

bottom of an upright (the exceptions are few and limited to cases where as in β \uparrow there is also juncture at the top). They are *increased* by the repetition on the opposite side of an upright of any diagonal appendage, & by repeating half the basic pattern: ~~FF~~ hence \uparrow Ψ Ψ \uparrow etc.

As for the Elves. Even in these legends we see the Elves mainly through the eyes of Men. It is in any case clear that neither side was fully informed about the ultimate destiny of the other. The Elves were sufficiently longeval to be called by Man 'immortal'. But they were not unageing or unwearying. Their own tradition was that they were confined to the limits of this world (in space and time), even if they died, and would continue in some form to exist in it until 'the end of the world'. But what 'the end of the world' portended for it or for themselves they did not know (though they no doubt had theories). Neither had they of course any special information concerning what 'death' portended for Men. They believed that it meant 'liberation from the circles of the world', and was in that respect to them enviable. And they would point out to Men who envied them that a dread of ultimate loss, though it may be indefinitely remote, is not necessarily the easier to bear if it is in the end ineluctably certain: a burden may become heavier the longer it is borne.

I hope you will forgive pencil and a crabbed and not too legible hand. I am (temporarily, I hope) deprived of the use of my right hand and arm, and I am in the early stages of teaching my left hand. Right-handed pens increase the crabbedness, but a pencil accommodates itself.

Yours sincerely

J. R. R. Tolkien.

246 From a letter to Mrs Eileen Elgar (drafts) September 1963

[A reply to a reader's comments on Frodo's failure to surrender the Ring in the Cracks of Doom.]

Very few (indeed so far as letters go only you and one other) have observed or commented on Frodo's 'failure'. It is a very important point.

From the point of view of the storyteller the events on Mt Doom proceed simply from the logic of the tale up to that time. They were not deliberately worked up to nor foreseen until they occurred.* But, for one thing, it became at last quite clear that Frodo after all that had happened would be incapable of voluntarily destroying the Ring. Reflecting on the solution after it was arrived at (as a mere event) I feel

*Actually, since the events at the Cracks of Doom would obviously be vital to the Tale, I made several sketches or trial versions at various stages in the narrative – but none of them were used, and none of them much resembled what is actually reported in the finished story.

that it is central to the whole 'theory' of true nobility and heroism that is presented.

Frodo indeed 'failed' as a hero, as conceived by simple minds: he did not endure to the end; he gave in, ratted. I do not say 'simple minds' with contempt: they often see with clarity the simple truth and the absolute ideal to which effort must be directed, even if it is unattainable. Their weakness, however, is twofold. They do not perceive the complexity of any given situation in Time, in which an absolute ideal is enmeshed. They tend to forget that strange element in the World that we call Pity or Mercy, which is also an absolute requirement in moral judgement (since it is present in the Divine nature). In its highest exercise it belongs to God. For finite judges of imperfect knowledge it must lead to the use of two different scales of 'morality'. To ourselves we must present the absolute ideal without compromise, for we do not know our own limits of natural strength (+ grace), and if we do not aim at the highest we shall certainly fall short of the utmost that we could achieve. To others, in any case of which we know enough to make a judgement, we must apply a scale tempered by 'mercy': that is, since we can with good will do this without the bias inevitable in judgements of ourselves, we must estimate the limits of another's strength and weigh this against the force of particular circumstances.*

I do not think that Frodo's was a *moral* failure. At the last moment the pressure of the Ring would reach its maximum – impossible, I should have said, for any one to resist, certainly after long possession, months of increasing torment, and when starved and exhausted. Frodo had done what he could and spent himself completely (as an instrument of Providence) and had produced a situation in which the object of his quest could be achieved. His humility (with which he began) and his sufferings were justly rewarded by the highest honour; and his exercise of patience and mercy towards Gollum gained him Mercy: his failure was redressed.

We are finite creatures with absolute limitations upon the powers of our soul-body structure in either action or endurance. *Moral* failure can only be asserted, I think, when a man's effort or endurance falls *short* of his limits, and the blame decreases as that limit is closer approached.†

*We frequently see this double scale used by the saints in their judgements upon themselves when suffering great hardships or temptations, and upon others in like trials.

†No account is here taken of 'grace' or the enhancement of our powers as instruments of Providence. Frodo was given 'grace': first to answer the call (at the end of the Council) after long resisting a complete surrender; and later in his resistance to the temptation of the Ring (at times when to claim and so reveal it would have been fatal), and in his endurance of fear and suffering. But grace is not infinite, and for the most part seems in the Divine economy limited to what is sufficient for the accomplishment of the task appointed to one instrument in a pattern of circumstances and other instruments.

Nonetheless, I think it can be observed in history and experience that some individuals seem to be placed in 'sacrificial' positions: situations or tasks that for perfection of solution demand powers beyond their utmost limits, even beyond all possible limits for an incarnate creature in a physical world – in which a body may be destroyed, or so maimed that it affects the mind and will. Judgement upon any such case should then depend on the motives and disposition with which he started out, and should weigh his actions against the utmost possibility of his powers, all along the road to whatever proved the breaking-point. ✓

Frodo undertook his quest out of love – to save the world he knew from disaster at his own expense, if he could; and also in complete humility, acknowledging that he was wholly inadequate to the task. His real contract was only to do what he could, to try to find a way, and to go as far on the road as his strength of mind and body allowed. He did that. I do not myself see that the breaking of his mind and will under demonic pressure after torment was any more a *moral* failure than the breaking of his body would have been – say, by being strangled by Gollum, or crushed by a falling rock.

That appears to have been the judgement of Gandalf and Aragorn and of all who learned the full story of his journey. Certainly nothing would be concealed by Frodo! But what Frodo himself felt about the events is quite another matter.

He appears at first to have had no sense of guilt (III 224–5);¹ he was restored to *sanity* and peace. But then he thought that he had given his life in sacrifice: he expected to die very soon. But he did not, and one can observe the disquiet growing in him. Arwen was the first to observe the signs, and gave him her jewel for comfort, and thought of a way of healing him.* Slowly he fades 'out of the picture', saying and doing less and less. I think it is clear on reflection to an attentive reader that when his dark times came upon him and he was conscious of being 'wounded

*It is not made explicit how she could arrange this. She could not of course just transfer her ticket on the boat like that! For any except those of Elvish race 'sailing West' was not permitted, and any exception required 'authority', and she was not in direct communication with the Valar, especially not since her choice to become 'mortal'. What is meant is that it was Arwen who first thought of sending Frodo into the West, and put in a plea for him to Gandalf (direct or through Galadriel, or both), and she used her own renunciation of the right to go West as an argument. Her renunciation and suffering were related to and enmeshed with Frodo's: both were parts of a plan for the regeneration of the state of Men. Her prayer might therefore be specially effective, and her plan have a certain equity of exchange. No doubt it was Gandalf who was the authority that accepted her plea. The Appendices show clearly that he was an emissary of the Valar, and virtually their plenipotentiary in accomplishing the plan against Sauron. He was also in special accord with Cirdan the Ship-master, who had surrendered to him his ring and so placed himself under Gandalf's command. Since Gandalf himself went on the Ship there would be so to speak no trouble either at embarking or at the landing.

by knife sting and tooth and a long burden' (III 268) it was not only nightmare memories of past horrors that afflicted him, but also unreasoning self-reproach: he saw himself and all that he done as a broken failure. 'Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same, for I shall not be the same.' That was actually a temptation out of the Dark, a last flicker of pride: desire to have returned as a 'hero', not content with being a mere instrument of good. And it was mixed with another temptation, blacker and yet (in a sense) more merited, for however that may be explained, he had not in fact cast away the Ring by a voluntary act: he was tempted to regret its destruction, and still to desire it. 'It is gone for ever, and now all is dark and empty', he said as he awakened from his sickness in 1420.

'Alas! there are some wounds that cannot be wholly cured', said Gandalf (III 268) – not in Middle-earth. Frodo was sent or allowed to pass over Sea to heal him – if that could be done, *before he died*. He would have eventually to 'pass away': no mortal could, or can, abide for ever on earth, or within Time. So he went both to a purgatory and to a reward, for a while: a period of reflection and peace and a gaining of a truer understanding of his position in littleness and in greatness, spent still in Time amid the natural beauty of 'Arda Unmarred', the Earth unspoiled by evil.

Bilbo went too. No doubt as a completion of the plan due to Gandalf himself. Gandalf had a very great affection for Bilbo, from the hobbit's childhood onwards. His companionship was really necessary for Frodo's sake – it is difficult to imagine a hobbit, even one who had been through Frodo's experiences, being really happy even in an earthly paradise without a companion of his own kind, and Bilbo was the person that Frodo most loved. (Cf III 252 lines 12 to 21 and 263 lines 1–2.)² But he also needed and deserved the favour on his own account. He bore still the mark of the Ring that needed to be finally erased: a trace of pride and personal possessiveness. Of course he was old and confused in mind, but it was still a revelation of the 'black mark' when he said in Rivendell (III 265) 'What's become of *my* ring, Frodo, that you took away?'; and when he was reminded of what had happened, his immediate reply was: 'What a pity! I should have liked to see it again'. As for reward for his part, it is difficult to feel that his life would be complete without an experience of 'pure Elvishness', and the opportunity of hearing the legends and histories in full the fragments of which had so delighted him.

It is clear, of course, that the plan had actually been made and concerted (by Arwen, Gandalf and others) before Arwen spoke. But Frodo did not immediately take it in; the implications would slowly be understood on reflection. Such a journey would at first seem something

not necessarily to be feared, even as something to look forward to – so long as undated and postponable. His real desire was hobbitlike (and humanlike) just ‘to be himself’ again and get back to the old familiar life that had been interrupted. Already on the journey back from Rivendell he suddenly saw that was not for him possible. Hence his cry ‘Where shall I find rest?’ He knew the answer, and Gandalf did not reply. As for Bilbo, it is probable that Frodo did not at first understand what Arwen meant by ‘he will not again make any long journey save one’. At any rate he did not associate it with his own case. When Arwen spoke (in TA 3019) he was still young, not yet 51, and Bilbo 78 years older. But at Rivendell he came to understand things more clearly. The conversations he had there are not reported, but enough is revealed in Elrond’s farewell III 267.³ From the onset of the first sickness (Oct. 5, 3019) Frodo must have been thinking about ‘sailing’, though still resisting a final decision – to go with Bilbo, or to go at all. It was no doubt after his grievous illness in March 3020 that his mind was made up.

Sam is meant to be lovable and laughable. Some readers he irritates and even infuriates. I can well understand it. All hobbits at times affect me in the same way, though I remain very fond of them. But Sam can be very ‘trying’. He is a more representative hobbit than any others that we have to see much of; and he has consequently a stronger ingredient of that quality which even some hobbits found at times hard to bear: a vulgarity – by which I do not mean a mere ‘down-to-earthiness’ – a mental myopia which is proud of itself, a smugness (in varying degrees) and cocksureness, and a readiness to measure and sum up all things from a limited experience, largely enshrined in sententious traditional ‘wisdom’. We only meet exceptional hobbits in close companionship – those who had a grace or gift: a vision of beauty, and a reverence for things nobler than themselves, at war with their rustic self-satisfaction. Imagine Sam without his education by Bilbo and his fascination with things Elvish! Not difficult. The Cotton family and the Gaffer, when the ‘Travellers’ return are a sufficient glimpse.

Sam

Sam was cocksure, and deep down a little conceited; but his conceit had been transformed by his devotion to Frodo. He did not think of himself as heroic or even brave, or in any way admirable – except in his service and loyalty to his master. That had an ingredient (probably inevitable) of pride and possessiveness: it is difficult to exclude it from the devotion of those who perform such service. In any case it prevented him from fully understanding the master that he loved, and from following him in his gradual education to the nobility of service to the unlovable and of perception of damaged good in the corrupt. He plainly did not fully understand Frodo’s motives or his distress in the incident

of the Forbidden Pool. If he had understood better what was going on between Frodo and Gollum, things might have turned out differently in the end. For me perhaps the most tragic moment in the Tale comes in II 323 ff. when Sam fails to note the complete change in Gollum's tone and aspect. 'Nothing, nothing', said Gollum softly. 'Nice master!'. His repentance is blighted and all Frodo's pity is (in a sense*) wasted. Shelob's lair became inevitable.

This is due of course to the 'logic of the story'. Sam could hardly have acted differently. (He did reach the point of pity at last (III 221–222)⁴ but for the good of Gollum too late.) If he had, what could then have happened? The course of the entry into Mordor and the struggle to reach Mount Doom would have been different, and so would the ending. The interest would have shifted to Gollum, I think, and the battle that would have gone on between his repentance and his new love on one side and the Ring. Though the love would have been strengthened daily it could not have wrested the mastery from the Ring. I think that in some queer twisted and pitiable way Gollum would have tried (not maybe with conscious design) to satisfy both. Certainly at some point not long before the end he would have stolen the Ring or taken it by violence (as he does in the actual Tale). But 'possession' satisfied, I think he would then have sacrificed himself for Frodo's sake and have *voluntarily* cast himself into the fiery abyss.

I think that an effect of his partial regeneration by love would have been a clearer vision when he claimed the Ring. He would have perceived the evil of Sauron, and suddenly realized that he could not use the Ring and had not the strength or stature to keep it in Sauron's despite: the only way to keep it and hurt Sauron was to destroy it and himself together – and in a flash he may have seen that this would also be the greatest service to Frodo. Frodo in the tale actually takes the Ring and claims it, and certainly he too would have had a clear vision – but he was not given any time: he was immediately attacked by Gollum. When Sauron was aware of the seizure of the Ring his one hope was in its power: that the claimant would be unable to relinquish it until Sauron had time to deal with him. Frodo too would then probably, if not attacked, have had to take the same way: cast himself with the Ring into the abyss. If not he would of course have completely failed. It is an interesting problem: how Sauron would have acted or the claimant have resisted. Sauron sent at once the Ringwraiths. They were naturally fully instructed, and in no way deceived as to the real lordship of the Ring. The wearer would not be invisible to them, but the reverse; and the

✓ *In the sense that 'pity' to be a true virtue must be directed to the good of its object. It is empty if it is exercised *only* to keep oneself 'clean', free from hate or the actual doing of injustice, though this is also a good motive.

more vulnerable to their weapons. But the situation was now different to that under Weathertop, where Frodo acted merely in fear and wished only to use (in vain) the Ring's subsidiary power of conferring invisibility. He had grown since then. Would they have been immune from its power if he claimed it as an instrument of command and domination?

Not wholly. I do not think they could have attacked him with violence, nor laid hold upon him or taken him captive; they would have obeyed or feigned to obey any minor commands of his that did not interfere with their errand – laid upon them by Sauron, who still through their nine rings (which he held) had primary control of their wills. That errand was to remove Frodo from the Crack. Once he lost the power or opportunity to *destroy* the Ring, the end could not be in doubt – saving help from outside, which was hardly even remotely possible.

Frodo had become a considerable person, but of a special kind: in spiritual enlargement rather than in increase of physical or mental power; his will was much stronger than it had been, but so far it had been exercised in resisting not using the Ring and with the object of destroying it. He needed time, much time, before he could control the Ring or (which in such a case is the same) before it could control him; before his will and arrogance could grow to a stature in which he could dominate other major hostile wills. Even so for a long time his acts and commands would still have to seem 'good' to him, to be for the benefit of others beside himself.

The situation as between Frodo with the Ring and the Eight* might be compared to that of a small brave man armed with a devastating weapon, faced by eight savage warriors of great strength and agility armed with poisoned blades. The man's weakness was that he did not know how to use his weapon yet; and he was by temperament and training averse to violence. Their weakness that the man's weapon was a thing that filled them with fear as an object of terror in their religious cult, by which they had been conditioned to treat one who wielded it with servility. I think they would have shown 'servility'. They would have greeted Frodo as 'Lord'. With fair speeches they would have induced him to leave the Sammath Naur – for instance 'to look upon his new kingdom, and behold afar with his new sight the abode of power that he must now claim and turn to his own purposes'. Once outside the chamber while he was gazing some of them would have destroyed the entrance. Frodo would by then probably have been already too enmeshed in great plans of reformed rule – like but far greater and wider than the vision that tempted Sam (III 177)⁵ – to heed this. But if he still preserved some sanity and partly understood the significance of it, so that he refused

*The Witch-king had been reduced to impotence.

now to go with them to Barad-dûr, they would simply have waited. Until Sauron himself came. In any case a confrontation of Frodo and Sauron would soon have taken place, if the Ring was intact. Its result was inevitable. Frodo would have been utterly overthrown: crushed to dust, or preserved in torment as a gibbering slave. Sauron would not have feared the Ring! It was his own and under his will. Even from afar he had an effect upon it, to make it work for its return to himself. In his actual presence none but very few of equal stature could have hoped to withhold it from him. Of 'mortals' no one, not even Aragorn. In the contest with the Palantír Aragorn was the rightful owner. Also the contest took place at a distance, and in a tale which allows the incarnation of great spirits in a physical and destructible form their power must be far greater when actually physically present. Sauron should be thought of as very terrible. The form that he took was that of a man of more than human stature, but not gigantic. In his earlier incarnation he was able to veil his power (as Gandalf did) and could appear as a commanding figure of great strength of body and supremely royal demeanour and countenance.

Of the others only Gandalf might be expected to master him – being an emissary of the Powers and a creature of the same order, an immortal spirit taking a visible physical form. In the 'Mirror of Galadriel', I 381, it appears that Galadriel conceived of herself as capable of wielding the Ring and supplanting the Dark Lord. If so, so also were the other guardians of the Three, especially Elrond. But this is another matter. It was part of the essential deceit of the Ring to fill minds with imaginations of supreme power. But this the Great had well considered and had rejected, as is seen in Elrond's words at the Council. Galadriel's rejection of the temptation was founded upon previous thought and resolve. In any case Elrond or Galadriel would have proceeded in the policy now adopted by Sauron: they would have built up an empire with great and absolutely subservient generals and armies and engines of war, until they could challenge Sauron and destroy him by force. Confrontation of Sauron alone, unaided, self to self was not contemplated. One can imagine the scene in which Gandalf, say, was placed in such a position. It would be a delicate balance. On one side the true allegiance of the Ring to Sauron; on the other superior strength because Sauron was not actually in possession, and perhaps also because he was weakened by long corruption and expenditure of will in dominating inferiors. If Gandalf proved the victor, the result would have been for Sauron the same as the destruction of the Ring; for him it would have been destroyed, taken from him for ever. But the Ring and all its works would have endured. It would have been the master in the end.

Gandalf as Ring-Lord would have been far worse than Sauron. He

would have remained 'righteous', but self-righteous. He would have continued to rule and order things for 'good', and the benefit of his subjects according to his wisdom (which was and would have remained great).

[The draft ends here. In the margin Tolkien wrote: "Thus while Sauron multiplied [illegible word] evil, he left "good" clearly distinguishable from it. Gandalf would have made good detestable and seem evil.']

247 To Colonel Worskett

[A letter to a reader of *The Lord of the Rings*.]

20 September 1963 76 Sandfield Road, Headington, Oxford
Dear Colonel Worskett,

Thank you very much for your charming and encouraging letter. It gave me great pleasure.

I could indeed give you another volume (or many) about the same imaginary world. I am in fact under contract to do so. But I have been held up for some years now, by close and heavy work on professional tasks neglected while seeing *The Lord of the Rings* into print. That will be over, for the present, when my translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* goes to press: soon, I hope. Then I shall return to the task of putting in order all or some of the legends of the earlier ages, referred to in the Appendices (esp. A i.).

I am afraid all the same that the presentation will need a lot of work, and I work so slowly. The legends have to be worked over (they were written at different times, some many years ago) and made consistent; and they have to be integrated with The L.R.; and they have to be given some progressive shape. No simple device, like a journey and a quest, is available.

I am doubtful myself about the undertaking. Part of the attraction of The L.R. is, I think, due to the glimpses of a large history in the background: an attraction like that of viewing far off an unvisited island, or seeing the towers of a distant city gleaming in a sunlit mist. To go there is to destroy the magic, unless new unattainable vistas are again revealed. Also many of the older legends are purely 'mythological', and nearly all are grim and tragic: a long account of the disasters that destroyed the beauty of the Ancient World, from the darkening of Valinor to the Downfall of Númenor and the flight of Elendil. And there are no hobbits. Nor does Gandalf appear, except in a passing mention; for his time of importance did not begin until the Third Age. The only major characters of the L.R. who appear are Galadriel & Elrond.