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## Gollum's Blighted Repentance and What Bilbo Saw

**Tom Hillman**

*Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired. A spasm of pain seemed to twist him and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head as if engaged in some interior debate. Then he came back, and slowly putting out a trembling hand, 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 far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing.*

*But at that touch Frodo stirred and cried out softly in his sleep, and immediately Sam was wide awake. The first thing he saw was Gollum 'pawing at master,' as he thought.*

*"Hey you!" he said roughly, "What are you up to?"*

*"Nothing, nothing," said Gollum softly. "Nice Master."*

*"I daresay," said Sam. "But where have you been to – sneaking off and sneaking back, you old villain?"*

*Gollum withdrew himself, and a green light flickered under his heavy lids. Almost spiderlike he looked now, crouched back on his bent limbs, with his protruding eyes. The fleeting moment had passed, beyond recall. (TT 4.viii.714)*



Of this passage, Tolkien later wrote:

“For me perhaps the most tragic moment in the Tale comes...when Sam fails to note the complete change in Gollum’s tone and aspect.... His repentance is blighted and all Frodo’s pity is...wasted. Shelob’s lair became inevitable.”<sup>1</sup>

Now Sam’s reaction to waking up to find Gollum beside a sleeping Frodo is completely intelligible because this is not the first time he has done so. On that occasion, during the Sméagol-Gollum dialogue, the ‘pawing at Master’ soon threatened to become something else entirely: “Finally both [his] arms, with long fingers flexed and twitching, clawed towards [Frodo’s] neck.”<sup>2</sup> (*TT* 4.ii.634) Moved by sudden fear, Sam is sharp and hasty. So in a heartbreaking instant, clear to us all, he fails the test of Pity.<sup>3</sup>

And in turn Gollum, stung by Sam’s gruff accusations, “withdrew himself.” Now in the present context, with two Gollums momentarily visible to us, this is a very interesting choice of words. For in Tolkien’s usage they suggest much more than a physical withdrawal. There is only one other sentence in all *The Lord of the Rings* where Tolkien uses the verb “withdraw” reflexively, and in that instance the sense is clearly not just physical.<sup>4</sup> It is Gandalf, speaking of how perilous it would be for him to look into the palantír, who says: “even if I found the power

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<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, selected and edited by Humphrey Carpenter (Boston, 1981), letter 246, p. 330. Cf. also letter 165, p. 221, quoted below n. 31. All citations of *The Lord of the Rings* are from the one volume 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition (New York, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> At Henneth Annûn Gollum clearly means to attack Frodo: “He spat and stretched out his long arms with white snapping fingers,” (*TT* 4.vi.688). It seems unlikely, however, that Sam saw this given his reluctance a few minutes earlier to approach the edge of the platform overlooking the pool (4.vi.684)

<sup>3</sup> For Tolkien’s assessment of Sam’s failure here, see *Letters* (1981) letter 246, p. 329-330.

<sup>4</sup> A search reveals twenty two instances of the verb “withdraw” in *The Lord of the Rings*. Twelve times the verb is intransitive, nine times transitive (including these two passages), once a gerund. In all the other transitive uses of the verb the object is something like “gaze,” “forces,” etc. Whenever Tolkien means to indicate merely physical removal or retreat – as in, e.g., “the further you go, the less easy it will be to withdraw,” (*FR* 2.iii.281) or “Strider withdrew into a dark corner,” (*FR* 1.x.166) – he simply uses the intransitive, which again suggests that the reflexive use of the transitive is not equivalent to the intransitive use. The two are not synonymous. The noun “withdrawal” does not occur.

to withdraw myself, it would have been disastrous for [Sauron] to see me...." (*TT* 3.xi.595).<sup>5</sup> So, given the vision we have just been granted of the "old weary hobbit" reaching out to caress Frodo, "himself" may well also refer to this remnant of what Gollum had once been, to Sméagol perhaps, now gone beyond recall or redemption.

And even as he draws back, the Gollum who was "almost ... caress[ing]" Frodo at once becomes "almost spiderlike." He reverts into the "nasty crawling spider on a wall" that the hobbits had first seen in the Eryn Muil,<sup>6</sup> and foreshadows the real monster whom the reader does not even know is there yet.

In a Tale which tells us right at the start that there is "not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies" and that "the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many" (*FR* 1.ii.59), Sam's pitilessness is striking and poignant. For until now the reader has had small reason to pity Gollum, and little hint that somewhere within him there languished "an old weary hobbit" for whom we should feel pity as Bilbo did rather than loathing as Sam does.<sup>7</sup> And yet, in that "fleeting moment," as our beloved Sam blunders, our hearts come to know a pity that Sam's has

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<sup>5</sup> Even if we allow that a physical withdrawal is part of what Gandalf refers to, more important and difficult would be the mental or spiritual withdrawal. Compare the experience of Pippin, who "gave a gasp and struggled" when the light within the palantír went out. Then, the moment he regains consciousness, "he struggled to get up and escape" (*TT* 3.xi.592-93). And when Pippin recounts his own experience with Sauron he says "I struggled. But [Sauron] said 'Wait a moment! We shall meet again soon.'" (*TT* 3.xi.593). Cf., too, Aragorn's contest with Sauron for mastery of the palantír, which he twice calls a struggle (*RK* 5.iii.780). Clearly the heart of the struggle here is not physical. Thus, neither is the withdrawal.

<sup>6</sup> *TT* 4.i.612. Gollum is twice more likened to a spider (*TT* 4.i.614, iii.645), and once to "some large prowling thing of insect-kind" (*TT* 4.i.615). Since Tolkien originally described Gollum as coming down the wall "like a fly" (*The History of Middle Earth*, VII.329 n. 15, italics his), and retroactively inserted the references to Shelob into the Sméagol/Gollum dialogue (*HME* VIII.115), it may be that the spider comparisons were also inserted as the solitary Shelob replaced what had been a Mirkwood-like horde. In general see *HME* VIII.187-191.

<sup>7</sup> The one sure hint, however, is long ago at *FR* 1.ii.55. See below pp 8-9. Gollum's youthful interest in tales parallels Sam's own, and Sam takes note of it (*TT* 4.iii.641, 646-647). It sparks perhaps the kindest impulse Sam ever has towards him (*TT* 4.viii.713), but it does not suggest their kinship as hobbits. Neither is typical: Sam can read and likes stories; and Gollum is a murderer (cf. Frodo's words at *RK* 6.viii.1006).

not yet learned.<sup>8</sup> Before we consider this moment further, let us examine the portrayal of Gollum thus far.

From the first even Gandalf, who learned pity at the feet of Nienna herself,<sup>9</sup> has named Gollum a liar, a murderer, and a robber of cradles.<sup>10</sup> He has confirmed Frodo's disgusted assertion that Gollum deserves death.<sup>11</sup> Aragorn in his turn was "not gentle" when he marched him from the Dead Marshes to Northern Mirkwood "with a halter on his neck, gagged, until he was tamed by lack of drink and food."<sup>12</sup> And the Wood Elves, to whom Aragorn had entrusted Gollum, receive only treachery and death for their kindness (*FR* 2.ii.255-56).

When we first encounter Gollum in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, he is an elusive presence we can never quite get a look at. In the long dark of Moria his footfalls are an echo of menace and his glowing eyes bring unquiet dreams;<sup>13</sup> in Lorien he appears in the wake of the orcs, a shadow sniffing about for his prey just as the Black Rider in the Shire had done;<sup>14</sup> on the Great River he comes closer yet, still shadowy and still sniffing, and both Sam and Strider make clear

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<sup>8</sup> Sam will learn pity once he has borne the Ring (*RK* 6.iii.944), but "for the good of Gollum too late" (*Letters*, 246, p. 330).

<sup>9</sup> "Wiseest of the Maiar was Olórin. He too dwelt in Lórien, but his ways often took him to the house of Nienna, and of her he learned pity and patience" (*The Silmarillion* 30-31). As pity is Gandalf's greatest strength, so it is his greatest weakness: "Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good.... The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength" (*FR* 1.ii.61).

<sup>10</sup> "The Woodmen [of Mirkwood] said that there was some new terror abroad, a ghost that drank blood. It climbed trees to find nests; it crept into holes to find the young; it slipped through windows to find cradles" (*FR* 1.ii.58). Gollum's cannibalism, already established in *Riddles in the Dark*, is a trait he shares with orcs: *TT* 3.iii.446 (man- and orc-flesh), and 450 (Pippin's refusal to eat meat provided by the orcs); 4.iv.651 (the bones in Ithilien). Sam initially thought "the desire to eat hobbits" was the chief danger Gollum posed (*TT* 4.ii.634).

<sup>11</sup> Though Gandalf of course does not think that such a sentence should be carried out: *FR* 1.ii.59.

<sup>12</sup> *FR* 2.ii.253. In *The Hunt for the Ring* we are given a detailed description of the route they took, and told that, "according to Aragorn," this journey lasted from 1 February to 21 March, close to 900 miles on foot in 50 days (*Unfinished Tales*, Boston 1980, p. 343). Not gentle indeed.

<sup>13</sup> In Moria: *FR* 2.iv.312, 318.

<sup>14</sup> In Lorien: *FR* 2.vi.345; Black Rider: 1.iii.75-76, iv.86, xi.189; cf. 1.v.108.

that “murder by night” would be no surprise from Gollum.<sup>15</sup> When the company is shot at from the eastern bank by orcs, Sam assumes that Gollum’s behind it (*FR* 2.ix.386).<sup>16</sup>

All of this sets the stage for our first clear look at Gollum in *The Taming of Sméagol*. There we first see him coming down a sheer cliff face “like a nasty crawling spider on a wall” (*TT* 4.i.612).<sup>17</sup> There we first hear him venting his murderous hatred for “the thieves, the thieves, the filthy little thieves” who stole his Precious (4.i.613). But, with Sting at his throat, Gollum instantly becomes a groveling, lugubrious, wretch, sadly wronged by the “nice little hobbitses” to whom he of course meant no harm (4.i.614-615). Neither Frodo nor Sam are fooled by this transformation,<sup>18</sup> but to Sam’s staring, scowling amazement Frodo pities Gollum and shows him mercy (4.i.615).<sup>19</sup> And if we are not already as alarmed by this as Sam is, we need only see the flicker of “cunning and eagerness” in Gollum’s eyes as he agrees to help them (4.i.615). His immediate attempt to escape, followed by more fawning wretchedness, only strengthens the impression that Frodo’s pity is dangerous. Even the final words of the chapter, as they set out with Gollum as their guide, do not augur well: “Over all the leagues of waste before the gates of Mordor there was a black silence.” (4.i.619) Sméagol may have been tamed, but Gollum has not.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> On the Anduin: *FR* 2.ix.382-84. That Gollum will murder them in their sleep is a frequent – and not unjustified – concern of Sam’s. He warns Frodo about precisely that before they fall asleep on the stairs of Cirith Ungol: “If we’re caught napping, Stinker will come out on top pretty quick” (*TT* 4.viii.714). See also 4.i.617; ii.621, 622-24, 633-35.

<sup>16</sup> Not unreasonably so. Grishnákh for one knows who Gollum is (*TT* 3.iii.455-56).

<sup>17</sup> See above n. 6.

<sup>18</sup> When Sam objects that Gollum’s plan is no doubt to “throttle us in our sleep,” Frodo agrees, but denies that Gollum’s plans for them should have a bearing on theirs for him (*TT* 4.i.615). Expecting mischief, they then pretend to sleep, and subdue him again when he attempts escape (4.i.616-619).

<sup>19</sup> Frodo’s pity and mercy, and Sam’s reaction to them, mark the emergence of the difference of opinion between Frodo and Sam about Gollum. Sam soon recognizes that Frodo and Gollum can communicate with each other in a way he doesn’t understand. Indeed the three of them are on proximate roads which meet up on the slopes of Mt Doom, when Sam, now a ringbearer too, can understand, and feel the pity Frodo feels here.

<sup>20</sup> The title of this chapter, *The Taming of Sméagol*, is positively tricky in view of the narrator’s use of “Sméagol.” See below p. 7 n. 26.

This picture does not improve in *The Passage of the Marshes*. Twice in this chapter the hobbits fall asleep together despite their fear that Gollum will murder them if they do. The first time, Sam awakes with a shock to find, “half remorsefully,” that he had been too suspicious (*TT* 4.ii.623).<sup>21</sup> Gollum is present and awake, but leaves at once to hunt for food. Meanwhile Frodo and Sam discuss their situation. Sam wants to husband their *lembas* so they will have some left once their errand is done. Frodo dismisses this notion:

*If the One goes into the Fire, and we are at hand? I ask you, Sam, are we ever likely to need bread again? If we can nurse our limbs to bring us to Mount Doom, that is all we can do. More than I can, I begin to feel. (TT 4.ii.624)*

Now earlier that very day, before the hobbits slept, Frodo had offered Gollum a share of their waybread. Though famished, he had rejected it with disgust “and a hint of his old malice” (4.ii.622).

*You try to choke poor Sméagol. Dust and ashes, he can’t eat that. He must starve. But Sméagol doesn’t mind. Nice hobbits! Sméagol has promised. He will starve. He can’t eat hobbits’ food. He will starve. Poor thin Sméagol. (TT 4.ii.622)*

The contrast between the scorn and self-pity Gollum feels, and Frodo’s abandonment of all hope of anything beyond the Fire, leaves all our pity with him and with Sam, who has no answer to Frodo’s despair but his tears. Then Gollum returns from the hunt:

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<sup>21</sup> But even this realization is tempered and cautious: “then it also occurred to him that his master had been right: there had *for the present* been nothing to guard against” (*TT* 4.ii.623, italics added).

*His fingers and face were soiled with black mud. He was still chewing and slavering. What he was chewing, they did not ask or like to think.*

*'Worms or beetles or something slimy out of holes,' thought Sam. 'Brr! The nasty creature; the poor wretch!'*

*Gollum said nothing to them, until he had drunk deeply and washed himself in the stream. Then he came up to them, licking his lips. 'Better now,' he said. 'Are we rested? Ready to go on? Nice hobbits, they sleep beautifully. Trust Sméagol now? Very, very good.'* (TT 4.ii.624)

Gollum needles the hobbits for their fear of him. He licks his lips, and makes clear that he had been watching them while they slept so beautifully.<sup>22</sup> He then asks and answers his own question, quite smugly in fact – as if not murdering them in their sleep were an unanswerable proof of his good will. But he has misjudged the hobbits. They make no reply. In fact Sam's answer was given before he was asked, in that cold shiver of loathing and disgust.<sup>23</sup> Thus, a scene that begins with Sam feeling half remorseful ends with the repulsiveness and menace of Gollum confirmed. Once again our pity is elsewhere.

The second time Frodo and Sam fall asleep together is far more unsettling. Sam awakens to hear the disturbing conversation between Sméagol and Gollum, the two different 'thoughts' of their companion which here manifest themselves quite distinctively.<sup>24</sup> Of these two 'thoughts,' the one the narrator calls Gollum is clearly the more dangerous, just as we might expect:

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<sup>22</sup> Just the day before Sam and Frodo had discussed their fears, but made no effort to conceal them. Sam "did not really care whether Gollum heard him or not" (TT 4.ii.622), and Frodo had answered "speaking openly" (4.ii.623).

<sup>23</sup> Later at TT 4.iii.640-641 Frodo speaks of trusting Gollum, but adds that he has had little choice. While unaware of Gollum's conversation with himself (TT 2.ii.632-34), Frodo is not blind: he reduces Gollum to cowering terror by threatening him with the Ring.

<sup>24</sup> "Gollum was talking to himself. Sméagol was holding a debate with some other thought that used the same voice but made it squeak and hiss. A green light and a pale light alternated in his eyes as he spoke" (TT 2.ii.632). Thus we see differences in speech, eyes, action, and thought, both in the sense of intent, and of "personality." "Thought" in the sense of "mind" is found only very early, in the mid-tenth century Lindisfarne Gospels. See *OED* s.v. 1b.

*Each time that the second thought spoke, Gollum's long hand crept out slowly, pawing towards Frodo, and then was drawn back with a jerk as Sméagol spoke again. Finally both arms, with long fingers flexed and twitching, clawed towards his neck. (TT 4.ii.633-34)*

On this showing we can hardly be surprised at Sam's reaction when he awakens later on the Stairs to find Gollum 'pawing at master,' words which the narrator himself puts into quotes, to emphasize that Sam habitually thought this way.<sup>25</sup> We can also see where the narrator stands. This is the only dramatic scene in *The Lord of the Rings* where the narrator in his own voice calls Gollum Sméagol, and he does so only to distinguish the one 'thought' clearly from the other.<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere he is always just Gollum.

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<sup>25</sup> "Pawing:" TT 4.i.618; ii.633, 634; iii.637; iv.651; viii.714. Only two other characters are so described, Grishnákh (3.iii.455; ix.564), and Sam, of all people, when Frodo, fearing for the Ring, sees him as an orc (RK 6.i.912). Sam of course had had Gollum's fingers at his own throat within seconds of meeting him (TT 4.i.614). See also Gollum's catchy endorsement of fish ("Makes eyes bright, fingers tight," TT 4.vi.686; cf. 688).

<sup>26</sup> In *The Two Towers* "Sméagol" occurs 145 times. Sixty five percent of the time (94/145) it is used by Gollum referring to himself. Frodo uses it 31 times, Sam 9, and Faramir 4. The narrator employs it in his own voice five times in this scene. If we allow that *The Taming of Sméagol* is named by the narrator, that accounts for one more instance, but a chapter title is a comment on the Tale rather than a part of the Tale itself. The narrator calls him "Sméagol" only one other time, in a passage of high mythic style introducing "Shelob the Great, last child of Ungoliant to trouble the unhappy world."

*Already, years before, Gollum had beheld her, Sméagol who pried into all dark holes, and in past days he had bowed and worshipped her, and the darkness of her evil will walked through all the ways of his weariness beside him, cutting him off from light and from regret. (TT 4.ix.723)*

"Sméagol" is here in apposition to "Gollum," and as such is syntactically and logically subordinate, a supplemental description of the main subject. Sméagol's characteristic of prying into dark holes both explains his acquaintance with her and recalls Gandalf's initial description of him as unduly interested in things that were secret and hidden (FR 1.ii.53). The sentence is very interesting otherwise. In *The Lord of the Rings* only Sauron is said to have been worshipped by anyone (RK 5.ii.782, x.888), and as Galadriel entertains the idea of what would happen if she had the Ring, she appears "worshipful" to Frodo (FR 2.vii.366). There is what seems to me a bleak echo of the sixth verse of the twenty-third Psalm in "and the darkness...beside him." Lastly, the sundering of Gollum from regret makes clear the difficulty of repentance.

In *FR* only Gandalf and Legolas use Sméagol; in *The Return of the King* only Gollum. Appendix B reveals an interesting progression: he is Sméagol when he kills Déagol (RK B.1087), Sméagol-Gollum while under the Misty Mountains (1089), and Gollum once he leaves (1089). It may be coincidence, but the transition from Sméagol-Gollum to simply Gollum matches up pretty closely with Gollum's statement at TT 4.i.616: "Don't ask Sméagol. Poor, poor Sméagol, he went away long ago. They took his Precious, and he's lost now." "They" of course can only refer to Bilbo.



How then – after we have been so carefully schooled to loathe Gollum, and to think Frodo’s pity unwise even if morally right<sup>27</sup> – how then do we now find ourselves so struck by pity and a sense of loss? The narrator can move us so much only by radically shifting our perspective:

*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 far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing.*

With these words the narrator steps out of the narrative to comment upon the scene, but amid the pathos evoked by this comment it is all too easy to overlook a very important point. With these words the narrator – Frodo, as we must recall, who is not omniscient – also steps beyond what he could have known. In that fleeting moment when Sméagol the old weary hobbit appears, Frodo and Sam, the only possible witnesses, are both asleep. So where does this vision come from?

We find a clue far back in *The Shadow of the Past*, where Gandalf is telling Frodo of Bilbo’s encounter with Gollum. It is also the only prior passage in the Tale which evokes *The Naming of Sméagol* unmixed pity for Gollum:

*There was a little corner of [Gollum’s] mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark: a light out of the past. It was actually pleasant, I think, to hear a kindly voice again, bringing up memories of wind, and trees, and sun on the grass, and such forgotten things. (FR 1.ii.55)*

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For an extended analysis of the uses of “Sméagol” in *The Lord of the Rings*, see my post, [The Naming of Sméagol](#).

<sup>27</sup> By recalling Frodo’s conversation with Gandalf from *The Shadow of the Past* the narrator underlines the moral correctness of Frodo’s pity and mercy.

The conversation between them grows more heated as Frodo’s fear mounts, until finally he rejects even the pity that Bilbo showed in not murdering Gollum, pity that Gandalf says was Bilbo’s salvation as well. Frodo feels no such pity. “You have not seen him,” Gandalf replies. “No, and I don’t want to,” is Frodo’s tart answer (*FR* 1.ii.59). And it is precisely this conversation that Frodo remembers when Gollum is at his mercy in the Eryn Muil: “I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him” (*TT* 4.i.615).

Given the connection between seeing Gollum and pitying him, one last passage merits our attention:

*Bilbo almost stopped breathing, and went stiff himself. He was desperate. He must get away, out of this horrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He must fight. He must stab the foul thing,<sup>28</sup> put out its eyes, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo’s heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering. All these thoughts passed in a flash of a second. He trembled. And then quite suddenly in another flash, as if lifted by a new hope and resolve, he leaped. (*The Hobbit*, 97)*

Here, in another fleeting moment, we behold another vision of an old weary hobbit. What Bilbo saw beneath the Misty Mountains, we see as in a mirror on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol. In *The Hobbit* Bilbo, poised to commit murder out of fear, glimpses the hobbit that Gollum was, and turns to pity.<sup>29</sup> In *The Two Towers* Gollum, also poised for murder, sees in Frodo what he himself has lost to the Ring – and what Frodo will lose before the end – and

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<sup>28</sup> Note the echo of the words “...while he had any strength left...He must stab the foul thing” in Frodo’s statement to Gandalf: “What a pity Bilbo did not stab that vile creature when he had the chance” (*FR* 1.ii.59).

<sup>29</sup> Bilbo of course need not have recognized Gollum as a hobbit *per se* then or later, but he had to come to see him as a person, not a “foul thing.” The sentence “And he was miserable, alone, lost” signals this transition. Gollum is now “he,” not “it,” which produces an intriguing moment of ambiguity. Every other “he” in this paragraph refers to Bilbo. And that ambiguity allows recognition, pity, horror. Aristotle would have been pleased.

nearly repents.<sup>30</sup> But he stumbles against the pitilessness of fearful, watchful Sam, and “withdraws himself.”<sup>31</sup> As Bilbo leaped forward, Gollum fell back.

The similarity in these two passages is of course no accident. For, as we learn from John Rateliff, Tolkien wrote them both at about the same time in 1944.<sup>32</sup> And if this were any other author we might end now with a comment on how cleverly Tolkien uses the one passage to illuminate the other, and how the both of them work together to reveal the razor’s edge between murder and repentance, between pity and pitilessness, between leap of hope and lapse into despair.

But that would not be enough for Tolkien, who writes under the pretense that not he, but Frodo is the author. Nor would it explain how Frodo the narrator can narrate for us the fleeting moment that he did not see and that no one could have told him of. The answer is not far to seek, I think. Frodo, the subcreator, knew the true story of *Riddles in the Dark* years before Bilbo left for Rivendell.<sup>33</sup> He was in fact the likely source of the version of this chapter which contains the

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<sup>30</sup> What Frodo will lose bears a remarkable resemblance (*RK* 6.iii.937-38): “No taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of wind, no memory of tree or grass or flower, no image of moon or star are left to me.” Cf. Sam, who bears the Ring long enough to learn pity at last (*RK* 6.iii.944): “and now he dimly guessed the agony of Gollum’s shrivelled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again.”

<sup>31</sup> See *Letters*, letter 165, p. 221 (the italics are Tolkien’s; “horses” seems a slip for the “horns” heard at *RK* 5.iv.829):

...I am most stirred by the sound of the horses of the Rohirrim at cockcrow; and most grieved by Gollum’s failure (just) to repent when interrupted by Sam: this seems to me really like the *real* world in which the instruments of just retribution are seldom themselves just or holy; and the good are often stumbling blocks....

<sup>32</sup> “Bilbo’s sudden insight into Gollum’s inner life here is on par with the unwitnessed moment outside Shelob’s lair when Gollum briefly appears as ‘an old weary hobbit [...]’ – not surprisingly because both passages were written at about the same time.” John Rateliff, *The History of the Hobbit*, revised and expanded one-volume edition (London, 2011) p. 745 n 38. Rateliff also cites *HME* VIII.183-84, where Christopher Tolkien establishes the date of this chapter of *The Lord of the Rings* as May 1944 on the basis of his father’s letters. For the dating of these revisions to *The Hobbit* see Rateliff pp. xxvii, and 731-32.

<sup>33</sup> When he was 99 (TA 2989), Bilbo adopted Frodo as his heir, and brought him to live at Bag End (*FR* 1.i.21). Soon thereafter he told him the true story, which Gandalf already knew (*FR* 1.i.40).

truth.<sup>34</sup> And in composing this Tale he admittedly relied on the recollections of his friends for events he did not witness.<sup>35</sup> For the journey from Ithilien onward, he would have had to rely heavily on Sam, since the Ring had driven all but the image of itself from his mind.<sup>36</sup> And when they came to recount that moment on the Stairs, it is all too easy to imagine Sam, who had expressed regret for his harshness even at the time, and who had since learned pity by experience,<sup>37</sup> telling Frodo that what he saw when he awoke that day might not have been Gollum 'pawing at master' after all, but rather an old weary hobbit, "miserable, alone, [and] lost."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "But many copies [of the Red Book] contain the true account (as an alternative), derived no doubt from notes by Frodo or Samwise, both of whom learned the truth, though they seem to have been unwilling to delete anything actually written by the old hobbit himself" (*FR* pr. 13).

<sup>35</sup> The book Frodo hands Sam in *The Grey Havens* has this periphrasis below the title: "...being the memoirs of Bilbo and Frodo of the Shire, supplemented by the accounts of their friends and the learning of the Wise" (*RK* 6.ix.1027). We can see this process at work, for example, in Pippin's recollection of Treebeard's eyes (*TT* 3.iv.463), and in the tale telling in the evening after the Field of Cormallen (*RK* 6.iv.955-56).

<sup>36</sup> Frodo's memory loss as he describes it at *RK* 6.iii.937-38 seems nearly total. Aside from the Ring, "all else fades."

<sup>37</sup> "Sam felt a bit remorseful, though not more trustful. 'Sorry,' he said. 'I'm sorry, but you startled me out of my sleep. And I shouldn't have been sleeping, and that made me a bit sharp.'" (*TT* 4.viii.715). Further down the same page he also says: " 'I said I was sorry, but I soon shan't be.' "

<sup>38</sup> The passage in *The Grey Havens* where Frodo sees "a far green country under a swift sunrise" offers an intriguing parallel (*RK* 6.ix.1030). Sam must be the author here, but he cannot have witnessed this scene. The text specifically mentions Frodo's dream "in the house of Bombadil" (*FR* 1.viii.135), which this scene realizes. Sam, therefore, must have known of this dream because Frodo had told him, or because he had read it in the book. But this scene is all Sam, and fits his character as described from the beginning: "They are sailing, sailing, sailing over the Sea, they are going into the West and leaving us." (*FR* 1.ii.45). He uses the dream to give Frodo the happy ending he feels he was denied (*RK* 6.ix.1029). Not of course that any reader should doubt that this is what actually happened.