

Gardeners and Thieves

Metaphors for Good and Evil
Mastery in *The Lord of the Rings*

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How do we understand power?

- Abstract concepts like **powers** and **abilities** are metaphorically understood as **physical objects**

*He **seized/snatched** power from his enemies*

*She **stole** his authority*

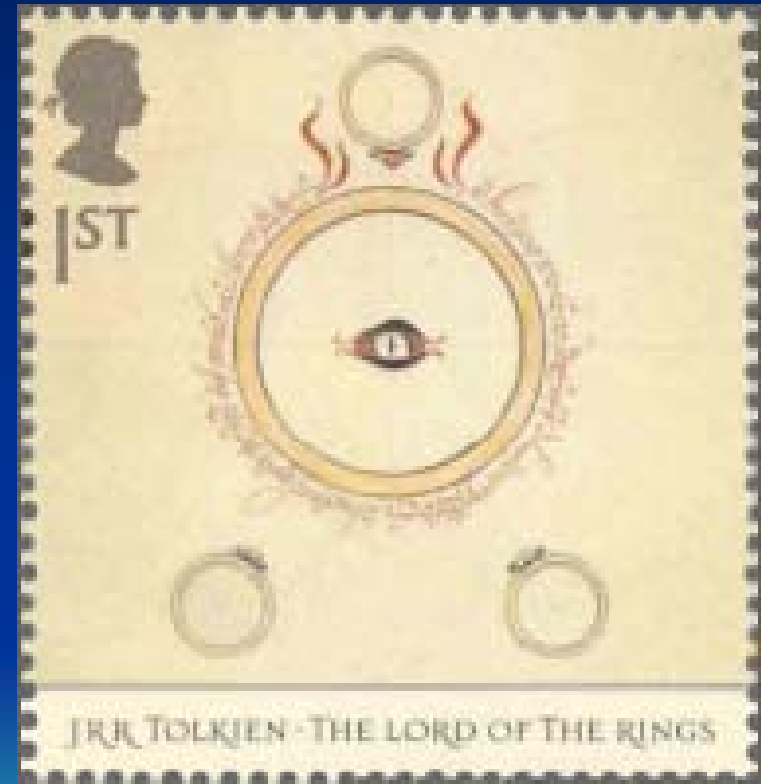
*He **inherited** the kingship*

*She has been **given** many responsibilities*



The One Ring

- The Ring embodies power
- Evil characters crave it
- Good characters refuse it, or bear it reluctantly



Conceptual Metaphor Theory

(cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999)

Metaphors are:

- Conceptual
- Structured

Metaphors allow abstract concepts to be understood in terms of more concrete ones



The Object Event-Structure Metaphor

(cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1999, <http://cogsci.berkeley.edu/lakoff/MetaphorHome.html>)

- Attributes are Possessions

*She **has** a long nose, He **possesses** a good sense of humor*

- Changes are Movements of Possessions (acquisitions or losses)

*She **got** that nose from her father, He **lost** his job*

- Causation is Transfer of Possessions (giving or taking)

*You're **giving** me a headache, She **stole** his job*

- Purposes are Desired Objects

- Achieving a Purpose is Obtaining a Desired Object

*He's **hunting** for a job, She's trying to **get** a better deal on her mortgage*



The Object Event-Structure Metaphor

(cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1999, <http://cogsci.berkeley.edu/lakoff/MetaphorHome.html>)

| PURPOSES | OBJECTS |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Attributes | Possessions |
| Changes | Movements of Possessions |
| Causation | Transfer of Possessions |
| Purposes | Desired Objects |
| Achieving a Purpose | Obtaining a Desired Object |

The Object Event-Structure Metaphor

- 324 instances of this metaphor throughout the trilogy
- 179 referred to good powers (Gandalf's power, etc.)
- 138 referred to evil powers (Sauron's power, the Ring, etc.)
- 7 referred to non-evil organic threats (Old Man Willow, Fangorn Huorns)



The Object Event-Structure Metaphor

I annotated:

- 811 examples of metaphor
- 324 instances of the Object Event-Structure metaphor
- 136 image metaphors



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Seizing Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

- 31 of 41 instances involved evil powers



Seizing Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

“(Boromir) would have stretched out his hand to this thing, and taking it he would have fallen.”
(Gandalf, TT:104)



Seizing Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

“Boromir **claimed** that errand and would not suffer any other to **have it**. He was a masterful man, and one to **take what he desired**.” (Gandalf, TT:29)



Seizing Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

...victory was slipping
from his grasp even
as he stretched out
his hand to seize it.
But his arm was
long. (referring to
the Lord of the
Nazgul, RotK:139)



Control is Reach

- Longer reach facilitates seizing possessions
- Greater control of resources facilitates causation and achieving goals
- 6 of 8 instances involved evil powers



Control is Reach

“(Sauron’s) arm has
grown long.” (Gandalf,
FotR:377)

“So long has the reach
of our enemy become!
Alas!” (Gandalf,
RotK:161)



The Object Event-Structure Metaphor

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| PURPOSES | OBJECTS |
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| Attributes | Possessions |
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Giving Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

- 17 instances involved good powers
- 8 involved evil powers
- 3 involved other powers



Giving Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

“Mayhap the Sword-
that-was-Broken may
still stem the tide – if
the hand that wields it
has *inherited* not an
heirloom only, but *the
sinews of the Kings of
Men.*” (Boromir,
FotR:351)



Giving Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

“Here I must put
forth all such
power and skill as
is given to me,”
(Aragorn,
RotK:170)



Giving Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

“It must often be so, Sam,
when things are in danger:
some one has to give them
up, lose them, so that
others may keep them.

But you are my heir: all
that I had and might have
had I leave to you.”

(Frodo, RotK:382)



Giving Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

“Pride would be folly that
disdained help and
counsel at need; but
you *deal out such gifts*
according to your own
designs.” (Denethor to
Gandalf, RotK:33)



Giving Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

“But will you scorn our help? For we **offer** it to you.” (Gandalf) ...

“All my hopes are **ruined**, but I would not **share** yours. If you **have** any.” (Saruman)

(RotK:323)



Giving Power

via the Object Event-Structure Metaphor

“Yet such as (my
service) is, I will
offer it, in
payment of my
debt,” (Pippin to
Denethor,
RotK:30)



Seizing vs. Giving

“ (The Ring) is
precious to me,
though I buy it
with great pain.”
(Isildur,
FotR:332)



Seizing vs. Giving

“Then I heard Bilbo’s strange story of how he had ‘won’ it ... Much like Gollum with his ‘birthday present’.” (Gandalf, FotR:77)



Seizing vs. Giving

“(The Ring) is my own. I found it. It came to me. ... I am not a thief...”
(Bilbo, FotR:59-60)



The Object Event-Structure Metaphor

(cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1999, <http://cogsci.berkeley.edu/lakoff/MetaphorHome.html>)

| PURPOSES | OBJECTS |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (Demanding) Attributes/Powers | (Heavy) Possessions |
| Changes | Movements of Possessions |
| Causation | Transfer of Possessions |
| Purposes | Desired Objects |
| Achieving a Purpose | Obtaining a Desired Object |

The Burden of Power

- 46 of 48 instances involved good characters



The Burden of Power

The Ring that hung
upon its chain about
his neck grew heavy,
heavier than a great
stone, and his head
was dragged
downwards.

(FotR:471)



The Burden of Power

“(Sam) knew in his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden (of the power the Ring could offer) ... (RotK:216)



The Burden of Power

“If what I have done displeases you, my father,” said Faramir quietly, “I wish I had known your counsel before the **burden** of so **weighty** a judgment was **thrust on me.**”

(RotK:104)



The Object Event-Structure Metaphor

(cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1999, <http://cogsci.berkeley.edu/lakoff/MetaphorHome.html>)

| PURPOSES | OBJECTS |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Using Attributes/Powers | Using Possessions (Tools/Weapons) |
| Changes | Movements of Possessions |
| Causation | Transfer of Possessions |
| Purposes | Desired Objects |
| Achieving a Purpose | Obtaining a Desired Object |

Wielding Power

- 53 instances involved evil powers
- 31 involved good powers



Wielding Power

“King of Angmar long ago, Sorcerer, Ringwraith, Lord of the Nazgul, a spear of terror in the hand of Sauron...” (Gandalf, RotK:112)



Wielding Power

“A great king and
sorcerer he was of
old, and now he
wields a deadly
fear.” (Gandalf,
FotR:337)



Wielding Power

“...the Lord of the Rings would learn of its hiding place and would **bend all his power toward it.**”
(Glorfindel, FotR:348)



Wielding Power

“Yet at last...the
Council put forth
its strength and
drove the evil out
of Mirkwood.”
(Gandalf,
FotR:328)



Wielding Power

“Strange and wonderful I thought it that the designs of Mordor should be **overthrown** by such wraiths of fear and darkness. **With its own weapons was it worsted!**” (Gimli RotK:186)



Power that Devours

- Power can be personified
- Personified powers can “capture” or “devour” sentient beings who try to control them



Power that Devours

- 39 of 54 instances involved evil powers



Power that Devours

“...it would utterly
overcome anyone of
mortal race who
possessed it. It would
possess him.”

“...sooner or later the
dark power will devour
him.” (Gandalf,
FotR:76)



Power that Devours

“...the vision of the great might of Mordor that was shown to him (Denethor) **fed** the despair of his heart until it **overthrew** his mind.” (Gandalf, RotK:161)



Cultivating Powers

- 49 of 73 instances involved good powers



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Cultivating Powers

“And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task, though Gondor should **perish**, if anything passes through this night that can still **grow fair or bear fruit and flower** again in days to come.” (Gandalf to Denethor, RotK:33)



Cultivating Powers

There is a **seed of courage** hidden (often deeply, it is true) in the heart of the fattest and most timid hobbit, waiting for some final and desperate danger **to make it grow.**
(FotR:194)



Cultivating Powers

“...you must start
somewhere (in learning
to love) and have some
roots, and the soil of
the Shire is deep.”
(Merry, RotK:179)



Cultivating Powers

“Yet, though you fight
upon an alien field, the
glory that you **reap**
there will be **yours**
forever.” (Theoden to
his men, RotK:135)



Blight, Disease and Poison

- 16 of 16 instances involved evil powers



Blight, Disease and Poison

“I grieve that so much that was good now festers in the tower.”
(Gandalf, TT:243)



Blight, Disease and Poison

“And ever since that day
(when Isildur took the
Ring) the race of
Numenor has **decayed**,
and the span of their
years has lessened.”
(Elrond, FotR:320)



Blight, Disease and Poison

“And ever
Wormtongue’s
whispering was in your
ears, **poisoning** your
thought, chilling your
heart...” (Gandalf,
TT:160)



The Object Event-Structure Metaphor

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Image Metaphors: Plants

- 11 of 14 instances described good powers
- the “plants” are usually trees and flowers



Image Metaphors: Plants

“Sometimes like a
great tree in
flower, sometimes
like a white
daffadowndilly,
small and slender
like.” (Sam,
TT:365)



Image Metaphors: Plants

...Legolas was
standing...
thoughtful and
silent as a *young
tree* in a windless
night. (TT:34)



Image Metaphors: Plants

“You thought I
remained in
Meduseld bent
like an old tree
under winter
snow.” (Theoden,
TT:168)



Image Metaphors: Plants

...as far as eyes could
strain in the mirk
there **sprouted**, like
a foul fungus-
growth, all about the
beleaguered city
great camps of
tents... (RotK:116)



Image Metaphors: Animals

- 41 of 66 instances described evil powers



Image Metaphors: Animals

They swarmed
across like
beetles.

(RotK:110)

...like swarming flies.

(TT:186)



Image Metaphors: Animals

“...little thin black fellow; like a **spider** himself, or perhaps more like a **starved frog**.” (Shagrat describing Gollum, TT:442)



Image Metaphors: Animals

At that (the
messenger from
Mordor's) breath
came like **the hiss
of snakes...**
(FotR:317)



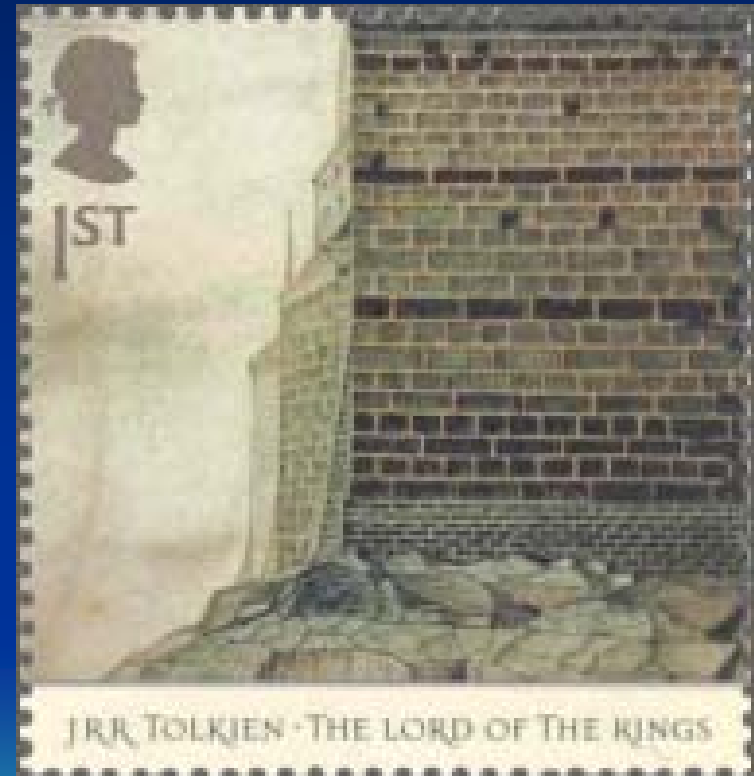
Image Metaphors: Animals

Harsh as an old
raven's their
master's voice
sounded in their
ears after the
music of
Saruman.
(TT:237)



Evil mastery involves:

- reaching for power
- stealing power
- taking power by force
- disease and blight
- animals



Good mastery involves:

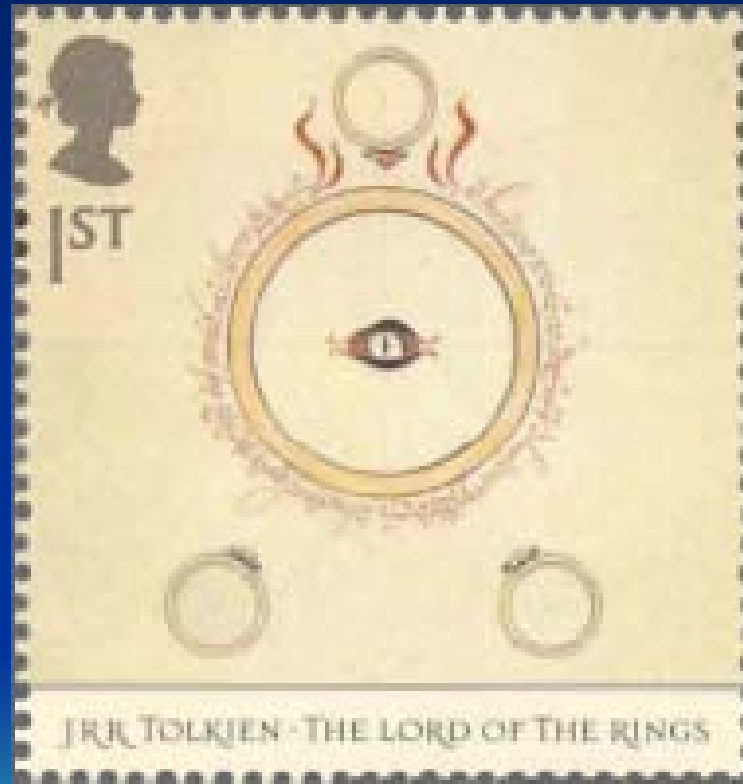
- inheriting power
- bearing a burden
- cultivating abilities
- cultivating peace and prosperity
- trees and flowers



Coherence with Tolkien's portrayal of the Ring



- Frodo inherits the Ring
- The Ring is a burden

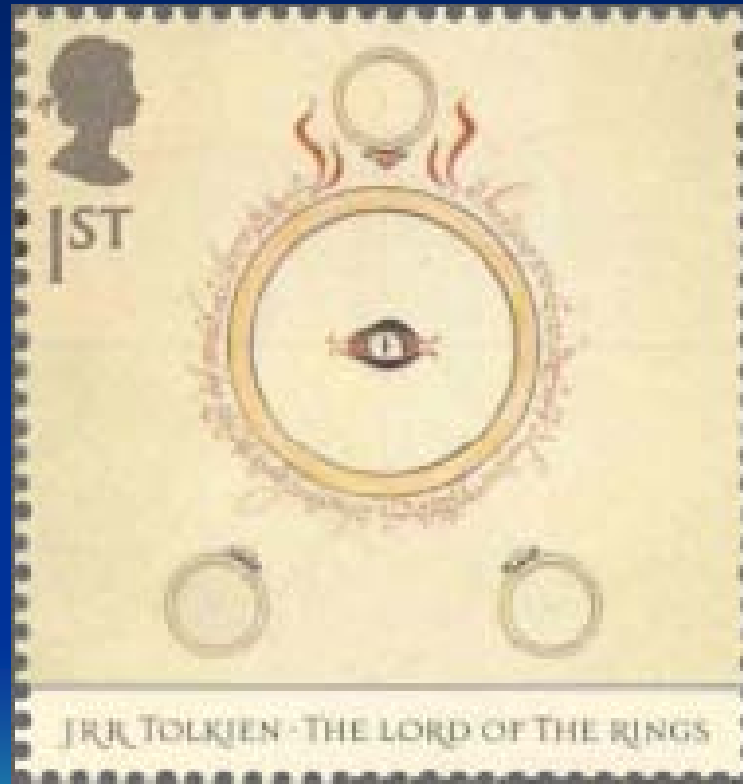


- Evil characters crave the Ring and try to steal it

Coherence with Tolkien's portrayal of nature

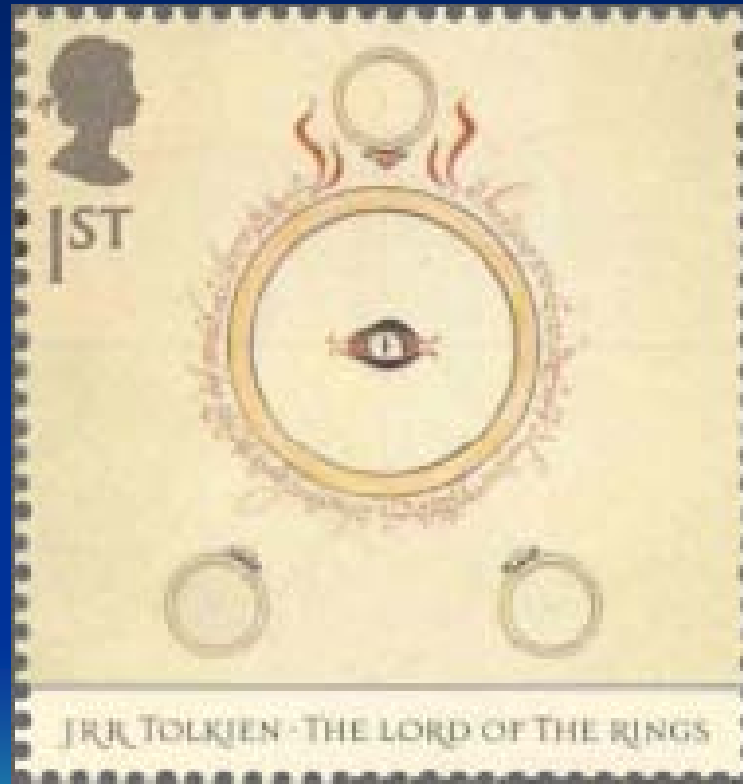


- Good characters preserve and guard nature



- Evil characters mindlessly destroy natural resources

Good and Evil, Gardeners and Thieves



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