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H.U. Yusupova
Bukhara State University
PhD, Uzbekistan

SYMBOLISM IN «THE LORD OF THE RINGS»

Abstract: This article is devoted to the study of the use of symbols in the novel “The Lord of the Rings”. Analysis of some stylistic devices, the function of symbols of colors, elements of ordinary use and others are given in the text.

Key words: symbol, color, idea, function, symbolism, interpret, fantasy, ring, author, novel.

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Introduction

Symbolism is often used by writers to amplify their works. Symbolism can give literary work prosperity and color can make a sense of the work deeper. Symbolism gives a writer freedom to add double levels of meanings to his work: a literal one that is self-evident, and the symbolic one whose meaning is far more profound than the literal. Symbolism, therefore, gives universality to the characters and the themes of a piece of literature. Symbolism in literature evokes interest in readers as they find an opportunity to get an insight into the writer’s mind on how he views the world, and how he thinks of common objects and actions, having broader implications.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in South Africa in 1892.

It is not surprising that young Tolkien did not enjoy the traditional children's books: “Alice in Wonderland”, “Treasure Island”, “The Pied Piper”, and the stories of Hans Christian Andersen. Like C. S. Lewis, he was moved by the Curdie books of George Macdonald. They were set in remote kingdoms where misshapen and malevolent goblins lurked beneath mountains. Though he was drawn to the Arthurian legends, Tolkien the boy found his chief delight in the “Red Fairy Book” of Andrew Lang. It contained the

best story he had ever read, the tale of Sigurd, the warrior who slew the dragon Fafnir. It was also a story set in the far-off and nameless North—a region at once the richest and most beautiful he had ever encountered, but also the most perilous. Again with Lewis, the fierce and dark beauty of Northernness, the stark and violent world of Scandinavian myth and saga, would always be more attractive to Tolkien than the sunnier mythologies of the Mediterranean world. It fit their own early, bitter experience¹.

In 1928, while grading exams, Tolkien absentmindedly wrote on a blank sheet of paper, “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.” With this sentence, Tolkien began to imagine what “hobbits” might be like and what they might do. From these imaginings grew “The Hobbit”, a children’s story and Tolkien’s first published work. In 1936, a version of “The Hobbit” reached a representative of the publishing firm Allen and Unwin, which published the novel a year later. The novel met with great success, and there was demand for a sequel.

Heartened by the profits of “The Hobbit”, Tolkien’s publisher encouraged him to start work on what later became “The Lord of the Rings”. Tolkien spent twelve years writing the novel. His initial goal was only to write a very long tale, but as the novel took shape, he related his story of Hobbits to the vast

¹ Drout, Michael D.C. Rings, Swords, and Monsters: Exploring Fantasy Literature. Course Guide. Recorded Books, LLC, 2006, p. 48

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history and mythology of Middle-earth that he had developed in the Silmarillion stories. “The Lord of the Rings”, completed in 1949, was conceived of as a single novel, but published in three volumes—“The Fellowship of the Ring” (1954), “The Two Towers” (1954), and “The Return of the King” (1955) — for logistical reasons.

If to pay attention to mood and tone, it is important to note that Fantasy novels also provide various moods and tone. Although the genre is generally optimistic, an elegiac tone pervades many titles, as the victories are not accomplished without loss. Every Fantasy fan has mourned the death of a favorite character, one who has been sacrificed, albeit willingly and knowingly, to ensure victory. Still, the mood ranges from dark and bleak tales of Dark Fantasy and Urban Fantasy to uproariously humorous ones, with much in between².

According to etymology, symbol literally means something that has been put together. The source of the word is the Greek word *symbollein*, that refers to the idea of putting things together to contrast them, and ultimately became a word that was used for compare. From the word symbol came the concept of symbolism where one object is used to refer to something else. So, when an author or a poet uses one object to refer to a completely different idea, then he or she is employing symbolism.

It's hard to find a work of literature that lacks any kind of symbolism. Symbolism is an important literary device for creating complex narratives because it enables writers to convey important information without having to state things directly. In addition, the use of symbolism is widespread because it can:

- Help readers visualize complex concepts and central themes, and track their development.
- Afford writers the opportunity to communicate big ideas efficiently and artfully.
- Invite readers to interpret a text independently, rather than be directly told what the author means.
 - Add emotional weight to a text.
 - Conceal themes that are too controversial to state openly.
 - Imply change or growth in characters or themes through shifts in the way that characters interact with particular symbols, or ways in which the symbols themselves change over time.

When the author wants to show a certain temper or feeling, he can also use symbolism to suggest it, rather than just ordinary saying it. In literature symbolism can take many forms including;

- A figure of speech where an object, person, or situation has different meaning rather than its literal content.

- The performance of character, word, action, or event that have more extensive sense in the structure of the whole story.

A metaphor is one of figures of speech that is used symbolism. It analogizes two objects which are not comparable and depicts that they have something in common. Metaphor has additional meaning to a word. This makes it an example of symbolism.

Tolkien's such characters as Frodo, Gandalf, and their band come into their own powers and join the battle to save the world³.

«The Lord of the Rings» is an epic high-fantasy novel. The story began as a sequel to Tolkien's 1937 fantasy novel «The Hobbit», but eventually developed into a much larger work. Written in stages between 1937 and 1949, «The Lord of the Rings» is the best-selling novel ever written, with over 150 million copies sold. The novel was published in three volumes over the course of a year from 29 July 1954 to 20 October 1955. The three volumes were titled «The Fellowship of the Ring», «The Two Towers», and «The Return of the King». Structurally, the novel is divided into six books, with several additions of background material included at the end of the third volume. Some editions combine the entire work into a single volume. The novel has since been reprinted numerous times and translated into 38 languages.

Tolkien's fantasy serves as a mirror to reflect reality, cruelty and in this way he backs his readers so that they can recognize that same reality in their own world. As for his masterpiece “Lord of the Rings”, it is surely one of the most influential books of the 20th century. The main reason for that is Tolkien's unmistakable ability to portray truly deep and diverse characters that make the novel both entertaining and didactic about human nature, while the themes discussed in it are and will be true in the centuries to come.

One of the most common criticisms of J.R.R.Tolkien's writing is that he merely produced idealistic, allegorical stories for children. Because the purpose and meaning of his work are often misinterpreted, the bulk of Tolkien criticism, whenever his work is given any consideration, is "shallow and silly commentary, both hostile and laudatory."⁴ Despite this fact, Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings was named Britain's best-loved novel of all time in 2003. Award-winning adaptations of The Lord of the Rings have been made for radio, theatre, and film.

² Trevor Hart and Ivan Khovacs. Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature, and Theology. Baylor University Press, 2007, p.189

³ Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.233

⁴ Rosebury, Brian. Tolkien: A Critical Assessment. London: St. Martins, 1992, p.227

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The full extent and nature of the Ring's power never becomes entirely clear to us, but we get the sense that the Ring symbolizes a power almost without limits, and which is utterly corrupting. It is immensely difficult for many of the characters to resist the temptation to take the Ring for themselves and use it for their own ends. Regardless of the wearer's initial intentions, good or evil, the Ring's power always turns the wearer to evil. Indeed, even keeping the Ring is dangerous. "The Fellowship of the Ring" is strewn with examples of those who are corrupted by the Ring⁵.

He accomplishes it through such a small, but a very symbolic thing as a ring, the symbol of greed for power and wealth. None of the characters have the strength to resist the power of the ring, except for Frodo and Sam.

After the events the novel describes, the age of the Elves will pass and the age of Men will dawn. A large portion of the story eulogizes this passing age of the Elves. The Elves and their realms have a beauty and grace unmatched by anything else in Middle-earth. Though the Elves themselves are immortal, as Galadriel tells us, the destruction of Sauron's One Ring will weaken the Three Elven Rings, forcing the Elves to leave Middle-earth and fade away⁶. Throughout the novel, Tolkien gives us the sense that the adventures of the Ring represent the last burst of a sort of magic that will not be found in the world that comes afterward. This later world will be a world without Sauron, but also a world without Lothlórien.

If we go back for a moment to the very beginning of the novel, to the forging of the great ring, Tolkien tells us that except this One Ring, nineteen more rings were created: nine for the race of Men, seven for the race of Dwarves and three for the race of Elves. All these peoples were deceived into believing that they were in control of their fate, however soon they lost their souls to the evil of the One Ring and Sauron.

At the time of the novel, all the characters prove to be unworthy to possess the ring: Gandalf is afraid to take the ring and he urges Frodo not to tempt him⁷, because he knows it will corrupt him, Galadriel, one of the Elven queens, has the same fear⁸. They both fear that the Ring will do great evils through them. Aragon, the heir of Isildur, is unsure of his ability to govern Gondor, although it is his rightful throne, and his possession of the Ring is out of the question. Boromir, Gollum and Saruman have already been corrupted by the ring and paid their lives for it. Even Bilbo Baggins, Frodo's uncle, the one who found the Ring in the first place, in the end becomes dependent upon the ring and he even snaps back at Gandalf when he offers help:

*"Bilbo flushed, and there was an angry light in his eyes. His kindly face grew hard. "Why not?" he cried, "And what business is it of yours, anyway, to know what I do with my own things? It is my own. I found it. It came to me." "Yes, yes," said Gandalf, "But there is no need to get angry." "If I am it is your fault," said Bilbo, "It is mine, I tell you. My own. My precious. Yes, my precious.""*⁹.

But the main element of the novel is the ring. The Ring was made by and belongs to Sauron, the Dark Lord, who is attempting to conquer all of Middle-earth. It was lost many years ago, but now it is trying to get back to its master, who is seeking it. With the Ring, the Dark Lord is effectively invincible. The only way to destroy it is to take it to Mount Doom in the heart of the land of Mordor and throw it into the lava. The Ring is safe with Frodo because he does not desire dominion over others, but Frodo himself is not safe, as he is being sought by the servants of the enemy. And over time, the desire that the Ring creates takes a terrible psychological toll on the bearer. It symbolizes the world which could be under the reign of The Dark Lord and at the same time it is a symbol of a community of those who tried to save the earth and to establish a peaceful life there.¹⁰

The color reflects the color, character, and beauty of all that exists in nature, and it has long been a reflection of the different moods, thoughts, and feelings associated with them. That is why people paid great attention to colors and tried to learn about its features. The great philosopher Abu Nasr Farabi in "Philosophical Questions and Answers" answers "What is the color?" When asked, "Color is the limit of what a shiny body is, and it is reflected on the surface of the body."¹¹

Color can have a communicative value that defines the relationship between elements and objects of nature; symbolic indicating a phenomenon, object or essence, and expressive (expression), transmitting a certain feeling and evoking the corresponding emotions (trinity of color).

Color is superimposed on the image naturally, therefore such expressive characteristics as warm (red), cold (blue), close (yellow), far (blue), light (white), heavy (black), over time, acquire a stable meaning of associations. However, when assessing the emotional impact of the color system, images sometimes resort to musical terms, since the purely pictorial vocabulary "warm, cold, colorful, color-local, transparent, pasty" gives too limited definitions that do not affect spirituality in the perception of color.

An ethnographer L. Mironova wrote about the generalized meanings of white, red, and black in

⁵ The same source, p.347

⁶ The same source, p.348

⁷ Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.336

⁸ The same source, p.339

⁹ The same source, p.123

¹⁰ Michael D.C.Drout. "Rings, swords and monsters:Exploring fantasy literature", Wheaton college, 2006, p.22

¹¹ Абу Наср Форобий. Фалсафий саволлар ва уларга жавоблар. – Тошкент: Фан, 1953. – Б.74.

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mythological imagination: "In the red the primitive man saw blood, fire, heat and the sun."¹²

Thus the novel shows the reader how the elements of fiction can be symbols of different types and stylistically can affect the further development of the structure.

Symbolism is often used by writers to amplify their works. Symbolism can give a literary work prosperity and color can make a sense of the work deeper.

All 5 famous Istari magicians had different colors (White Saruman, Gray Gandalf, Brown Radagast and two blue ones, with later changes of Gandalf to white and Saruman to "many colors").

When the author wants to show a certain temper or feeling, he can also use symbolism to suggest it, rather than just ordinary saying it. In literature symbolism can take many forms including;

- A figure of speech where an object, person, or situation has different meaning rather than its literal content.
- The performance of character, word, action, or event that have more extensive sense in the structure of the whole story.
- "Gandalf was shorter in stature than the other two; but his long white hair, his sweeping silver beard, and his broad shoulders, made him look like some wise king of ancient legend. In his aged face under great snowy brows his dark eyes were set like coals that could leap suddenly into fire."¹³

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Gandalf is a major character of J.R.R. Tolkien's "Hobbit" and "Lord of the Rings". He was a protagonist in these works. Gandalf is a magic character, one of the last stunners of Middle-earth. Though, he looked like unprepossessing, grizzled, tall man with staff, all grey, in cloth and appearance, he was actually one of the mightiest wizards.

"He wore a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, and a silver scarf. He had a long white beard and bushy eyebrows that stuck out beyond the brim of his hat. Small hobbit children ran after the cart all through Hobbiton and right up the hill. It had a cargo of fireworks, as they rightly guessed. At Bilbo's front door the old man began to unload; there were great bundles of fireworks of all sorts and shapes, each labeled with a large red G and the Elf rune. That was Gandalf's mark, of course, and the old man was

Gandalf the Wizard, whose fame in the Shire was due mainly to his skill with fires, smokes, and lights."¹⁵

In "Hobbit" Gandalf played a role of ideological encourager, what shows his effect on others. Exactly Gandalf reasoned Bilbo into going with gnomes for treasure hunting. At the beginning of their adventures gnomes did not like Bilbo, because instead of helping he always prohibited them. But wise wizard cooled gnomes down, because he believed in Bilbo and liked him.

Among people Olorin was known as Gandalf the Gray, Elves called Mithrandir, Grey Vagrant. He walked in Middle-earth, never staying for a long time somewhere.

Gandalf was the only wizard, interested in Hobbits. It is unknown when exactly; he came to Shire first time. He appeared there time by time, and was famous with his fireworks. Gandalf liked hobbits for their courage in dangerous situations and mercy to each other. He also knew, that hobbits can be inconspicuous- what is very useful merit. Exactly hobbit Bilbo was chosen by him for adventures. In "The Lord of the Rings" Gandalf returned to Shire for Bilbo's "eleventy-first" birthday party. Wise Gandalf encouraged Bilbo, to leave the ring to Frodo. The ring was troubling him, that is why, with the help of Gandalf's; he decided to leave it for Frodo and departed for Rivendell. With the help of Gandalf, he became the first of ring bearers who gave it up willingly.

White is the color of purity and innocence. Some of the positive meaning that white can convey includes cleanliness, freshness and simplicity. Being like a blank slate, white symbolizes a new beginning or a fresh start. This thing is exactly related with Gandalf. After his renewal, he became much stronger and wiser than before.

Gandalf and Fellowship of the ring travelled to Rohan, where they saved King Théoden from Worm tongue's influence. Then he made effort to gather army for coming battle with Sauron. Gandalf came in time to Minas Tirith, where his presence was resented by Denethor, the Steward of Gondor. In the battle with forces of Mordor, Gandalf managed to confront the Witch-king of Angmar, Lord of the Nazgûl. With the help of Aragorn Gandalf distracted the Dark Lord's attention from Frodo Baggins Sam Gamgee, scaling Mount Doom to destroy the One Ring.

Gandalf was the grey, also because of his humility. As we know, grey itself is a color of compromise. In the first part of "The Lord of the Rings", Gandalf was not in the center of attention. But he always had a role of controller.

White is a color that defends and emboldens. It proposes a sense of peace and tranquility, comfort and

¹² Миронова Л.Н. Цветоведение. – Минск: Высшая школа, 1984. – С.19-25.

¹³ Tolkien J.R. The Fellowship of the ring, Many meetings, p.290

¹⁴ The same source, p.290

¹⁵ Tolkien J.R. The Fellowship of the ring, chapter 1 p. 7

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hope, and helps to relieve emotional disturbances. White color meaning gives a sense of order and competence, and it is a great help if you need to clean up your life. The color white offers an inner cleansing and purification of your thoughts, feelings and ultimately, your spirit. It is refreshing and strengthens your entire energy system. Although there are very few negative meanings of the color white, too much white (especially in Western culture) seems cold, solitary and empty. White can give a sense of sterility, distance and lack of interest. In other cultures, the white color is traditionally associated with death and mourning. In these cultures, death usually means the end of one life and the beginning of another. So in color psychology, the meaning of new beginnings still lasts. White may indicate the end of a cycle in your life.

Positive characteristics given by white are purity, innocence, simplicity, cleanliness, neat, open, equality, and new beginnings. The color also has a negative part, giving traits like ignorance, sterility, distant, boring, cold, empty, or critical. If used in balanced proportions it can be our savior from the dark side in times of distress. It represents a clean future and the fact that we have a change to a better beginning. It is efficient, showing an excellent organization and sense of order.

Tolkien used white color with the personage called Saruman.

"[Saruman] is great among the Wise. He is the chief of my order and the head of the Council. His knowledge is deep, but his pride has grown with it,

and he takes ill any meddling. The lore of the Elven-rings, great and small, is his province. He has long studied it, seeking the lost secrets of their making (...)"

Saruman was known as Saruman the White in J.R.R.Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings". He was a head of Istari Wizards, and a leader of White Council. After coming to Middle-earth, he became popular as Curunir, which meant "Man of Skill". It is considered that the purity of his knowledge has connection with the white color. He was the wisest wizard. In Valinor Saruman was named Curumo.

Tolkien did try to create an escapist world, which was one of the most important factors that distinguished him among all other writers. He created a world where adults could relax at least for some time from their everyday lives. This eternal theme of good wins evil was very important at the time throughout the world, as people had just been through the two world wars and a cold war, and they needed to escape from this for some time.

Concerning the novel itself, two main aspects of it were discussed in the dissertation work: the importance of color symbolism in *The Lord of the Rings* and the connection between the colors and the main personages of the work. Tolkien managed to depict his heroes in both side, with negative and positive colors. White, brown, gray, blue, yellow, red, black are the main colors he used in his writing. Each of these colors has deep meaning which is associated with the characters of wizards.

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