

# The Physical and Spiritual Manifestations of Evil in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*: The Orcs as Effective Images of Terror

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**Abstract:** The appeal to *The Lord of the Rings* comes not only from Tolkien's handling of the plot, characters, mythology, language, and themes, but also from the strong portrayal of evil. It stems from the Orcs being powerful physical images of evil. They are salient to the plot of the novel and are indispensable in complementing other images of evil. This paper discusses the two forms of evil, spiritual and physical, and how there exists a form of dependence of spiritual evil (Sauron) on physical evil (the Orcs). The Orcs come across as an important image of physical terror because of their sheer physicality and pervasive presence throughout the epic. They symbolise Sauron's authority and the spread of evil throughout the realm and their countless involvement in many events have shaped them into compelling physical images of terror which inadvertently transform Tolkien's epic into an inspiring and riveting novel. My study of the Orcs as powerful physical images of evil also seeks to unveil the influential role of secondary images of evil in the novel. The Orcs are an example of Tolkien's ingenuity; they reflect the extent of his astute imagination in creating a host of characters, each unique in its own form and function. The presence of the Orcs also symbolises the necessary existence of darkness that is essential for the aesthetic experience of art to be felt. In that, it is from the coexistence of evil and good, and the conflict that is generated from it that inspires the dualities and complexities of our philosophical understanding of good and evil from the lens of Tolkien's epic mythology.

**Keywords:** Tolkien, evil, physical evil, Orcs, spiritual, mythology

## INTRODUCTION

The Lord of the Rings (*The LOTR*) has often been described as a great literary masterpiece because the fantasy novel has won many acclaims for its detailed and intense mythology. Others have praised Tolkien for his great mastery of the plot, his ingenuity with the created languages

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of the elves, and his dealings with many universal themes that were so deeply profound for its time. While other readers could enjoy *The LOTR* for the “structure of the epic, and something of the interplay of story elements, and the force of narrative” (Lawhead 1999, 157), it cannot be denied that the characters of the tale do lend their charm to the complexity and timeless appeal of the novel. This may be true for such characters like the hobbits, Ents, elves and dwarves but one does not usually include the race of the Orcs under the category of ‘alluring’ characters. The Orcs are after all evil and in comparison, to the other characters of the story, critics have often discounted this minion race as undeserving of any recognition and as inconsequential to the development of the story. From their harmless portrayal in *The Hobbit*, the Orcs of Tolkien’s *The LOTR* have become one of Sauron’s most deadly and ruthless servants. This paper examines one of the external aspects of this race and argues that the allurements of *The LOTR* stems also from the strong and powerful images of evil. I will discuss the Orcs as a powerful and encompassing physical image of evil that is salient to the novel as well as complementary to the other spiritual manifestations of evil.

#### GOBLINS AND ORCS

First and foremost, it must be noted that Tolkien did not create the race of the Orcs but they “descended from the ‘goblin tradition’ of MacDonald” (Goodenough 1999, 343). George MacDonald’s ‘goblins’, as they were called in *The Princess and the Goblin* which was essentially written for children, was Tolkien’s inspiration for the Orcs in his story. MacDonald’s creations were definitely not the “stunted, black-skinned, yellow-fanged and crimson-eyed race of cannibal warriors” (Day 2001, 182) that readers recognise in *The LOTR*. In the passage quoted below, we are given a glimpse of the George MacDonald’s version of the goblins:

There was legend current in the country that at one time they lived above ground, and were very like other people. But for some reason or other they had all taken refuge in the subterranean caverns, whence they never came out but at night... [T]hey had greatly altered in the course of generations; and no wonder, seeing they lived away from the sun, in cold and wet dark places. They were not ordinarily ugly, but either hideous, or ludicrously grotesque both in face and form... And as they grew misshapen in body they had grown in knowledge and cleverness, and now were able to do things no mortal could see the possibility of. But as they grew in cunning, they grew in

mischief...and they had strength equal to their cunning. (qtd. in Colbert 2002, 105)

It would seem that the goblins of MacDonald's version are worlds apart from their counterparts of Middle-earth. While the Orcs were created in a far more terrifying manner, both the goblins and the Orcs share a distinct similarity with one another in terms of the legend of their creation. Here, Colbert (2002, 103) notes:

For *LOTR*, Tolkien created goblins far more disgusting than MacDonald ever imagined. But he kept one feature that goes back to the same legends that originally inspired MacDonald. Orcs start out as another species then became misshapen over time, as they live underground. They are like demons shaped by the fires of hell. Tolkien made that old idea fit his own history of Middle-earth's early years.

The goblins of MacDonald's version were also famous for having a distinct incapacity, which was "tender feet" (Ibid., 105). Here, Tolkien omitted such a characteristic and made the Orcs' fear of sunlight their main weakness. However, this was later overcome with the introduction of the greater Orcs, or Uruk-hais who were able to launch sorties even under broad daylight. Tolkien also expanded the race of the Orcs in terms of their function, objective, depth of character and appearance. It is here that Tolkien surpasses MacDonald in the conceptualisation aspect, but credit must be given to MacDonald for inspiring Tolkien to include this race in his grand epic.

Aside from the inspirational idea of the Orcs, George MacDonald could have possibly inspired Tolkien to write in the fantasy genre as a means of spiritual expression and reaffirmation. In nineteenth century, England, chiefly during the Victorian era, writers such as MacDonald, Christina Rossetti, and Oscar Wilde were already using the fantasy genre to inspire understanding and discourse in religion.

How the lapsed could find salvation--by changing their mind or that of God, by meritorious works, or by grace, faith, love, friendship, prayer, suffering, or art became for Rossetti, MacDonald, and Wilde an intense inner question that inspired their fantasy. Tapping realities that could not be approached through the logic of a sermon or a novel, archetypal fairy tales by these three writers revitalised Christianity with energies of the body suppressed in the dominant culture... At the end of the twentieth century, these works of fantasy endure not only as popular children's texts but as tales of transformation for adults who seek through mainstream churches, identity politics, and New Age therapies to connect the creative spirit of the inner

Child and feminist and gay liberation with religious faith. (Goodenough 1999, 337-338)

### THE DIVINE PRESENCE IN MODDLE-EARTH

Tolkien's major work, *The LOTR* mirrors the Christian faith implicitly rather than explicitly. For moral views of his own, Tolkien made God to be unseen because he wanted his work to be unique and imaginative but at the same time, he could not dismiss God completely. For such a reason, the God of Tolkien's Middle-earth is felt but is unseen (Carpenter 1995, 99). Overall, Tolkien's inspiration for Middle-earth was drawn more from his love for mythology and his Catholic faith. Thus, Tolkien very much wanted his work to divulge his faith and he did so by inserting an elaborate array of rich religious symbolism in the story. At one point or another, Tolkien describes indirectly the influences of some higher divine power that manipulates some major events in the tale. This guiding force remains noticeably subtle as can be seen in the story of how Bilbo found the One Ring of power:

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. And that may be an encouraging thought. (Tolkien 1995, 54-55)

The presence of a divine authority might be lacking in form and appearance, but this is compensated by the whole mythological system of Middle-earth that was created by the all-powerful Ilúvatar, narrated comprehensively by Tolkien in *The Silmarillion*. In *The LOTR*, the visible influence of a Godly dominance is evident in the race of the elves that exemplifies the perfection and grace of the omnipotent God. While it is true that God can only be felt, the same cannot be said for the various images of evil that almost eclipse everything else with their terrifying aura throughout the story. Whether evil takes on a physical, spiritual, or psychological form, its image in *The LOTR* is powerful and all-consuming to the extent that it has made *The LOTR* a compelling and profound tale.

### EVIL IN *THE LOTR*

Critics have long commended Tolkien for his creations that were unsurpassed in many ways including their genesis and long had his characters been used as a standard model for images such as elves, rangers, dwarves, dragons, trolls, and orcs. In them, Tolkien has engrained a certain reality that is believable. "His creatures were so

real, elf princess, hobbits, ents, trolls, orcs, and other grim enemies, that the Merton Professor of the English language has acquired, like them, a certain timelessness" (Coren 2001, 124-125).

This "certain timelessness" also includes the portrait of evil and the very prevalent and devilish race of the Orcs. Tolkien's portrayal of his evil characters in the story was so convincingly done, and so true-to-life, that at times they manage to overshadow the rest of the good characters. The point here is that the appeal of the book lies also in its images of evil, in which we see the race of the Orcs as playing a forceful and indispensable role. Before this is discussed, it is best that an overview of evil in *The LOTR* is given to establish its link with the Orcs as a powerful image of evil.

Firstly, to speak of evil in the story is to speak of Sauron because he is ultimately the lord of the ruling Ring, the ruler of the many evils that exist in Middle-earth. With the One Ring of Power, Sauron would eventually control the other rings and ultimately Middle-earth itself. He is unmistakably the ruler of the Orcs, and is also known by other names such as 'Gorthaur the Cruel', 'The Lord of Mordor', 'the Lord of the Earth (in the Second Age)', 'the Dark River', 'the Lidless Eye' (Foster 1978, 345), and many more. His awesome presence is intensified by the enshrouding and forceful power of evil as it rises from the unfathomable depths of darkness. When Frodo stares into the Mirror of Galadriel, Sauron makes his appearance as a large, lidless burning Eye, radiating an aura of fear as it searches vainly for its other half.

But suddenly the Mirror went altogether dark, as dark as if a hole had opened in the world of sight, and Frodo looked into emptiness. In the black abyss there appeared a single Eye that slowly grew, until it filled nearly all the Mirror. So terrible was it that Frodo stood rooted, unable to cry out or to withdraw his gaze. The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing.

Then the Eye began to rove, searching this way and that, and Frodo knew with certainty and horror that among the many things that it sought he himself was one. But he also knew that it could not see him – not yet, not unless he willed it... The Mirror seemed to be growing hot and curls of steam were rising from the water. He was slipping forward. (Tolkien 1995, 355)

Here, Sauron is pictured as an all-powerful and consuming burning Eye, a Dark Lord who has lost his true form. The recovery of the Ring would enable Sauron to regain his terrible powers and subsequently,

the enslavement of Middle-earth. In the beginning, there was Melkor who was the true embodiment of evil in the new world, and with the overthrow of the first Dark Lord, Sauron will eventually pursue what Melkor had failed to do in *The Silmarillion*: the destruction of Middle-earth. However, it is ironic that we do not see him or hear him at all throughout the entire story. Only Frodo, Gollum and Aragorn had a first-hand experience seeing Sauron directly. His words of terror in the Black Speech of Mordor: “One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the Darkness bind them” (Tolkien 1995, 248) were uttered by Gandalf in Rivendell at the Council of Elrond. Even when the Black Gate of Mordor opens, Aragorn was greeted not by the Dark Lord himself but by “The Lieutenant of the Tower of Barad-dûr” or otherwise known as “the Mouth of Sauron” (Ibid., 70) who was there on behalf of the Dark Lord. We do not see Sauron and, as Michael Torre explains in his brilliant observation, “Herein lies Tolkien’s great literary achievement: to make us feel the presence and the truth of an evil that is fundamentally spiritual. *This* is what we rightly fear. Indeed. It is a virtual rule in *The Ring* that the more physical the evil, the less it frightens us” (Torre 2002, 66-67).

### SPIRITUAL EVIL

Torre’s statement conjures the idea of spiritual fear that is greater than physical evil and Sauron being an aspect of spiritual evil is extremely frightening. This is true to a certain extent and Torre (2002, 67) further elaborates:

And yet we *feel* him. His presence is pervasive. One of the most harrowing moments comes at the end of the Fellowship, as Frodo stands alone on Amon Hen. The Eye that does not sleep leaps out towards him. We feel its onslaught, its swift approach...its power. And yet this power requires no physical instrument...The greatness of its power is felt precisely in its transcendence of our physical limits. We need only to turn our will toward it unprotected to find ourselves caught and bound.

To complement this ultimate spiritual evil entity would be the Ringwraiths who convey Sauron’s authority and presence. But unlike Sauron, they are not a spiritual nor a physical entity but a mixture of both and it is by striking psychological fear that the Ringwraiths overwhelm their victims, hence they are Sauron’s swiftest and most deadly servants. The appearance of the Black Riders is marked above all by their overwhelming shadowy presence and certain physical traits

that induce terror of the unimaginable. In 'The Siege of Gondor' (Tolkien 1995, 788), this is well described as Pippin and Beregonde sense the approach of the Black Riders gliding down for their kill.

Suddenly as they talked they were stricken dumb, frozen as it were to listening stones. Pippin cowered down with his hands pressed to his ears; but Beregonde, who had been looking out from the battlement as he spoke of Faramir, remained there, stiffened, staring out with starting eyes. Pippin knew the shuddering cry that he had heard: it was the same that he had heard long ago in the Marsh of the Shire, but now it was grown in power and hatred, *piercing the heart with a poisonous despair* (my emphasis). (Tolkien 1995, 791)

The Ringwraiths can strike tremendous fear in their victims with their Black infernal power of the unseen and the physical as well. Tom Shippey (2002, 125) explains that "Ringwraiths work for the most part not physically but psychologically, paralysing the will, disarming all resistance", and this is evidently true of the Pippin and Beregonde's encounter with the Ringwraiths, for their cry pierces "the heart with poisonous despair." The psychological fear induced by the Ringwraiths is intertwined with the physical as well because it is with such a combination that their terror eclipses the frailties of the senses, and their cry melts all hope away.

It is not their cloaks or daggers that alarm, but the shadow within. When Tolkien chooses a physical action to convey this hidden power, it inevitably is nonembodied: a sniff, a hiss, a cry on the wind, the Black Breath. And their true terror is entirely internal; their implacable hatred and cruelty, before all hearts quail... (Torre 2002, 67)

Thus, we have Sauron as the embodiment of spiritual evil and the Ringwraiths representing evil in its psychological and physical form. The two portraits of evil are profound; they excite and terrify the reader which, in turn, does much for the depth and complexity of the story. Evil is shown to be a powerful force that is destructive, manipulative and appalling. Throughout the story, there is a sense of pervasive gloom that reaches out even to the end, when Frodo leaves for the Undying Lands and there is a sense of foreboding that evil will return once again to the realm. In a way, this makes *The LOTR* compelling, due to Tolkien's art in making evil exist in myriads of form that are authentic as well as entertaining. Even as The Ring is finally destroyed in the end, there is a sense of sadness in the return of the Elves to the Undying Lands, the breaking of the Fellowship and the

traumatic effects of the quest on Frodo. Thus, the story has a positive ending that is tinged with sadness. While most critics have labelled Tolkien as a pessimist, he has successfully shown the triumphant virtues of perseverance and courage in the face of greater adversity and the value of forgiveness and fellowship.

### PHYSICAL EVIL

While Sauron and the Ringwraiths are terrifying evil entities whose presence permeate almost half the novel, other physical manifestations of terror are equally as horrifying and as pervasive as well. Michael Torre's second statement regarding portraits of evil is that "the more physical the evil, the less it frightens us" (Torre 2002, 68). Torre has tried to justify to a certain extent that nothing could possibly match the greatness of Sauron's power as the Dark Lord of Middle-earth. Sauron does not have a physical body, yet his dreadful presence is felt throughout the realm because he is, after all, a powerful Maia spirit that has gained tremendous power throughout the ages. But Sauron is still powerless without the One Ring of Power and for this matter he relies heavily on his other physical and tangible agents of darkness who might prove Torre's statement to be untrue. While the pervasive influence of spiritual and psychological evil cannot be denied in the novel, the role of physical images of evil should not be discounted. David Harvey comments that "From the beginning of the Third Age, Evil is presented as having a physical and real form. The nature of Evil is given form and substance" (Harvey 1985, 69). In relation to this, the most ancient of all evil creatures in Middle-earth are terrifying not because of the powers that they yield. It is because of their sheer physicality that is equally horrifying to many creatures and races alike. Creatures like Shelob the giant spider, the Watcher at Moria's West Gate (a gigantic octopus-like monster), and the Balrogs (giant evil spirits of fire) are all ancient evils of the old world that are larger-than-life. They are as deadly and destructive as other evil images and for that they remain a part of Middle-earth's deadly images of evil.

Even the greatly feared lidless Eye of Sauron takes on a physical form because, to comprehend its tremendous evil powers, the Eye must be conceptualised in a material form. This is necessary because our response to evil is greatly influenced by it being in a physical form that enhances its material and spiritual existence.

Hence, the various physical images of evil do have an important role in the story, and they should not be perceived to be of lesser

importance or secondary in nature to the often-perceived primary images of evil i.e. the Ringwraiths and Sauron. I shall first begin by explaining the significance of a great physical manifestation of evil, in this case, the Ring and subsequently the race of the Orcs and how the Orcs, as a powerful physical image of evil, is compelling in its role and portrayal while complementing other images of evil in the story.

Physical manifestations of evil in *The LOTR* are largely servants of Sauron who do his bidding, but the One Ring of Power comes across as a powerful physical manifestation of evil that transcends the role of a servant or slave. The Ring is a physical evil entity with tremendous power that far supersedes its common description as a ring:

Frodo drew the Ring out of his pocket and looked at it. It now appeared plain and smooth, without mark or device that he could see. The gold looked very fair and pure, and Frodo thought how rich and beautiful was its colour, how perfect was its roundness. It was an admirable thing and altogether precious. (Tolkien 1995, 59)

The One Ring of Power contains a greater part of Sauron's power; it is the Master-ring that the Dark Lord has lost and must regain for his conquest of Middle-earth. "The Enemy still lacks one thing to give him strength and knowledge to beat down all resistance, break the last defence and cover all the lands in a second darkness. He lacks the One Ring" (Tolkien 1995, 50). Lost many ages ago, Sauron has become weakened without the ruling Ring that has a mind of its own. Far from being just a physical object, the Ring grants the power of invisibility to the wearer but with great consequences, as it cannot be truly owned or controlled by anyone except Sauron. The Dark Power within the ring would "possess" (Ibid., 44) any mortal race that wears it. Subsequently, the victim would succumb to the sway of evil that nourishes the physical self while it slowly gnaws the soul, feeding it until the victim becomes an empty shell to be under the tyranny of evil and diminish into nothingness. The power of the Ring is precariously consuming to the mortal wearer and as Gandalf tells Frodo:

A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he *fades*: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the dark power that rules the Rings. Yes, sooner or later, 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. (Tolkien 1995, 46)

The One Ring of Power exists as a physical manifestation of great evil that is manipulative and deceiving. It bestows great power to its owner “according to the measure of each possessor” (Tolkien 1995, 357) and yet, could betray the wearer at any given time because the Ring “did not seem always of the same size or weight; it shrank or expanded in an odd way, and might suddenly slip off a finger where it had been tight” (Ibid., 46). Just as the Ring itself had decided to leave Isildur and Gollum, the Ring could easily exert its sublime influence without the wearer fully comprehending the potency of the Ring.

Frodo took it from his breeches-pocket, where it was clasped to a chain that hung from his belt. He unfastened it and handed it slowly to the wizard. It felt suddenly very heavy, as if either it or Frodo himself was in some way reluctant for Gandalf to touch it. (Tolkien 1995, 48)

The power of the Ring as told by Gandalf is “so powerful that in the end it would utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it” (Tolkien 1995, 45). Thus, the Ring is a physical embodiment of evil that is controlling, as it is all consuming of the physical will. Its plain physical composition is all the more menacing because it contains the essences of Sauron’s evil powers. The lure of the Ring with all its great powers is tempting even for Gandalf and Lady Galadriel but both characters know that the Ring is also capable of possessing and enslaving the wearer with dreams of greater power. Ultimately, the Ring would be the Master. The Ring corrupts and enhances desire, be it good or bad, binding the wearer to the essences of evil while transforming the individual internally to a withered and decrepit being, forever longing for the enticing allurements of the Ring. When Frodo offers the Ring to Gandalf, the wizard vehemently declines it.

But I have so little of any of these things! You are wise and powerful. Will you not take the Ring?

No! cried Gandalf, springing to his feet. With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly. His eyes flashed and his face was lit as by a fire within. Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire to do good. Do not tempt! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need for it. Great perils lie before me. (Tolkien 1995, 60)

Gandalf’s refusal is in many ways like Lady Galadriel’s rejection of the Ring and her triumph over the temptation is clearly expressed in a

sad and sorrowful resignation "I pass the test" she said. "I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel" (Tolkien 1995, 357). Others like Boromir and Frodo succumb to the temptation of the Ring that comes from it being a "physic amplifier" (Shippey 2000, 157) that manipulates the mind and increases one's longing for the Ring. Faramir (Boromir's brother) meanwhile rejects the Ring and all its terrible powers, "*Not if I found it on the highway would I take it...*" (Tolkien 1995, 666). Here it is shown that there are individuals who can resist and reject the subtle advances of the Ring that many have failed to do. Its existence in a material form corresponds to it being a physical manifestation of evil that is comprehended for its reality. Physical evil like the Ring is an equally forceful image of evil that is equal to Sauron's spiritual dominance and terror in the novel. The Ring makes the visible wearer invisible, or the seen, unseen. And Sauron depends much on this physical entity not only to regain his powers but also to materialise once again after being without a form for thousands of years. If Sauron commands a tremendous presence in his current spiritual form, one could only speculate how much more powerful his presence would be if the Dark Lord takes on a physical manifestation as well.

Whilst the Ring remains a part of Sauron, it is nevertheless an autonomous entity that the Dark Lord must regain to be whole and complete. Hence, there is a sort of interdependence between spiritual evil and physical evil, and the interrelatedness between these two images is strongly portrayed in the physical entity of the Ring and Sauron. To further justify my argument that the physical images of evil in the novel are as important as the spiritual entities and that the former complements the latter, I shall move on to discuss the importance of the Orcs as a powerful image of evil that is essential to the novel.

#### THE ORCS AS A POWERFUL IMAGE OF PHYSICAL EVIL

Unlike the Ring of Power that exists as a solitary symbol of great power, the Orcs are a race of evil minions whose presence any avid reader of *The LOTR* might dismiss as inessential. They are the lowest ranking evil creatures of Middle-earth, whom Tolkien described as the "infantry of old war" (qtd. in Shippey, 2000, 133) and the common slaves of Sauron. Although they may appear to be common evil stock-characters, the Orcs are a powerful image of evil in their own right as no other evil race in *The LOTR* matches the Orcs in terms of the portrayal of their complexity.

The Orcs, evil foot soldiers of the Dark Lord, are a more formidable image of evil than the many ancient but fleeting creatures of terror in *The LOTR*. What the Orcs lack in power and physical size, they achieve in quantity and in an all-encompassing presence of evil in the story. The Orcs are described as:

...hideous, with jagged fangs, flared nostrils, broad faces and slanting eyes which could see like gimlets in the dark-but which still feared the light of Sun as powerfully as in earlier times. They wielded spears and curved scimitars and bore shields of hide, and their weapons were often poisoned. All were filled with fierce, daemonic energy and had formidable strength; and they hated Elves and Men with an abiding hatred which reached back to their Beginnings. (Tyler 1976, 358)

The Ringwraiths might challenge the Orcs as a greater image of evil but as horrible as the Ringwraiths may be, “the Ringwraiths are just like mist or smoke, both physical, even dangerous and choking, but at the same time effectively intangible” (Shippey 2000, 124). The role of the Black Riders extends to much of Book One and only half of Book Five, when Éowyn defeats Angmar, the Witch-king. Three of the Black Riders were defeated at the Ford of Rivendell while the rest were on the lookout for Frodo.

The Orcs, as a contrast, are everywhere in *The LOTR*, *The Silmarillion*, and *The Hobbit* (where they were known as ‘goblins’). While they are the obedient slaves of their master, they do play a significant role in many scenes, key events, and major battles in the story. For example, the Orcs’ ambush of Isildur caused, in a way, the Ring to be lost until it came into the possession of Gollum.

For Isildur was marching north along the east banks of the River, and near the Gladden Fields he was waylaid by the Orcs of the Mountains, and almost all his folk were slain. He leaped into the waters, but the Ring slipped from his finger as he swam, and the Orcs saw him and killed him with arrows. (Tolkien 1995, 51)

The Orcs also play an important role as Saruman’s infantry at the Battle for Helm’s Deep that could well turn the tide of events. Here, the Uruk-hais of Saruman’s creation were fiercer and stronger than the common Orcs—the Uruks had “the strength of two of Sauron’s warriors” (White 2001, 209) and were relied upon by the wizard to plunder and kill at Helm’s Deep.

Orcs and hillmen swarmed about its feet from end to end. Ropes with grappling hooks were hurled over the parapet faster than men could cut them

or fling them back. Hundreds of long ladders were lifted up...and Orcs sprang up them like apes from the dark forests of the South. Before the wall's foot the dead and broken were piled like shingle in a storm; ever higher rose the hideous mounds, and still the enemy came on. (Tolkien, 1995, 523)

The Orcs, too, prove to be vital not only to Saruman but to Sauron, as he relies heavily on them for launching raids, heavy skirmishes, battles, the gathering of information, the rebuilding of the Black Fortress, the construction of war machines, and much more. Saruman depends on the Orcs as well for the construction and the firing of furnaces in the bowels of Orthanc in which the former produces the terrible Uruk-hais. So many were the Orcs of Sauron that he could spare them to Shelob to devour from time to time. "And Orcs, they were useful slaves, but he had them in plenty" (Tolkien 1995, 708). Robert Foster meanwhile comments on the role of the Orcs as an effective evil race from the time of Melkor to Sauron:

Ever after they were the most numerous of Melkor's servants and soldiers. After the overthrow of Morgoth, tribes of Orcs survived in the Misty Mountains and elsewhere, and in the Second and Third Ages they were Sauron's chief servants, although they were also used by Saruman and seem to have acted independently on occasion. (Foster 1978, 304)

Tyler (1976, 357-358) also comments that the Orcs "were formidable soldiery" and "With their aid Sauron rapidly made himself Lord of Middle-earth (or of a great part of it)". Knowing that the Orcs were skilled warriors, Saruman had raised an army not only to defeat the free peoples but also to rival Sauron too. Gandalf remarked at the Council of Elrond, "Wolves and orcs were housed in Isengard, for Saruman was mustering a great force on his own account, in rivalry of Sauron" (Tolkien 1995, 254). The Uruk-hais, because of their sheer numbers, had also overwhelmed the Fellowship at Parth Galen, killing Boromir and capturing Merry and Pippin as well, thus causing the Fellowship to be broken. The Orcs also prove instrumental in boosting Saruman's hold over the people of Rohan and, as Éomer explains, Saruman's army of Orcs and other creatures might overwhelm them if nothing is done to stop them.

But this time our chief concern is with Saruman. He has claimed lordship over all this land, and there has been war between us for many months. He has taken Orcs into his service, and Wolf-riders, and evil Men, and he has closed the Gap against us, so that we are likely to be beset both east and west. (Tolkien, 1995, 427)

It is interesting to note that the free peoples of Middle-earth seem to have more skirmishes and battles with physical images of evil such as the Orcs, than with any other evil creatures under the influence of Sauron. The Orcs not only deal with material resistance, but they figure predominantly in the novel as an ironic comment on Saruman as well. The wizard, who is the leader of the renowned Istari wizards and a powerful Maia spirit, has forsaken his true cause as a guardian of the realm. Instead, his meddling with the Black Arts has corrupted him with greed and desire for more power and total dominance of the realm. Saruman has also resorted to the services of the evil Orcs to perform his dastardly deeds. Once again there exists a dependence of spiritual evil on physical evil and this is reflected in the role of the Orcs as invaluable agents of Sauron and Saruman.

In the caves of Moria, even Gandalf was quite wary of the dangers of any Orc company that may lurk in the dark caverns, though he remained optimistic:

I would not lead you into Moria if there were no hope of coming out again. If there are Orcs there, it may prove ill for us, that is true. But most of the Orcs of Misty Mountains were scattered or destroyed in the Battle of Five Armies. The Eagles report that Orcs are gathering again from afar; but there is a hope that Moria is still free. (Tolkien, 1995, 288)

Aside from the typical image of the Orcs as mere minions of carnage and savagery, the Orcs are reflective of a cold and ruthless race that is devoid of any consciousness but Sauron's. Occasionally, we do hear the Orcs speaking their mind but the newer breed of Orcs, such as the Uruk-hais, is reflective of an experiment gone wrong, a mistake that has resulted in the creation of an unnatural race, brought about by means of some terrible wizardry. The Orcs are not merely a run-of-the-mill evil race but clearly a terrifying composite image of old and new evil in ancient Middle-earth. Old, because they were crafted by Melkor from the days of the Beginning and new, because Saruman's foul deed in using unlawful and debased wizardry has created a newer and greater evil of terrifying consequences. Altogether the Orcs are:

...engines of some terrible technology. They are clearly beasts, primitive and animalistic on one hand, with their "filthy jowl and hairy ear," but they are slaves and mechanical servants because they have relinquished their individual identities to the power and command of the Dark Power which first created them. In this they are linked to abstract technology, power unredeemed by human consciousness, "unresting, as if they were made of

wire and horn, beating out the nightmare seconds of an endless time." Time has practically no meaning to these slaves, because their lives have essentially no meaning. (Mathews 1978, 35)

Besides the commonly perceived image of this nefarious race lies another view of the Orcs as a race that heralds the impending doom of mankind. They bring along with them a sense of dread and convey the image of a mechanical race, created from a sort of adverse technology that is forbidden in pristine and natural Middle-earth. The construct of the Orcs as an image of terror and as a by-product of technological and scientific horror also intertwines with the embedded human image in the Orcs that I had discussed in my second chapter. Altogether, this further strengthens the fact that the Orcs are made up of a diverse multiplicity of images and influences, which further reinforces the position of the Orcs as a powerful and complex image of evil.

## CONCLUSION

To say that the Orcs are a powerful portrait of evil without giving due recognition to other evil entities would be unfair. In fact, it is only right to say that the Orcs also complement Sauron, Saruman, the Ringwraiths, the Wargs, trolls, evil men, Balrogs, dragons and other evil creatures, making *The LOTR* a compelling and profound tale. Physical embodiments of evil such as the One Ring of Power and the race of the Orcs are a menacing duality that proves the importance of physical evil. Physical evil not only complements spiritual evil but the interrelatedness of such a relationship also enriches the complexities of Tolkien's portraits of evil. The Orcs, being the most dominant race are also inter-linked with the growing spectre of evil in the realm and the omnipresence of Sauron who is the heart and centre of all evil in Middle-earth depends much on the Orcs for his conquests. The Orcs are the bodily extensions of the Dark Lord and of his influence throughout the entire story and just as The Eye and the One Ring of Power represent Sauron, the Orcs are the third symbolic representative of the Dark Lord. They project the continuous presence of evil that is further magnified by their compelling presence. Their great numbers only prove how diverse, extensive, and pervasive the influence of evil is. Evil is shown to be insatiable, in its pursuit of Middle-earth, brought about to a large extent by the Orcs who are the perfect embodiment of physical evil that grows at a steady pace while the forces of good slowly diminish.

And they were easily bred. No matter how many were slain by the Elves-or by their allies, the Edain--there were always more Goblins to take the places of the fallen. In the end sheer numbers overwhelmed the Elves and Men, and the cities of Nargothrond and Gondolin were taken by hosts of shrieking Orcs who were undeterred by enormous losses; and with this final defeat the Darkness rolled over most of Middle-earth. (Tyler 1976, 357)

The Orcs might be deemed to be mindless servants of Sauron who follow his every will and thought, but the sheer physicality of this race throughout the story which is more than that of other evil creatures has justified the fact that they are indispensable and important. As much as Sauron needs his One Ring of Power, the Orcs are equally important, if not indispensable to the Dark Lord throughout the three Ages of Middle-earth. One could only wonder how Sauron could do without the race of the Orcs. Just as the Orcs have been aiding Melkor with the dragons and Balrogs in the days of *The Silmarillion*, they now reprise the extension of their roles in *The LOTR* with great effect and force. Whether or not the Orcs are merely animated characters of Sauron it does not in any way affect them as effective physical images of evil that are unnerving as well. Just as the Orcs have evolved from the mischievous ‘goblins’ of MacDonald’s tradition to its present-day form, the Orcs of Tolkien’s *The LOTR* will remain in their own distinctive way an ingenious creation that has truly empowered the story to be as compelling as it is profound.

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