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"Above All Shadows Rides The Sun"

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Abstract
Sees the main theme of *The Lord of the Rings* as “the strength of those who love, because they love, is greater than the strength of those who hate.”

Additional Keywords
Love in *The Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*
The power of Sauron was overthrown by the only power that loves, which needs to be destroyed in order to keep it from Sauron, who made it and lost it, and who, if he had it could dominate the whole of Middle Earth. Gollum is a wretched, small creature who possessed the ring for many ages, and who sneaks, grapples, stolen, and murders to get it back. Throughout the story there are many who have the opportunity and would like to kill him, and yet who love him enough to let himlive, Gandalf, who initiates and guides the action to destroy the ring, says: “Do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment.” I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it.

There appears to be in literature in general an emphasis on what is best in man, and it seems that writers are also saying that whatever rises converges, for what is best in man leads him to love, to unity within himself, and with others and all of creation, and with God. A man is small in his journey toward community, and he feels even smaller as he finds his purpose opposed by the powers of disunity. It has been my experience that communicating with the thought of others in literature has helped me to a clearer awareness of creation’s growing unity, and to a deepening sense of identity with its pursuit. Some authors I think, speak with more clarity of vision than others. Among those who appear to aim explicitly at unity is Tolkien.

As I see it, the theme of his central work, The Lord of the Rings, is that the strength of those who love, because they love, is greater than the strength of those who hate. The theme shows itself in many ways—in the peoples dealings with friends and enemies, in their treatment of non-rational creation, and in the story as a whole. I would like in this paper to point out some instances of weakness which come about as a result of selfish concern, and compare them with examples of strength brought about by loving concern.

On the one hand are the orcs, the servants of Sauron, the Dark Lord of Mordor. They are physically strong beings, yet they are ineffective as a group, for they have never learned to care for anyone but themselves. Two of them show their lack of concern as they discuss the fate of one of their comrades who was caught by the flesh-eating monster Shelob: “Do you remember old Ufthak? We lost him for days. Then we found him in a corner; hanging up, he was, but he was wide awake and glaring. How we laughed. She’d forgotten him, maybe, but we didn’t touch him—no good interfering with Rep.”

This dissipation of the orcs’ strength in their un-concern for their fellows can be compared to the growing strength of the Ents, the ancient people who herd trees. When one of their number is burned in the battle against Saruman, the wizard who has turned evil, the Ents band together in even greater force to overthrow Saruman’s power.

The strength of the opposing camps is shown in perhaps even higher relief in their treatment of prisoners. The orcs, to feel safe, have to confine Frodo, small and weak as he is, to a room with no escape in the top of the strong, high tower of Cirith Ungol, and even then whimp him to stop him from singing. Frodo, however, later on in the Shire, has Saruman as a prisoner. Saruman makes an attempt to kill Frodo, and yet Frodo lets him live and go free. “He has not hurt me. And in any case I do not wish him to be slain in this evil mood. He was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hands against. He is fallen, and his cure is beyond us, but I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find it.”

Tolkien’s people also treat the non-rational elements of Middle Earth in a way according to their respect for life, that tends to their destruction or to their strengthen-thening. The land of Mordor, on the one hand, is desolate, the sun doesn’t shine, water doesn’t flow, except a little from the tops of the western mountain boundary, there is no wholesome plant or animal living there; food has to be imported from tributary lands. The land that has been made a desert is also pathless. No unity exists, except that of the power of the dark lord.

This compared with the love which has built the elves’ land of Lothlorien, where the light is such that even after sunset, the grass “was green, as if it glowed still in the memory of the sun that had gone” where water is clean and washes away “stains of travel and all weariness” where the elves make food and give it to the travelers for strength on their journey; and where the paths are soft and smooth, in the midst of trees and grass, “upon which there was no stain” Sam says, “I feel as if I were inside a song, if you take my meaning.” Here the travelers are “healed of hurt and weariness of body,” and here the ancient friendship of elves and dwarves, a unity that had been lost for many ages.

The plot of the story as a whole is geared toward the end, that love is a living, strengthening force. The story is of the ring of evil power which has been found and which needs to be destroyed in order to keep it from Sauron, who made it and lost it, and who, if he had it could dominate the whole of Middle Earth. Gollum is a wretched, small creature who possessed the ring for many ages, and who sneaks, grapples, stolen, and murdered to get it back. Throughout the story there are many who have the opportunity and would like to kill him, and yet who love him enough to let him live, Gandalf, who initiates and guides the action to destroy the ring, says: “Do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment.” I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it.

The community effort, the effort to love, on the part of the members of the fellowship, is the real power that destroys the ring, for none of them alone has the power to destroy it—even Gandalf was afraid to attempt it, and Frodo, the one most likely to be able to do the deed, after all his effort, gave up to the ring’s power, and refused when he had the chance, to throw it to the fires at the Crack of Doom. It was only Gollum, wretched, but through “pity and mercy” alive, who inadvertently did the deed. The power of Sauron was overthrown by the only power which was stronger than his.

This work of Tolkien’s has made me see in a more colored and three-dimensional manner the power of love over evil. There is much else in The lord of the Rings; many other concepts are illustrated and colored and given a third dimension. But this is the one I see as central.

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