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Davidsen, M.A.; Breda, J, van; Marchetti, C.; Redeker, J.S.; Vink, R.

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# Narrative prototypicality and the Depiction of Evil in *The Lord of the Rings*

Markus Altena Davidsen

## 1 INTRODUCTION: NARRATIVE PROTOTYPICALITY IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Much ink has been spilled in Tolkien Studies discussing the plot of *The Lord of the Rings* (*LotR*) and the metaphysical nature of Tolkien's created world. Issues of contestation include the following: Is Frodo, Aragorn, Gandalf, or Sam the main hero of the story? Is the *LotR* a Christian allegory, or a Pagan romance, or rather a manifestation of Jungian archetypes? How are we to understand the depiction of Good and Evil in Arda? In this brief article, I hope to approach these issues in a novel way, by taking inspiration from narratologist Patrick Colm Hogan (2003; 2011).

My main claim is that *LotR* is a prototypical narrative in Hogan's sense. That *LotR* is a prototypical narrative is to say that its plot is so designed that the narrative arouses emotions and stirs the imagination to an extraordinary degree. Many readers may already recognise this from their own reading experience, but Hogan's theory of prototypical narrative allows us to unpack the narrative prototypicality of *LotR* in a systematic way. Hogan himself has not discussed *LotR*, but I will demonstrate that *LotR* conforms astonishingly well to Hogan's schema for a prototypical narrative. The story's prototypicality, I furthermore suggest, may be among the chief reason for its success.

In what follows, I will first present some key features of Hogan's theory of narrative prototypicality (Section 2). Next, I will compare the plot structure of *LotR* to Hogan's schema (Section 3), before moving on to a discussion of the social and metaphysical *intensifications* of the plot in *LotR* (Section 4). Of particular importance for the present thematic issue is the question of 'metaphysical intensification' in *LotR*, which bears on how Evil (and Good) are depicted in an absolute and personalised way,

and on how a narrative causality guarantees that morally good actions are rewarded, and morally evil actions are punished.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 PATRICK COLM HOGAN'S THEORY OF PROTOTYPICAL NARRATIVES

The systematic study of narrative plot began with Aristotle's *Poetics* (2013 [c. 335 B.C.]), but it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that 'narratology' emerged as an independent sub-discipline within literary studies. Narratology is – as the name indicates – the systematic study of narratives as such, but in practice narratologists have focused their interest on two specific kinds of narratives from the Western world: folktales (the foundational text is Propp 1968 [1928]) and, even more so, the modern novel (e.g., Genette 1980 [1972]). Against this background, the scope of the American narratologist Patrick Colm Hogan's project stands out as remarkably ambitious and broad. Hogan wants nothing less than to uncover universal plot structures in world literature. His geographical scope is wider than usual: his theory of universal plot structures rests on a broad analysis of 'paradigm stories', not only from the Western tradition, but also from the Middle Eastern, South Asian, Chinese and Japanese written traditions and from the oral traditions of sub-Saharan Africa, South America, and Australia (Hogan 2003, 13). By paradigm stories, Hogan means stories that within a given literary culture have proven most valued and enduring, and have inspired later generations of authors (2003, 6). Hogan's historical scope, too, is unusually deep, spanning from ancient epics to modern genre literature and film. It would not be too much to characterise Hogan's approach as comparative and historical narratology. Let me introduce some basic ingredients of Hogan's theory, before demonstrating how well *LotR* conforms to the universal patterns identified.<sup>2</sup>

Narratives, begins Hogan, "*have a telic (i.e. goal-directed) structure, including an agent, a goal and a causal sequence connecting the agent's various actions with the achievement or nonachievement of the goal*" (2003, 205; original emphasis). Let us unpack this a bit. Narratives are not just descriptions of sequences of events – narratives have plots. That is to say that narratives focus on a main character (the agent or hero), explain what this

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1) I will not discuss *The Silmarillion* (*Sil*) in this article but can briefly state the following: With Eru, Melkor, and the Valar featuring explicitly, *Sil* is even more metaphysically intensified than *LotR*. However, the complex and chronicle-like plot structure of *Sil* conforms ill to the plot structures of prototypical narratives identified by Hogan (these which will be discussed in Section 3).

2) What here follows systematises ideas presented by Hogan in chapter 7 'The Structure of Stories: Some General Principles of Plot' in *The Mind and Its Stories* (2003).

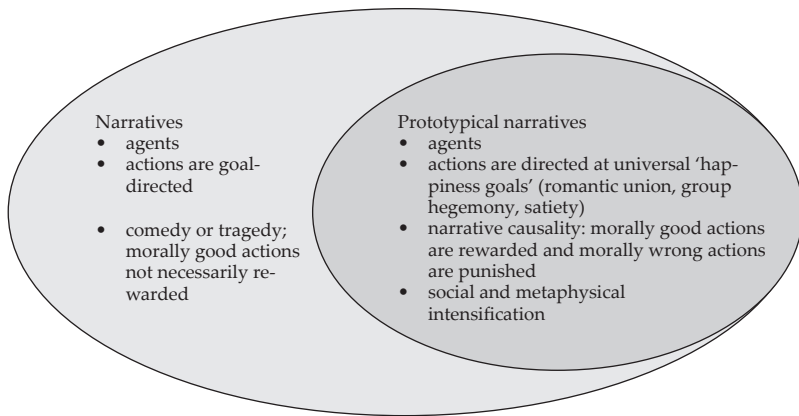
hero wants (the goal), and describe the actions of the hero (a causal sequence). The hero's actions culminate either in the hero achieving the goal (we then have a comedy) or in the hero failing to achieve the goal (we then have a tragedy).<sup>3</sup>

Narratives come in many shapes and forms. Take a simple story about, say, a cat (the hero) who is hungry and wants something to eat (the goal). This story may tell of the cat chasing a mouse (goal-directed actions) and the eventual success of catching the mouse (making the story a comedy). Such a simple story is a narrative, according to Hogan's definition. But it is not a very good or interesting one. Hogan is specifically interested in what he calls 'prototypical narratives'. Prototypical narratives have two additional traits, besides a goal-directed plot structure:<sup>4</sup>

1. First, prototypical narratives have plot structures that thematise *happiness* goals that are universally shared across human cultures. Such happiness goals include group hegemony, love, and satiety.<sup>5</sup>
2. Second, the plots of prototypical narratives are *socially and metaphysically* intensified. An aspect of metaphysical intensification is the personification of the forces of Good and Evil. Another aspect is that prototypical narratives operate according to a binding *narrative causality* that guarantees what Aristotle called *poetic justice*. In prototypical narratives a metaphysical instance (Providence or God) guarantees that good actions are rewarded, and evil actions are punished.

The effect of all of this is that prototypical narratives engage human emotions and imagination more effectively than ordinary narratives. They are, so to speak, cognitively optimal given the human condition.<sup>6</sup> Figure 1 summarises the traits of narratives and prototypical narratives.

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- 3) By emphasising the goal-directed structure of narratives, Hogan places himself in a tradition begun by Aristotle's study of the tragedy in his *Poetics* (Hogan 2003, 204).
  - 4) For the sake of clarity, I depart here slightly from Hogan's terminology. For Hogan, narratives with a goal-directed plot structure are already prototypical, and those prototypical narratives that also have the two additional traits are more prototypical still.
  - 5) This focus on emotion in narratives is another original contribution in Hogan's narratology and the reason he characterises his approach as 'affective narratology' (2011).
  - 6) It should be noted that Hogan's category of prototypical narrative is what Max Weber would characterise as an 'ideal type' (Giddens & Sutton 2014). Ideal typical categories are categories to which membership is a matter of degree, not a matter of either/or. Concrete narratives – such as *Gilgamesh*, *LotR*, and *Romeo and Juliet* – do not belong to the category 'prototypical narrative'. But when we *compare* them to the ideal type, we



**Figure 1: Traits of prototypical narratives**

### 3 UNIVERSAL PLOT STRUCTURES, HAPPINESS GOALS, AND THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Hogan distinguishes four universal plot structures that prototypical narratives may have: the heroic plot, the romantic plot, the sacrificial plot, and the plot of separation and reunion (2003, ch. 7; 2011, ch. 3; 2016).<sup>7</sup> *LotR* features all of these.

In the heroic plot, the story is set in motion because an enemy king seeks to dominate the hero's group (or perhaps already has established such domination through conquest). It can also be that an unrightful usurper from within the realm seeks power. The goal is to restore peace and rightful rule. As Hogan puts it, the universal happiness condition at stake

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can judge them to have a high *degree* of prototypicality. For this reason, it would be more correct to speak consistently of traits that *contribute* to narrative prototypicality – rather than of traits that prototypical narratives have. However, since the notion of prototypicality is cumbersome in practice, I will allow myself the same freedom as Hogan and identify as prototypical narratives those concrete narratives that conform well to Hogan's ideal typical abstraction of 'prototypical narrative.'

7) Hogan has gradually developed his theory of universal plot structures in a series of articles and books. The first universal plot structures he identified were the heroic and the romantic. These two are not only recurrent in all literary cultures, but also very frequent. In a later exposition, Hogan added the sacrificial plot (2003). In addition to the universal plot structures, Hogan counts on the existence of a number of cross-cultural (though not universal) plot structures. In *Affective Narratology* (Hogan 2011), he identified four such plot structures, focused, respectively, on the happiness conditions of attachment, lust, revenge, and criminal justice. Some years later, he had come to the conclusion that the attachment plot of separation and reunion should be counted as a fourth universal plot structure (Hogan 2016, 119).

here is that of group hegemony. The protagonist tasked with achieving this goal is either the rightful (possibly temporarily dethroned) king, or a warrior who acts on behalf of the king. The 'blocking character' to be overcome is the enemy king or usurper (Hogan 2003, 207-209, 231-237). Examples of narratives featuring the heroic plot include the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (and Disney's retelling in *The Lion King*) and the blockbuster *Independence Day*.

It should be immediately apparent that *LotR* features the heroic plot, with Aragorn as king-protagonist. In fact, *LotR* combines the two variants of the heroic plot, for Aragorn is pitched not only against Sauron (in the role of the enemy king threatening to dominate the hero's group), but also, secondarily, against Denethor, the Steward of Gondor, who can be classified as a usurper in so far as he does not willingly relinquish the throne of Gondor to Aragorn, the rightful king (RK, V, vii, 853).<sup>8</sup>

In the romantic plot, the happiness condition at stake is romantic union (Hogan 2003, 222). The protagonist is a lover, but parents and/or a rival appear as blocking characters (Hogan 2003, 207, 231-237). Narratives featuring the romantic plot include *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Little Mermaid*. *LotR*, too, has a romantic plot, though it is only fully unfolded in an appendix (RK, App A, V). Aragorn and Arwen are the lovers, and Elrond (Arwen's father) is the blocking character. Elrond initially wants Arwen to take ship with him to the Undying Lands rather than to stay in Middle-earth and fade (RK, App A, V, 1059). After agreeing to Arwen's choice of marrying Aragorn, he sets the condition that Aragorn first wins the war and becomes king, stating: "Though I love you, I say to you: Arwen Undómiel shall not diminish her life's grace for less cause. She shall not be the bride of any Man less than the King of both Gondor and Arnor" (RK, App A, V, 1061). In this way, *LotR* interweaves the goal-structures of the heroic and romantic plots.<sup>9</sup> After defeating Sauron, Aragorn is first crowned king (thus achieving his rightful reward on the heroic plot line) and then married to Arwen (thus achieving his rightful reward on the romantic plot line).

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8) References to *LotR* give the volume: *The Fellowship of the Ring* = FR; *The Two Towers* = TT; *The Return of the King* = RK, followed by book number in majuscule Roman numerals, chapter number in minuscule Roman numerals, and page number following the pagination of the 50th anniversary edition (Tolkien 2007).

9) As is well-known, Peter Jackson's movie adaptation of *LotR* integrates the romantic plot into the main narrative and makes it more explicit and intensive. All the ingredients of the romantic plot are present, however, already in Tolkien's text.

Hogan's third universal plot structure is the sacrificial (2003, 210-211, 231-237). In the sacrificial plot, the violation of a divine prescription by a violator (which may be an individual or the entire people) has led a wrathful deity to withhold boons until indemnity has been paid. As Hogan presents it, the happiness condition at stake is satiety (as opposed to hunger), and he finds stories about this across the worlds where typically the breach of some taboo leads a deity to withhold rain or game. As Ole Davidsen (2015) has pointed out, however, the happiness condition in sacrificial plots – including those discussed by Hogan himself – often extends beyond mere satiety to health, physical survival, or even spiritual salvation. This is the case, for example, in the Christ story in the New Testament, where Jesus' self-sacrifice makes good the sins of all mankind and makes salvation possible (Hogan 2003, 210-211). In any case, the central trait of the sacrificial plot is that a protagonist (the 'scapegoat') willingly sacrifices him- or herself to restore the cosmic order. In the 'secular' version of the sacrificial plot, the scapegoat is also the violator. This is the case in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* where Oedipus, upon learning that it is his patricide and incestuous relation with his mother that has brought the plague on Thebes, gouges out his own eyes and begs to be exiled (Hogan 2003, 211). In the 'pure' version of the sacrificial plot, which is most emotionally arousing, a scapegoat other than the violator is sacrificed, such as in the Christ story. A variant of the sacrificial theme, notes Hogan, is found when a helper character in a heroic plot willingly sacrifices himself to make possible the hero's success (2003, 215).

Elements of the sacrificial plot are found in *LotR* in several places. One is of the secular type. Boromir's self-sacrifice in his attempt to save Merry and Pippin from the Uruk-hai saves his honour, thereby making good his own violation in attempting to take the Ring from Frodo (*TT*, IV, i, 414). Two other appearances of the sacrificial theme in *LotR* are of the pure type where the scapegoat is not the violator. Gandalf's self-sacrifice to save the rest of the Fellowship from the Balrog of Moria (*FR*, II, v, 331) is a textbook example of the helper's pure self-sacrifice within a heroic plot. The sacrificial theme finally appears in Frodo's plot. This plot is more complex as it does not fall neatly into any of Hogan's universal plot categories but combines elements from the heroic plot (Frodo is a hero who sets out to confront Sauron for the same reasons as Aragorn) with elements from the sacrificial plot (Frodo's means are those of the scapegoat). The sacrificial aspect of the Frodo plot is furthermore of a weakened kind: Frodo is *willing* to sacrifice himself to save all of Middle-earth

from Sauron, but in the end, he does not have to. He and Sam are saved last minute by Gandalf on Gwaihir (RK, VI, iv, 951).

The heroic plot often ends with what Hogan refers to as an ‘epilogue of suffering’ (222, 232-233, 237). I have postponed the discussion of this element because in *LotR*, it is Frodo – and not the more straightforwardly heroic figure Aragorn – whose plot line is extended by such an epilogue. The epilogue of suffering occurs when the hero, after having vanquished the enemy and been justly rewarded, cannot properly reintegrate in society. This is Frodo’s fate, marked as he is by the Morgul blade with which the Witch King stabbed him on Weathertop. The epilogue of suffering ends either with the hero returning home after a period of exile with spiritual wisdom that makes reintegration in society possible, or with the achievement of a divine home. Frodo’s case is the latter: as he cannot be at home in Middle-earth, he is granted passage on the last ship setting out for Valinor (RK, VI, ix, 1030).

The fourth universal plot structure is the plot of separation and reunion. It is structurally similar to the romantic plot but deals with the separation of family (often children and parents) or close friends. The blocking character here is the abductor and the protagonist the parent or friend whose child or friend has been abducted (Hogan 2011, 199-209). In *LotR*, this attachment plot features as a sub-plot when Merry and Pippin are taken by the Uruk-hai, and Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas set out to find them. It is, however, not Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas who save their friends (as per the prototypical attachment plot), but the captives themselves who escape, aided by the Rohirrim and Treebeard.

I have summarised the most essential aspects of Hogan’s four universal narrative plot structures, as well as their manifestations in *LotR* in Table 1 on the next page. Hogan remarks that prototypical narratives not only employ universal narrative plot structures, but also combine and interweave them (2003, 228). This too, as we have seen, is the case of *LotR*.

#### 4 INTENSIFICATIONS OF THE PLOT IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Prototypical stories, argues Hogan, not only employ the four plot structures; they also *intensify* them. Hogan makes a wealth of acute observations about plot intensification, and in this Section, I will present the most important of these. I will not always follow Hogan’s own exposition but hope to present his ideas in a more accessible way that still do them justice. In turn, we will look at social and metaphysical intensifications of the plot.



Table 1: Hogan's four universal plot structures and *The Lord of the Rings*

| Plot                        | Happiness condition                                    | Protagonist                        | Blocking characters | Initial lack/Goal                                                                      | <i>The Lord of the Rings</i>                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Heroic plot                 | Group hegemony                                         | King, or warrior on behalf of king | Enemy king, usurper | (Threat of) oppression/<br>Vanquish enemy and restore group hegemony and rightful rule | Aragorn (on behalf of the Free Peoples) vs. Sauron<br>Aragorn (as dethroned, rightful king) vs. Denethor<br>Frodo (on behalf of the Free Peoples) vs. Sauron + epilogue of suffering               |
| Romantic plot               | Romantic union                                         | Lover                              | Parents, rival      | Separation/Romantic union                                                              | Aragorn and Arwen, blocked by Elrond                                                                                                                                                               |
| Sacrificial plot            | Satiety<br>(by extension: health, survival, salvation) | 'Scapegoat'                        | Wrathful deity      | Famine, withholding of boons (due to transgression by violator)/Return of plenty       | Boromir: fighting Uruk-hai to restore honour (secular)<br>Frodo: willingness to self-sacrifice (pure, hero variant, weakened)<br>Gandalf: self-sacrifice to save Fellowship (pure, helper variant) |
| Separation and reunion plot | Attachment (family, friends)                           | Parent, friend                     | Abductor            | Separation/Reunion                                                                     | Breaking of the Fellowship: Uruk-hai capture Merry and Pippin who later escape and are reunited with their friends                                                                                 |

Hogan points to four aspects of *social intensification* of the plot in prototypical narratives. He seems convinced that social intensification plays a role in all four plot types, but gives examples mainly from the heroic and romantic plots:

1. The first aspect of social intensification is *social generalisation*, which means that the goal-structure of the plot (i.e. the initial lack and the reward in the conclusion) is extended beyond the protagonist himself (Hogan 2003, 225). In the heroic plot, the hero acts on behalf of society. This can be the hero's own group, but in *LotR*, this social generalisation is extended further, as the heroes Aragorn and Frodo act on behalf not only of their own groups (Gondor and the Hobbits), but on behalf of all Free Peoples of Middle-earth. In the romantic plot, not only the main lovers are united (in *LotR*: Aragorn and Arwen), but ancillary couples as well (in *LotR*: Faramir and Éowyn, and Sam and Rose).
2. Second, conflicts are socially intensified by taking place within the *family* (Hogan 2003, 227). In the romantic plot, parents act as blocking characters (in *LotR*: Elrond). In the heroic plot, the usurper is often a brother or an uncle. In *LotR*, the main heroic plots do not feature familial conflict, but the minor heroic plot arcs of Éomer and Faramir, do. (Think also of the brotherly rivalry between Manwë and Melkor in *Sil*). Hogan does not mention it, but the sacrificial plot, too, may be intensified as a family drama, as it is often a son or a mother who is sacrificed or self-sacrifices (this theme, however, is absent from *LotR*).
3. Third, *social structure* may intensify the blocking. Blocking in the romantic plot can be intensified by having lovers belonging to different classes, castes, or ethnic groups (Hogan 2003, 230). In *LotR* we have a particularly strong variant of this, with Arwen and Aragorn belonging to different races. In particular, the sacrifice Arwen must make to be with Aragorn, emotionally intensifies the romantic plot in *LotR*.
4. Fourth and finally, *social hierarchy* is reflected in prototypical narratives: agents are nobles or royal (Hogan 2003, 230). This, again, is the case in *LotR* – even the Hobbit characters (save Sam) are 'gentlehobbits' belonging to the Hobbit aristocracy.

More important, and also more complex, than social intensification, is the metaphysical intensification of the plot in prototypical narratives.

First of all, metaphysical intensification entails *metaphysical idealisation*: Heroes, helpers, and goals represent the metaphysically good. The hero is chosen by God; helpers are angelic. The restored kingdom not only puts an end to suppression; it is utopian. The sacrifice not only brings an end to famine, but ensures salvation, too. The beloved is extremely beautiful and virtuous, as well as spiritually elevated (Hogan 2003, 226-227). Importantly, in prototypical narratives, the beloved, the kingdom, and so on are not only idealised in the imagination of the hero; their idealised – and often spiritualised – nature is real within the story-world (Hogan 2003, 227). *LotR*, obviously, has all of this: Hero Aragorn is the rightful king, and his virtuous character is demonstrated by his long lifespan, his extraordinary healing abilities, and the elven blood in his royal, Númenórean lineage (*FR* I, xi, 194). (Readers of *Sil* will know that Maian – which is to say divine – blood, too, flows in Aragorn’s veins). Furthermore, helper Gandalf is an Istar, an emissary from the Gods, and the beloved Arwen is an Elf of extraordinary beauty, skill, and wisdom. After the final victory over Sauron at Cormallen, the Valar (The Lords of the West) send tidings by eagle to Minas Tirith, demonstrating that the hosts of the Free Peoples act in their name (*RK*, VI, v, 963). Furthermore, the colour of Gandalf returned and of Gondor, the chief realm to oppose Sauron, is white. Hogan does not systematise the many examples of idealisation that he gives, but using the examples of *LotR*, we may do so: idealisation typically combine markers of three orders: symbolic (e.g., the colour white), physical (e.g., beauty, skill, abundance, longevity), and spiritual (virtue, angelic helpers, God on our side).

The antagonists in prototypical narratives, similarly, represent metaphysical evil. Spiritually, antagonists are demonised (or backed by demonic helpers). In *LotR*, Sauron, the Balrog, and the Nazgûl all appear as demons; they are motivated by mindless hate. Furthermore, the evil nature of the antagonists is apparent in their outward, physical appearance. In *LotR*, the Orcs are extremely ugly and dirty, black-skinned, beast-like, and unable to endure sunlight; their dead bodies are referred to as “carcasses” (*TT*, III, iii, 454) and Treebeard likens them to “vermin” (*RK* VI, vi, 979). More extremely, the Nazgûl are living dead, and Sauron is bodiless. When the Witch-king, Sauron, and Saruman – the three most metaphysical representatives of evil in *LotR* – die, their bodies simply evaporate, and they turn into nothing (*RK*, V, vi, 842; *RK*, VI, iv, 949; *RK*, VI, viii, 1020). Finally, the identification of evil with blackness is symbolic, as well as physical: Barad-dûr is the ‘Black Tower’; Sauron is the ‘Dark Lord’, the tongue of Mordor is the ‘Black Speech’.

The second aspect of metaphysical intensification concerns the causal sequence. In prototypical narratives there is an adjudicating instance within the story-world that guarantees what since Aristotle has been known as *poetic justice*, i.e. the reward of morally good actions and the punishment of morally evil actions (Hogan 2003, 218-221).<sup>10</sup> This adjudicating instance can be impersonal, e.g., in the form of fate or karma. Or it can be personalised, typically in the form of a deity. Such a deity can either dispense rewards and punishments in this world or do so in a transcendental world. The latter case is often found in romantic and pure sacrificial plots, where a tragic ending in this world is overcome by a transcendent comic ending. Lovers who could not have each other in this world, are united in Heaven. The 'scapegoat', who was unrightfully killed in this world, is glorified in Heaven (this is the case in the Christ story; Hogan 2003, 224).

In *LotR*, it is the providential power of The One (Eru) that safeguards poetic justice. The clearest intervention is Eru's reward of Gandalf's self-sacrifice: an unnamed power that can only be Eru returns Gandalf to life, more powerful than before as Gandalf the White (*TT*, III, v, 502). With the same narrative necessity, Frodo and Sam are saved from the slopes of Mount Doom – not by the supreme deity himself in this case, but by Gandalf and Gwaihir, both emissaries of the Valar (*RK*, VI, iv, 951). In other cases, the providential force works in hidden ways. That Bilbo found the Ring of Power in Gollum's cave is explained by Gandalf as the work of "something else [...] beyond the design of the Ring-maker". According to Gandalf "Bilbo was *meant* to find" the Ring, and Frodo was "*meant* to have it" (*FR*, I, ii, 56, original emphases). Similarly, Gandalf foresees that Gollum has a destiny (*FR*, I, ii, 59; *FR*, II, ii, 251; *RK*, V, iv, 815; *RK*, VI, iii, 947), namely, to destroy the Ring and so make good for his violations and redeem himself (*RK*, VI, iii, 946). A related form of narrative causality, which is not discussed by Hogan, but is prevalent in the mythologies that inspired Tolkien, is the metaphysically binding character of oaths. The Dead under the Mountain are bound to their oath to Isildur; as oathbreakers, they are doomed to linger as Undead, but after fighting for Aragorn, Isildur's heir, and thereby finally fulfilling their oath, they are given peace (*RK*, V, ii, 789; *RK*, V, ix, 876-877). (In *Sil*, the story of Fëanor and the Silmarils provide another example of a metaphysically binding oath).

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10) I borrow the notion of the narrative adjudicator from A.J. Greimas (see Martin & Ringham 2006, 22). Greimas' structural analysis of narrative – especially his actantial model and his notion of the 'narrative schema' – is an important source of inspiration for Hogan.

The personification of Good and Evil and the working of narrative causality to achieve poetic justice yield an important corollary: Since a good power – whether personal (God) or impersonal (Providence) – guarantees just rewards and a happy ending in prototypical narratives, the power balance between Good and Evil in such narratives is always and necessarily asymmetric. In other words, Good is stronger than Evil. This, again, is the case in *LotR*.

## CONCLUSION

As I hope to have shown, *LotR* possesses as good as all those traits that according to Hogan characterises prototypical narratives:

- In terms of plot structure, *LotR* interweaves the four universal plot structures identified by Hogan: the heroic plot (Frodo and Aragorn vs. Sauron), the romantic plot (Aragorn and Arwen), the sacrificial plot (esp. Gandalf and Frodo), and the plot of separation and reunion (breaking and reunion of the Fellowship).
- In terms of plot intensification, *LotR* is both socially and metaphysically intensified (social: cosmic scale, family drama, and noble characters; metaphysically: idealisation of protagonists and demonisation of antagonists; Eru as providential and adjudicating force, securing that evil acts are punished and good acts are rewarded).

In other words, according to Hogan's yardstick, we can characterise *LotR* as a prototypical narrative.

Why does this matter? I think that the prototypical character of *LotR* may be among the reasons for the narrative's enormous and enduring attractiveness for readers – arguably together with the immense depth of the created world in which the plot unfolds, and the artistic skill with which the plot is narrated. Furthermore, the prototypical character of *LotR* may have implications for the ongoing debate in Tolkien Studies on whether the story is fundamentally a Christian or a Pagan story (e.g., Kerry 2011; Testi 2018). *LotR* shares its prototypical character with the Christian Christ story and with paradigm stories from various pagan mythologies. I propose that it is because of the shared prototypicality (more so than the direct intertextual loans), that Christians experience *LotR* as a Christian story, and Neo-Pagans experience it as Pagan.

Let me finish by summing up how narrative prototypicality impacts the depiction of evil in *LotR*. First, an intensification of perspective (us vs. them) pitches the antagonists as demonic, beastlike, bodily deformed, and black; the story is told from 'our' perspective and gives no voice to the antagonists. Second, the intensification of scale turns the narrative into a cosmic strife between the representatives of Good and Evil. It is Eru and his representatives vs. Sauron and his representatives. Third, the power balance between Good and Evil is ultimately asymmetric. At the of the narrative, Good prevails. It could not have been otherwise.

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