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Harken Not to Wild Beasts: Between Rage and Eloquence in Saruman and Thrasymachus

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. . . On th' other side up rose
Belial, in act more graceful and humane;
A fairer person lost not Heavn'n; he seemd
For dignity compos'd and high exploit:
But all was false and hollow; though his Tongue
Dropt Manna, and could make the worse appear
The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest Counsels: for his thoughts were low;
To vice industrious, but to Nobler deeds
Timorous and slothful: yet he pleas'd the ear,
And with persuasive accent thus began.

Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II, 108-18

INTRODUCTION: THE TWO WILD BEASTS

Industrialization, technology, modernity, and the megalomania of reformism: when it comes to Saruman, Tolkienists have already spilled a fair amount of ink on such themes. The same cannot be said, however, for Saruman's Voice. This seems surprising, especially as the Voice seems to be Saruman's flashiest trait, the greatest danger which he is said to pose. No critic, nonetheless, has to my knowledge connected how Saruman clearly responds to the ancient opposition between philosophy and rhetoric. This opposition goes back to Plato and suffuses the intellectual tradition of Western thought. In short, Plato—the first to use “rhetoric” as a term—disparages sophists in general and rhetoric in particular, dubbing it “flattery” rather than art, a mindless tool indifferent to right and wrong as well as true and false, limited only by the practitioner's scruples. Aristotle had a higher opinion and, indeed, the study of rhetoric—which Aristotle founded—flourished in the classical world. Still, Plato provided the philosophical groundwork for everyone afterward who feared that rhetoric brought relativism both moral and epistemological, the elevation of seeming over being, illusion over reality, and the subversion of truth.

By way of showing J.R.R. Tolkien's participation in this anti-rhetoric tradition, let us look briefly at John Milton, who approaches rhetoric from a similar standpoint of faith and piety. In my epigraph, Milton makes *Belial* embody all the classic arguments against rhetoric, arguments instantly recognizable to Milton's 17th-century readers. *Belial* is all gloss, all veneer, all surface. The sweetness of his eloquence (“his tongue dropped manna”) can make the good argument appear bad, the bad argument appear good. The audience misses the “lowness” of his thought through being lulled by his “persuasive accent.” Fair and dignified does his exterior

seem, but his character has no substance or strength: all is “false and hollow.” Each of these things—applicable to Saruman in equal degree—denounces rhetoric with brilliant conciseness. The art of persuasion is represented as “all show, grounded in nothing but its own empty pretensions, unsupported by any relation to truth” (Fish 204). Rhetoric fails epistemologically insofar as speech is divorced from truth, *morally* insofar as speech is divorced from sincerity, and socially—but especially politically—insofar as the rhetorician “panders to the worst in people and moves them to base actions” (204). Simply consider Saruman’s attempt to enlist Gandalf in double-dealing Sauron: let us *appear* to join the Enemy, Saruman says, bidding our time against the day, “deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose” (II.2 253). Such “Mordor”-speech does not tempt Gandalf, of course, but the seductiveness of Saruman’s eloquence echoes Belial’s manna-dripping “persuasive accent.”

Thus Tolkien does not simply use Saruman to critique modernity, industrialization, or the like—he situates Saruman squarely in an ancient debate within philosophy that stretches to the roots of the Western tradition. The Wise know reality directly. They possess “true” knowledge. They, therefore, have no desire to shape mere appearances or opinion (*doxa*) through subtle speech and cunning words. That path belongs only to the sophists, the rhetoricians, and the relativists. Saruman, in other words. Though neither Tolkien’s letters nor his essays give any indication that such matters interested him, it still seems odd that critics have missed the connection. True, a few critics have attempted to link Tolkien with Plato. Many have noted the clear (if superficial) similarities between the One Ring and the Ring of Gyges,¹ and Gergely Nagy makes a more significant connection

¹ For the writers on this subject, see Robert E. Morse (1980), John Cox (1984), Gary B. Herbert (1985), Frederick de Armas (1994), Eric Katz (2003), Robert Eaglestone (2005), and most recently Jane Beal (2015). Eaglestone’s reference to Gyges’s Ring comes in passing, and de Armas’s main focus is on Lope de Vega rather than Tolkien. Neither Morse nor Katz add much of significance. Cox at least suggests, fairly enough, that Tolkien’s Platonic influences probably came filtered through Augustine. Beal continues the basic theme about the “real connection” between the two rings being not just invisibility but “the protagonist’s immorality” (9). She, however, adds an intriguing point by connecting the Ring’s invisibility to the “the feeling of invisibility soldiers sometimes experience when overwhelmed by the ‘shell shock’ of wartime experience” (2). From my viewpoint, however, Herbert’s discussion has the most potential, though underdeveloped. He does not say so explicitly, but his essay—like mine—uses a reading of Plato heavily indebted to Leo Strauss. He paraphrases Glaucon as saying that “what makes an unjust man’s injustice invisible is not a magic ring but rather an art or craft of some sort” (156), such as rhetoric, and Herbert also notes that the “rhetoric of righteousness” (157) can serve to conceal the workings of injustice. Yet these are only glancing observations. Ultimately, Herbert fails to do the necessary analysis on Saruman, rhetoric, and especially anger or *thymos*, though some of his points on Bombadil (his main focus) are worth preserving.

between Plato's and Tolkien's mythopoeic practices.² Still, the larger rhetorical tradition within Western thought goes entirely unremarked.

When critics *do* comment upon Saruman's Voice, they invariably focus on individual logical fallacies or rhetorical devices. For example, Tom Shippey (2002) simply notes the "emptiness" of Saruman's rhetoric, tying it to vacuous contemporary political discourse. Dickerson and Evans (2006) follow suit, linking Saruman's speech to the "rhetoric of many contemporary enemies of the environment" (201). Robley Evans (1972) astutely notes the disjunction between seeming and being but never goes beyond a focus on Saruman as an individual: i.e., his word-craft and image-making have "resulted in bondage to himself" (133). Jay Ruud (2010) at least returns to Aristotle's classical categories of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, but his analysis still overlooks the various rhetorical situations present within *The Lord of the Rings*. Likewise, Brian Rosebury (2003) simply classifies Saruman's speech styles as "colloquial, diplomatic, intimidatory, [and] vituperative" (79). Additionally, Jonathan Evans (2007) only focuses on Saruman's specific rhetorical devices in his entry for the *Tolkien Encyclopedia*. Tellingly, no cross-listing exists for his entry on "Saruman" and the entry on "Rhetoric." Still other critics seem to think *non-rhetorical* speech a possibility. For example, Cody Jarman (2016) contrasts Gandalf's "plainspoken" words against Saruman's "'double-think'" (159) without noticing that plain-spokenness carries its own rhetorical implications—a shortcoming shared by Ruud, whom Jarman follows. The entry for "Rhetoric" in the *Tolkien Encyclopedia* makes this mistake as well, suggesting that hobbit speech has a "direct conversational style *without rhetoric*" (Turner 567, my emphasis), and further mistakenly attributes a "supernormal" power to Saruman's voice (568).³ Jane Chance (2001), for her part, simply observes that Saruman's voice is "evil because its beauty arouses the envy of its listeners . . . [and] seduces by arousing the listeners' admiration for the speaker" (77).

I argue here that the Saruman episodes should be read in light of this larger tradition of rhetoric and that, specifically, *eloquence* and *rage* form constitutive parts of Saruman's being—without which we cannot grasp the world-historical impact he has on Middle-earth. To motivate these views, I must make a few central claims. First, obviously, Saruman operates against the backdrop of the larger intellectual tradition separating philosophy from rhetoric. Tolkien, however, faces a problem also faced by Plato: he must *persuade* his reader of the inferiority of the persuasive arts. He cannot or will not force the reader to rely on brute logic. Thus Tolkien employs a *literary* rhetoric—acknowledging that his basic critique must be

² See Nagy, "Saving the Myths: The Re-creation of Mythology in Plato and Tolkien," *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth*, edited by Jane Chance, 2004.

³ Turner evidently bears Tolkien's statement in *Letters* 277-78 in mind, which states that there is nothing magical about Saruman's Voice. Still, "supernormal" makes the same mistake as "supernatural"—the art of persuasion can be learned and used by *anyone*. It is entirely "normal."

(as Michael D. C. Drout, 2006, says of Tolkien's academic writing) not only "logically sound but also rhetorically persuasive" (184).⁴ Correspondingly, Section I applies a rhetorical analysis to Tolkien's tactics and strategies for "undermining" the authority and credibility of Saruman. This sleight-of-hand steers the reader away from Saruman's perspective and towards the perspective of Gandalf and company. Such an analysis, furthermore, explains the oddly distinct character of "The Voice of Saruman" chapter. Its narrator provides commentary that offers continual guidance on how we, as readers, should interpret Saruman—an intrusiveness adopted nowhere else to such extent in *The Lord of the Rings*.

As becomes clear, though, something else gradually overwhelms the rhetorical dimension behind Saruman's character: *rage*. When cautioning his companions about approaching Orthanc, Gandalf uses a striking metaphor to describe the trapped Saruman. A "wild beast cornered," says Gandalf, "is not safe to approach" (III.10 563). Curiously, Plato uses the exact same metaphor to describe *another* rhetorician, this time Thrasymachus from *The Republic*. When Thrasymachus hears Socrates's "nonsensical" opinions on justice, he bursts into the dialogue "like a wild beast" (*Republic* 336b). If we examine the figure of Thrasymachus, then, as I do in Section II, we can uncover an unusual link between rhetoric and rage (or "*thymos*" in the Greek). Following the political philosopher Leo Strauss, this section argues that anger and rhetoric go together in constituting the state or "the city." I attempt, furthermore, to show that Tolkien has worked a subtle but significant change on the relationship established by Plato between anger and rhetoric, and this change entails vast implications for the history of Middle-earth. Whereas Thrasymachus had subordinated his anger to his art, Saruman—motivated by Sauron's example—will ultimately disdain the persuasive arts entirely. The power of his famous Voice wanes; in fact, it virtually disappears. In lieu of art, Saruman indulges a full-throated and blinding rage, a thymotic excess that overwhelms his being.

The political and historical impact of such overwhelming anger will constitute the focus of Section III, which works closely with the ideas of rage theorist Peter Sloterdijk. Through Saruman's re-invention as "Sharkey," the expelled wizard is no longer a rhetorical being—he has become, instead, a rage-filled *thymotic* being, a creature bubbling with the choking resentments (*ressentiment*) of injuries and slights both real and imagined. Having disdained eloquence, a relatively peaceful art, Saruman transforms himself into the first whole-hearted politician of rage in Middle-earth's history. I deny, then, that Saruman solely represents "the quisling voice of mordantly cynical *realpolitik*" (Senior 2). His combination of bitterness and resentment adds non-rational

⁴ Thus I agree with Drout that there is a "consistency" between Tolkien's methods of literary and academic composition, since "even the most formally perfect argument will not be effective if it is not capable of convincing its readers" (Drout 184).

psychological motives that modern political realism largely ignores, since modern realism instead assumes *rational* actors ruthlessly pursuing self-interest and security amidst a wildly anarchic international state of affairs. The modernity of Saruman must, rather, be seen in his “applications of rage,” i.e., his transformation or “modernizing” of the Shire in light of a specific vision founded on that rage. Tragically, however, the hobbits rebelling against Sharkey’s rule must use similar applications of rage to overthrow Saruman’s tyranny. A community *thymos* must be unleashed—and this thymotic spirit cannot easily be reconciled with the specifically Christian wisdom *The Lord of the Rings* spends so much time trying to defend. Ironically, Bilbo had left his bourgeois world and discovered the existence of a wider heroic realm; Frodo leaves that heroic realm only to discover that his comfortable bourgeois world had become heroic in his absence. The heroes of the Shire’s rebellion, having embraced the politics of *thymos*, rage, and pride, now reject the wisdom Tolkien considers greater—the wisdom of mercy, forgiveness, and turning the other cheek.

I. UNDERMINING SARUMAN—THE RHETORIC OF TOLKIEN

Writing someone like Saruman poses a stiff challenge. Tolkien must present a master of persuasion believably—but not *so* believably that he challenges the moral and perspectival norms Tolkien wishes to establish. With *The Lord of the Rings*, the truth of the revelation of the Word of God—the Death as well as the Resurrection—provide, though unstated, a guaranteed meaning within the textual world. In a text that denies moral relativism, rhetoric becomes relativism’s handmaiden. If nothing is true except that saying makes it so, those who have mastered the art of “saying” have mastered the art of truth. To put the matter bluntly, Tolkien must discredit Saruman before Saruman discredits Tolkien. The power of speech-craft means that Saruman can orchestrate the perceptions and passions of the many. Tolkien must contest that advantage by convincing the reader, long before the reader ever encounters Saruman, of Saruman’s basic unreliability. Nonetheless, in adopting an anti-rhetoric position, Tolkien cannot himself acknowledge the rhetorical strategies that he employs. Instead, as in the Platonic dialogues, Tolkien will use his narrative medium to shape the fundamental rhetorical situations within the text, disdaining the more blatant sophistries and rhetorical devices used by Saruman himself. Thus Tolkien silently guides the reader away from any perspective friendly towards Saruman and towards those moral and perspectival norms deemed by Tolkien most true.

This section breaks down into two “preludes” (before the reader meets Saruman) and two “attempts” (when Saruman tries to turn Théoden and Gandalf). The preludes blacken Saruman’s character and warn us about his Voice. Even then,

Tolkien does not trust us to resist Saruman without assistance. A shockingly heavy intrusion by the narrator marks the chapter containing Saruman's two attempts, a tactic repeated nowhere else in the book. These intrusions attempt to provide the reader the "correct" interpretation of Saruman's arguments—basically, a safety net in case Tolkien accidentally makes Saruman *too* persuasive.⁵ Whereas most critics either focus on Saruman's specific inconsistencies or specific rhetorical devices, my rhetorical analysis will show how the reader never needs brute logic to find Saruman's sophistries and committed fallacies. Instead, both preludes and both attempts carefully predetermine and direct the "proper" interpretation of Saruman, rhetoricians, and all rhetoric.

FIRST PRELUDE: THE COUNCIL OF ELROND

The name "Saruman" appears for only the second time during the Council of Elrond. At this point, we know little about him. We *do* know that Gandalf has been delayed—by someone or something—from reaching the Shire at his promised time, but the why remains a mystery. When Gandalf begins speaking before the Council, the culprit is quickly identified as a "Saruman." Knowing Gandalf as we know, we trust Gandalf and, trusting him, naturally adopt his perspective against this unknown quantity. As the captivity narrative begins, Gandalf reminds the Council of information the reader now hears for the first time: during the events of *The Hobbit*, Saruman had apparently "dissuaded us from open deeds against" the Necromancer, and his soothing words had furthermore "lulled" Gandalf's natural wariness in matters concerning the One Ring (II.2 244). As the captivity narrative continues, the reader soon recognizes Saruman as a villain. He responds to Gandalf with "cold laughter" and scorn, and Gandalf uses "scoffed," "sneered," and "declaim" to describe his adversary's remarks (II.2 252). Gandalf is the most reliable of narrators: we trust all that he says. We believe him when he claims that Saruman's speeches are similar to those from "the mouths of emissaries sent from Mordor to deceive the ignorant" (II.2 253). There is no need to hear Saruman defend himself; the echoes of Mordor now taint any possible defense. When Gandalf finally utters the word "treachery" (II.2 255), a word not applied until the

⁵ Lest anyone see this observation as a criticism, let me point out that Milton does the same thing. When Stanley Fish (1995) unpacks the phrase "persuasive accent" in the last line of my epigraph, he says that "the two words mean the same thing and what they tell the reader is that he is about to be exposed to a force whose exercise is unconstrained by any sense of responsibility either to the Truth or to the Good. Indeed," Fish continues, "so dangerous does Milton consider this force that he feels it necessary to provide a corrective gloss as soon as Belial stops speaking: 'Thus *'Belial* with words cloth'd in reason's garb / counsell'd ignoble ease and peaceful sloth' (II, 226-27). Just in case you hadn't noticed" (Fish 204). The narrator of *The Lord of the Rings* is also basically offering us corrective glosses—just in case.

end of Gandalf's story, the reader understands that "treachery" is exactly how events at Orthanc should be understood.

Gandalf's presentation of events decisively convinces the Council, which then continuously reaffirms his viewpoint. Elrond himself, second only to Gandalf in personal authority, asserts the peril in studying "too deeply the arts of the Enemy, for good or for ill" (II.2 258); after all, the "very desire of [the ring] corrupts the heart" (261)—a classic case of 20/20 hindsight. Glorfindel, an established hero from the Ford of Bruinen, reinforces this position as well. "For it is clear now," he says, "that even at the Council his feet were already on a crooked path" (II.2 259). Afterwards, no competing narrative will have the power to challenge the narrative established by Gandalf. Gandalf has condemned Saruman; so shall Saruman be condemned. Evil and corruption mark his spirit. When Saruman finally relates *his* version of events after the Battle of Isengard, no reader takes his defense seriously. Saruman presents his case to a compromised jury.

Of course, I do not wish to suggest that we should *actually* apply a positive spin to Saruman's actions. He clearly deserves condemnation. Nonetheless, we ought carefully to attend the way in which Tolkien stacks the deck against his master rhetorician. He does not permit the wizard's misdeeds to speak for themselves. During the Council of Elrond, Tolkien's rhetoric constructs Gandalf as an authoritative being with the power to blacken Saruman's name from the very beginning—in the words of Benjamin Saxton (2013), Tolkien has a talent for placing "rhetorical approval behind those characters with whom he agrees" (172). Farah Mendlesohn (2008) puts the matter even more strongly. In her four-fold typology of fantasy fiction, she argues for the ways in which literary "form may act to constrain ideological possibilities" (xvi); that is to say, authors always attempt to control the reader's tendency to control the text. In a "portal-quest" fantasy such as *The Lord of the Rings*, the narrative moves from an insulated, stable world (the Shire) to a wider, wilder, more dangerous fantasy realm (Middle-earth). In order to maintain the desirability of the quest-object, the portal-quest fantasy needs an authoritative figure (such as Gandalf) who guides the reader through polysemic uncertainty and provides an understanding of the world that "validates the quest" (13). Although Mendlesohn seems to disapprove of portal-quest fantasies in general, her description nonetheless fits *The Lord of the Rings* well. Even a friend to semiotic theory, such as Gergely Nagy (2006), admits as much when he says that, within Middle-earth, Tolkien has created a textual world where "meaning *is* guaranteed" (58, emphasis original). Gandalf thereby becomes the spokesman for this single, unitary, and unchallenged viewpoint.

The possibility for a competing narrative *does* exist, however. As we know, Saruman is the highest *Istari* in Gandalf's order. We also know, because Saruman has "long studied the arts of the Enemy himself" (II.2 251), that he has created many devices for forestalling the plans of the Enemy—including the unnamed

“device” that ultimately defeats the Necromancer (II.2 251). Saruman deserves legitimate credit for this victory—but Gandalf has already undermined that credit by reminding everyone of Saruman’s dissembling counsels from earlier. The ends never justify the means in Tolkien, of course, and he refuses to measure Saruman’s beneficial deeds against his crooked motives. Still, there is a sense in which Gandalf, Elrond, and the rest want to have their cake and eat it too. Tolkien’s distaste for Saruman partially stems from a Christian tradition long distrustful of the pursuit of worldly knowledge and power, especially as revealed by the medieval legend of Dr. Faustus. But neither Elrond nor Gandalf, curiously, forego the chance to take advantage of Saruman’s “devices.” Although knowing that studying the arts of the Enemy (for whatever reason) sooner or later results in corruption, they nonetheless permit Saruman’s studies to continue—and reap the benefits of his labor until the consequences finally catch up to Saruman. A reader determined to read against the grain could therefore see Elrond’s *post hoc* condemnation as potentially hypocritical. None of this absolves Saruman, of course, but it *does* complicate the Council’s blanket disapproval. That few readers and critics notice or seem to care about this wrinkle simply indicates the success of Tolkien’s rhetorical privileging.

SECOND PRELUDE: FLOTSAM AND JETSAM

Following Elrond’s Council, references to Saruman pepper the text. The next major prelude comes at Isengard as Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas find Merry and Pippin. Whereas the first prelude tarnishes Saruman’s character, this prelude warns hobbits and readers alike about Saruman’s “Voice”—a warning reiterated by Gandalf in the next chapter. According to Aragorn, Saruman has a “power over the minds of others” due to his deep knowledge; the “wise he could persuade, and the smaller folk he could daunt” (III.9 553). Though other of Saruman’s powers may have waned, his power of persuasion remains.⁶ But Aragorn’s warning also implies a subtle distinction: the cunning speech of a smooth-talker may pose a greater threat than all the treachery and military might hitherto shown by Saruman. A similar remark will be made later by Gandalf, who tells Gimli to be warier of Saruman’s Voice than of any illusions Saruman might cast (III.10 563). The power to control appearances through disguise signals nothing compared to the power to control appearances through speech.

⁶ The warning serves a second function as well, dramatic rather than thematic. Considering how easily Saruman has been defeated (the Battle of Isengard occurs off-stage, so to speak), the reader might legitimately question Saruman’s general competence or the danger he poses. Pippin even raises questions of this sort. Aragorn’s warning convinces the reader that a danger remains, heightening the narrative intensity.

Nonetheless, there is nothing “magical” about Saruman’s speech-craft. It is neither supernatural nor “supernormal” (as Allan Turner calls it). Anyone with skill, talent, and patience can learn the speech-craft possessed by Saruman. Tolkien makes precisely this point in a letter, denying any “hypnotic” quality to Saruman’s speech; the danger comes from “agreeing with his arguments while fully awake. . . . Saruman corrupted the reasoning powers” (*Letters* 277). Such a skill has wide applicability in an age of soundbites, memes, and mass media, but it is the most ancient of arts: Plato levels the same charge against the Sophists, and Aristophanes against Socrates (who he thought *was* a sophist).

These warnings by Aragorn and Gandalf strengthen the reader’s basic resistance to Saruman. Relying on individual readers to pinpoint logical fallacies can be hazardous, especially in young or careless readers. Aragorn and Gandalf both offer authoritative commentary delegitimizing anything uttered by the master of Orthanc.

THE FIRST ATTEMPT: SARUMAN AND THÉODEN

Even after two preludes, however, Tolkien does not rest easily with Saruman. “The Voice of Saruman” represents an outlier chapter in *The Lord of the Rings*. Nowhere else does Tolkien provide such heavy narratorial comment to such a marked degree. The binaries of seeming versus being, reality versus appearance, or surface versus depth get emphasized at every opportunity. For instance, the narrator prefaces Saruman’s first instance of direct speech in the text with remarks highlighting these binaries. Among the listening Rohirrim, they

remembered only that it was a delight to hear the voice speaking, all that it said *seemed* wise and reasonable, and desire awoke in them by swift agreement *to seem wise themselves*. . . . For many the *sound of the voice* alone was enough to hold them enthralled; but for those whom it conquered *the spell* endured when they were far away, and ever they heard that soft voice whispering and urging them. (III.10 564, my italics)

Every italicized phrase highlights the gap between seeming and being, surface and depth. Saruman provides no direct contact with things as they are. Instead, the Riders merely recall in memory the *effect* of his words, not the words themselves. Memory itself indicates absence or lack; we only remember that which can no longer be experienced directly. Likewise, the “sound of the voice” represents pure surface; the depth or content of his words has vanished. Furthermore, the Rohirrim’s eagerness to assent to what Saruman says—for the purpose of *seeming*

wise themselves—indicates a lack of true wisdom. Wisdom requires understanding, and the Rohirrim do not understand. They nod their heads like pupils for whom the teacher lectures too rapidly. Saruman knows how to exploit this fear of looking foolish to full effect. The last italicized portion, “spell,” also reinforces the narrator’s basic theme. The word does not here denote a magical glamour. Instead, “spell” has an older sense deriving from the Old English *spellian*: “tell, speak, discourse, talk.” Simple speech has the effect of a magical glamour without actually being magical. If the deity could create all being by speech or *logos*, then Saruman, possessing the lesser power, can create seeming (but not being) through speech as well.

Also, nowhere else in *The Lord of the Rings* does the narrator focus so heavily on the listening crowd. He describes them with great care. Orators live by addressing the crowd, after all, and classical rhetoric developed as a discipline in democratic Athens because the many, the *hoi polloi*, wielded great political power; Demosthenes and the like perfected their art by addressing public assemblies and law courts. Although Saruman’s first attempt addresses only one individual specifically (Théoden), narrative description clearly shows how Saruman always speaks with an eye toward persuading the many. He succeeds to the extent that the “spell-bound” Riders see Gandalf’s similar dealings with Théoden as “[r]ough and proud” (III.10 565), inferior to Saruman’s own. Other examples of public rhetorical address occur in *The Lord of the Rings*,⁷ but they are minor and unsustained in comparison to what the narrator presents in this chapter. Thus it seems astounding that no one has picked up on this feature of “The Voice of Saruman.” Brian Rosebury, for example, notes Tolkien’s distrust of “smooth-talking demagogues and political operators” but, instead of linking this distrust to the classical debate about philosophy, rhetoric, and demagoguery, Rosebury ascribes that distrust to Tolkien’s “‘anarchist’ suspicion of political processes and institutions” (179)—which is true, as far as it goes, but concerns about hucksterism radically obscure the larger philosophical and theological implications involved in the ancient disjunction between being and seeming.

Tolkien’s antipathy toward rhetoric runs even deeper. Although the narrator continuously emphasizes the crowd’s positive response to Saruman, that crowd *never actually influences events at Orthanc*. Though they listen—and we *know* they listen—their approval or disapproval has no effect on the outcome. Théoden, owing his authority to birth rather than popular acclaim, never once gauges the mood of his subjects. His struggle is entirely personal. Yet Tolkien goes even further in denying agency to the many. An interruption twice occurs during Saruman’s attempt on Théoden. Gimli provides the first, Éomer the second. Neither speaker, tellingly enough, addresses either Saruman or Théoden—instead, they address the

⁷ The Lieutenant of the Tower of Barad-dûr, for example, though he speaks to Aragorn and Gandalf directly, also largely intends his words to be heard by all present.

faceless crowd harkening to Saruman's words. Gimli and Éomer have become orators themselves. They attempt to fight fire with fire. But Tolkien makes them fail. Their counter-speeches remind Riders and readers alike of all that has been said about the dangers of Saruman's Voice, but their speeches—though virtuous in nature—do not triumph over Saruman's own. When Théoden eventually pulls free, he does so only by drawing on reservoirs of inner strength. Tolkien has no patience for the devices for swaying the many, whether “for good or for ill.” Only individual resiliency and inner fortitude, not “nobler” rhetoric, will be permitted to triumph against sophistry.

The two interruptions really only serve to cause cracks in Saruman's façade of kindness. Slowly, a theme of anger emerges. Every piece of resistance that Saruman encounters causes his veneer to disintegrate further. His elegance and smoothness is merely a cover, it appears, for something seething and raging underneath. The unraveling begins when “a light flickered in his eyes” after Gimli's interruption; Éomer's remarks cause a plainly visible “flash of anger.” Both wind up diverting Saruman's attention away from his principle target, Théoden, and he strangely chooses to address both Gimli and Éomer personally. His response to each, even more strangely, contains some sort of sneering dismissal or personal attack. To Gimli he says that “I do not speak to you yet, Gimli Glóin's son” (III.10 565), and Éomer is a “young serpent” with a poisoned tongue (III.10 566). Some restraint still remains; the attacks still *sound* elegant. But Saruman's susceptibility to distraction and his recourse to insult seem unusual in a master of persuasion. One does not woo a lover, Théoden in this case, by getting sidetracked. Nor does insulting Théoden's kin and allies seem sensible. Saruman's seething inner anger, only hinted at before, bubbles up at these interruptions. Though a rhetorician must control a crowd, it does not seem as if Saruman can even control himself. He has, in fact, ceased to be a master rhetorician. The destruction of Isengard and all his ambitions have unbalanced Saruman—and with the waxing of his anger comes the waning of his Voice.

When Théoden repudiates the wizard for good, Saruman loses control completely. Like a child denied its toy, Saruman directs all his wrath against the barrier that has denied him his desires. Instead of sweet-talking Théoden further, Saruman hurls abuse upon abuse on Théoden and the entire House of Eorl. This tactic is completely irrational; it destroys his *ethos* for all subsequent rhetorical attempts. Ranting or raving garners no admiration. A new element seems to be emerging, an element absolutely necessary for understanding all subsequent actions by Saruman following Isengard. That new element is *rage*. After Isengard, rage and its thymotic byproducts—resentment, bitterness, the desire for revenge—will mark Saruman's being in its entirety. The famed eloquence will disappear for good. A few warnings about Saruman's Voice still occur, once by Gandalf (VI.6 958) and then again by Frodo (VI.8 995), but they ring hollow. Saruman has lived to see his

Voice become a myth, its power only a memory. During the Scouring of the Shire, one sharp word from Frodo dispels whatever illusions the remnant of that Voice has cast.

THE SECOND ATTEMPT: SARUMAN AND GANDALF

The second attempt barely deserves the name. Ludicrously, having failed to sway a mere Man, Saruman now attempts a fellow *Istar*—one who clearly remembers harsh treatment at Saruman’s hands. Saruman tries claiming that Gandalf has somehow misinterpreted abuse and imprisonment, a claim as foolish as it sounds. Anyway, Saruman’s petulant outburst against Théoden means that we no longer take Saruman seriously, if we ever did. Gandalf quickly seizes control of the conversation and thrusts Saruman of the Many-Colours from their Order.⁸

Ultimately, Tolkien’s literary craft privileges the likes of Gandalf at the expense of the likes of Saruman. Gandalf, the moral opposite of Saruman, also espouses the opposite of rhetoric as defined by Plato—true knowledge that is objective and unmediated. Jay Ruud characterizes Gandalf’s speeches as “hortatory rather than persuasive” (148), but he seems to miss that hortatory speech possesses a rhetorical dimension of its own. He may have been misled by Tolkien’s skill in concealing Gandalf’s own powers of persuasion. Unlike with Saruman, the narrator barely shows Gandalf as having any effect on the many. Wisdom does not require rhetorical “prettying up” because wisdom should speak for itself. Truth is, so it is implied, transparent and non-rhetorical. No care need be taken for the *perception* of that truth by the fickle, the restless, or the many. Correspondingly, Tolkien downplays how his narrative form uses rhetorical ploys designed to enlist the reader in Gandalf’s central, unchallengeable perspective. While Tolkien will permit ambiguity in some places in the text, he will not permit ambiguity to muddy the waters at the moral center of his textual universe. The two preludes prepare the

⁸ Gandalf later attributes Saruman’s failure as attempting to deal with his victims “piece-meal,” a claim at least partially true. He *does* address Théoden, Gimli, Éomer, and Gandalf individually. Nonetheless, the narrator always carefully indicates the effects of Saruman’s words on the crowd—and gives no comparable description for the speeches made by Gandalf’s companions. Gimli and Éomer have no effect whatsoever; Théoden’s speech merely startles the Riders “out of a dream.” In fact, Saruman’s sudden resemblance to “a snake coiling itself to strike” (III.10 566) has more effect than anything Théoden says. And when Gandalf speaks, the narrator barely describes the Riders’ reactions at all. The two vague references to the crowd after Gandalf’s speeches actually focus on Saruman rather than Gandalf. First, Gandalf’s laughter dispels the Riders’ “fantasy” about Saruman inviting the other wizard into Orthanc for an amiable chat. Second, the Riders also see the effect of Gandalf’s speech *on Saruman*—they “saw through [Saruman’s] mask the anguish of a mind in doubt, loathing to stay and dreading to leave its refuge” (III.10 568). The words of Saruman the rhetorician induce a dream; the words of Gandalf the White force them awake.

reader for the challenge Saruman presents; the two attempts discredit rhetoric as an art. Gandalf is the anti-rhetor.

Now the major issue left to explore is the relationship drawn—and then unraveled—between rhetoric and rage within the figure of Saruman. After all, why should rage be combined with rhetoric? Why rage and not some other characteristic? To answer that question, we must turn to Thrasymachus, the rhetorician from Plato's *Republic*.

II. THE TAMING OF THRASYMACHUS

The main reason critics have missed the larger philosophical tradition lurking behind these Saruman episodes stems, I suspect, from an over-reliance on the *Letters*. Tolkien has always been an author determined to control the interpretation of his works, and his commentary has never portrayed Saruman as participating in philosophy's old feud with rhetoric; instead, he talks about Saruman's status as a fallen angel, his status as a reformer, or his association with metal and cunning and industrialization. Tom Shippey himself may have inadvertently contributed to the oversight, linking Saruman firmly to modernity by calling him "the most contemporary figure in Middle-earth, both politically and linguistically" (*Author* 76), thus directing our eyes away from classical associations. Yet Tolkien certainly knew the debate between rhetoric and philosophy. He read classics at Exeter College in Oxford and participated actively in debating societies at King Edward's School and Exeter. If my rhetorical analysis of the Saruman episodes proves sound, as I think it does, then I think we can agree with Miryam Libran-Moreno (2005) that, although Tolkien *greatly* privileged the north and northern literature, he "never truly left Greek and Latin literature behind" (29). The literature suffused the Western intellectual tradition and heavily influenced Christian thinking, as Milton demonstrates in his treatment of Belial. Even if Saruman embodies the modern politician, the rhetorical dimension of Saruman nevertheless reaches back to the foundations of Western thought.

Thus, maintaining a strong parallel between Saruman and Thrasymachus seems appropriate. Both are "wild beasts." Both are rhetoricians. Both embody rage and eloquence in a unique relationship. Saruman, as we have seen, gradually allows his anger to overwhelm and finally eradicate his art. Thrasymachus differs, however. My following interpretation of Thrasymachus in *The Republic* will be heavily influenced by political philosopher Leo Strauss. According to Strauss (1964), Thrasymachus represents "the city" or more specifically the passions and beliefs of the city. Thrasymachus explicitly claims that justice is "only" the advantage of the stronger—and he maintains as well that injustice is superior to

justice. (Incidentally, Saruman also holds these beliefs, in deed if not in speech.) Thrasymachus is the only speaker in *The Republic* “who exhibits anger and behaves discourteously and even savagely,” thereby propounding “the most savage thesis on justice” (Strauss 74).

But Thrasymachus, as a rhetorician, keeps tight control of his anger. He subordinates his anger to his art. As a teacher of rhetoric, he wishes to be paid for imparting what he knows. His anger and claims about justice are meant to hook potential students. Yet what Thrasymachus pretends to believe reveals what he thinks the many *truly* believe but fear to admit. The people are angry—and they do not really believe that justice is intrinsically valuable. To look at Thrasymachus, therefore, is to come to a particular understanding of the relationship between art and power. As David Hancock (2015) says, “Any theory of [anger] as a political tool has to take into account that it is beholden to the will of the person who can orchestrate it, the figure that Plato presents through Thrasymachus” (280). Until Gandalf expels him from their Order, Saruman also possesses Thrasymachus’s ability to orchestrate anger through the persuasive arts. But when Saruman, following his expulsion, becomes flooded by rage as Isengard has been flooded by the river Isen, his eloquence fails him at last. A new relationship to political power is born: all future political endeavors will be sparked by resentment or *ressentiment*. A new politics of rage develops. This section unpacks that politics of rage in more detail. Since rage or anger is better understood through the Greek term *thymos*, I will begin by explicating Plato’s theory of *thymos*. Then I will employ that understanding of *thymos* to show how Thrasymachus “plays the angry city” (Strauss 78) in *The Republic*. The final portion of this section will unpack the links and differences between these two “wild beasts.”

AN INTRODUCTION TO ANGER: PLATO’S THEORY OF THE *THYMOS*

Thymos is a concept with much greater complexity and connotation than offered by its usual translations as anger, rage, spiritedness, or “heart.” Plato’s ultimate task in *The Republic* is to explain the goodness of justice and, to accomplish this difficult task, he makes a questionable analogy between the individual soul and the city. A city operates in perfect justice when its three constitutive classes operate in harmony together. These classes are the artisan or producer class, who provide for basic needs; the warrior class, which protects the city from enemies; and the philosophic or ruling class, who employ wisdom in order to guide the affairs of the city. Each of these classes, allegedly, corresponds to a different portion of the individual’s (tripartite) soul. The artisans represent the appetitive or desiring part, the warriors the spirited or thymotic part, and the rulers represent the logical or rational part. Whereas the *logos* constitutes the soul’s rational part, both the appetite

and the *thymos* are non-rational. It quickly becomes clear that Plato has little interest in the appetitive. When Adeimantus first proposes the “healthy city,” a place where all basic needs and bodily desires are met, it does not take Glaucon long to dub this city scornfully as the “city of pigs.” Humans require more than simply meeting their basic needs, and Glaucon objects to the lack of “virtue or excellence” (Strauss 95) in the healthy city. The healthy city may be just, but no one wants to live there, especially not someone of Glaucon’s high spirit. Thus Socrates (and Plato) must turn to the *thymos*, the spirited part of the soul, to answer Glaucon’s need.

Thymos serves well the warrior class because it centers around both esteem and reputation. Although the city may exist for the sake of preserving life, it nonetheless needs men willing to die to protect that city—and *thymos*, desiring glory and the singing of one’s praises by the poets, confers the ability to overcome our natural appetitive fear of death.⁹ Achilles offers the greatest example of the thymotic man: the warrior-prince who scorns long life for the immortal glory given for doing great deeds. *Thymos*, however, also serves as the seat of indignation and outrage. Any insult or offense to oneself or one’s own—whether one’s friends or kin or city or country—demands immediate redress. An outrage of any sort requires action and constitutes both the strength and the weakness of *thymos*. It moves our spirits to “boil and become harsh and form an alliance for battle with what seems just” (*Republic* 440c), and it enables us to take pride in withstanding “hunger, cold and everything of the sort . . . and not cease from its noble efforts before it has succeeded” (440d). When we see our city—or our friends, or our way of life—under attack, *thymos* compels us immediately to leap to the defense, hence why the warrior class needs a highly developed *thymos*. To imagine that Achilles could be *Achilles* without his petulant, destructive anger against Agamemnon for stealing “his” slave girl would be to overlook the complexities of *thymos*.¹⁰ Yet *thymos*,

⁹ This fear of death later eventually became the bulwark of the tradition of liberalism founded by Thomas Hobbes, and the transition from *thymos* to the appetitive (which also includes the desire for wealth) signals a key difference between classical and modern political philosophy.

¹⁰ According to classicist Angela Hobbes (2000), *thymos* requires us to form a conception of oneself “in accordance with one’s conception of the fine and noble.” Since this self-image also requires social recognition, acquiring this recognition might necessitate self-assertion and maybe even aggression—and “any offense committed to one’s self-image by others will prompt anger and a desire to retaliate” (30). When Agamemnon took Briseis, he symbolically asserted his superiority over Achilles, an act offensive to Achilles’s image of himself as best of the Achaeans. His subsequent withdrawal from battle, disastrous for the Greeks, is an attempt to re-assert his prestige. *Thymos* is higher than patriotism, which occasionally may require self-effacement. (Indeed, the Christian emphasis on humility runs strongly counter to *thymos*, a continuous trouble point for Tolkien in his study of the literature of the north.) Yet Achilles’s *thymos*, which leads him to withdraw after losing his slave-girl, also compels him to rejoin the fighting after the death of Patroclus—*thymos* compels him to seek revenge and thus also live up to his reputation as the greatest living warrior.

being irrational, cannot properly distinguish true friends from seeming friends (or true enemies from seeming enemies). This issue opens the way for Plato to subordinate *thymos* to reason.

An important corollary to *thymos*, however, is the possibility of shame. If the need for glory and reputation form an essential component to *thymos*, then the thymotic individual correspondingly needs the endorsement of public opinion. *Thymos* ties one to society. If that public opinion turns to censure or disapproval instead of praise, then shame, embarrassment, or self-disgust can result (at best). At worst, however, the scorned thymotic individual may turn to bitterness, resentment, anger—even a need for revenge. Although Plato does not mention *thymos* until Book II and saves extended discussion of it until Book IV, it will become clear in the next section that Thrasymachus is a man brimming with thymotic anger. That he play-acts this anger and subordinates it to his rhetorical art is not obvious at first, but becomes apparent only under Socrates’s relentless questioning. Yet *thymos* also proves Thrasymachus’s salvation in a limited sense. His “shocking” claims about justice betray his eagerness to be praised for his shockingness. When caught out in a logical contradiction, though, the rhetorician has the decency to begin “blushing” (350d). He knows the company present has just seen him bested by Socrates. However ignoble his character, his capacity for shame will separate Thrasymachus from Saruman.

Ultimately, Plato will develop a strong relationship between *thymos* and “the city,” i.e., the social and political community from which individuals cannot be separated. This relationship between *thymos* and the city gradually reveals itself through the unique combination of rage and eloquence in Thrasymachus.

BETWEEN RAGE AND THE CITY

Book I of *The Republic* has a strange character. It may be considered a preface or an introduction to the themes which will dominate the rest of the book. Beginning with Book II, Socrates will converse almost entirely with the Athenians Glaucon and Adeimantus, Plato’s two half-brothers, but in Book I he converses mainly with “foreigners.”¹¹ Strong literary resonances from Socrates’s trial and Plato’s *Apology* pervade Book I. Socrates travels down to Athens’s port for a festival dedicated to Bendis, a foreign god introduced to Athens—ironically, a charge brought against Socrates himself. Suddenly, Polemarchus and a group of friends accost Socrates. Playfully, Polemarchus—later executed by the Thirty Tyrants for his democratic sympathies—compels Socrates through numerical superiority to visit him at his

¹¹ Cephalus is a metic, a resident of Athens who pays taxes but possesses no rights of citizenship. Polemarchus, his son, is a metic as well. Thrasymachus hails originally from Chalcedon, visiting Athens in the hopes of acquiring pupils.

home. Polemarchus's playful use of force nevertheless foreshadows the more serious situation philosophy faces when confronted with the political power of "the many" in democratic Athens. After arriving at Polemarchus's home, Socrates will then symbolically encounter the three major regimes (through their representatives) that claim to exemplify true justice: oligarchy via Cephalus, democracy via Polemarchus, and tyranny via the angry Thrasymachus.

Before Thrasymachus enters the stage, expounding his "savage" theory of justice, Socrates must handle two other claims about justice. Unlike Thrasymachus's definition, both will rely on some sort of authority for their sanctity. Cephalus, an oligarch by virtue of his wealth, proposes the first. Basically, we must be just out of piety, the sense of duty we owe the gods. (He enters the conversation having come from a sacrifice, and he leaves to perform another.) Yet it soon becomes clear that pious justice is merely instrumental, performed for fear that the "tales told about what is in Hades" might be true (331d). Socrates quickly dispatches Cephalus; he has no patience for a *pro forma*—if praiseworthy by the many—adherence to tradition.¹² Polemarchus provides the other definition of justice from authority. As with Cephalus, Polemarchus turns to the poets. From the poet Simonides Polemarchus derives the principle that "justice is doing good to friends and harm to enemies" (332d). That is to say, Polemarchus identifies the good with what is closest to him, an identification indicative of his "attachment to family and city" (Bloom 332). He holds his friends in higher esteem than strangers, his family over non-relations, his own city over foreign cities, Greek speakers over the speakers of unintelligible tongues. Such attachments hold high dignity in some circles, even today. Socrates, however, points out that Polemarchus's definition can lead one to dishonorable acts, such as lying and cheating, at least if done to an enemy—a consequence for which Socrates ascribes Polemarchus's admiration for a poet even greater than Simonides, Homer himself.¹³ Finally, Socrates encourages Polemarchus to admit that "it is never just to harm anyone" (335d).

¹² The attitude Tolkien might have had to this scene is complex. On one hand, he could not have sanctioned Plato's easy dismissal of tradition and traditional religion. Plato wishes to found a political philosophy, and substantive reason competes with piety as the highest authority. On the other hand, though Tolkien would have defended tradition against the claims of philosophy, he would have agreed that treating justice as an instrumental good—as a way of gaining Heaven and avoiding Hell—is a travesty of the truth. For Tolkien, tradition is not good because it is traditional; it has become traditional because it is good.

¹³ Homer had praised Odysseus's grandfather, Autolycus, for surpassing all men "in stealing and in swearing oaths" (334b). Socrates, tellingly enough, points out this connection, not Polemarchus. As might be becoming clear, Socrates continually distrusts the poets, for the Greek poets are a major competitor—perhaps *the* major competitor—for the admiration of young men, which philosophy and philosophers wish to have for themselves. The poets are the most authoritative myth-makers, and philosophy, although it may *use* myth, ultimately subordinates myth to *logos*. The implications for Tolkien are, again, obvious. Although philology as a discipline demands the strictest use of reason, Tolkien's love of myth and traditional religion puts him at odds with philosophic *logos*.

Thrasymachus's definition of justice, when that rhetorician bursts upon the sage, denies *any* prior authority. His definition is the most democratic and, perhaps not uncoincidentally, the one most conducive to ambition. He offers Glaucon and Adeimantus, two ambitious young men of good birth, the "means of success, both by the tools of persuasion he can provide and by the liberating insight into the nature of political life" (Bloom 339). They need not, in effect, feel bound by the old conventions on justice, which hinder their ambitions; those old conventions are nothing by illusions designed to protect the status quo. The anger of Thrasymachus is the same anger of any spirited youth chafing at the strictures of "society." Polemarchus's admission, led by Socrates, that "it is never just to harm anyone" drives Thrasymachus into a frenzy. It seems to go against common sense—what people *really* think if only they dared speak their minds. Thrasymachus sees himself as a man who dares to speak those uncomfortable truths. Being daring, he desires to be praised for his daringness. That daringness will win him honor and therefore pupils. His concern for honor can be seen in his accusation against Socrates, whom he accuses of engaging in disputation only to gratify his own "love of honor." He likewise dares Socrates to provide a definition of justice, but Thrasymachus cannot long resist providing his *own* definition, which he considers "very fine" and liable to win him "a good reputation" (338a).

Thrasymachus's anger, then, is a manifestation of his *thymos*—the desire for glory or praise essential for one's social sense of self. This desire for praise will eventually prove Thrasymachus's undoing. Had he simply maintained a legalistic position—i.e., justice is the advantage of the stronger so long as we always identify "the stronger" with the current ruling class—then he would have presented Socrates a much more difficult challenge. But as Thrasymachus wishes to call ruling an art, something teachable by someone like himself, he must position himself as someone who can teach powerless students how to be "the stronger." His potential pupils are not those who are already rulers—they wish to *become* rulers. Therefore, Thrasymachus denies that rulers who make mistakes about their own interests can be "stronger" in the strict sense. Socrates exploits this loophole and eventually "tames" Thrasymachus despite the rhetorician dragging his feet under questioning and producing "a wonderful quantity of sweat" (350d). Finally, Thrasymachus blushes. Though Thrasymachus had bragged about his shamelessness, in the end he proves himself a beast with red cheeks. Rhetoric falls before Socratic dialectic, and

Rather than seeking to found a political philosophy, as Plato does, Tolkien uses his literary works to defend a sort of political theology.

It must be noted, though, that Tolkien almost certainly did not share the Straussian view of Plato being described here. Insofar as Tolkien knew Plato, he probably understood him through a neo-Platonic lens, initially developed through Church fathers such as Plotinus and Augustine and vastly influencing interpretations of Plato during Tolkien's time. Strauss, however, sought to emancipate his reading of Plato from Neo-Platonism, which he saw as obscuring some of the most fascinating issues within Plato's works.

Thrasymachus demonstrates himself inferior to Socrates. That Thrasymachus blushes shows his dependence on public approval. He is not as liberated as he thinks; he has “no true freedom of mind, because he is attached to prestige, to the applause of the multitude and hence their thought” (Bloom 336). A more shameless man, someone of greater evil, would have denied logical constraints. As someone of high *thymos*, *thymos* eventually brings Thrasymachus low.

Despite this taming, the nature of justice itself remains questionable, and Glaucon and Adeimantus present injustice’s challenge in stronger terms in Book II. Yet the link established by Plato between rage and eloquence continues. Thrasymachus possesses both anger and rhetorical skill in equal quantities. He is defeated by Socrates because his “anger or spiritedness [*thymos*] is not the core of his being but subordinate to his art” (CM 78)—i.e., he places art above *thymos*. Though his anger is genuine, it is not so blind as it might first appear. It has become a tool for strengthening his art. Such visible anger permits Thrasymachus’s audience to identify with him. They can say to themselves, “That Thrasymachus, he is one of us. He denounces what we denounce, and he praises what we praise.” Thrasymachus understands that a rhetorician who controls his anger can thereby manipulate the anger of the many. Rhetoric does more than simply persuade subjects to obey laws passed to advance the interests of the law-making class.¹⁴ Rhetoric also rouses indignation and outrage, passions essential for defending the city and preserving institutions as they are. The laws themselves derive from outrage because only such anger can create taboos against performing the offending actions. *Thymos* “inspires one to enforce the taboo and the taboo only stands if breaking it is punishable and there is a will to punish” (Hancock 283). Such outrage or indignation at broken taboos becomes all the stronger when the creation of those taboos stems, not from practical or rational necessity, but from the most sacred myths and traditions of the city or to appeals about “our way of life.”

When Thrasymachus “plays” the angry city, adopting its indignation as his own without visible qualification, he understands that the city cannot exist without anger. Anger leads to the laws. It also leads to the preservation of the city. It compels warriors to defend their city and way of life even at the cost of their lives. Even questioning the goodness of what the city holds most sacred can cause offense to *thymos*. Rhetoric becomes the tool for manipulating these passions. It allows the demagogue to instigate outrage when convenient and soothe it when inconvenient. Plato dedicates *The Republic*, therefore, to finding a means of understanding justice that goes beyond rhetoric and the passions of the city.

¹⁴ The rulers “need the art of persuasion in order to persuade their subjects that the laws which are framed with exclusive regard to the benefit of the rulers serve the benefits of the subjects” (Strauss 80).

THE TWO WILD BEASTS, THRASYMACHUS AND SARUMAN

When Tolkien inverts Plato's hierarchy between rage and eloquence, elevating *thymos* over rhetorical skill, the change—though small in itself—produces wide-ranging consequences for Middle-earth. John Milton had contented himself with defaming rhetoric by linking it to Belial. Only by examining Thrasymachus, however, can we see how rhetoric relates first to rage and then to “the city” at large; only by examining Thrasymachus do we uncover the extent of the loss suffered by Saruman by permitting *thymos* to triumph over his Voice. Thrasymachus's skill had allowed him to play the multitude. Though tamed eventually by Socrates, he nonetheless possesses the potential to rule a city. Alone and therefore numerically weaker than the many, rhetoric granted him the ability to orchestrate the passions of the many according to his desires.

Saruman *used* to have that ability. He had always desired to rule, of course, even before betraying Gandalf, but his eloquence at least provided him a method to pursue that ambition in a socially acceptable manner. As leader of the White Council, his counsels held vast sway in Middle-earth. The many accounted him Wise, and even the likes the Gandalf and Elrond (who adopt between them the role of Socrates, believing a variation of the thesis that “it is never just to harm anyone”¹⁵) defer to Saruman's judgment. Throughout it all a tight rein had been kept on Saruman's inner anger—a like anger to that which propels Thrasymachus on-stage upon hearing Socrates's “nonsense.” Nonetheless, the example of Sauron presents itself continuously before Saruman. Sauron has no rhetoric and, indeed, is never heard to speak in the text. He never needs to accommodate himself to the conventional morality. He can acquire all that he desires without dissembling or mouthing the platitudes praised by the many. In this regard, Sauron shows himself “the stronger.” He actually possesses the most “justice” as defined by Thrasymachus.

Saruman sees Sauron's example and cannot help admiring the true Lord of the Rings. The master of Orthanc has always chafed at the limitations placed on his ambitions by convention. He begins to see his own politicking in the White Council, pursued by means of his speech-craft, as a sign of weakness; Sauron, after all, does nothing of the sort. Sauron is the highest arbiter of the just and unjust in his realm since he rules by fiat rather than persuasion. Saruman seeks that highest status for

¹⁵ In an intriguing observation, Adam Rosman (2005) notes that Gandalf, when he tortures Gollum to gain information on the One Ring, actually “violates the values of the Free Peoples” that Tolkien wishes to uphold (38)—i.e., Middle-earth does not face a threat imminent enough (the “ticking bomb” scenario) to justify Gandalf wringing important information from a defenseless prisoner by force. Although Rosman does not cite Tolkien's comment in *Morgoth's Ring*, it seems that Tolkien might have agreed with Rosman's assessment. Concerning the orcs (whose souls may be redeemable), Tolkien writes, “Captives must not be tormented, not even to discover information for the defense of the homes of Elves and Men” (*MR* 419).

himself. Rhetoric now being seen as unnecessary, his eloquence begins to slip. As it slips, Saruman allows himself to indulge his anger. He disdains to hide it as has been his wont, since only the weak must hide their true feelings. He never truly means or expects Gandalf to accept his proposal to double-cross Sauron at Orthanc; Saruman certainly does not try very hard. Nonetheless, all Saruman's machinations unravel when Isengard gets demolished by the Ents. Unable to accept his implicit inferiority to Sauron, whom he at least admires as "the stronger," Saruman refuses to accept his implicit inferiority to Gandalf, representative of the "conventional" morality Saruman now despises. His thymotic passion for pre-eminence thwarted, the humiliated *thymos* of Saruman now turns outward. It is not *he* who has failed but the unfair world which has failed *him*. As his rage overwhelms every rhetorical skill that remains, Saruman now turns his hand to seeking revenge against those whom he still has the power to harm.

We do not know what becomes of Thrasymachus after Book I of *The Republic*. He never speaks again except for twice briefly in Book V, neither statement particularly friendly; he even remains silent when Socrates later says that they have "just become friends, though we weren't even enemies before" (498C). Whatever resentment his public humiliation may have stirred, he knows he cannot express it. In a way, it was safe for Socrates to silence him. No Athenian citizen at the height of Athens's empire really cares about the opinions of a disgruntled foreign rhetorician. Thrasymachus's resentment could never foment into revolution. The case is different with Saruman. Even lacking his Voice, Saruman *does* possess the power to make his resentment felt—and that resentment provides him the determination to re-make the world according to his hate-filled will. This difference in situation between Saruman and Thrasymachus ushers Middle-earth into the rage politics of secular modernity. The Scouring of the Shire will differ from all prior political events by unleashing the politics of resentment on a mass scale.

III. PSYCHOPOLITICS AND THE SHIRE

Among critical theorists today, Peter Sloterdijk (2010) deals with the "psychopolitics" of *thymos*, rage, and resentment perhaps to the greatest extent.¹⁶

¹⁶ Francis Fukuyama, whom Sloterdijk credits with re-introducing *thymos* into modern political thought, approaches the concept from the perspective of French Marxist critic Alexandre Kojève. In the field of international relations, Richard Ned Lebow has constructed a "grand theory" of international relations involving *thymos*. He consistently translates the term as "standing," "prestige," or "esteem," however, meaning that the elements of rage and resentment noted by Sloterdijk go unincorporated. For a review of the literature relating to honor and international affairs, see Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, 2008, chapter 1.

Modern political theory has virtually eliminated *thymos* as a valid conceptual tool, preferring instead rational actors (liberalism), security (*realpolitik*), or the social construction of individuals and identities (constructivism). For Sloterdijk, though, all such appetite-based theories do not go far enough in explaining history as it actually occurs. History, according to Sloterdijk, is always “the history of rage applications” (62); rage and all its thymotic siblings provide the grounds on which individuals are compelled to catalyze the mass movements that enact world-historical change. My claim in this section is that, after the Battle of Isengard, a radical break occurs in Saruman’s character. Tolkien does everything in his power to discredit rhetoric and, like Milton, discredit it he does. Yet Saruman’s Voice had already begun to wane by the time he betrays Gandalf; his persuasive skills have been slipping for a long time, failing at last to live up to their reputation. The seeds of rage within his spirit, held tightly in check by his art, grow and reach maturity during his imprisonment in Orthanc. Resentment at all that he has lost begins to flourish. Enlisting the aid of other resentful people (the remnants of his defeated forces at Isengard, Bill Ferny, Ted Sandyman), Saruman wages a battle against the Shire. He begins the first mass rage movement. But he also awakens *thymos* in the Shire.

Nearly alone of all the warrior societies of Middle-earth, the Shire has never had need of a thymotic warrior class. Protected by the Dúnedain, *thymos* served them no purpose; the fierce competitiveness and striving for primacy indicative of *thymos* do not play a major role in Shire life. Beginning with Sharkey’s Shire, however, all that changes. With the passing of Gandalf and other protectors, the hobbits of the Shire must unleash the thymotic energies that had long lain dormant within them. They feel a burning anger against the injustices imposed on them by ruffians and outsiders—destroying *their* land, *their* property, *their* self-respect. They initiate a revolution against Sharkey and his men based on this anger—an anger that might easily have transformed into the same resentment felt by Sharkey, Ferny, and the like, had their oppression lasted any real length of time or had they lacked the strength to fight back successfully. Such a resurgence of *thymos* in the Shire must have posed grave problems for Tolkien as a Christian, despite his sympathy for the hobbits’ plight. Their new sense of nationalism and self-esteem in the post-Sharkey Shire indicates, under the Christian point of view, a “corruption” peculiar to the modern world.

By identifying the politics of resentment and *thymos* as key political components between Sharkey and the Scouring, I also hope to address a side issue about the nature of Sharkey’s takeover. Although Sharkey’s men bleat about “fair distribution,” Sharkey is not actually a reformer in any real sense. He has no clear ideology, whether of the left (communism) or the right (fascism). The critical literature on the Scouring has, in fact, divided itself on how to understand the

policies he institutes.¹⁷ My argument concerning psychopolitics, however, will build upon the work of Jessica Yates (1996) who, in a thorough and admirable essay, bypasses questions of communism and fascism by seeing the Scouring as representing Tolkien's Christian abhorrence of "totalitarian evil" (242). To this analysis, though, we must add a further dimension, one which Tolkien never intended explicitly but which nevertheless makes itself felt throughout the Scouring: rage and *ressentiment*. In the twentieth-century, political parties have indicated a particular brilliance in organizing the thymotic energies of the disadvantaged, providing a "liaison between rage capacities and a desire for dignity" (Sloterdijk 144-45) that can be shaped for political ends. Yet fascism—which is only "socialism without a proletariat" (152)—differs little from leftist parties in marshalling the forces of rage. Fascism's promise to resuscitate the "greatness of the national collective" (152) mirrors the left's thymotic anger at class and social inequality. Indeed, as Sloterdijk writes, both the communist and fascist movements "identified each other as competitors" (153) for the resources of rage and discontent. I see Sharkey and the response to Sharkey less as critiques of totalitarianism per se and more as a stoic acknowledgment of the new character of modernity.

RAGE AND RESENTMENT IN THE POLITICAL RAGE BANK

Although Sloterdijk praises Leo Strauss's recovery of classical thought and titles his monograph in homage to Heidegger, the core of Sloterdijk's thought is actually Nietzschean. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche investigates the "transvaluation of all values" which occurred between the ancient world and the

¹⁷ For example, the Marxist critic Ishay Landa (2002) believes that Tolkien's horror at communism "subsumes the initial critique of capitalism" implicit in Lotho, the rapacious "monopolizing capitalist" (131). Tolkien's own letters state his conception of Saruman as a "reformer" whose reforms lead inevitably to tyranny (*Letters* 197), and Sauron from the fragment *The Lost Road*, written during the heyday of the Great Depression, parodies Karl Marx. The infamous Marx-influenced anthology, *J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land* edited by Robert Giddings (1984), also lambasts Tolkien for his alleged antipathy to communism and socialism. Iwan Rhys Morus calls Saruman's deed "unmistakably Fascist" (qtd. in Yates 241), and Robert Plank (1975), with questionable logic, asserts that "fascism preaches the unity of the people, which means in practice that everybody is treated equally badly, and this is certainly true in the shire [sic]" (111). Peter E. Firchow (2008) and Niels Werber (2005), furthermore, both argue that the text suggests the "blood and soil" ideology of fascism. For Firchow, calling the hobbits fascist is "exaggerated" but "not farfetched," particularly in regards to "killing supposedly inferior races" like goblins in *The Hobbit* (29). More seriously, the German critic Niels Werber argues that the geo- and biopolitics of Middle-earth reveals an "almost frightening coherence" (229), familiar to anyone conversant with the prevailing discourses in pre-1945 Germany. Only after expelling Sharkey's half-orkish Men can the Shire become the "ethnically homogenous gated community" Tolkien had intended it to be (241).

modern. According to Nietzsche, the passive priestly caste of a Roman province, filled with centuries of bitterness at a long string of historical subjugations, had essentially retaliated against their conquerors by “transvaluing” their conquerors’ *thymos*-based virtues as “vices”—a fatal intellectual and cultural shift that Nietzsche brands as hateful of life. This transvaluation derives directly from resentment or, in Nietzsche’s terminology, “*ressentiment*.” When *ressentiment* “itself turns creative and gives birth to values,” says Nietzsche, it denies the efficacy of deed and compensates “for it only with imaginary revenge” (20). Judeo-Christian thought correspondingly developed a “slave morality” emphasizing humility, meekness, faith, and forbearance. Gone was the pagan tolerance, even praise, of vengeance—a deadly part of Greek tribal life taken quite seriously by the dramatist Aeschylus, who examines revenge and justice in his *Oresteia* series of plays; but, whereas Aeschylus ultimately privileges organized litigation over personal vendetta, Judeo-Christian ethics took revenge out of the secular realm entirely. It delayed revenge *much* farther into the future than the secular world did or could. It gave over that revenge into “the hands of an angry God” (to paraphrase theologian Jonathan Edwards), delaying that revenge onto an “imaginary” but ever imminent future Day of Judgment, a cataclysmic event where all the wrongs of the world would be avenged and set right. The prime value of Nietzsche’s analysis, according to Sloterdijk, has less to do with Nietzsche’s loathing of 19th-century European Christianity and more with religion’s development of the “ethics of deferring rage” (28).¹⁸ Such “deferred rage” leads to *Rage and Time*’s central metaphor: the notion of a rage bank.

A rage bank develops when an individual does not immediately “spend” rage or related thymotic affects (resentment, revenge, etc.) and instead “deposits” that rage or defers gratification—effectively storing that rage like grain in a silo or books in a library.¹⁹ This collected rage then provides the “raw material for

¹⁸ As an expert in the literature of the north, Tolkien intimately knew the extent of pagan justice or vengeance. *Weregild* was a form of custom-bound justice, closely bound to the desire for revenge, that dictated appropriate restitution for lost property, a slain kinsman, or some other wrong. Such justice had to be sought by the wronged person or his kin; it left little appeal to law courts or divine justice. So far as I can tell, the word “weregild” appears only once in *The Lord of the Rings*. That appearance is negative: when Isildur refuses advice and keeps the One Ring for himself instead of destroying it, he claims, “This I will have as weregild for my father, and my brother” (II.2 237), both of whom had perished by Sauron’s hand. Isildur’s form of pagan justice, the blood-price of his kin, needless to say has disastrous consequences for Middle-earth.

It should also be noted that the War of Wrath from *The Silmarillion* displays a type of rage politics in action, though it bears little other resemblance to modern mass political movements. Nonetheless, the War of Wrath is hardly a *secular* rage movement since the Valar and the Elves of Aman initiate it. For Sloterdijk, following Nietzsche, secular rage energies in modernity have replaced theological rage energies.

¹⁹ These analogies are used by Sloterdijk; he is attempting to link the origins of rage politics to technological advancement.

historical change” (60), by which Sloterdijk means that this rage, having been organized and directed into fruitful channels, can then look upon the present world “as a realm for constructing future projects” (60). The factors or conditions which gave rise to the original rage must be changed; anger provides the drive to change them. Within the psychopolitics of *thymos*, rage is *the* strongest motivating force—and Sloterdijk thereby positions himself in contrast to nearly all modern political thought, which overwhelmingly privileges “appetitive” motives such as wealth accumulation or security concerns. Rage “draws its force from an excess of energy that longs for release” (56). Resentment develops when *thymos* has been sinned against but its agent lacks the power to effect revenge immediately. That resentment gets deposited in the rage bank. The twentieth-century, full of mass movements, is rife with examples of such banks. The “milieu of nationalism and internationalism,” in other words, as well as the rising forces of socialism, communism, and fascism, have created “new and acute breeding grounds for resentment . . . supported by an unknown type of clergy, the secular clergy of hate, who stormed against ‘existing conditions’” (27).

Within *The Lord of the Rings*, Saruman becomes the first character to utilize a rage bank successfully. *Thymos* has always filled Saruman, manifesting through his competitiveness to be first and dominate Middle-earth, and the resulting competition this triggers with Sauron eventually turns to resentment when perceived lesser beings, hobbits and mere trees, thwart him and irrevocably harm his own estimation of himself. That resentment is the key factor here. In simply *possessing* thymotic elements, Saruman differs little from Boromir or Aragorn, who channel their *thymos* into nobler ends, or even Éowyn, who shows the tragic consequences of *thymos* shamefully constrained by gendered social circumstances. *Thymos* turns to resentment when injuries for which the injured cannot retaliate go unaddressed. The destruction of his armies, his expulsion from the *Istari*, and his imprisonment in Orthanc have rendered Saruman absolutely powerless. His last remaining skill, his Voice, is but a shadow of itself, overwhelmed by the rage that floods his being. Had Saruman possessed the capacity for shame or embarrassment, as Thrasymachus did, perhaps he could have accepted Gandalf’s forgiveness. As it is, however, he refuses.

Refusing that forgiveness, in fact, grants Saruman the ability to maintain his reserves of rage in stock. Forgiveness would have siphoned off his slowly developing *ressentiment*, depriving him of its energy. Accepting forgiveness would also acknowledge a position of weakness: only the forgiver, not the guilty, has the power to withhold or grant that forgiveness. Since Saruman needs to salvage what remains of his shredded self-respect, he refuses to let Gandalf put him in that “weaker” position. He nurses his anger against the day vengeance might be unleashed with impunity. The “fury of resentment,” as Sloterdijk astutely observes, “begins at the moment the person who is hurt decides to let herself fall into

humiliation as if it were the product of choice” (48). Saruman continually verbalizes his hurts and injuries, giving himself some measure of power over them by refusing to be ashamed. He also exaggerates the extent of those injuries,²⁰ elevating them to the size of a mountain in order “to stand on its peak, full of bitter triumph” (Sloterdijk 48).

Left-wing or right-wing ideology, then, plays no role in Sharkey’s takeover of the Shire; in the Primary World, such ideologies mostly function to organize rage banks along particular channels. Mouthing phrases like “fair distribution” is just a way of asserting superiority over the oppressed, since now the oppressors demand that the oppressed express gratitude for their oppression. Indeed, only the likes of Ted Sandyman truly consider Sharkey’s Shire to constitute genuine “progress.” Bill Ferny and the ruffians do not care one way or another. As for Saruman, the Shire’s transformation derives from nothing but his personal *ressentiment*. He holds the belief, as Sloterdijk writes, that “there is too little suffering in the world on a local or global level. . . . The rage bearer sees in those people who are unjustly without suffering as his most plausible enemies” (56). The security and complacency of the hobbits infuriate Saruman. The meek have inherited the earth, they who are so much inferior to him. The Shire, as Saruman sees matters, has reaped the benefits of all that he himself has lost. Out of his *ressentiment*, therefore, he attempts a transvaluation of his own. He witnesses the Shire’s bucolic conditions and calls them *backward*; he observes its peacefulness and calls it *naïve*. As one of the ruffians says, “This country wants waking up and setting to rights” (VI.8 982). The intent, nominally, is to turn a hapless “pre-modern society” into a modern marvel of technology and civilization. *Ressentiment* reveals to us Saruman’s belief that the hobbits actually deserve their oppression. Their complacency has brought this upon themselves. Thus can Saruman’s resentment now perceive itself as being lordly and giving: he gives them a newer, better way of life. Such a belief is an illusion, of course, however pleasing Saruman considers it, but it contains the well-spring of world-historical change—provided that a leader of sufficient charisma and organizational drive exists to harness those deposits of rage. Saruman is not that leader.

Saruman wastes himself in his cleverness and fritters away every reserve of resentment. Lacking any clear ideology, he does not even wish material enrichment for himself. His revenge is of the pettiest sort: to “think of [the harm I have done] and set it against my injuries” (VI.8 995). Nietzsche describes Saruman’s psychology perfectly when he describes the resentment-filled individual:

²⁰ There are many examples, but a few will suffice. When the company meets Saruman for the first time following his escape from Orthanc, Saruman’s first words to Gandalf remind everyone of his “ruin” (VI.6 961). He also accuses the hobbits of gloating over his misfortunes (VI.6 962), which of course they never do.

While the noble man is confident and frank with himself . . . the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve, nor honest and straight with himself. His soul *squints*; his mind loves dark corners, secret paths and back-doors, everything secretive appeals to him as being *his* world, *his* security, *his* comfort; he knows all about keeping quiet, not forgetting, waiting, temporarily humbling and abasing himself. A race of such men of *ressentiment* will inevitably end up cleverer than any noble race, and will respect cleverness . . . as a condition of existence of the first rank. (21, emphasis original)

Saruman's affinity for gadgets, the products of metals and gears, as well as his early-learned penchant for acquiring power by proffering "counsels from the shadows" (i.e., the plan he expresses to Gandalf prior to the betrayal), all indicate a certain sideways character to Saruman's actions. The resentful, admiring cleverness alone, must subvert the honor derived from direct battle in favor of more indirect tools: speech-craft that controls appearances rather than reality, technology that kills from a distance, industrialization that permits the development of ever greater technologies, etc. Brian Rosebury notes how no heroic character uses warfare "as a sphere in which to win 'honour'" (164), which is true, but this point also shortchanges the relatively greater honor nonetheless accorded to such warriors than to Saruman and his ilk. Saruman's *ressentiment* never couples with the willingness to risk oneself, which is what a revolutionary leader needs. He imagines that his men call him "Sharkey" out of affection, but this is simply one more of Saruman's self-serving illusions. Only personal gain garners their allegiance; when things get difficult, Saruman's ruffians all abandon him.

In order to find leaders who *can* channel resentment and anger into revolutionary ends, we must look in an unexpected place: Merry, Pippin, and Sam.

COUNTER-THYMOTICS

No less than Sharkey's invasion of the Shire, anger and resentment spark the Scouring. Some might hesitate to link a revolt against kleptocratic oppression with psychopolitical rage, but *any* revolution, no matter how sympathetic, seeks to redress perceived wrongs, slights, and injustices. Saruman brutally implants a burgeoning anger in a people unfamiliar with anger. He succeeds because they, being unfamiliar with anger, do not know how to use it. It simply collects or pools "against the day." Waiting Sharkey out seems their dominant strategy, at least initially, yet their resentment builds as the unrelenting string of abuses continues. Nonetheless, the hobbits *still* do not know how to respond properly. The Cottons themselves wait for a leader, and the Took, who might have taken a leadership role, retreat behind their deep holes in Tuckborough. The reader encounters the new

psychopolitical energies articulated for the first time by the aptly named Robin Smallburrow (since great things have small beginnings): “If we all got *angry* together,” he says, “something might be done” (VI. 8 979, my emphasis). Yet *he* is not the one to do it. That flame needs Merry, Pippin, and to a lesser extent Sam. *Thymos* motivates one to acquire revenge on slights to one’s honor or standing, but Sharkey’s injustices have built so gradually over such an extended length of time that the Shire hobbits never saw the “appropriate” moment for revenge.²¹ That moment comes only when Frodo and company arrive fresh from the wider heroic world of Middle-earth. Seeing outrages, they become outraged. Significantly, honor being the peculiar province of the aristocrat, the most aristocratic hobbits—Merry and Pippin—lead the way. The “individual *thymos*” of these hobbits “appears now as part of a force-field that provides form to the common will” (Sloterdijk 13).

Neither Merry nor Pippin, however, strike the revolution’s first blow. That honor, ironically, belongs to the broom-wielding Lobelia Sackville-Baggins. Although Mayor Will Whitfoot tries to protest once folk “got angry” at the new state of affairs in the Shire (VI.8 989), his protest never rises beyond the status of a strongly worded letter—one which, moreover, never gets delivered. Only when Lobelia “ups with her umbrella and goes for the leader, near twice her size” (990) does *thymos* strike its first blow. Though the scene strikes us as ludicrous and comic, Lobelia’s act contains great implications. As Young Tom Cotton realizes, a

²¹ Such a long delay in revenge indicates how significantly centuries of peace have leeched *thymos* from the collective consciousness of the Shire. Most critics writing on the Scouring appropriately link it to the situation of England at about the time of the First World War. Shippey, for example, indicates that the Shire’s failure to praise Frodo well in his own country suggests “the disillusionment of the returned veteran” (156). Janet Brennan Croft (2011), in turn, argues that Tolkien’s participation in the Officer Trainings Corps as a youth convinced him that “watchfulness and preparedness are the responsibility of good government and its citizens” (97), an atmosphere he incorporates into Shire preparedness. Both readings are plausible, but I wish to forge a different link. My emphasis here is on the similarity between the Dúnedain-induced peace of the Shire and the long peace in England that spanned the 99 years from Waterloo to Germany’s invasion of Belgium. World War I was one of the most senseless wars in history. Its main motivation was nationalism—and nationalism is entirely thymotic, constituted by a nation’s pride and concern for its honor, standing, and prestige on the international scene. (Both militarism and the competition for colonies can be seen as corollaries of this nationalism.) To put the matter in the bluntest way possible, the First World War began because citizens became bored with peace. They wanted to compete with and excel against other nations on the noblest field upon which nations traditionally competed—the battlefield. Hence the initial enthusiasm that greeted declarations of war. Whereas the Scouring of the Shire clearly (and deservedly) gains the reader’s admiration, the essential goodness of the Scouring must be complicated by understanding the complexities of *thymos*. Only the rise of long-quiescent *thymos* enables the hobbits to overthrow Saruman—the same *thymos* that led the European nations to enter into the Great War so enthusiastically.

little old lady has here evinced “more spirit” (a frequent translation of *thymos*) than any of her masculine counterparts, including the hapless Mayor. That Tom Cotton explicitly admires Lobelia for her deed shows that he, a young man, feels the pull and inherent nobility of thymotic action. He seeks to emulate that which he admires. Not only that, but being outdone by an old woman is naturally shameful to any young man—and shame must be avoided. The comedy of the scene, also, stems from Lobelia attacking a Man nearly twice her size. Strictly speaking, her action was irrational. She could not have expected to win that encounter, nor did her action gratify any basic appetitive need or desire. Indeed, the resulting imprisonment prevents such gratification. Yet Lobelia’s blatant disregard for her own self-interest makes the action all the nobler. If Lobelia is a tiny guard dog yapping at an intruder, protective of “me and mine,” what might not stalwart young hobbits like Tom do? What will happen if they realize, as they have never realized before, that honor may be gained from performing great and noble deeds against outrages and injustices of the worst sort?

That Lobelia’s act of insurrection fails to spark revolution immediately is only because no leader yet exists to transform that first blow into larger thymotic outlets. The readiness with which the reader wants such a leader to emerge indicates the success of Tolkien’s rhetorical skills. The entire chapter on the Scouring is basically a “resistance to occupation” story. Writing such stories is tricky; they require the reader to side instinctively with the revolutionaries. As such, they must deny the possibility of multivalent discourse, by which I mean that the good guys and bad guys need to be absolutely clear and separate from one another. Classic examples of the genre include John Steinbeck’s *The Moon is Down* and Alan Moore’s *V*; both authors must get the reader to endorse revolutionary tactics ranging from sabotage (Steinbeck) to terrorist activity (Moore). In other words, the reader must share in the thymotic energies of the resistance. In the Scouring, this means that Tolkien has to downplay the potential for *ressentiment* among the hobbits. True, their oppression does not last long enough to develop into full-blown permanent resentment. But the seeds are there. Likewise, a community *thymos* itself must re-emerge after lying dormant from long centuries of protection by the Dúnedain. This must have given the Christian Tolkien some pause.

Within the Scouring, the pull between Tolkien’s sincere nationalism and his even more powerful Christian piety takes him in two different directions. Christianity has long struggled against the lure of *thymos*. It privileges the priest over the warrior, the saint over the hero. It upholds (as did Tolkien) humility as the highest virtue, but humility is antithetical to *thymos* because *thymos* requires worldly glory and demands self-assertion. Tolkien’s essential conflict comes to a head in the figure of Frodo. Thanks to his experiences and Gandalf’s departure, Frodo is the “wisest” character present during the Scouring. The content of his wisdom demands mercy and forgiveness, up to and including enemies. Bereft of

thymos himself, he plays no part in the Battle of Bywater, and he contributes only by reducing the fighting's bloodiness. His injunctions to let Saruman go free come to naught. He does nothing to gain the admiration of young hobbits inspired by heroic deeds; worse, his contributions do not even gain the admiration of his friends. When Frodo advises that everyone keep "your tempers and hold your hands to the last possible moment" when dealing with the ruffians, Merry responds with the impossibly harsh words,

"But if there are many of these ruffians," said Merry, "it will certainly mean fighting. You won't rescue Lotho, or the Shire, just by being shocked and sad, my dear Frodo." (VI.8 983).

Merry's term of endearment softens his undeniable repudiation. Though Frodo's sacrifices during the War of the Ring deserve respect, Merry completely rejects Frodo's moral insights. Those insights, bought at great personal pain and suffering, simply do flatter Merry's new self-conception. They seem neither noble nor heroic—and Merry has already tasted nobility and heroism by helping kill a Nazgûl. Having tasted that honor in Middle-earth, neither Merry nor Pippin will willingly reject it. They see no reason to. Injustice deserves heroic response, not stoic passivity. Merry and Pippin have sipped at the sweetness of indignation and outrage. They indulge their anger because they know it to be righteous. Sharkey has offended against them and theirs, and all the Shire will bestow great praise on those who orchestrate Sharkey's downfall. Indeed, Merry, Pippin, and Sam all enjoy the highest honor from the Shire folk forever afterwards. Yet to anyone who considers *Frodo* as the character endowed with the noblest spirit, a spirit possessed of qualities particularly *Christian* in character, Merry's rejection must constitute a tragedy of the highest order. The Shire triumphs only when true wisdom fails. Here, then, is the true horror unleashed by Saruman: not the felling of the Party Tree or the building of a mill, but the undamming of *thymos* within the formerly ideal community.

Indeed, Tolkien has worked a strange reversal. Since Shippey, everyone has recognized Sharkey as a modern villain and the Scouring as a modern episode. The denouement of the Scouring transports the reader from Middle-earth to a modern English community. Yet the awakening of the Shire's thymotic pulse, formerly quiescent, nonetheless indicates the re-awakening of a pre-Christian pagan *ethos*. *Thymos* now has its champions. Merry's confrontation with Ted Sandyman makes the new spirit utterly clear. Sandyman, seeing trouble, warns Sharkey by blowing a horn. Merry's response is to laugh and blow a horn of his own—the silver horn given him by Éowyn. Curiously, Merry's action mirrors that of a prior horn-blower in the Fellowship: Boromir. Upon setting forth from Rivendell, Boromir brazenly sounds the Horn of Gondor. For this deed Elrond censures him, cautioning him that

warning enemies displays bad sense, but Boromir's reply rings of characteristic pride: "I will not go forth as a thief in the night" (II.3 272). *Thymos*, of course, is Boromir's dominant trait, his pride a mere manifestation. Elrond's criticism, though, could apply equally well to Merry. Warning Saruman through his "better" horn serves no rational purpose. Merry, like Boromir, simply wishes to boast of his dauntlessness. That is the sort of thing for which songs are sung—and for which, indeed, songs *will* be sung in the post-Sharkey Shire.

Merry's horn-blowing has one further effect. In addition to signaling the pagan valuation of *thymos*, his horn-blowing also signals the resurgence of the pagan or classical morality. When Éowyn gives Merry the silver horn, she explains that its blowing will cause "fear in the hearts of his enemies and joy in the hearts of his friends" (VI.6 956). We have encountered that sentiment before—in Plato's *Republic*. Among the ancient Greeks, conventional morality demanded good done to one's friends but evil to one's enemies, a sentiment in Polemarchus's definition of justice. It must be admitted that such a morality has great inherent dignity. As Allan Bloom (1991) explains, although the justice of doing evil may sound "harsh to our ears, for it is far from the morality of universal love to which we are accustomed," its inherent dignity stems from "unswerving loyalty, loyalty to the first, most obvious attachments a man forms—loyalty to his family and his city"; such loyalty seems natural, springing up from our first knowledge of the world, and "is identical with love of our own" (318).

The ethic of harm to enemies but good to friends continues into the modern Shire, signaled by Merry's Rohirrim-given silver horn. Merry has now divided the world into the relevant groups; his friends he will inspire with joy, his enemies he will make tremble with fear. Like Lobelia, Merry has become a guard dog, the community's ideal noble gentleman. His nobility does more to inspire passionate young hobbits than does the more austere ethic of Frodo, who barely distinguishes friends from enemies and wishes to apply the same blanket mercy and forgiveness upon all. Socrates, the wisest man by virtue of knowing that he knew nothing, needed the entire *Republic* to educate the *thymos* of Glaucon and Adeimantus into ends amenable to the dictates of philosophy. With the leaving of the Wise from Middle-earth, only Frodo remains to educate the thymotic energies of the young—but the young, sadly, no longer feel compelled to listen.

CONCLUSION: THE RETURN OF RHETORIC?

If the state is "thymos that has been orchestrated by rhetoric" (Hancock 284), then the question occurs: does the new post-Sharkey Shire indicate a resurgence of rhetoric? In short, yes—but so heavily disguised that readers cannot easily see the

resemblance between the hobbits and Saruman. We have already seen how the hobbits' revolt stems from the same well-spring of rage that motivated Saruman's initial takeover of the Shire. Now we can also see that Saruman's speech-craft survives in a modified way. Tolkien, having successfully discredited rhetoric by this point in the narrative, no longer feels threatened by it. Thus he permits good characters to succeed in public address, which he had not permitted in "The Voice of Saruman." Frodo soothes an assembled crowd by warning them that Saruman speaks only lies; Pippin rallies the Tooks and Merry rallies most everyone else. Tolkien has guided the reader into accepting that Pippin's and Merry's successes have nothing to do with skill in persuasion but everything to do with their nobility and greatness: increased physical statures by means of Ent-draught, after all, indicates an increased moral stature. Though Tolkien does not highlight their speech-making, only by speaking the correct inflammatory words could the hobbits have successfully catalyzed the revolution. The rejection of skilled speech by a resentful Saruman has been but an interlude; rage and eloquence will now mark all future states in Middle-earth as it ushers forth into the Fourth Age and beyond.

Throughout this essay, I have tried to articulate the strong linkage that exists between eloquence (or rhetoric) and rage (or *thymos*). That linkage has been incarnated by Tolkien in one figure: Saruman. One of the great gaps in Tolkien scholarship, misled partly by Tolkien himself, has been to miss how deeply Saruman answers the age-old opposition between rhetoric and philosophy. Like John Milton, Tolkien cannot bring himself to trust rhetoric. It threatens the unitary truth of a divinely-revealed moral order. He applies great rhetorical skill to sway the reader's sympathies against Orthanc's master of eloquence. In this Tolkien succeeds—but, in the process, he also shows that Saruman's outward smoothness is nothing but a façade. A raging "wild beast" boils within his spirit. By examining Saruman in light of another "wild beast," Thrasymachus from *The Republic*, we begin to see how Tolkien has subtly inverted the hierarchy between art and anger in his rhetorician. Already by the time of Saruman's first appearance in the text, the skillfulness of his speech has begun to slip. The example of Sauron, who needs no rhetoric, drives home the lesson that rhetoric is superfluous. It belongs to the weak. Saruman thereby becomes more brutal; he allows his anger freer head. Once Gandalf expels him from the *Istari*, Saruman's rage overwhelms him completely, and defeat quickly turns that rage into resentment. A "new" Saruman emerges: a man who becomes the first wholehearted politician of rage in Middle-earth. Sharkey's Shire displays *ressentiment* in action. The ultimate tragedy is that the meek do *not* inherit the earth. Rage and eloquence must be marshalled together to defeat the oppressor—a situation that finds no easy reconciliation with Christian humility, meekness, and stoicism.

There is no telling how consciously Tolkien intended the reading I have provided here. As has been said, Tolkien never understood Saruman in these terms

and, by utilizing Peter Sloterdijk's theory of rage, we have gone significantly beyond any intellectual model Tolkien would have recognized. Regardless, anytime we use a new terminology or critical discourse to understand a text, we do so in the hopes of revealing things about that text that have—until now—remained concealed. It seems clear that Tolkien, in some way, *did* intend Saruman to intimate the age-old debate between rhetoric and philosophy, relativism and truth, eloquence and rage—and that he found a way in his fiction to link these things to modernity and what he saw as unique about modernity. Tolkien scholars have spilled a lot of ink in the attempt to explain their author's originality but, by examining in detail the relationship between eloquence and rage in *The Lord of the Rings*, perhaps we might begin to consider Tolkien a wider and deeper writer than even we Tolkienists have realized.

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