

Abstract: Gollum's path might be seen as the modern equivalent of the Greek tragic hero: though fated to fail personally, he yet serves greater needs. Driven by greed and avarice, Gollum loses his identity, reduced to little more than desire for his "Precious" ring. Yet, even in failure, even while committing evil, Gollum plays an indispensable part in the Quest. Subdued, almost won over by Frodo's kindness, he leads Frodo and Sam to Mount Doom. There, in Frodo's moment of weakness, it is necessary for Gollum to bite off Frodo's finger in order for Frodo's destiny to be fulfilled. We each have a Gollum within us: who has never experienced greed and avarice. We each have to treat the Gollum inside with the same kindness displayed by Frodo, the same firmness displayed by Sam.

Chapter Five: The Path of Tragic Failure

It might seem strange to include Gollum in our list of heroes, but failure can be as instructive as success, if not more so. The tragic hero of Greek drama was someone of great ability who possessed a flaw that ultimately led to their downfall. Perhaps our modern age requires a role reversal, in which a tragic hero is replaced by a villain whose flaw somehow leads him to accomplish something great.

Like the Greek tragic heroes, Gollum has a single flaw that destroys his entire life: his covetousness of the Ring. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, the Ring is the central symbol that dominates all else. Everyone's character is seen through their reaction to the Ring. There are those who, when brought into the Ring's proximity, grow to covet it. As an example, the book has hardly begun before we find Bilbo, under the sway of the Ring, accusing Gandalf of trying to steal it from him; yet Bilbo manages to triumph over his greed and gives the Ring to Frodo. As Gandalf later points out to Frodo, Bilbo is the only one who was ever able to give the Ring away, even if he needed Gandalf's prodding to do so. Later in the book, Boromir, filled with hubris, thinks himself a better Ring bearer than Frodo. His arrogance leads to the splitting of the fellowship. But afterwards Boromir realizes his sin and redeems himself by his bravery in defense of Merry and Pippin. And, of course, without the fellowship being split, perhaps Frodo would never have accomplished his great task. Even figures as great as Aragorn and Gandalf and Galadriel know the temptation of the Ring. Each imagines what great things they could accomplish with its power, yet each is wise enough to turn away and leave the Ring to

the Ring bearer. In the entire story, only Tom Bombadil is indifferent to the Ring; he has no desire for the Ring, and sees it as merely a pretty bauble. Bombadil is indifferent not only to the Ring, but to all the goings on in Middle Earth beyond his own domain, in which he reigns supreme, at one with nature.

But Gollum is not indifferent to the Ring; he is consumed by his desire for it. As Gandalf tells Frodo of Gollum: "he hated it and he loved it, as he hated and loved himself" (I,70).

This might be the most common problem we all have to face along our path of development. For all of us, there is something - alcohol, drugs, sex, fame, wealth, power - whose appeal is so compelling that it can make us forget who we really are, and who we are intended to become. If we yield to that attraction, eventually we also come to both hate it and love it.

HOW THE RING CAME TO GOLLUM, THEN LEFT HIM

After Isildur cut the Ring from Sauron's hand, he foolishly kept it for himself, despite Elrond's pleas to throw it into the volcano Orodruin (more commonly known as Mount Doom). But he didn't possess it long; within two years, by the side of the Great River, Isildur was killed by Orcs. The Ring fell into the river and drifted to the bottom, where it lay for two thousand four hundred and sixty-one years. One day, one special day, the Hobbit Sméagol's birthday (or so he claimed), Sméagol and his friend Déagol went fishing in the river. An especially big fish pulled Déagol from his boat down deep into the water. There on the river's bottom, he saw something shiny and grabbed it. When he rose again to the surface, he found that he was holding a beautiful golden Ring. When Déagol raised it up in delight, Sméagol so desired the Ring that he killed Déagol and took it for his own, calling it "my birthday present."

If we are to become the person we are intended to be, we must be willing to struggle with our conscience, to hold a tension between competing desires. Gollum didn't struggle at

all. He immediately chose the path of the villain without any compunction. Having done so, he found himself driven ineluctably along a path that would give him few rewards, and much suffering.

Sméagol was born into a powerful Hobbit family, part of which eventually became the Stoor clan, which was ruled by his Grandmother. These particular Hobbits, unlike our friends from the Shire, live near the river and actually like sailing and swimming and fishing. The young Sméagol, like Merry and Pippin, is more curious about the world than his fellow Hobbits. But, unlike Merry and Pippin, whose curiosity pushes them outward toward the wider world, Sméagol "was interested in roots and beginnings . . . his head and eyes were downward" (I,68). He is always pulled by the possibility of secrets hidden deep within the earth, more like a Dwarf than a Hobbit. But while Dwarves are practical and make something out of what they find inside the earth; Sméagol merely searches aimlessly, not knowing what he seeks.

Though Tolkien was a scholar of prodigious capacity, he was not an introspective man. He distrusted those who looked too deeply into themselves. Yet, despite that distrust of introspection, over the course of the Quest, each of his heroes (save perhaps sweet Sam) is forced to look deeply into his own nature; each is changed in the process.

Now, under the Ring's influence, this tendency increases. He soon discovers that he becomes invisible when he wears the Ring, which leads him to thieving and other villainies. Suspicious of all around him, desirous only of his own company and the company of the Ring, he takes to making strange gurgling sounds in his throat - sounds like "gollum, gollum," - as he mutters to himself about "his Precious." So Sméagol becomes Gollum to the other Hobbits, who grow to fear and despise him. Finally, grown sick of Gollum's evil ways, his grandmother exiles him from the clan.

The Ring itself begins to isolate Gollum, to take him away from his kin. Just like a drug addict, whose only friend is eventually the needle, Gollum has only the Ring for company. And poor company it is.

As he wanders alone, feeling deeply sorry for himself over his mistreatment by his fellow Hobbits, his tendency to look to the dark rather than the light increases. The light of the sun becomes intolerable, so he wanders more by night than day. Eventually even moonlight bothers him. When he comes to the Misty Mountains, he thinks to himself that it must be dark and cool underneath the mountains. There he could roam on his own and discover the secrets hidden in "roots and beginnings." And so, for nearly six hundred years, he lives beneath the Misty Mountains, his life prolonged by the powers of the Ring . . . until one day Bilbo appears.

Gollum's life, under the spell of the Ring, is reminiscent of Yossarian's friend Dunbar in Joseph Heller's Catch-22. Dunbar thinks he can increase his life-span by making his life as boring as possible. Of course, subjectively, this works: time passes ever more slowly for Dunbar, but only because he lives less and less. Similarly, Gollum's life-span increases enormously, but can we really call it life? Look how much life Mozart and Keats lived in 35 years, how little Gollum has lived in the six hundred years of isolation in the darkness.

At one point during Bilbo's adventures (which were recorded in *The Hobbit*), while escaping from Orcs, he becomes lost in the Orc-mines beneath the mountains. There, by chance, he discovers a golden ring on the floor of the tunnel and hides it in his pocket. Little does he know that this isn't just any golden ring, it is the One Ring that was cut from Sauron's hand by Isildur. With the Ring in his pocket, Bilbo hunts for a way out of the mines, but instead he finds himself becoming more and more lost, going ever deeper into the mines. When he can go no lower, he comes to a lake with an island in

the middle where Gollum lives.

Gollum has degenerated to such a point that no one would ever recognize him as being a Hobbit. After all this time cut off from the light of the sun, he is totally grey, with large, bulging eyes which help him to see in the darkness. He lives largely on fish, which he eats raw, but he will eat anything that he can easily kill, including Orcs, or even Hobbits. If Bilbo hadn't had his sword Sting in his hand (the very sword that he later gave to Frodo), Gollum would have immediately killed Bilbo. Instead, biding his time, he offers to play a riddle game with Bilbo. If he wins, he will eat Bilbo; if Bilbo wins, Gollum will show him the way out of the mines. This riddle game is a reminder that there is still a Hobbit alive somewhere in Gollum, for Hobbits love riddles and the riddle game is respected by all creatures.

The riddle game is life's attempt to call back Gollum from the depths to which he has sunk. It is a reminder that he was once a Hobbit, and that there are rules that are respected by all. All of us are forced to play a riddle game at some point in our lives. There comes a series of questions to which we have to supply answers. These questions, which are often moral choices, push us to our limits. If we answer them well, our life expands; if we answer them poorly, our life contracts.

With little alternative, Bilbo accepts the challenge, in the hope that he can somehow defeat Gollum at the game. Both know many riddles, so the game goes on for a long time. Finally, with his stock of riddles exhausted, Bilbo happens to put his hand in his pocket and feels the Ring. He immediately asks Gollum what he has in his pocket. Gollum complains bitterly that this isn't really a riddle, but still he accepts the challenge, only demanding that he have three guesses instead of the usual one. His first guess is very shrewd: "hands." But luckily Bilbo has just removed his hands from his

pocket before Gollum's guess. Then Gollum thinks of all the things he might have kept in his pocket and tries "knife." Wrong again. Finally, giving way to despair he guesses: "string, or nothing."¹ While that is technically four guesses, Bilbo hardly objects, since Gollum is wrong on both counts.

But by then, a niggling suspicion is forming at the back of Gollum's mind: where is his Precious? He can no longer bear to be parted from his Precious. As Bilbo stands, Sting in hand, insisting that Gollum keep his side of the bargain and show him the way out, Gollum says that first he has to check on something. He leads Bilbo to his lair to look for the Ring, and when he finds it is gone, he begins to shriek. He insists that Bilbo tell him what he does have in his pocket. When Bilbo answers that "answers were to be guessed, not given,"² the suspicion is strong that this nasty hobbit has stolen his Precious. No sword is going to stop Gollum now; he springs at Bilbo who flees in terror from this mad creature.

In his flight, Bilbo's hand goes into his pocket and the Ring slips onto his finger. As we saw with Frodo, first in the Prancing Pony and later on Weathertop, the Ring seems to be able to place itself on people's fingers with little or no action on their part. And so Bilbo becomes invisible, though he doesn't yet know it. When he trips and falls, he expects Gollum to jump on him and kill him. But instead Gollum goes running by, not noticing Bilbo lying on the ground. At first, Bilbo can't figure out why, but as Gollum keeps muttering about the nasty creature who has stolen his birthday present, his Precious, he begins to realize that perhaps Gollum's birthday present is the Ring he is wearing, and that it must be a magic ring that makes its wearer invisible.

Afraid that Bilbo will escape, Gollum goes as quickly as possible through a necessarily circuitous route toward the exit, counting which passage to take at each decision point. Finally he comes to a final passage, where he stops, muttering that he can't go further because he'd encounter

goblins (the Orcs of *The Lord of the Rings*). Without his Ring of invisibility, he wouldn't be safe. So he crouches like a frog at the entrance, blocking the way.

Gollum's whole world has become these dark passages. He cannot let the wider world in, or in this case, let a representative of that wider world, out. Especially not with his Precious. We sometimes come to a point where our life has become sharply circumscribed, cut off from anything new. We will do almost anything to protect ourselves from the new. But, of course, this is hopeless: life will have its way with us, whether we cooperate or not.

Bilbo has followed him, guessing that he will lead him to the exit, and now he is desperate to get past Gollum. He knows that since he is invisible, he could stab Gollum in his eye and kill him. But compassion stays his hand. It doesn't seem fair to Bilbo to kill such a pathetic creature, one who doesn't even have a sword to defend himself (though, if Bilbo only knew, Gollum hardly needs a sword.) Instead Bilbo makes a mighty leap which barely clears Gollum, then goes running down the corridor, with Gollum shrieking behind him: "Thief, thief, thief! Baggins! We hates it, we hates it, we hates it forever!"³ Thus Bilbo escapes with the Ring, or perhaps, as Gandalf surmises, the Ring has simply chosen another bearer who might take it further along on its journey back to its creator.

If Bilbo had not had compassion for Gollum, perhaps neither Gandalf nor Sauron would have ever learned of the existence of the Ring. If so, then the entire battle between Sauron's forces and those of the West would have been fought simply on the battle-field, and Sauron would have won. Or, even if somehow both had learned of the Ring, and the Ring had become a factor, certainly Gollum would not have been alive to guide Frodo to Mount Doom. And again Sauron would have won. Small acts of kindness reverberate in

ways that we can never predict.

GOLLUM'S HUNT FOR BILBO AND THE RING

After Bilbo leaves with the Ring, Gollum stays in the caverns, muttering in self-pity about the thief Baggins who has stolen his birthday present. But, though his desire for the Ring never dampens, away from its vampire-like presence, he finds himself growing stronger again. After a year or two, his renewed strength, coupled with his desire to recover his Precious from the thief Baggins, is enough to drive Gollum out from his caves beneath the Misty Mountains, into the world he so despises. Traveling largely by dark of night to avoid both sunlight and moonlight, he spends more than six decades in his search for Bilbo. Deprived of the rats in his caves who have been his chief source of food, he kills anything young or weak he finds, often drinking its blood, leaving horror stories in his wake of a new terror that stalks in the night.

Though all Gollum can think of is his loss of the Ring, in its absence, he regains his strength. When we are cut off from whatever "fix" has taken over our lives, we do regain our strength, even if we don't notice it or appreciate it.

Meanwhile, after hearing Bilbo's self-serving story of how he acquired the Ring from Gollum, Gandalf wants to know more about Gollum and how he acquired the Ring. Gandalf searches for him, and sends wood-elves to search. But Gollum eludes them all and Gandalf, to his later regret, turns to more pressing matters. After all, he still believes Sauron's story that the One Ring is irretrievably lost. So for fifty years or more, Gollum is left without interference in his own search for Bilbo. Only later, after Bilbo's birthday party, does Gandalf realize the importance of the Ring, and begins to hunt once more in earnest for Gollum. And this time, he enlists the aid of Aragorn, the greatest hunter of his age, who from his own wanderings, knows every highway and byway of Middle Earth.

Unfortunately, both for Gollum and for Gandalf, Gollum's search eventually brings him too close to Sauron's stronghold in Mordor, where he is caught, taken to Sauron, and tortured to find out what he knows. Sauron finds that Gollum once had a Ring of Power and, by elimination, Sauron concludes that it was the One Ring. Beyond that, all he can get from Gollum is "Baggins" and "The Shire," but that is enough for Sauron to set the Black Riders off to seek a Baggins in the Shire, wherever that may be. (For, by this time in history, so little knowledge does the rest of the world have of hobbits that neither name means anything to Sauron.) Having finished his interrogation of Gollum, Sauron, ever mindful of using any foul creature for his needs, releases him. He knows that Gollum's own desire for the Ring is so great that, if anyone can find the Ring, it might well be Gollum. If so, there will then be time enough for Sauron to once more reel Gollum in.

So the wheels are set in motion that will lead, ineluctably to the destruction of the Ring on Mount Doom, and to Sauron's downfall. Gollum, the villain, is an integral cog in a process bigger than his personal life.

Gollum then resumes his search for Bilbo, little knowing that he in turn is being hunted. And the hunter eventually finds his prey. Aragorn brings the whining Gollum to Gandalf for questioning. Getting little of use from Gollum, Gandalf eventually has to turn to the threat of torture by fire, if not to torture himself, to extract the history of Gollum's acquisition of the Ring, his loss of the Ring to Bilbo, his hunt for Bilbo and the Ring, and his capture by Sauron, who he speaks of indirectly as a powerful friend. And thus Gandalf at last knows the whole story.

He then leaves Gollum to be kept prisoner by the Elves. They prove too tender-hearted for their task and Gollum manages to escape and continue his hunt for the Ring. At this point, he has no idea yet that the Ring has passed on to another hobbit: Frodo.

HOW GOLLUM ONCE MORE BECOMES SMÉAGOL

Somehow - perhaps simply the call of the Ring is enough - Gollum manages to follow Frodo and his companions. As early as the ferry ride toward Buckland, Sam and Frodo notice a small dark figure following their party. On the journey to Lórien, Frodo spots strange eyes in the darkness. And while lying at night on a sleeping platform high up in the trees of Lórien, both Frodo and the elf Haldir are aware of some unknown creature in the night. Later, when the company has left Lórien and are sailing along the Great River, Sam spots what looks like a log with eyes. That night, Sam and Frodo take turns keeping watch on their boat. Just as Frodo is almost yielding to sleep's call, Gollum grabs the edge of the boat, preparing to board it, and probably try to steal the Ring from Frodo. But when Frodo sees him and draws Sting, Gollum slips back into the water. This is enough to waken Aragorn, who tells Frodo that Gollum has been following them since Moria. Though they will never know for sure, it may not have been Pippin's carelessness that alerted the Orcs in Moria, but Gollum's treachery. We certainly find repeatedly that Gollum is not to be trusted.

But Gollum remains a boogie in the night until the fellowship is broken and Sam and Frodo are on their own, climbing the hills of Emyr Muil, on their way to Mordor. After managing a perilous descent down a steep cliff (which we'll discuss more in the next chapter), Sam hopes that at least they've left Gollum behind. But just then, they see him climbing head-first down the sheer cliff face with his fingers and toes splayed out, "finding crevices and holes that no hobbit could ever have seen or used" (II,219). Their feelings of repugnance at the sight echo those of Jonathan Harker in *Dracula*: "But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over the dreadful abyss, face down with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some

trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow, but I kept looking, and it could be no delusion. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones, worn clear of the mortar by the stress of years, and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall."⁴

At no point does Gollum seem more inhuman (or in his case, less of a hobbit) than here. To Frodo and Sam, it is as if they were observing a rat scuttling down a wall, or perhaps something lower on the evolutionary scale, some enormous insect. But just as Dracula was once a human, Gollum was once a hobbit, and Frodo is gradually able to touch the hobbit that still lives in Gollum.

Sam is fed up with being followed by Gollum and decides to turn the tables on him. Gollum reaches a point near the bottom of the cliff where the cliff is undercut and he can't hold on any longer. He tries to turn around so that his feet face the ground, but he loses his grip and simply falls. The moment he hits the ground, Sam jumps on him. But we see just how strong and resourceful Gollum is, for he manages to wrap his own arms and legs around Sam and squeeze him tighter and tighter. His fingers reach for Sam's throat while he bites into his shoulder. Thankfully, Frodo is there with his sword Sting, or Sam would have been a goner. He pulls Gollum off Sam and shows him Sting, reminding him that he has seen it before. If Gollum had any doubt that this hobbit was connected to Bilbo Baggins, who he hates forever, this removes that doubt.

In a flash, Gollum changes from ferocity to whining and pleading. "Don't hurt us! Don't let them hurt us, Precious! They won't hurt us will they, nice little hobbitises? We didn't mean no harm, but they jumps on us like cats on poor mices, they did, Precious. And we're so lonely, *gollum*. We're be nice to them, very nice, if they'll be nice to us, won't we, yes, yess" (II,221).

As Sam and Frodo debate what to do with him, Frodo remembers when he stood by the fire with Gandalf, looking at the Ring and knowing for the first time what it was. Gandalf told him the story of Bilbo and Gollum, and Frodo, in his fear, insisted that Bilbo should have killed Gollum while he had the chance. Gandalf, wiser than Frodo, told him then that "It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need" (I,74). Frodo has come a long way since then, and no longer feels so sure of his moral rectitude. Sam's values are simpler; he has no pity for Gollum. When he suggests tying him up and leaving him, which would be tantamount to killing him, Frodo says that they can't do that. "Poor wretch! He has done us no harm" (II,221). Instead he shocks Sam by telling Gollum directly that they are going to Mordor, and he will have to lead them. Since he prefers to travel by the dead of night, when even the moon doesn't shine, they decide to first rest for a bit.

Sam and Frodo see Gollum differently. Sam sees him through realistic eyes and knows he's a villain and not to be trusted. Frodo sees past the creature Gollum has become to the hobbit he once was, and might be again. We all have to find the right balance between justice and mercy.

But mercy is not the same as stupidity. Frodo and Sam sit on each side of Gollum, and pretend to fall asleep. Gollum waits until their breathing lengthens, then tries to leap away into the darkness. But Sam and Frodo are on him like a flash. Now sure just how little he can be trusted, Sam ties an Elven rope around Gollum's foot. But when Gollum starts to shriek in pain, they know this isn't play-acting on his part. Gollum has somehow gone so far into the dark side of things that he can't tolerate anything connected with Elves, who are the living embodiment of light.

A telling incident. If we go too deep into the dark, we can't tolerate the light. We have to slowly work our way back.

So what are the hobbits to do? Frodo realizes that there is only one oath that Gollum can swear that he won't easily break. Gollum knows, too, and says that he will wear on his Precious. As he says this, he calls himself Sméagol, and so Gollum takes the first step back to the hobbit he once was. The creature who scuttled head-first down the cliff face like an insect, recovers a little of his old identity. Though even here, he first tries a little duplicity, wanting to touch his Precious, for surely he knows by now that Frodo has it.

Frodo tells him sternly "No! not on it. . . . Swear by it, if you will. For you know where it is. Yes, you know Sméagol. It is before you" (II,224). Before him in the person of Frodo. And Frodo grows in stature before Sam's eyes, just as Gandalf had grown when he stood before Bilbo, just as Aragorn grew when he stood before the riders of Rohan. At this moment, Frodo has begun fully to move into his destiny.

Gandalf and Aragorn and Frodo! Frodo is indeed in good company. Who would have guessed, when we first saw the simple, pleasure-loving hobbit Frodo back in the Shire, that, when put to the test, he could grow to heroic proportions. As the story proceeds, we will see Frodo continue to grow in moral stature, until arguably, he surpasses all others, including Gandalf and Aragorn.

Sméagol almost falls over himself vowing by the Precious to be good and serve his master well. At that point, Frodo tells Sam to remove the rope from Gollum's leg. When Sam does so, albeit reluctantly, Gollum transforms. He is neither the vicious creature who has been hunting them, nor the whining self-pitying one-time hobbit who begged for his life. Now he is almost friendly, though he still shrinks away from any physical touch. Frodo has become the center of his life: a kind word makes him dance with joy, the mildest reprimand drives him to tears. While Sméagol seems a different character

from the Gollum they know, Sam remains as suspicious as ever. "If possible [he] liked the new Gollum, the Sméagol, less than the old" (II,225). Gollum he terms "slinker;" the new Sméagol is "stinker."

We can certainly sympathize with Sam's view, but, nevertheless, Sméagol is different than Gollum. Some trace of the hobbit inside has truly come to the surface.

SMÉAGOL THE GUIDE

Now that Sméagol has accepted Frodo as the Master of the Ring, he seems eager to act as their guide. In his search for the Ring, he learned hidden ways into Mordor, that, for a long time, kept him out of the hands of Sauron's Orcs. Moving by dark of night, he leads Frodo and Sam away from the hills and down toward the Dead Marshes that lie between Eryn Muil and Mordor. It is no longer a situation of the hobbits holding Gollum captive; he moves so fast that he could leave them behind easily at any time. The hobbits are hard pressed simply to keep up with him.

In each of our individual journeys, we must at some point look to the darkness to find our guide.

After a hard night's walk, they stop, exhausted and hungry. Though the hobbits have only the Elves' lembas bread left to eat, and only about three weeks worth of that, Frodo offers to share it with Sméagol. Sméagol sniffs at the leaves from Lórien in which the enchanted waybread is wrapped, and pulls back as if he had smelled something vile. Then when he nibbles on a tiny piece of the lembas, he immediately spits it out and begins coughing as if it had poisoned him. "You try to choke poor Sméagol. Dust and ashes. He can't eat that. He must starve" (II,228). But immediately, in his new oily Sméagol way, he reassures them that he doesn't blame them. He'll simply have to starve. For Sam, who despises Sméagol even more than he did Gollum, the lembas tastes especially good now he's found that Sméagol can't stand it.

Gollum can only be nourished by things that live in the dark. Anything associated with the light tastes like ashes to him.

When they bed down for the night, Sam tells Frodo that he'll take first watch in case Gollum tries to kill them while they sleep. Frodo reassures him that they have no worries - at least for now - but that Sam should wake him anyway for the second watch. Then Frodo falls deeply asleep, as does Gollum. Sam sits, determined to protect his master, but the night's journey has been long and he falls asleep on his watch, only waking up after sleeping through the entire day. He finds Frodo still asleep, happily unhurt, but Gollum is gone. Sure he has left them, Sam looks up and sees Gollum standing in the near distance. When he tells him to come back, Gollum tells Sam that he's hungry, then leaves.

Sam's yelling at Gollum to come back wakes Frodo. Though Sam apologizes for falling asleep on his watch, Frodo reassures him, saying that they both needed the sleep, and that for now Gollum isn't their worry. A little later, Gollum returns, with his hand and face covered with mud, still chewing, as if he's been grubbing away at things they prefer not to even think about. Then it's time to resume their journey—down into the stinking marshes that surround Mordor.

Here, in contrast to the airy-light lembas of the Elves, we see Gollum's disgusting food. Yet sometimes, we all have to eat filth. If we don't swallow some of the darkness, integrate it into our personalities, we are always in danger of being overwhelmed by it. Remember Harry Haller, the reclusive professor in Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf, who is caught in a tension of opposites between the bourgeois world he professes to despise, and the world of sensuality, represented by a jazz saxophone player (picture a rock star today).

From here on, there is little point in whether the hobbits trust or distrust Gollum/Sméagol, since

they are at his mercy. Once they descend into the mists that cover the swamps, the two hobbits are totally lost. When Frodo asks if there isn't some other way to go, Sméagol tells him in his own oblique way, that of course there are, many ways, and each will bring them to Sauron much more quickly than they would like. "Follow Sméagol very carefully, and you may go a long way, quite a long way, before He catches you, yes perhaps" (II,232).

Only someone who knows the darkness can lead us through the darkness. And it is only because of Frodo's compassion that Gollum is willing to be that guide. It is wise to keep this in mind in our own dealings with the darkness inside us, the darkness of the unconscious.

And so they move on, with Gollum leading the way, followed by Sam, with Frodo lagging behind in the rear. By this point Frodo is so dragged down by the weight of the Ring that he can hardly move. A more gloomy land is almost unimaginable. By the end of the third day with Gollum, they are in the thick of the Dead Marshes, and soon discover where the name comes from. As they walk in the dark, they see dim lights appearing over the marsh. Gollum tells them that they must keep moving and not look at the lights. But when Sam trips and falls with his face next to the surface of the water, he sees, to his horror, dead faces staring up at him out of the water. Gollum laughs at Sam's distress, telling him that the Dead Marshes got their name, from all those - Elves, Men, and Orcs - who died at the great battle that took place three thousand years ago, at the end of the Second Age, when Isildur cut the Ring from Sauron's hand. And again Gollum warns them to move slowly and carefully and not to look at the lights. "Or hobbits go down to join the Dead ones and light little candles" (II:235).

A frightening scene, where Sam gets a view into death itself. There are places in each of our journeys when we must simply move forward without looking too closely beneath us.

As they move on, to Sam's irritation, Gollum increasingly stops and sniffs the air. When Sam tells him that there is no need to sniff, as the whole place stinks, Gollum says that he smells a change coming in the air, and he doesn't like it. So they continue on. But soon they hear a far-off cry in the air, a cry they've heard before: Black Riders! Gollum is petrified with fear, babbling to himself. When they see a dark shape flying above, they all fall down, almost burrowing into the ground in the hope of escaping the Black Rider's notice. When the Rider has finally passed them, Frodo and Sam get up. Gollum, who knows the cruelty of the Riders even better than Frodo, stays face-down on the ground until forced up, moaning to himself: "Wraiths! Wraiths on wings. The Precious is their master. They see everything, everything. . . . and they tell Him everything. He sees. He knows. Ach, *gollum, gollum, gollum!*" (II:236).

A MORAL DEBATE INSIDE GOLLUM/SMÉAGOL

The passage of the Black Rider has reminded Gollum that his fear of Sauron is greater than his momentary loyalty to Frodo. Though, for a while, Frodo's kindness transformed him back into at least a semblance of the hobbit that he once was, he now adopts a phony, falsely friendly tone. Sam notices the change immediately. Gollum keeps glancing over at Frodo whenever he thinks he's undetected. By this point, Frodo is so weighted down by the terrible weight of the Ring that he is completely unaware of anything around him. So Sam has to watch Gollum even more carefully now, anticipating some evil to come. On the fifth day of their trip with Gollum, they finally leave the Dead Marshes and come to something even more hideous: the slag heaps that were all that remained of the once green country.

Tolkien, who loved nature so much, abominated the destruction caused by industrialization. To him, nothing in nature, not even the Dead Marshes could be as sickening as the desolation left by man's greed. In Mordor, which was his portrait of a

world destroyed by industrialization, he says: "nothing lived, not even the leprous growth that feed on rottenness. The gasping pools were choked with ash and crawling muds, sickly white and grey, as if the mountains has vomited the filth of their entrails upon the lands about" (II:238).

Frodo and Sam are appalled at the sight, knowing that they will have to cross this wasteland. But first they must rest. Sam wakes when he thinks he hears Frodo calling him. But then he sees that Frodo is still asleep with Gollum sitting by his side, talking to himself, as if he were two different people. One person argues that he promised to obey Frodo. The other insists that their only loyalty is to the Ring, the Precious, and the hobbits are taking it to Sauron. The first side says that he promised to obey the Master, meaning Frodo. The other side says if he had the Ring, he would be the Master. The first reminds him how kind Frodo has been, how he took away the Elven rope when he saw it hurt him, and always talks kindly to him. The other side says then don't hurt him, but get the Ring. But then he can make the nasty hobbit, Sam, crawl before him. When the first side says again that they mustn't hurt Frodo, the second reminds him that Frodo is a Baggins, like Bilbo.

The fact that such a moral argument can go on inside Gollum shows that he has not become totally evil. The fact that the evil side wins the argument shows, unfortunately, that even Frodo's kindness is not enough to save Gollum from himself.

Then, with the moral dilemma seemingly resolved, so that he no longer owes any allegiance to Frodo, he begins worrying about "Him": Sauron. Sauron must know about the promises he made to Frodo, and won't forgive him, so Gollum must keep the Ring for himself. Perhaps with the Ring, he will become even more powerful than Sauron. But for now he has to bide his time, since there are two hobbits and only one of him. Finally he adds "She might help. She might, yes" (II:240).

Sam has listened with dismay to this whole schizophrenic exchange, following everything, including the references to "He" and "Him" as Sauron, but he has no idea who "She" might be. Soon he will find out, to his dismay! But for now, he is careful not to let Gollum know that he's been overheard. When Frodo wakes they move on again.

A NEW PATH

As they walk through the dusk, twice again they fall to the ground when Black Riders pass overhead. When, by the third time, Gollum is so frightened that he says they can go no further, Frodo turns stern and puts his hand on the hilt of his sword. And so they move on still again. Another night's journey brings them at last to their destination: the Black Gate that is the entrance to Mordor, the Black Gate where a mere three weeks later Aragorn and Gandalf will arrive with their small force of men to face the great might of Sauron.

At the sight of the great Gate, with sentinels visible on top, it is clear to Sam that they can go no farther. But Frodo knows only that he must enter Mordor, no matter what. At the thought of losing his Precious to Sauron, Gollum falls all over himself trying to dissuade Frodo, telling him that if he continues, Sauron will have them, and have his Precious. In his anxiety, he slips and begs Frodo to give it to him, that he will take good care of it, and with it take care of the hobbits. But Frodo is adamant: if this is the only way into Mordor, this way he must take, no matter what the consequences.

Gollum then changes his tune still again and begins to talk about another way. Both Sam and Frodo are suspicious, since they are hearing about this alternative path for the first time. Gollum insists that the only reason he's never mentioned it is because they never asked, they simply told him to take them to the Gates of Mordor. Frodo says that Gollum has treated them well to this point. Twice he could have killed them, and yet did not. So now he will trust him a third time. Just as Sam is beginning

to fear that Frodo is altogether too trusting, Frodo changes again before their eyes.

Frodo tells Sméagol that he gave himself away when he asked Frodo to give him the Precious. He says that, not only will Sméagol never again have the Precious, he is in terrible danger since he promised on the Precious to obey Frodo. So now if Frodo was to put on the Ring and command him, he would have to do whatever he was told. If he was told to jump off a cliff, that is what he must do. And, in a way, this is what eventually happens to Gollum. Both Sam and Gollum once again see something in Frodo that they have never seen before. Sam has mistaken his kindness to Gollum for weakness, and now he sees that Frodo is greater and more powerful than he had even imagined.

As one grows wise, one grows kind. But one must also occasionally show one's strength.

Gollum, knowing the power of the Ring, is so frightened that for some time, Frodo can get nothing more out of him than whining and begging for his life. Finally, Gollum has calmed down enough to tell of this other way into Mordor. They must go to Minis Ithil, the Tower of the Moon, built by the men of Gondor as a fortress against Sauron near the end of the Second Age. Within a hundred years, it was conquered by Sauron's forces, who held it less than a decade before Sauron's defeat. It then passed back into the hands of men, who held it for two millennia before the Nazgûl recaptured it. Now for over a thousand years, now called Minis Morgul, it has been under Sauron's control.

Sam argues that this is no better than where they are now, just another fortress under Sauron's thumb. But Gollum slyly explains that, while that is true, Sauron cannot see everywhere at once. He expects to be attacked at the Black Gate, not in Minis Morgul. When Gollum escaped from Mordor, he found a dark tunnel that led to a path across the mountain into Mordor. This time it is Frodo who presses him hard, for Aragorn told him that Gollum didn't escape, he was allowed to leave by Sauron in order to hunt for the Ring. Gollum protests indignantly that he did escape on his own. While it was true

that he was told to seek the Precious, he searched, but for himself. "The Precious was ours, it was mine. I tell you. I did escape" (II:249).

Frodo notices that in Gollum's self-defense, "our" and "we" gave way to "mine" and "I." In the past, when that happened, Gollum was at least partially truthful. But still, this is a dangerous undertaking, and one in which they would once more be led by an increasingly untrustworthy Gollum. But what other choice does he have. And so it is off to Minis Morgul that they go.

So now they follow a path that Gollum intends to lead to the death of Frodo and Sam, so that he can regain the Ring. But in his treachery, he shows them the only path that could ever have led them to complete the quest. There are many moral ambiguities we encounter once we decide to move through the darkness.

Not long on their journey, however, while Gollum is off hunting food, Frodo and Sam encounter Faramir and his warriors from Gondor. The story of that encounter belongs in the following chapters, for it shows all three of Frodo, Sam, and Faramir at their finest. While the three are sizing each other up and concluding they like what they see, Faramir's men spy Gollum fishing. When they ask if they should shoot him with their bows and arrows, Frodo begs for his life, and even reveals, to Faramir's astonishment, that Gollum once bore the Ring. So Gollum's life is spared, but Frodo is forced to deceive Gollum in order to capture him. Though it is only by doing so that Gollum is allowed to live, Gollum only sees that Master betrayed him to the nasty men. Eventually, they are all allowed to return to their quest.

GOLLUM'S BETRAYAL AND REDEMPTION

On they go, with Frodo now so tired that he notices little of their journey; even Sam struggles to keep up with Gollum's relentless pace. Three more days pass until finally Gollum leads them to the entrance

to Shelob's Lair; Shelob—the "She" Sam heard Gollum mention in his moral debate with himself—is an enormous spider so ancient that she probably goes back to the First Age. Somehow in his earlier wanderings after leaving Mordor, Gollum has made a pact with Shelob, he brings her food - Orcs, now hobbits - and she allows him safe passage through her tunnel. While Frodo and Sam drop exhausted to the ground, Gollum goes off to tell Shelob he is bringing her more food. After Shelob is through with them, Gollum figures that he will gather up his Precious and become himself master of the Ring.

But Gollum has one last moment of moral conflict. When he returns from Shelob, he finds Sam and Frodo lying asleep, Frodo's head in Sam's lap, Sam's hand on his brow. Something moves inside Gollum, some emotion he hasn't felt in many years. "Very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee - but almost the touch was a caress. For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing" (II:323).

One of the most touching scenes in The Lord of the Rings. For one brief moment, Gollum might have redeemed himself. But if he had, perhaps then he would not have fulfilled his destiny, the destiny tied so deeply to the fate of the Ring.

But that moment of peace, when Gollum might have become Sméagol once more and spared their lives from Shelob, was ruined when Sam awoke. Seeing Gollum leaning over Frodo, he thinks the worst and accuses him of sneaking off on some villain's errand, as of course he did. And at that, Sméagol reverts to Gollum for the last time, and continues on with his betrayal. He leads them into the tunnel that is Shelob's Lair. As they enter, the smell inside is so loathsome that they almost turn back. But if this is the only way forward, then forward through the tunnel they must go.

But we have to leave them there, lost in Shelob's Lair, for the story of all that happened with Sam and Frodo after they were left by Gollum to be Shelob's food, belongs to their chapters. Here we are concerned with Gollum, so we must move forward in time, to the very end of the Quest, at the top of Mount Doom. Frodo and Sam are standing on the lip of the volcano, the only fire that can destroy the Ring. They have come so far, suffered so much, to arrive at this moment. And then something unexpected happens: Frodo, too, is finally overpowered by the temptations of the Ring. At the point when he must fulfil his destiny and throw the Ring into the volcano, he finds that he can't. Like Isildur, who refused to destroy the Ring when he had a chance; like Gollum, who killed to get the Ring; like Bilbo, who was ready to attack Gandalf as a thief for suggesting he give up the Ring; Frodo, too, cannot part with it. He must have it for himself. He slips it on his finger and vanishes from sight.

And then, in his greed for his Precious, Gollum accomplishes the greatest deed of his life. He has been stalking Frodo and Sam. Just a few moments before, he tried to get the Ring from Frodo, but Frodo held it forth and commanded him to fall down before him. Prophetically, Frodo tells him "If you touch me ever again, you shall be cast into the Fire of Doom" (III:224). But now, just as Frodo puts on the Ring, Gollum jumps on Frodo, struggles with him, then bites off Frodo's ring finger and takes the Ring. He has one brief moment of satisfaction, dancing in his joy at finally being re-united with his Precious. Then, having come too close to the edge in his struggle, he pitches backward into the Volcano, clutching the Ring as he falls to his death. And thus, at the end of this long journey, it is evil Gollum who fulfils the Quest and destroys the Ring.

Before the quest had properly begun, Gandalf speculated that Gollum would play some role in the quest, whether for good or for evil, he did not know. And so Gollum did play a role, a central role, both for good and for evil. Without Gollum's aid as their guide, Frodo and Sam would never have made

it into Mordor, to Mount Doom. Without his treachery, Frodo and Sam would not have come so close to death at the fangs of Shelob. Without Gollum's covetousness for his Precious, Frodo would have failed in his task and Sauron would have won the war. Gollum, flawed as he was, fulfilled his destiny; he played the role of villain in order that heroes might live.

1. *The Hobbit*, 79.

2. *The Hobbit*, 82.

3. *The Hobbit*, 87.

4. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1987), Ch. 3.