes) because one of the hobbits possesses a ring (powerful, evil and full of black magic) that will render the owner invisible should he put it on.

For a second time in *LotR*, real dogs are mentioned, though briefly, in a single line, by Barliman Butterbur, proprietor of The Prancing Pony Inn in Bree. As a precursor to the terror that occurs that very night, Butterbur informs his hobbit guests that earlier in the week a Black Rider had arrived in Bree inquiring about a hobbit named Baggins. Within minutes, the menacing horseman had succeeded in disrupting the peaceful daily routine of the farming community, setting all the dogs to “yammering” and the geese to “screaming,” realistic reactions of animals and fowl that are suddenly startled or frightened (I.10.165). Even though dogs are not actually present, in a conversation with Gandalf, Frodo expresses the same sentiments as Butterbur except he elaborates a bit. Not only did “dogs howl” and “geese scream” in fear when the Black Horses and Riders were in Bree, but even “the elf-horse of Glorfindel” at the Ford of Bruinen, is terrified of them (I.12.208).

Then, no more dogs until Book Six, in the next to last chapter entitled “The Scouring of the Shire.” Tolkien brings hobbit heroes and readers home from an exhausting journey filled with dangerous adventures, fantastic kingdoms and peoples, and mortal peril, to the homely Shire, only to find it all but destroyed by a vengeful wizard, the Chief/Saruman, and his gang of murdering ruffians. As soon as Sam rides off to rouse Farmer Cotton and neighboring hobbits, dogs are mentioned for the third and final time. Again they act as watch-dogs to warn residents of strangers/intruders, and Tolkien merely notes that “dogs barked” (VI.8.984). The dogs exhibit a canine response that is customary under ordinary circumstances and that probably would occur in almost any humble and rustic farming community. Tolkien’s attention to the common and mundane is not accidental. In a letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien mentions that in dealing with recurrent themes such as “world politics” (Tolkien’s emphasis), he often focuses on the “small,” the “ungreat” and the “ordinary,” all of which could apply to the dogs of the pastoral Shire (*Letters* 160).

Besides helping to create a realistic setting, episodes involving real dogs also introduce and establish a foundation for the forthcoming and more extensive figurative application of dogs. As a literary device for plot-development, Tolkien relies on dog imagery to escalate conflict. For example, in close proximity, Éomer and Saruman, both of whom are filled with anger and hatred, verbally spar with one another via dog references. Before the tower of Orthanc where Saruman sues for peace with Théoden after having betrayed him almost to the death, Éomer interrupts the parley to insult and demean the disenfranchised wizard. The young warrior calls the conniving wizard an “old liar with honey on his forked tongue” who behaves like a dangerous “trapped wolf” trying to convince “the hounds” to give up the hunt (III.10.565). The hounds are Gandalf, Aragorn, Théoden and Éomer himself, of course. These wily hounds will not be tricked by the dissembling, vicious old wolf. Venting some of his own anger, Théoden further provokes Saruman by promising to make peace only after Saruman is hanged “from a gibbet [...] for the sport of [his] own crows” (III.10.566). In a fit of rage that all but renders him slaving, Saruman retaliates with the only weapon left in his arsenal—*words*. Hoping to humiliate the king, he calls the royal house, Meduseld, a “thatched barn where brigands [the king’s mighty warriors] drink in the reek” and the noble children, the “brats[,] roll on the floor among the dogs” (III.10.567).

Just as Tolkien employs figures of speech involving dogs to promote tension, so, too, does he use them for the opposite purpose—to relieve tension. Following the loss of Gandalf in the mines of Moria, the survivors of the Fellowship flee for their lives to Lóthlorien. The tension builds almost to a breaking point before Tolkien inserts a bit of ironic humor via a dog allusion. The group meets the elf, Haldir, who agrees to lead them to safety, provided the

dwarf is blind-folded. A reasonable enough request until Gimli's stubborn pride refuses to tolerate such an indignity. He initiates contention by placing his own obstinate pride above the welfare and comfort of the other companions. As the leader of the group, Aragorn must resolve the stalemate by requesting that the elves blind-fold all members of the Fellowship. At this tense juncture and out of the mouth of the very companion who instigated the trouble, comes an ironically humorous comment alluding to a guide dog for the blind. Gimli refers to himself and the remaining members of the Fellowship as "many blind beggars with one dog" (II.6.339).

In addition to manipulating tension, Tolkien also exploits dog allusions as a portraiture technique, applying it to a variety of characters and for diverse purposes. He is impartial in his selection of subjects to portray via dog similes and metaphors, taking into account the lowly as well as the great; the good and the evil; elves, dwarves, hobbits, men and monsters alike. A dog simile is even applied to the pony, Bill. Once the Companions of the Ring reach the doors of Moria, Bill must be released to find his way home as best he can or perish on the perilous journey back to Bree. Sam has developed the affection of a pet-owner for Bill and worries that he quite likely will never see Bill again. Happily, when the hobbits pass through Bree on their way home from Gondor, Sam learns that Bill, too, has made his way safely back to Bree. To stress the hardships the poor old pony has endured, but to do so in a lighter more colloquial vein, Tolkien notes that Bill looked as "shaggy as an old dog" (VI.7.972). The pet/pony is compared to another popular pet—the dog—and an old one at that.

Occasionally, Tolkien assigns the hunting and tracking skills of hounds to two-legged hunters rather than the four-legged variety. As Frodo and Sam are on the verge of slipping out of Crickhollow and the Shire, Merry informs Frodo that he and Pippin are aware of Frodo's intentions and they intend to come along. They hope to accompany him as welcome companions; otherwise, they will follow "like hounds," tracking his scent and following his trail (I.5.103). The hound comparison emphasizes hunting and tracking skills, and the concentrated tunnel-vision exhibited by hunting dogs when they are "hot" on a trail. In Book Three Tolkien expands the hunting-hound motif to include Gimli, Legolas, and Aragorn as they follow the trail of the Isengard Orcs who have kidnapped Merry and Pippin. "[R]unning like hounds on a strong scent, and [with] an eager light [...] in their eyes," the three companions are united in a pack to exercise collectively their hunting and tracking skills (III.2.414). Last, a hunting-hound description is applied to the Orcs stationed at the watch-tower of Cirith Ungol. The Orcs have been ordered to search for spies on the stairs and in the tunnel, but before they have an opportunity to demonstrate any tracking skills at all, they stumble across Frodo's body "lying right on the road." A few dart this way

and that, all the while crying with “baying voices”; some excited hounds have cornered their prey. Others merely pose “bent like dogs on a trail” (IV.10.718).

Even good old Sam is not exempt from being the subject of dog comparisons. According to Ruth Noel, Sam and his hobbit neighbors “live a simple, satisfying provincial life close to the land,” and dog imagery helps nourish the depiction of Sam as an ordinary, carefree, countrified hobbit who is simultaneously childishly innocent and even naïve (59). Creating for Sam an unsophisticated nature that prefers the simple things of life is intentional on Tolkien’s part. Regarding the simple side of Sam, in a letter to his son Christopher, Tolkien explains that Sam’s very name derives from an Old English word meaning “half-wit” (*Letters* 83). Sam is no clever, well-educated, sophisticated country gentleman. He cannot claim the same standing in the Hobbit community as do Bilbo or even Frodo. In correspondence to Milton Waldman, Tolkien explains that the “simple, ‘rustic’ love” between Sam and Rosie is “*absolutely essential*” (Tolkien’s emphasis) to the linking of Sam’s “character” with “the theme of the relation of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifice, causes and the ‘longing for Elves,’ and sheer beauty” (*Letters* 161). Further, Tolkien asserts that “without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless” (160). Before the novel ends, both Frodo and Sam must behave heroically. Their heroism is more strongly dramatized by first portraying them as simple hobbits.

Upon occasion, Sam’s behavior actually mimics that of a dog, especially of a lovable, playful puppy. In many ways he resembles the fun-loving dog of “The Man in the Moon” or the loyal but vain hound of *Farmer Giles*. Sooner or later, Sam engages in many of the same ordinary doggy pleasures and behaviors as does the little pup named Roverandom. Before he is safely returned home by the magician Artaxerxes, Roverandom enjoys many adventures (21), plays games of hide-and-seek, takes a “run and a long walk,” “goes on a rabbit hunt,” splashes in the ponds and pools, and rolls over and over in the grass (*Roverandom* 45). Likewise, by accompanying Frodo on his quest to destroy the One Ring, Sam definitely experiences one great adventure and numerous smaller ones (e.g. meeting the Elves in the woods, I.3.75); gets to play hide-and-seek with the Black Riders, Orcs, Shelob, and other nasty creatures; takes an awfully long walk that, at times, requires that he run for his life (I.12.207, the flight to the Ford); hunts for food and concocts rabbit stew from the coney that Gollum has killed (IV.4.639); splashes through streams, rivers, and marshes (Stock-brook, Bruinen, Nimrodel); and, following their rescue from the Barrow-wights, even joins Merry and Pippin in romping about, naked, on the grass (I.8.140).

To further strengthen the perception of Sam as playful, simple, innocent, and naïve, Tolkien employs both a dog simile and a dog. When Sam is informed by Gandalf that he (Sam) will accompany Frodo on his escape from the

Shire, Sam springs up “like a dog invited for a walk” (I.2.63). Faced with the opportunity to travel and share an adventure (Sam has never before traveled outside the Shire), Sam responds, not like an overly excited child who might squeal in delight and skip about, but like a frisky dog that anticipates taking an invigorating walk, frolicking and having fun with the master. Remembering the doggy exuberance of Roverandom or the innkeeper's dog in “The Man in the Moon Stayed up Too Late,” a reader might imagine that Sam shouts (rather than barks) for joy, jumps and hops about, pats or thumps his master on the back, and, no doubt, would wag his tail, if he had one.

However, these analogies not only convey Sam's simple emotions and affection, but they also call attention to the master/pet dog relationship between Sam and Frodo. Over time, Frodo and Sam have formed an affectionate and caring relationship that parallels that of a master to his loyal pet dog. Throughout the quest, Sam often refers to Frodo as “master” and thinks of himself as some kind of protector/servant (e.g. IV.10.176), as do Elrond (II.2.264) and Faramir (e.g. IV.5.650). In several instances, Tolkien/the narrator recognizes Frodo as Sam's master. Sam “half lifted his master and hugged him to his heart” (VI.1.889); or Sam “suddenly remembered his master” (VI.3.923); or “there was the dear master of the sweet days in the Shire” (VI.3.926). But, Sam and Frodo's relationship also resembles that between Huan and Celegorm. When Celegorm goes into exile, Huan is “faithful” and accompanies him (*Silmarillion* 172). Later, he leaves temporarily to rescue Lúthien and Beren, but, ever “faithful,” he returns to Celegorm, his rightful master (176). Similarly, when Frodo flees the Shire, Sam goes with him. And, when the hobbits spend the night in the camp of Gildor and the elves, Sam refuses “to leave his master,” and curls “up at Frodo's feet” (*LotR* I.3.81).

Equally important, Huan is “true of heart” (*Silmarillion* 173). Out of devotion to Lúthien, Huan forsakes the service of Celegorm who chooses to pursue his own evil and treacherous interests, then risks his life and eventually sacrifices himself for Lúthien and Beren. Sam, too, follows his master, Frodo, through all kinds of hardships and dangers, often risking his own life. Circumstances never require that Sam sacrifice himself for Frodo's sake, but his heart is just as true. As they are on the verge of reaching Sammath Naur (the door to Mt. Doom), Sam notices that Frodo's strength has completely faded. So, Sam must carry/drag Frodo most of the way. Then, as they are on the verge of attaining the goal, Sam remains behind, all alone, to keep vigil and brandish his sword to prevent Gollum from attacking and overcoming Frodo and retrieving the Ring (*LotR* VI.3.923). For a final time toward the end of the quest, Sam is again compared to a dog. An Orc in the tower of Mordor flees at the sight of Sting, and Tolkien applies a humorous dog metaphor to express Sam's relief: “Never was any dog more heartened when its enemy turned tail” (VI.1.883-84).

In contrast to the basically favorable canine imagery applied to emphasize Sam's simple, innocent, faithful, and loyal nature, the imagery applied to Gríma and Gollum is not. Employing favorable/positive and unfavorable/negative canine imagery in close proximity creates a visual portrait whereby Tolkien elicits sympathy from the readers for two characters who are seemingly totally despicable and beyond salvage, though vital to Tolkien's grand scheme—Wormtongue/Gríma and Gollum/Sméagol. The demise of Gollum, a debased hobbit, resembles that of the utter ruin of Wormtongue, a corrupt man. While he initially begins with some positive dog imagery, very subtly and cleverly Tolkien reverts to pitiful, negative images to turn Gríma and Gollum into objects of sympathy. In order to convince readers that the pity of Gandalf, Frodo, Théoden and of the readers themselves, is justified, Tolkien employs dog allusions that stimulate pity for both pathetic and degraded creatures.

Wormtongue/Gríma, son of Galmod, does not play a prominent role in *The Lord of the Rings* and is the subject of only a few dog allusions. These dog modifiers occur toward the end of his treacherous life when he is poised on the precipice of accomplishing some bit of good. Initially, for Wormtongue, as for Gollum, Gandalf recommends mercy—but only after calling him a “witless worm” (III.6.503) and a “snake” (509) casting him sprawling face-down on the floor, and accusing him of treachery and deceit. Gandalf refrains from referring to Wormtongue as a dog in this encounter, but by referring to Wormtongue in such derogatory language, treating him with disdain, and applying the impersonal pronoun “it” rather than a personal “he,” Gandalf dehumanizes the forked-tongue advisor, calling attention to his debased and animal-like condition. Still, Gandalf recommends mercy. Why? Gandalf reminds Théoden that once “it [Wormtongue] was a man” who had performed service to the king (III.6.509). In Gandalf's opinion, Wormtongue is not yet beyond redemption. Following Gandalf's advice, on their last day together before Wormtongue flees to Isengard, Théoden indeed extends pity and mercy (III.6.509). Contrary to his earlier stance, just a few days later at the foot of the tower of Orthanc, Gandalf adopts a hardened attitude toward Wormtongue. Gandalf predicts that now that Wormtongue has chosen to seek asylum with Saruman, thereby acknowledging Saruman as his master; if ever Wormtongue leaves Orthanc alive, “it will be more than he deserves” and the “punishment [death] will be just” (III.10.570). Having established Wormtongue's base and pitiable condition, later in the story Tolkien applies the dog comparisons.

In Book Six on the return journey from Gondor and Rohan, Gandalf, Galadriel and the hobbits again meet Saruman and Wormtongue. Without success, Gandalf and Galadriel attempt to persuade the two misfits to accept a last “chance” from the new but absentee King Aragorn (VI.6.961). In sharp contrast to the affectionate master-dog relationship that exists between Frodo

and Sam, in hostile obstinacy and in full view of all, Saruman demonstrates that he is certainly not a master who harbors any affection for the loyal dog who is slouching and whining at his heels. He rejects the offer, turns on Wormtongue and kicks and beats him with a staff. In return, Wormtongue begins to display responses—whining and “whimpering”—that are more characteristic of a dog that has been subjected to human abuse and torment than playful affection (VI.6.961). Wormtongue continues to behave in a doglike manner to the conclusion of the story.

Once the hobbits have delivered the Shire from the ruffians and proceed to Bag End to evict Saruman, they are shocked to discover Wormtongue in a completely dehumanized state; his back is so bowed that he practically crawls on all fours “like a dog” (VI.8.995). Katharyn Crabbe interprets this dog comparison as visible evidence of the “breaking,” “deforming” and twisting of a spirit by evil (156). For the final time, someone (Frodo) offers Wormtongue an opportunity to break away from abusive master/dog relationship with Saruman. Almost, he is redeemed, but not quite. As Wormtongue is cowering, dispirited and whimpering, though pondering the prospect of separating from his evil master, Saruman destroys Wormtongue’s last opportunity for redemption by announcing that Wormtongue is guilty of Lotho’s murder. Opting in favor of habitual cruelty and abuse, rather than kindly affection, for a final time Saruman, the master, treats Wormtongue like a misfit cur, kicking him in the face as he grovels. In response, Wormtongue’s self-control snaps, and as often happens with dogs that have been mistreated and forced to endure physical abuse, he turns on his master and “with a snarl like a dog” attacks and stabs Saruman to death (*LotR* VI.8.996). Having been humiliated and demeaned to the level of animal, a dog, Wormtongue is finally provoked to violence and, thus, accomplishes some good. He rids Middle-earth of a still potent figure of evil.

Just as canine analogies trace Wormtongue’s deterioration, so, too, do they help depict the ruin of Gollum. The first connection between Gollum and dogs resembles in words but sharply contrasts in tone with the warm, inviting episode of the dogs of the Maggot family that contentedly “gnawed rinds and crunched bones” in front of a warm fire amidst a happy family setting (I.4.93). Gollum, too, gnaws bones, but in the dark and all alone, completely alienated from friendly contact with others. And, on Gollum’s behalf, as on that of Wormtongue, Gandalf is once more the first to broach the subject of extending pity to Gollum: he commends Bilbo for having shown mercy in sparing Gollum’s life (I.2.58), as recorded in *The Hobbit*. Gandalf holds onto the hope, slim though it be, that the old wretch can be cured before he dies. Not so, Frodo; initially, Frodo assures Gandalf that he has no pity to spare whatsoever for a creature that is as evil as an Orc and deserves death. Frodo even dares to criticize Bilbo for not having killed Gollum when he first had the opportunity.

Fortunately, when circumstances enable Frodo to become better acquainted with Gollum, Frodo's opinion softens and he finally begins to experience pity. Obeying his own sense of fairness, Frodo, like Bilbo, refuses to kill or harm Gollum at their first meeting because he has done Frodo and Sam no harm (*LotR* IV.1.601). Frodo, the kindly master, seems to extend to Gollum the possibility of a relationship closer to that between Frodo and Sam than that between Saruman and Gríma. Here, in clusters of three or four and in quick succession, Tolkien begins to bombard the reader with provoking canine allusions that juxtapose the playful and affectionate behavior of a doggy that has received some kindly treatment with the pathetic, cowed responses exhibited by a dog that has endured abuse, pain and suffering. For example, in the first cluster, Gollum reminds Sam of "a little whining dog" that paws Frodo and fawns at his knees (IV.1.604). Gollum may not fully understand the master/pet dog connection and affection between Frodo and Sam, but he begins to recall past kindness and camaraderie. Hopefully his desire for connection will prompt him to seek such a relationship for himself, that of lovable and loyal puppy to loving and caring Master. Indeed, to gain release from the elfin rope, Gollum even promises to "serve the master of the Precious" and thereafter, repeatedly, acknowledges Frodo as "master" (e.g. *LotR* VI.1.604). But when readers recall Gollum's enslavement to the dark power of the Ring/Precious, this connection is more reminiscent of master/slave or harsh master/dog relationship than that of a loving Frodo to a lovable Sam. Tolkien's simile seems to encompass this intended meaning by combining an unpleasant with a pleasant reference. Gollum begins prancing about "like a whipped cur whose master has patted it" (VI.1.604).

Via this mixture of unpleasant/pleasant similes, the "divided personality" of Gollum is early differentiated (Noel 64). Michael Stanton notes that "the idea of doubling, [...] split or dissociated personality," the product of "literary imagination" not a "clinical definition," "fascinated the age Tolkien grew up in" (63).² Not unexpectedly, then, Tolkien uses dog analogies that help distinguish the two halves of Gollum, especially the abused, broken-spirited side, in order to engage readers' sympathy and to remind them that half of Gollum is not yet totally ruined. There yet remain some vestiges of the playful, affectionate nature that also characterizes doggy Sam. Reminiscent of the simile assigned earlier to Sam, a third reference describes Gollum as looking back over his shoulder at Frodo and Sam "inquiringly like a dog inviting them for a walk" (*LotR* IV.1.605). A few pages later, as Gollum watches every bite Frodo and Sam

² Other scholars have briefly dealt with Gollum's schizophrenia, including Jane C. Nitzsche who calls it the "divided self" (82), David and Carol Stevens who refer to it as Gollum's "two sides" (98), and Charles Keim, who notes the lack of a mediator between Gollum and Sméagol (295).

take “like an expectant dog by a diner’s chair” (VI.2.608), even Sam, who is the hobbit character most suspicious and doubtful of Gollum, begins to feel a little sorry for him. Still, while he does think of Gollum as that “poor wretch,” he does so only “half remorsefully” (609).

Once the trio is in the midst of the dangerous Dead Marshes, Tolkien employs a second cluster of dog images, again beginning with favorable traits. Gollum welcomes Frodo “with dog-like delight” and “pawing at Frodo’s knees” (VI.2.620). But the tone changes on the very next page when Gollum grows angry and uncooperative, maybe reminding readers of Roverandom’s spiteful nip at the Wizard’s trouser legs. With a threat from Sting, Frodo must harshly convince Gollum to continue as guide. Again, a dog description re-enforces the Slinker/Stinker side of the split nature of Gollum, the demoralized, angry side that is ever ready to displace the playful, affectionate doggy side: “He rose with a snarl, and went before them like a beaten dog” (621). At Faramir’s cave-headquarters, Frodo must totally destroy Gollum’s trust in him. Indeed, the betrayal does save Gollum’s life, but it also increases his confusion and undermines his struggle to remain loyal, to trust his timorous confidence in Frodo. He crawls “on all fours, like an erring dog called to heel” (IV.6.672). All these examples in which Gollum is portrayed as doglike, first positively and then negatively, spotlight the dispirited and degraded state into which he is spiraling so steadily. He is becoming sub-hobbit. Readers want to share Frodo’s hope that Gollum is “not altogether wicked” or totally lost to redemption even though evidence to the contrary is mounting (VI.6.676).

In one of the most poignant scenes in *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum himself seems to realize that he has forfeited his last chance to experience the connection, the friendship, the master/pet relationship that Frodo and Sam have forged. Having returned from betraying Frodo and Sam to Shelob, note how Gollum touches Frodo’s knee as he has done previously in connection with dog imagery:

Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired. A spasm of pain seemed to twist him [...]. [V]ery cautiously he touched Frodo’s knee [...]. For a fleeting moment, [he appeared as] an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing. (IV.8.699)

Just moments before Gollum plunges to his death in the fires of Mt. Doom, Sam’s thoughts confirm the final ruin of Gollum. A part of Sam believes that it “would be just to slay” Gollum. Still, “deep in his heart [...] something [...] restrained” Sam. He could not slay the “thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous,

utterly wretched," especially when it "whimpered" and rose "on all fours" like a dog (VI.3.923). Gollum has become "scarcely more than the shadow of a living thing," a thing "wholly ruined and defeated" (922). At the very end, instead of behaving like a cur dog, he behaves "like a mad thing" (925) with "shriveled mind and body" that will be "unable to find peace or relief ever in life again" (923). Gollum is lost. In his personal correspondence, Tolkien acknowledges that Frodo did "all that was within his utmost physical and mental strength to do," but he failed nonetheless (*Letters* 251). Ultimately, Frodo and the quest are "saved," not merely by Frodo's bravery and dogged dedication, but by his "Mercy: by the supreme value and efficacy of Pity and forgiveness of injury" (252). Literally, the mission is saved by the cur, the hopeless reprobate, the totally dispossessed, dispirited, "treacherous," and "nasty" (IV.1.603) "old villain" (*LotR* IV.3.625). Without doglike Gollum, the Ring would not have been destroyed.

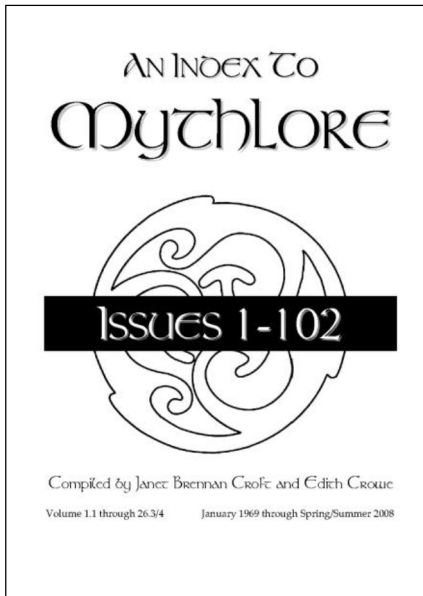
By evoking sympathy for Wormtongue and Gollum, Tolkien prevents callous condemnation. To some degree, he uses dog allusions to enable readers, via sharp visual contrasts, to nourish the hope for the culprits' possible recovery. These tragic, wretched creatures were not always completely evil. The opinion Elrond voices about Sauron can also be applied to Wormtongue and Gollum. "For nothing is evil in the beginning" (II.2.261). They were not born evil, but were perverted to do and be evil. Nor are they totally evil. Tolkien is explicit, "I do not think that [...] any 'rational being' is wholly evil" (*Letters* 243). After all, to the conclusion of the book readers hold hope that Gríma might abandon Saruman. and Gollum occasionally behaves as if there is still some spark of good in him, some doggy desire to love and be loved by a master. Early in the first book Gandalf voices hope regarding Gollum. "My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end" (*LotR* I.2.58). In fact, both Wormtongue and Gollum do help bring about some good, even if they commit evil deeds to accomplish that good. Wormtongue murders Saruman, and Gollum destroys the Ring, thereby ridding Middle-earth of Sauron and his most powerful means of corruption.

Wormtongue and Gollum are capable of making bad choices, and they do. To the very end of the lives of Wormtongue and Gollum, pathetic and pity-provoking dog imagery feeds the hope that their good side might prevail and a means of redemption and making amends for bad decisions might be possible. Maybe they can re-establish the broken relationships with men/hobbits. In conclusion, Tolkien, the philologist and word-craftsman, gets the most mileage from this single, simple image. He uses dogs and dog comparisons to effectively establish a realistic and ordinary setting, to manipulate tension in the plot, to enrich the portrayals of various characters, and, most importantly, to encourage the reading audience to engage with the text, especially on a visual level, to extend mercy and empathetic understanding to two of the fallen.

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