Winter 12-15-1987

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Deborah Webster Rogers

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Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol14/iss2/4

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Abstract
Sees a common motive in three villains of fiction: Gollum, Captain Hook, and Salieri. Each believes that he lacks something “and devotes himself to making it good at the expense of a protagonist who has what the villain wants.”

Additional Keywords
Barrie, J.M.—Characters—Captain Hook—Motivation; Shaffer, Peter—Characters—Salieri—Motivation; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Gollum—Motivation

This article is available in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol14/iss2/4
Misery loves... A Root of Villainy
Deborah Webster Rogers

They hate their victims, right? Wrong. Take Hook. Besides revenge and his quest-object, more involves him with Peter. Peter is admired! He has Good Form! He is "Youth, Joy, a little bird that has broken out of the egg!"\(^3\) And what Hook really would crave is to be Peter Pan.

But a longing to identify with someone goes with love, not hate. What is going on? What about our other villains? Gollum villainously wants to identify with Frodo as Ring-bearer, feeling he himself should be it. He leaves himself free to hurt Frodo by confounding the two in his trick oath, "I will serve the master of the Precious" (II, 285). Yet we glimpse some disinterested identification. Sam sees Frodo and Gollum as "akin" (II, 285).\(^4\) When Gollum finds Frodo and Sam asleep, "a strange expression passed over his lean and hungry face.... A spasm of pain seemed to twist him.... slowly putting out a trembling hand,... he touched Frodo's knee — but almost the touch was a caress." He looked like "an old weary hobbit" (II, 411).

Salieri obviously longs to identify with "God's beloved" composer. Mozart's music transfixes him like love's own arrow, plunging him into positively petrarchian paradoxes: "agonizing delights" (S, 519), or "a phrase of such delight it had me trambling," which becomes "Long lines of pain around and through me" (S, 497, cf. III, 286).

But perverse loves, when they are all Hell-bent on robbery and murder. Those are no fruits of love, but of hatred. Again, what goes on? Oh, I never said these villains were driven by hatred. I said hatred was not the crux of their feelings for their victims. Hook, Gollum, and Salieri all hate: themselves. We are bidden to love our neighbor as ourself; these twisted three, hating themselves, take it out on their neighbor. The best short term for their common motive would be a French coinage: haine-propre.

They hate themselves for the lack which underlies all they know of themselves. "Now... I feel my emptiness as Adam felt his nakedness" (S, 519); "Poor Smegol... went away long ago. They took his Precious, and he's lost now" (II, 263); Hook "felt his ego slipping from him" (PW, 112).

The protagonists have what the villains lack. We have heard Peter's Key words, "joy," "youth," and the riddlesome "a little bird that has broken out of the egg." Again Iago sums it up: "He hath a daily beauty in his life that makes me ugly."

That our villains lack beauty need hardly be belabored. That they crave it — yes, all. Hook affects Restoration dress and (Barrie says) goes in for music. Music is Salieri's passion (second only to that for himself). Looking at Mozart's manuscripts, he says, "I was staring through the cage of those meticulous ink strokes at an Absolute Beauty" (S, 519). And Gollum: when he say the Ring he had no thought of gaining inviability, nor food, nor power; he only wanted it "because the gold looked so bright and beautiful" (I, 85). Beautiful gold, emblematic of plenteous, antithesis of lack. Salieri decks his apartment with gold. Hook's Jolly Roger no doubt carries golden loot.
So they lack but crave beauty. Their lack of joy — well, given that their central perception is of themselves, and that self lacking, how could one be joyous? "Unsmiling concentration upon self," says C.S. Lewis, "is the mark of Hell."

The phrase "a little bird that has broken out of the egg" incorporates two ideas, youth and freedom. Do the villains lack freedom compared to the protagonists? Salieri seems more free; his smooth conduct has won him theentrée anywhere, whereas Mozart is poor and less popular: limited. Yet Mozart has free access to some divine vein of music. He is altogether too free in his speech. And the circumspect Salieri surmises he is free to leap into bed with sopranos! Which just turns the screws on Salieri’s sense of his own limitations.

Gollum traverses Middle-earth far and wide, and he had the Ring of Power for some five hundred years. This sounds free! He is bound by no duty to others, as Frodo is. But Gollum is incapable of desiring anything but the Ring, and following it. Frodo has his own will, has freely assumed this obligations, and actually opposes the Ring, carrying it towards destruction. And what happened while Gollum had the One Ring, its longest possessor except for Sauron its maker? Gollum spent almost five hundred years alone, in eternal dark and wet, existing on raw fish and orcs. If that is freedom, I’ll take poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Peter Pan’s freedom — he can fly, for human beings the greatest image of freedom. And he can pass back and forth between Neverland and London. Captain Hook aboard his ship has not broken out of any shell.

Peter is also free to choose to remain a boy and never grow up, which brings us to the subject of youth. Lo, it matters in all three works we are studying. All our authors make a point of youth, and neoteny, which is the retention of youthful features in an adult specimen.

Barrie is the most overt. How ever long Peter has been in existence, he is and will be a boy. Barrie says several times that he still has his first teeth. Hook, on the other hand, is a Grownup (ugh). Further, he is usually played by the same actor as George Darling, Wendy’s father. Barrie characterizes Darling Daddy as having his own villainous streak, self-absorbed and dishonest.

Salieri is older than Mozart by six years: not a lot. Salieri has qualities we would praise as “mature”: he has developed his ability and moved from being a small-town kid to a sustained career at court. This hardworking adult is outraged to find in “infantine Mozart” “an obscene child!” (S, 520, 497). Mozart, aged from twenty-six to thirty-six, is small and restless, childish traits; also irreverent, potty-mouthed, and a showoff. Seeing this creature gifted and believing him beloved, Salieri becomes perfectly miserable with his grownup status. (So, by the way, are Shaffer’s Dr. Dyeart and Pizarro.)

Tolkien puts neoteny at the center of his fiction with hobbits. They are two to four feet tall and don’t grow beards. Other races have trouble taking them seriously. Their long lifespans go with extended youth: Frodo at thirty-three is only just of age. Gollum, also of hobbitish nature, has had his lifespan stretched by the Ring and is “tired.” Tolkien’s leading case of what we could call pernicious adulthood is a human villain, Denethor.

So villainy inheres in adulthood, one gets to Heaven by being a child, and our Villains’ main lack is of youth? No. Not one of our authors is simply stating that the grownup is the bad guy. Shaffer makes clear that Mozart’s neoteny damages him and is not a necessary yoke-fellow of his talent. Barrie makes Peter stunningly attractive, yet undercuts him too: he tells us Peter is impoverished in personal relations, e.g. he can’t be touched. And after the capture of the Jolly Roger, Peter can be found striking attitudes as a mini-Hook. Tolkien, with the greatest variety of neotenous characters, shows us with Pippin’s pranks that mere childishness brings trouble. (Imagine Pippin and Mozart let loose at the same party!)

But if neither adulthood nor childhood makes a villain, what have youth and age to do with our study? Plenty, given that the villains are driven to discontent with themselves. Human children and adults are notorious for feeling their own lacks and wanting to be the other. The child feels helpless, the grownup feels burdened; both feel they lack freedom. Each is certain that the other has more fun. Gollum’s desperate need and Denethor’s conviction that he is the Sole Responsible Party give us the two poles.

So the question of how not to be a villain becomes a pair of questions: how can one be young without being a baby or a brat, and how can one be mature without being a Grownup (ugh), miserable, envious, and self-hating?

Barrie and Shaffer provide no answer. Mozart and Hook are dead, Peter is frozen in time; and Salieri, “alive though barely,” combines a degree of dementia with Final Impenitence. The playwrights are limited to one evening’s matter.

Tolkien can range wider and does. Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin survive, to mention only the hobbits; and hobbits particularly have the features Tolkien seems to deem necessary for a successful, non-villainous life. Primarily two: fun and company.

I have mentioned that among us, children and adults suspect each other of having more fun. But among hobbits, all ages frankly enjoy bright colors, fetes and fireworks, and presents. Fun includes learning — a hobbit conning her family tree or Faramir in the archives of Minas Tirith. Fun includes all the arts (remember beauty?): dwarves forging, hobbits dancing in the springling, or Mozart composing.

The villains don’t have fun. You’d think Hook would, “for it is, it is a glorious thing to be a pirate king,” especially in Neverland. But he is so obsessed with not being Peter and revenge for his hand that he poisons his own existence. Captain Hook’s hand is in a class with Captain Ahab’s leg; we should also mention Salieri’s futile attempt on his jugular. Their personalities have something cut off. Frodo, left with the same mark as archvillain Sauron, the missing finger, finds he no longer much enjoys Shire festivities.

Salieri loves music, except he makes himself hate it when it is not his, and his own is no more fun for him since it isn’t Mozart’s! Otherwise all he enjoys is sweets, and he makes even that an occasion for self-hatred: “It’s a little repellant... but... the first sin I have to confess to you is Gulletty. Stinky gluttony at that. Infantine — Italian gluttony!” (S, 488). Now,
would any hobbit mock itself for taking seconds on crema al mascarpone?8

I said all Salieri enjoyed was sweets, and I hope those of you familiar with the stage version of Amadeus will retort, "What about Katherina?" That brings us back to the subject of company. Our villains lack it. On the stage, even though Salieri has a wife and a mistress, the marriage is deliberately cold and boring, and the affair was entered into more from spite than lust. In the screen version, Shaffer wisely cuts both (Katherina is solely a pupil, despite the lust). This gives us a more accurate picture of Salieri's mentally lone condition.

Hook lacks the rapport with his band that Peter has with his. "As dogs he treated and addressed them, and as dogs they obeyed him" (PW, 66). Gollum is Tolkien's most isolated character except for dragons and Shelob, who aren't even anthropomorphic.

Company, externally, is being with other persons. Internally, it ranges from recognizing some common interest up through all kinds of love. Company can even exist without presence: Aragorn and Arwen are "with" each other; Elbereth is "with" Sam in Mordor.

Two easy occasions for becoming company are with one's likes and (often) with the unfortunate; harder are with persons different from oneself and (for some) with the fortunate. Examples: hobbits generally are alike and have an easy time being company with each other. Elves and Lost Boys band together easily. The other easy is when one sees someone in misfortune and feels a sadness for it. This is pity, spoken of by all our authors and specially stressed by Tolkien.

The playwrights raise the subject only to deny it, "Does no feeling of compassion disturb his sombre breast? The man is not wholly evil... What really warps him is a presentiment that he is about to fail" (P, 73). "Could I have stopped my war? Shown him some pity? Oh yes... if He above had shown me one drop of it!" (S, 537). In Tolkien, Pity is a hero's quality. Bilbo, Frodo, and even Sam take pity on Gollum; and snared by pity, he resolves the plot when Frodo will not. Gollum had his moment of feeling pity and companionship with Frodo and Sam, but Sam's pitiless attitude at that point isolated Gollum again into his villainy. It's these possibilities getting wasted that make our villains tragic (especially Salieri) and not just bad.

So with one's likes or the unfortunate it is easy to become company; less easy with others. For instance, someone of the opposite sex in an Other. Tolkien's ents and entwives have allowed their differences to sunder them completely. Lust can provide a fast start toward a relationship, but as we saw with Salieri and Katherine and Theresa, going to bed with someone does not necessarily mean much company. Mozart and Constanze, on the other hand, have a nest for each other and have fun and stick together through thick and thin. This is company. (If Tolkien had ever lowered himself to lurk around in wing chairs the way Salieri does, God forbid, we might find out Sam and Rosie have coarse private jokes. "Mind your own beeswax" [S, 411].)

People of different races are Others. Bilbo the Hobbit starts with the dwarves as the merest, grudging on both sides, common-interest companion, and Tolkien shows us by what gradual stages he becomes a full companion and friend. Elf and dwarf, Legolas and Gimli, begin as suspicious roadfellows and become friends because of Galadriel the elf's appreciation of dwarvish arts.

Then we get the situation which calls for reverse pity (is there a word?). Hook and Salieri are confronted with a superior, a creature of wonder. We have seen that something in them would wish to join with him, to rejoice and to love. But they don't. Neither will Denethor, the hitherto faithful steward, rejoice in his returned King. They won't be companions.

Why not? Because the Villains are entirely stuck and centered on themselves. We have spoken of their main perception of themself as lacking; now shift emphasis: they perceive just themself, and it lacking. It's I and Me and Mine from here to Hell with all of them. God is a member of Salieri's entourage! He and Denethor make the same dying declaration: "I would be Lord of this City... But if doom denies this to me, then I will have naught." (III, 158); "If I cannot be Mozart then I do not wish to be anything." This is pride, as Gandalf observes: pride, the villains' besetting sin even more than envy.

Now, everybody is lacking, protagonists too. Mozart says frankly, "I'm a jackass" (S, 528), and goes on composing his heavenly music. Frodo feels and is very small in the face of his task. He gladly appreciates the help of his company, specially Sam, and even Gollum. Everyone lacks, somehow. Our villains feel this personally, judge it wrong, and make it the center of their universe. Their selves being defective, they worship the defective, which cyclically warps them more and more.

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Moving?


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