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**A CASE OF THE EXCLUSION METAPHOR – A QUESTION ABOUT TOLKIEN’S
“HETEROTOPIAS”**

Abstract: At first sight ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’ are distinctly separated in the mythology of Middle-earth. In this paper I consider the problem of social exclusion in the universe of Tolkien. I put forward the question whether any heterotopias can be found in Middle-earth. Is there any reason to speak of exclusion metaphors in the works of Tolkien? Finally, I provide a few remarks on the possibility of Tolkienian heterotopias, and suggest a way of interpretation, but this paper does not give a definitive answer to the question.

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It often happens that Tolkien’s Middle-earth and the stories set in that world are interpreted simplistically: these texts, so the argument goes, show us the conflict of a ‘Good’ and an ‘Evil’ side, distinguished on a moral basis. Even this distinction itself might seem an oversimplified reduction, but this is not a place to address that question at length. This paper will rather try to tackle how exclusion towards their own races appears in the behavior of the different creatures that populate Middle-earth. Does the form of exclusion where an in-group member is cast out and enclosed within a distinct place appear at all? This problem leads to further questions: for instance, what metaphorical significance is attached to distinct places in Middle-earth? Of course, we can easily find examples of members of different races acting hostile towards the other race: it is enough to think of the relationship between Dwarves and Elves (see Tolkien 2002, p. 332). However, it still remains a question how exclusion appears in this fictional world – if indeed it is valid at all to term the phenomenon ‘exclusion’ in this case. It might be worth examining how exclusion appears in Tolkien’s works, since they are very popular today, and therefore the representation of this phenomenon could thus be influencing people’s opinions. As Susan Sontag writes,

“(…) one cannot think without metaphors. But that does not mean there aren’t some metaphors we might well abstain from or try to retire. As, of course, all thinking is interpretation. But that does not mean it isn’t sometimes correct to be ‘against’ interpretation.” (Sontag 1989, p. 5)

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But what, after all, is exclusion? It is important to work with a precise definition of phenomena, but if precision proves impossible, at least an approximation should be given, and our case is no exception. Research in communal behavior has only recently started to delve deeper into the theme of communal exclusion. Among other consequences, this resulted in the fact that precise definitions have not yet evolved concerning this theme. This paper does not undertake to find these definitions; but this means we will not be able to rely on any one precise delineation of the phenomenon. We will, however, make efforts to work out terms which we will use for describing certain situations within the scope of our topic. In recent years, several directions of research have started into exclusionary practices, but here we will engage only with one specific form and its metaphorical effects. One of the first difficulties in defining communal exclusion is to determine precisely from what point an individual can be considered excluded. Where do rejection and acceptance start? Does a liminal phase exist between the two states? On whose feelings, behavior should we base our judgment about whether someone is excluded or not? These are all questions we cannot currently answer, but for our present purpose it is not necessary that we do. We will merely concentrate on our individual case and some provisional theories to apply to it. It might be worth mentioning that specialists of the topic consider four practices to constitute the sphere of exclusion: ostracism, social exclusion, rejection, and bullying (see Williams et al. 2005, p. 2). As the following quotation will witness, however, even they are not entirely certain:

“Not only are we not certain about the extent to which these phenomena overlap (...), but precise definitions for each are lacking. Generally speaking, ostracism refers to being ignored and excluded (...). Social exclusion refers to not being included within a given social network (but not necessarily ignored). Rejection is usually an explicit verbal or physical action that declares that the individual is not wanted as a member within a relationship or group. Bullying usually involves others’ aversive focus on an individual, and often is accompanied by physical, verbal and nonverbal abuse of an individual.” (Williams et al. 2005, p. 2-3)

The phenomenon of exclusion opens up several associational spaces for the interpreter. Identity, group dynamics, the problems of abuse could justifiably emerge, but one direction could lead to questions of aggression in general. It naturally complicates the case that fictitious persons are analyzed, whose complete psychological profile is not available for the interpreter – we cannot know, for example, what background motivates them. But recipients of a text cannot break free from their own characteristics, and so necessarily take their own identity as a starting point in the process of understanding. Thus, our analysis here follows the approach available to any recipient.

If we approach Tolkien’s works from this direction, the first thing to consider might be our criteria by which to separate ‘alien’ and ‘familiar’. How great a

significance should be assigned to racial differences in *The Lord of the Rings*? Does it make sense to deal with exclusion based on these racial differences from this point of view? How far does the limit of in-group extend? By what criteria should we determine what is 'familiar' and what is 'alien' in Tolkien's world? It seems appropriate to differentiate based on who resort to violence against whom. By this line of reasoning, we might easily reach the conclusion that the 'Good' are fighting against the 'Evil'. There are naturally differences and conflicts within both sides (see Tolkien 2002, p. 232–264), but the most important violent actions take place between the Alliance of Men, Dwarves, and Elves on the one hand, and the forces of Darkness on the other. Here we can only mention in passing the fact that the real difference between the creatures of Middle-earth is not how they relate to morality, but the level of being they are situated on. Thus Elves, Men, and Dwarves can be grouped together, as opposed to Orcs, Sauron, and all other creatures, who seem to be drawing further and further from real being, like the Nazgûl or Gollum. The case is thus getting clearer: what we have to examine is how exclusion appears between creatures on the same level of being, in a way that is relevant to us, and how creatures on the same level of being treat others belonging to the other category. By operating this difference, we can set up two larger groups, whom we can, for the sake of simplicity, call the 'living' and the 'dead'. We will have to take a look at exclusionary practices between the members of the two groups, and between members within the same group. As we can assume from the following quotation, the prison as an institution is in some form used in Middle-earth:

“Yet this is held true by the wise of Eressëa, that all those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes.” (Tolkien 1999, p. 47)

Gollum too is known to have been imprisoned several times during the story. Aragorn and Legolas report about one of these occasions later in Rivendell as follows:

“He is a small thing, you say, this Gollum? Small, but great in mischief. What became of him? To what doom did you put him?’ ‘He is in prison, but no worse,’ said Aragorn. ‘He had suffered much. There is no doubt that he was tormented, and the fear of Sauron lies black on his heart.’” (Tolkien 2002, p. 248)

From Legolas we also learn that if there is a real possibility that someone might amend their ways, they strive to create the best circumstances for them to do this:

“How came the folk of Thranduil to fail in their trust?’ ‘Not through lack of watchfulness,’ said Legolas; ‘but perhaps through over-kindliness. And we

fear that the prisoner had aid from others, and that more is known of our doings than we could wish. We guarded this creature day and night, at Gandalf's bidding, much though we wearied of the task. But Gandalf bade us hope still for his cure, and we had not the heart to keep him ever in dungeons under the earth, where he would fall back into his old black thoughts.” (Tolkien 2002, p. 248-249)

Therefore the institution of the prison definitely exists in Middle-earth, even though we have very little information about what its practical purpose is. To what extent is punishment as a way of disciplining used in Middle-earth? Does it play a role similar to its function in the primary world, where the prison is used to enclose people whose way of life is to be condemned by majority culture? Do the ‘heterotopias’, described by Michel Foucault, exist in Middle-earth? Foucault defines heterotopia in the following way:

“There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.” (Foucault 1967)

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He further differentiates those heterotopias on which attention is focused in some sort of a liminal situation:

“(...) there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.” (Foucault 1967)

These Foucault terms ‘crisis heterotopias’, and writes that they have lately been substituted by heterotopias of deviation: “those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (Foucault 1967). Among others, he places prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and cemeteries to this category. At the origins of the heterotopias of deviation we find the medieval *leprosarium*:

“At the end of the Middle Ages, leprosy disappeared from the Western world. At the edges of the community, at town gates, large, barren, uninhabitable areas appeared, where the disease no longer reigned but its ghost still hovered. For centuries, these spaces would belong to the domain of the inhuman. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, by means of strange incantations, they conjured up a new incarnation of evil, another grinning mask of fear,

home to the constantly renewed magic of purification and exclusion.”
(Foucault 2006, p. 3)

After the problem of leprosy had disappeared, these areas continued to function as spaces of exclusion:

“Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures remained. Often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor vagabonds, criminals, and ‘deranged minds’ would take the part played by the leper (...).” (Foucault 2006, p. 7)

Can we see spaces in the scenery of Middle-earth which could play a role similar to heterotopias? Are there areas, institutions where the excluded are placed? Certain spaces that appear in the story can be considered some sort of heterotopias of deviation. We have already seen by way of Gollum’s story that prisons exist. Éomer too ends up in one for a period: ““But first send for Éomer. Do I not guess rightly that you hold him prisoner, by the counsel of Gríma, of him that all save you name the Wormtongue?”” (Tolkien 2002, p. 504.). Gollum has to be imprisoned because should he be captured by the Enemy, he would be able to divulge valuable information; Éomer is held because he turned against Gríma (see Tolkien 2002, p. 505.). But when it comes to punishing Gríma, mercy immediately appears, as it did earlier with Gollum. In both cases, imprisonment is only intended to limit the subjects so that they could not harm others directly, but they are also given the chance to change and amend their ways:

“[t]o slay it would be just. But it was not always as it now is. Once it was a man, and did you service in its fashion. Give him a horse and let him go at once, wherever he chooses. By his choice you shall judge him.” (Tolkien 2002, p. 509)

The most important purpose seems to be the preservation of the possibility that these individuals could perhaps function again as valuable members of society. But what happens to those who are psychologically unsound? In Denethor’s case, we see exactly this: Denethor loses his mind because he thinks he has lost his son, Faramir. “Something terrible may happen up there. The Lord is out of his mind, I think. I am afraid he will kill himself, and kill Faramir too.” (Tolkien 2002, p. 832) However, he commits suicide before we learn what the usual procedure is in such cases. His suicide does not elicit the rejection of society, though; and there is no way to perform any exclusionary ritual on his remains after his death:

“Then Denethor leaped upon the table, and standing there wretched in fire and smoke he took up the staff of his stewardship that lay at his feet and broke it on his knee. Casting the pieces into the blaze he bowed and laid himself on

the table, clasping the *palantír* with both hands upon his breast. And it was said that ever after, if any man looked in that Stone, unless he had a great strength of will to turn it to other purpose, he saw only two aged hands withering in flame.” (Tolkien 2002, p. 836)

During the events following the battle of Pelennor Fields we can observe how an institution of healing works in Middle-earth. Most of the people there, however, are warriors wounded in battle, and so we do not learn why (apart from illness generally or pathological reasons) one would end up in the houses of healing. We do learn some things about the healing methods used: the treatments with different herbs and the faith in “[t]he hands of the king [being] the hands of a healer” (Tolkien 2002, p. 842.) might lead us to conclude that in this period of the fictional history, the psychologically unsound were not treated as sinful. Whenever healing comes into the focus of the story (as in the cases with Frodo), supernatural forces are always invoked. So even in cases of psychological disorder, exclusion might not necessarily play a part. Probably this is the reason why we never see institutions the purpose of which is the treatment of psychiatric cases.

The story naturally includes sacred places, bearing exceptional significance. There are areas that simply by their existence generate awe in the characters. We cannot go through all of them one by one here, and so have to concentrate on those which can be read as places of exclusion. As Sauron’s power waxes, the area of his influence also increases. He quickly conquers the lands that are geographically adjacent: even Gondor is suspected already to be his vassal (see Tolkien 2002, p. 426.). It could be argued that ‘the enemy’ in Middle-earth is not distributed all over the map, but radiates outwards from one point, Mordor. As Sauron’s power grows, more and more spaces become heterotopias of deviation. One would think there is only one huge heterotopia of deviation in Middle-earth: Mordor. We find here everything that would be excluded by others in the normal course of things: Orcs, Nazgûl, the Uruk-hai, Shelob. Gollum eventually dies here, and Sauron himself inhabits Mordor.

So, Mordor adequately represents the Foucaultian heterotopia in Middle-earth in the Third Age. Though Mordor is not the only potential heterotopia in the works of Tolkien, e. g. the stronghold of Angband can be interpreted as a similar place in the First Age (see Tolkien 1999, p. 134) Mordor has ambivalent relations to the ‘normal’ places of Middle-earth. While Mordor is separated by its geographical conditions, fortresses, towers, and other military buildings from the rest of Middle-earth, the ‘spirit’ and the creatures of Mordor spread as a communicable disease throughout the ‘healthy’ spaces. The transport of the different types of spaces is unidirectional: penetrating the empire of Sauron is almost impossible, but the orcs can easily move in it and out.

This irreversible relation sheds light on the difference between Mordor and the familiar, Foucaultian heterotopias: the exclusion in Mordor is, in effect, a self-exclusion, a separation. If the goal of the fortress-structure were only the separation, it would be unnecessary to siege Mordor. The inhabitants of the majority spaces do not seize the usual heterotopias since they have already dominated them. Though the heterotopias are not safe for the inhabitants of the regular space in any case, the majority can control the events in heterotopias with the exercise of power. The heterotopias mostly have a specific order, structure, and the inhabitants of the major areas are not interested in the functioning of ‘the other spaces’. They are content with watching the borders. However, Aragorn must attempt to occupy Mordor, because this area closes itself. Its borders are not borders of a prison, but a hold.

In Middle-earth the exclusion does not make sense, since the good and the evil automatically detach themselves. Moreover, the few exceptions do not aim at seclusion; the phenomenon of confinement means the first step of reintegration (e. g. hospital, prison). The empire of Sauron is even more the centre of the evil emanation, than the typical space of exclusion. Mordor is a fortress which dominates its periphery with the incursions and conquests of orcs. It is a fixed and central point of contagion which spreads in the whole Middle-earth. Mordor disposes nearly all attributes of heterotopias, but its relation to the outside world is completely different from the way of ‘the other spaces’.

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