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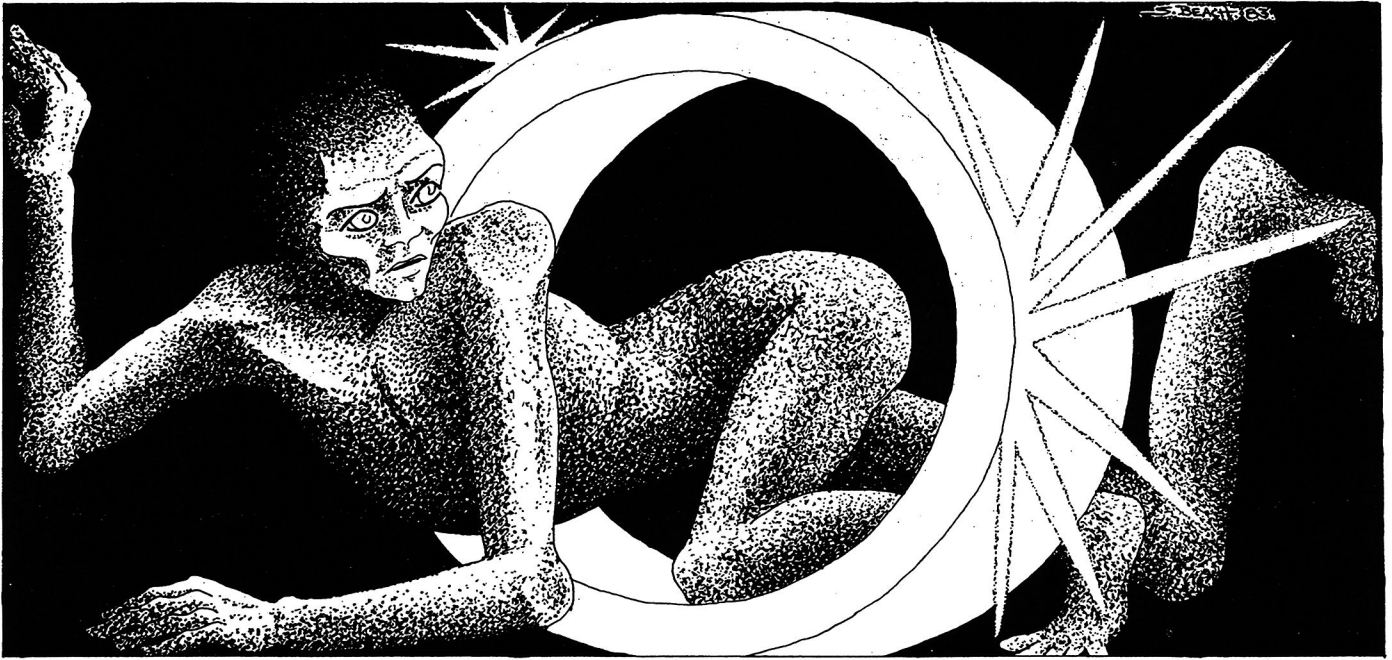


Abstract

Considers the question of where Gollum fits within the overall Christian framework of Middle-earth, and proposes that he is “an emblem of the internal dilemma faced by all creatures in a Christian-based cosmology [...] each must struggle with his own inherent evil.” Argues that Gollum, still retaining some goodness and potential after holding the Ring for 478 years, was a hero who consciously chose to destroy the Ring at the end.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Gollum; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Christian symbolism; Sarah Beach



Gollum: A Misunderstood Hero

David Callaway

Gollum is poorly understood and often misinterpreted. Although Bilbo Baggins "finds" the Ring, which begins the epic, and Bilbo's heir Frodo destroys the Ring which concludes the tale, neither historically significant Middle-earth event could have occurred without Gollum. And although Tolkien claims that his epic is not allegorical, he does say that "an author cannot of course remain wholly unaffected by his experience,"¹ and Tolkien's experience is immersed in Christianity. Clyde Kilby found Tolkien to be a "staunchly conservative Tridentine Roman Catholic." (Kilby, p. 53) Understanding the religious world created by Tolkien, and elucidated in *The Silmarillion* enables one to better understand Gollum and how he fits into Tolkien's created cosmology. When Gollum is scrutinized in terms of this cosmology, he can be considered heroic. Gollum possesses, is dominated by, the One Ring—"The very desire of it corrupts the heart,"²—for ages, yet still possesses goodness, a "chink of light" in his mind. It is this remaining fraction of goodness which helps Frodo reach Mount Doom, and plays a great part in the destruction of the Ring. Gollum becomes a symbol of man's struggle between the forces of good and evil, and Tolkien's conclusion illustrates his insistence on the eventual triumph of good—no matter how corrupted the good may be. If Gollum can withstand the Ring, and Sauron, for ages and still have this "chink of light," and traces of individuality, and then in his pitiful condition help in the destruction of the Ring, he must be considered heroic.

Tolkien, in his forward to *The Lord of the Rings* denies that the tale has any allegorical meaning: "As for any inner meaning or 'message,' it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical." (Vol. I, p. 10). Although Tolkien's work is neither "allegorical nor topical," this does not

mean that he hasn't created a system similar to his own. *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien's religious mythology of Middle-earth, closely resembles Genesis. In *The Silmarillion*, as in *The Bible*, there is one God who creates the earth and creates light. There is also a discordant Valar, Melkor, who is similar to the fallen angel Satan of *The Bible* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Melkor has many characteristics similar to this conception of Satan: "He desired rather to subdue to his will both Elves and men, envying the gifts with which Illuvatar promised to endow them; and he wished himself to have subjects and servants and to be called Lord, and to be a master over other wills."³ Melkor's desire to pervert the creations of Eru is similar to Satan's desire to pervert newly created man in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's Satan also has this insatiable desire for power—

High on a throne of royal state,

...

Satan exalted sat, by merit raised
To that bad eminence; and from despair
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue
Vain war with heaven, and by success untaught
His proud imaginations thus displayed.⁴

Both Satan and Melkor are outcast by the one God, and both attempt to pervert the creations of their creator. Both also are not allowed to participate in the ordering of the newly created worlds, and become envious:

And the Valar . . . labored in the ordering of the earth and the curbing of its tumults. Then Melkor saw what was done, and that the Valar walked on earth as powers visible . . . and were lovely and glorious to see, and blissful, and

that the earth was becoming a garden for their delight, for its turmoils were subdued. His envy grew then the greater within him; and he also took visible form, but because of his mood and the malice that burned in him that form was dark and terrible. (Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 18.)

Melkor is an ostracized Valar who, like Satan, takes a visible "earthly" form which he uses to pervert his God's creation. Tolkien also uses biblical references when referring to Melkor and the creation. In the above passage the earth is being made into a "garden," and in the following passage Tolkien again uses language directly from Genesis when describing Melkor: "understanding he turned to subtlety in perverting to his own will all that he would use, until he became a liar without shame." (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, p. 31) Melkor is endowed with "subtlety," just as the serpent in Genesis is "more subtle than any other wild creature."⁵ Melkor, then, is a subtle, fallen creature, and Tolkien's language and imagery presents a Middle-earth cosmology which is similar to Christianity.

If Melkor is the equivalent of Satan, then Sauron becomes an instrument of Satan, as Tolkien elucidates in *The Silmarillion*: "Among those of his servants that have names the greatest was the spirit whom the Eldar called Sauron . . . In all the deeds of Melkor the Morgoth upon Arda, in his vast works and in the deceits of his cunning, Sauron had a part." (Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 32.) This becomes a key passage in understanding the Christian cosmology contained in *The Lord of the Rings*. *The Silmarillion* is the religious mythology of Middle-earth, and the foundation upon which the trilogy rests. And although there are few references (some claim erroneously that their are none) to religion in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion* gives a detailed account of the creation and ordering of Middle-earth. *The Silmarillion* describes Sauron, and illustrates that this is not a mortal creature, but a spirit under the domain of Melkor—who is the beginning and essence of evil in Middle-earth. Without *The Silmarillion* one would not know that Sauron is a "servant" of Melkor—and this knowledge becomes necessary for a complete understanding of the religious tone within *The Lord of the Rings*.

With *The Silmarillion* as a mythological-religious base, the cosmology of Middle-earth in *The Lord of the Rings* becomes clear. Although Eru is never mentioned by name it becomes obvious that the characters are aware of his powerful influence in Middle-earth. Gandalf, it is learned in Appendix B is a messenger "sent to contest the power of Sauron," and it must be assumed that either the Valar, or Eru directly is responsible for Gandalf's and the other four wizards arrival. Gandalf, who is "sent" to Middle-earth by this enigmatic force, speaks continually of this power, displaying knowledge of Eru. He talks of this power to Frodo when giving the history of the One Ring:

Behind that there was something else at work beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it. (Vol. I, p.88)

This must be a reference to the power of Eru, and also evidence of Gandalf's awareness of Eru, and of his being a missionary of the creator. If this "something else at work" is beyond Sauron's designs, it must also be beyond the designs of Melkor, Sauron being a servant of Melkor. Since we learn that Melkor is the mightiest of the Valar in the beginning, it becomes obvious that only Eru has the power to work designs beyond Sauron and Melkor. So from the outset of the epic there are references to a providential choreographer, who must be Eru. Gandalf tells Frodo "you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have." (Vol I, p. 95) And at the Council of Elrond, Eru is responsible for gathering the members of the council: "You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world." (Vol. I, p. 318) There can be no doubt that there is a God, Eru, although never mentioned by name in the trilogy, determining events and partly the fates of characters in Middle-earth. But although Eru can control certain events, it is always left to the individual to decide his own fate. This freedom of choice again mirrors Tolkien's Christianity. Man, by eating of the tree of good and evil, not only introduces evil into his world, but also introduces the concept of choice—of choice between good and evil. This similarity of the Middle-earth cosmology to Christianity is commented upon by Paul Kocher—"Words like purpose, called (thrice spoken), ordered, believe look to some living will and even have a distantly Christian aura."⁶

Further evidence of Tolkien's religious schema can be found at Denethor's death. Gandalf elucidates the prohibition against suicide to Denethor—a dogma which Kocher claims, "The flavor of this prohibition is distinctly religious, condemning the practice as 'heathen' and ascribing it to pride and despair, mortal offenses in the lexicon of Christianity and other religious faiths." (Kocher, p. 57)

Although Tolkien claims in his forward to *The Lord of the Rings* that the tale has no intentional allegorical meaning, this point could be argued. But even if Tolkien is not creating a work of Christian allegory (which is irrelevant), there is no doubt that his cosmology is Christian. The parallels between *The Bible* and *The Silmarillion*; the one omnipotent God, Tolkien's preoccupation with the battle between good and evil point to a cosmology which is Christian and which is created by a man who is staunchly Christian. Tolkien, later in a correspondence, does not hesitate to describe the epic as being religious:

The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first but consciously in the revision. I . . . have cut out practically all references to anything like "religion," to cults and practices in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism. (Kilby, p. 56)

Acknowledging the fact that *The Lord of the Rings* is a Christian work, the question becomes: "where does Gollum fit into this religious framework?" The most important point

when considering Gollum is that nothing in Middle-earth is wholly evil, or created evil—"nothing is evil in the beginning." (Vol. I, p. 351) Melkor, like Satan, is a creation of an omnipotent God, and thus is completely oblivious to the motives and completely under the domain of this benevolent being. Eru addresses the Valar in *The Silmarillion* in what is a key passage to understanding the nature of evil, and the nature of Eru's omnipotence:

Mighty are the Ainur, and mightiest among them is Melkor; but that he may know, and all the Ainur, that I am Illuvatar, those things that ye have sung, I will show them forth, that ye may see what ye have done. And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined. (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, p. 17.)

This passage is fundamental to understanding *The Lord of the Rings*, and the nature of evil within it. What Eru tells Melkor, and which also must apply to Sauron (being a servant of Melkor), is that there is really no evil. Any evil done by Sauron or Melkor is only part of a greater plan created by Eru. This passage helps to explain one of the dominant themes in *The Lord of the Rings*, which is that good often emanates from what appears evil. An excellent example of this theme occurs when Wormtongue in his wrath throws down Saruman's Palantir, and Gandalf with his knowledge of the nature of evil, elucidates this theme precisely: "Still for us things have not gone badly. Strange are the turns of fortune! Often does hatred hurt itself! I fancy that, even if we had entered in, we could have found few treasures in Orthanc more precious than the thing which Wormtongue threw down at us." (Vol. II, p. 243) Again, when Pippin looks into the Palantir, and is seen by Sauron, this works to the advantage of the company. Instead of Sauron finding that Orthanc has been taken, he misinterprets, and believes wrongly that Frodo is going to wield the Ring against him, and thus turns his eye towards Gondor, and away from Mordor—helping Frodo, Sam, and Gollum finish the quest.

Gollum, like Wormtongue and all creatures in Middle-earth, is a creation of Eru, and is being partly manipulated by Eru in this cosmic chess game. Gandalf, being a spiritual messenger of Eru, realizes this, and because of his powerful foresight, acknowledges that Gollum will be an important character concerning the fate of the Ring: "I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many." (Vol. II, p. 93)

Bilbo's pity allows Gollum to live, and thus pity helps directly in the destruction of the Ring. But Bilbo is not the only character who finds Gollum pitiable. When Frodo finally meets Gollum, he, like Bilbo finds he cannot hate him, but discovers "now that I see him, I do pity him." (Vol. II, p. 281) And Aragorn also finds that he cannot hate Gollum, knowing

that the pressure of the Ring which his forefather Isildur bore has been responsible for Gollum's pitiable condition—"he has suffered much. There is no doubt that he was tormented." (Vol. I, p. 334) The others are aware that Gollum is not wholly evil, that he has been under the evil influences of the Ring for ages, and that there is some hope for his "cure."

Gollum stands as an example of what can happen to any creature wielding the Ring. Gandalf explains to Frodo the result of possessing the Ring for too long: the possessor "in the end becomes invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the dark power that rules the Rings. Yes sooner or later—later if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last—sooner or later the dark power will devour him." (Vol. I, p. 76) The Ring affects persons according to their strength and their virtue, and as we find, hobbits are strong-willed. Boromir the man succumbs to the power of the Ring immediately after hearing of its presence at the Council of Elrond. Bilbo carries the Ring for sixty years and can feel the effects of its power. It makes him feel "all thin sort of stretched, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much bread." (Vol. I, p. 58) He also begins to call the Ring his "precious," just as all previous Ring-bearers had, and finds he cannot easily part with it—"you won't get it. I won't give my precious away." (Vol. I, p. 60) But Bilbo, showing his considerable strength, becomes the first to give up the Ring willfully, which is in itself an historical event.

Frodo possesses the Ring for only seventeen years, and finds that he, like Bilbo, cannot easily part with it. He stands atop Mount Doom: "I have come . . . But I do not choose now to do what I came to do . . . I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" (Vol. III, p. 274) The Ring affects characters according to their inner-strength. Gandalf is somewhat surprised by how long Bilbo resists the Ring—"I think it likely that some would resist the Rings far longer than most of the wise would believe." (Vol. I, p. 79) Boromir and Frodo illustrate that they do not possess the strength to overcome the power of the Ring for even a short time. Boromir is affected immediately, and Frodo has the Ring seventeen years and then finds that he cannot destroy it (which is understandable). How quickly the power of the Ring affects Boromir, Frodo, and to a lesser degree Bilbo helps to illustrate the strength of character Gollum must have once possessed. Bilbo's sixty year battle, and Frodo's seventeen year battle, and Boromir the man's day long battle (he can be seen to be influenced by the Ring even at the Council of Elrond), pale in comparison to Gollum's struggle with his "precious." Gandalf is amazed by Bilbo's strength, but he must surely be equally amazed at the strength of Gollum. For from the time Smeagol acquires the Ring from his brother, to the time when Bilbo "wins" it from him deep below the earth, 478 years have elapsed. This fact becomes evidence of Gollum's extreme strength of will. For a creature to possess the Ring for this long and not yet be "devoured" by the dark power and still have hope for a "cure," or still have a fraction of good tucked away somewhere in his mind, shows strength of will, and it is this strength which earns Gollum the pity of those who understand what possessing the Ring can be.

Gollum is pitied because the more aware characters, the characters knowledgeable about the history of the Ring and

its corrupting influence, realize what torment Gollum has withstood, and what strength he must have. Gollum is also pitied because he is recognized as kin with hobbits. Gandalf explains Gollum's heritage when he elucidates the history of the Ring to Frodo—"I guess they [Gollum's ancestors] were of hobbit-kind; akin to the fathers of the fathers of the Stoors." (Vol. I, p. 84) This kinship between Gollum and the hobbits becomes a prominent theme in the trilogy. Gandalf sees Bilbo acting increasingly like Gollum; he finds Bilbo "had been trying to put his claim to the Ring beyond doubt. Much like Gollum with his 'birthday present.' The lies were too much alike for my comfort." (Vol. I, p. 77) Besides this similar behavior in attempting to claim absolute ownership of the Ring, there are several references to their physical similarities. Haldir the Elf sees Gollum in a tree near Lothlorien and finds that "he might have thought that it was one of you hobbits." (Vol. I, p. 448) Sam also realizes that if he were tormented long enough by the Ring, he too would begin to physically resemble Gollum. During their passage through the Dead Marshes, Sam remarks to himself "three precious little Gollums in a row we shall be, if this goes on much longer." (Vol. II, p. 298) And near the conclusion of the epic, the narrator once again reminds his readers of the kinship between Gollum and hobbits: "For a fleeting moment could one of the sleeper's have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing." (Vol. III, p. 411) Tolkien repeatedly emphasizes the kinship between these creatures—but why? It becomes apparent that Tolkien is illustrating that Bilbo or Frodo could easily have become Gollum. What would have become of Frodo had he possessed the Ring for 478 years instead of his mere seventeen. Bilbo might have had the Ring as long as Gollum and become Gollum had it not been for the timely counsel of Gandalf. Gollum is not as fortunate, for after acquiring the Ring he has no wizard to help detach him from it.

What Gollum becomes is an emblem of the internal dilemma faced by all creatures in a Christian-based cosmology. Gollum is not more evil in the beginning than either Frodo or Bilbo, he is just controlled by the Ring for a longer period of time. He is created by Eru with a specific role to play in Middle-earth. Bilbo or Frodo could have just as easily have been chosen to play Gollum's role instead of their own—and Gandalf reminds them of this fact: "A sad story," said the wizard "and it might have happened to others, even to some hobbits that I have known." (Vol. II, p. 86) And this "sad story," this struggle with the corrupting power of evil *does* happen to others, it happens to all the characters, although not to the degree it happens to Gollum. Each character, from Gandalf and Lady Galadriel, to Sam, is tempted by the evil of the Ring, and each must struggle with his own inherent evil. Gollum, because his struggle has been so long and torturous, and because he has still resisted, becomes a positive symbol to the others.

However, Gollum's 478 year struggle with evil has not been without its costs. It has left his mind splintered. He becomes a personality consisting of two distinct parts, one which is the Ring, and another which is what remains of pre-Ring Smeagol.

Gollum often uses the plural "we," and this is characteristic of the Ring-controlled portion of his mind. He speaks predominantly in the plural, but occasionally lapses into the first person, showing glimpses of the hobbit-like creature he was before the Ring. On one occasion he illustrates a self-awareness of his loss of personality—"Poor, poor Smeagol, he went away long ago. They took his precious, and he's lost now." (Vol. II, p. 283)

When Gollum swears to Frodo to be good, he is. If Gollum were completely under the dominion of Sauron, he would not lead the hobbits faithfully through the Dead Marshes, and directly towards Mordor, a land he fears. And if Gollum is entirely corrupted, he would have killed Frodo and Sam and taken the Ring easily, for he was presented with many opportunities. When Gollum makes his promise to "be good," when he says "we promise, yes I promise," (Vol. II, p. 285) both parts of his personality can be seen. First the Ring-possessed half promises, and then Smeagol, the hobbit-like creature promises—and as we find Smeagol does fulfill his promise at least temporarily. But this temporary control by Smeagol is at best precarious, as Sam finds. Sam hears Gollum having a discussion with himself, and although he cannot discover which side "won," he does nevertheless discover that like hobbits Gollum does indeed possess both the good and evil sides of the argument.

It can be claimed that Gollum's evil side did in fact "win" the argument which Sam overhears, and that this is proved when Gollum leads the hobbits into a trap in Shelob's Lair. While it is true that Gollum leads the hobbits into Shelob's Lair, he does so only at the command of Frodo—just as Frodo commanded Gollum to bring the hobbits to the gates of Mordor—"Master says: Bring us to the gate. So good Smeagol does so." (Vol II, p. 310) Smeagol in his desire to please, takes the commands from Frodo literally. When Frodo inquires about the "secret way" into Mordor, Gollum tells the hobbits about Shelob. He tells them that "very dreadful things live there." (Vol. II, p. 317) And when Frodo asks if this passage into Mordor is guarded, Gollum again is honest and answers "yes, yes, perhaps." (Vol. II, p. 317) Gollum cannot be said to have led Frodo and Sam unknowingly into Shelob's Lair. Smeagol, the good fraction, has warned them that there are enemies in the passage and that the passage is guarded, and again before they begin their ascent he illustrates that he does not want the hobbits to meet Shelob: "Smeagol wants master to go. Nice master, won't he come with Smeagol." (Vol. II, p. 323) His good fraction has warned the hobbits repeatedly, but once they are in the tower, the Ring-controlled fraction of his mind again dominates and the hobbits are trapped.

Although his Ring-controlled evil side does win this particular battle (although with much help from Frodo and Sam for ignoring the warnings of Smeagol), there is evidence that his good side is still powerful despite the influence of the Ring. Gandalf describes this splitting of Gollum's mind into the good and evil parts: "There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark." (Vol. I, p. 86) This light, in this small (yet powerful) area of his mind is representative of the inability of the dark lord to completely overpower Gollum after 478 years of

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perfection. When the source of death is destroyed at the end of time, Christ will reign in a perfected world.

Tolkien speaks of Christ's resurrection as the eucatastrophe of the Gospel story. Analogously it could be said that Christ's second coming is the Eucatastrophe of all history. It is the sudden happy turn which surprises everyone.¹¹ Every myth has it in its retelling of the regeneration story. When right is about to fail, right prevails, and the world is restored. In the Christian myth, which Tolkien says all stories mirror, right is completely victorious, and the universe is eventually returned to the completeness which existed at the dawn of time.

We have seen how every age of Middle-earth mirrors the Christian tale through the four components of creation, degeneration, sacrifice, and renewal which are present in some form in every age. Each age is not presented as Christian allegory, however. This tale is of a pre-Christian world and does not allow for a one-to-one correspondence of its characters and events with those of the Christian myth. But because Tolkien feels that any good myth reflects its Christian counterpart, he has created a world permeated with messages from this deeper reality. The three ages of Middle-earth do not retell the life of Christ, but they parallel the Christian story. Tolkien has remained true to his mission of being a sub-creator. He does not copy the Christian tale; he uses it as an example for his own creative efforts because he is, as he says, "made in the image and likeness of a maker".¹²

NOTES

¹Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), p. 44.

²J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Tolkien Reader*, "On Fairy-Stories" (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), p. 55.

³Richard Purtill, *Lord of the Elves and Eldils: Fantasy and Philosophy in C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 127.

⁴G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* as quoted in Kathryn Lindskoog's *The Lion of Judah in Never-Never Land. God, Man, and Nature in C.S. Lewis's Narnia Tales* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), pp. 24-25.

⁵J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p. 16. All further references to this book will be cited in parenthesis following the information given.

⁶C.S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975) p. 139.

⁷Genesis 1:1

⁸Revelation 1:7-17

⁹J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings, II* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), p. 197.

¹⁰*The Lord of the Rings, III*, p. 190.

¹¹"On Fairy Stories", pp. 68-72.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 55.

Gollum, continued from page 17
effort. And this light is still more powerful than many of the characters expect. Frodo tells Gandalf that he wishes Bilbo had killed Gollum when he had the chance, but when Frodo meets Gollum, he also pities him, and immediately allows himself to become dependent on Gollum as his leader. Gollum then leads Sam and Frodo faithfully through the Dead Marshes, showing not only his goodness, but also his courage. And during this passage through the Dead Marshes, "the hobbits were . . . wholly in the hands of Gollum." (Vol. II, p. 293) Often Frodo is forced to trust and depend on Gollum, and often Gollum is true.

Gollum is given these chances to help in the destruction of the Ring because of pity, and because there is hope that he may yet recover from the corrupting influence of the Ring. All who are aware of his struggle can pity him, and all are convinced by Gandalf that regardless of his wretchedness there is always hope. Gandalf says that Gollum is "not wholly ruined," (Vol. I, p. 86) and that "I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it." (Vol. I, p. 93) Because of Gandalf's influence, the Elve's also "hope still for his cure." (Vol. I, p. 335) So there is awareness that although Gollum is dominated by evil he is "not altogether wicked." (Vol. III, p. 381)

When Sam says to Gollum, "Gollum . . . would you like to be the hero," (Vol. II, p.409) his words become portentous. Gollum does indeed become a hero. And when Sam says "even Gollum might be good in a tale" (Vol. II, p. 409) he again is correct. Because Gollum is good in the tale of the One Ring. When one looks at what Gollum literally does concerning the Ring, he must be considered heroic. After being under the absolutely evil power of the Ring for 478 years, and then losing the Ring to Bilbo, Gollum returns to lead Frodo through the Dead Marshes, shows the hobbits a secret way into Mordor (and warns them that it may be guarded), and on the way catches Sam rabbits for stew. And then in the ultimate heroic self-sacrifice, Gollum, with the good fraction in his mind finally overpowering the Ring's evil, sees that Frodo cannot destroy the Ring, so consciously takes it from him and destroys it, thus saving Middle-earth.

And this ending fits perfectly into the religious schema of *The Lord of The Rings*. Although the characters are not aware of it, evil can never triumph in Middle-earth. And although it often appears that evil will triumph within Gollum, it never can. Gollum becomes a symbol of the absolute persistence of good in Middle-earth.

Notes

¹Clyde S. Kilby, *Tolkien and the Silmarillion*, (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1976), p. 10.

²J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), p. 53. Successive references to the trilogy will us this edition, volumes I, II, and III.

³J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p. 18.

⁴John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975), p. 29.

⁵Genesis 3.

⁶Paul H. Kocher, *Master of Middle-earth*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 41.