
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Conceptual Metaphor to Conceptual Blending: The Construction of Good and Evil through Light, Darkness, and Colour in *The Lord of the Rings*

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| ABSTRACT

This study investigates the metaphorical representation of morality in *The Lord of the Rings* by integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT). Although previous studies have applied these frameworks to Tolkien's works, they have largely examined conventional conceptual metaphors and conceptual blends independently, leaving the relationship between these two levels of conceptual organisation insufficiently explored. Drawing on the complete text of *The Lord of the Rings*, the study analyses metaphorical expressions related to morality, focusing on representations involving light, darkness, and colour. It first identifies the conventional conceptual metaphors underlying Tolkien's moral system before examining how these conceptual metaphors are elaborated into more complex conceptual blends. The findings demonstrate that GOOD IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS constitute the primary conceptual framework through which morality is represented, while white and black function as colour elaborations of the more fundamental light–darkness opposition. The analysis further shows that fictional representations in which moral qualities become physically embodied in characters or materialised in objects are better explained by Conceptual Blending Theory than by Conceptual Metaphor Theory alone. By integrating CMT and CBT, the study offers a more comprehensive cognitive account of moral representation in Tolkien's fictional world.

| KEYWORDS

The Lord of the Rings; morality; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Conceptual Blending Theory; metaphor; cognitive linguistics

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Since its publication in 1954–1955, *The Lord of the Rings* has been widely recognized as one of the defining works of modern fantasy literature (Shippey, 2003). One of the central themes of the trilogy is the sustained representation of morality through the opposition between good and evil, which shapes the narrative and influences the portrayal of its characters (Sullivan, 2013). Rather than presenting moral values in abstract terms, Tolkien repeatedly expresses them through recurring patterns of imagery. Throughout the novel, goodness is consistently associated with light, whereas evil is linked to darkness. These recurrent associations extend beyond individual linguistic expressions to form a coherent conceptual system underlying the representation of morality. They therefore invite investigation not only as literary motifs but also as manifestations of the conceptual structures through which moral meaning is constructed.

Because of its literary and cultural significance, *The Lord of the Rings* has received sustained scholarly attention across a wide range of disciplines. Previous research has examined the trilogy from theological and religious perspectives (de Novaes et al., 2024; Thompson-Handell, 2024), political and philosophical viewpoints (Dunai, 2019; Pridmore, 2025), ecocritical approaches (Morgan, 2010; Habermann & Kuhn, 2011), and literary perspectives (Cossio, 2024a, 2024b; Kielich, 2025). In addition to these literary and interdisciplinary approaches, linguists have investigated *The Lord of the Rings* through stylistic analysis, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, and studies of language use (Kullmann & Siepmann, 2021; Livesey, 2023; Reid, 2009). More

recently, cognitive linguistic approaches have also been applied to the analysis of the novel, particularly in studies of metaphor. Studies specifically addressing metaphor in *The Lord of the Rings* include Kullmann (2013), Podhorodecka (2014), and Sullivan (2013), although only the latter two examine metaphor from cognitive linguistic perspectives. While these studies demonstrate the explanatory potential of cognitive approaches, Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Blending Theory have been applied independently. Consequently, the relationship between conventional conceptual metaphors and fictional blends in the representation of morality remains insufficiently explored.

To address this gap, the present study investigates how morality is metaphorically represented in *The Lord of the Rings* and how Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) jointly account for its representation. Drawing on the complete text of the trilogy, the study analyses metaphorical linguistic expressions related to the representation of morality, with particular attention to those involving light, darkness, and colour. Specifically, it addresses two research questions: (1) How is morality metaphorically constructed in *The Lord of the Rings*? and (2) How do CMT and CBT complement each other in explaining the metaphorical representation of morality in the novel? By integrating CMT and CBT, the study argues that conventional conceptual metaphors establish a hierarchical conceptual organisation that provides the foundation for more complex fictional blends, thereby offering a more comprehensive account of how morality is represented in Tolkien's fictional world.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Blending Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003), views metaphor as a cognitive mechanism rather than merely a rhetorical device. According to this theory, metaphor consists of systematic cross-domain mappings through which abstract concepts (target domains) are understood in terms of more concrete concepts (source domains) (Lakoff, 1993; Kövecses, 2010). These mappings, which are generally conventional, directional, and partial, allow speakers to conceptualize complex notions such as morality, emotion, and time through more familiar bodily and physical experiences. Because conceptual metaphors underlie a wide range of everyday expressions, CMT has fundamentally changed the understanding of metaphor from a linguistic ornament to a central mechanism of human cognition. As it primarily accounts for relatively stable mappings between two conceptual domains, CMT successfully explains many conventional metaphors. This framework is, however, less effective in accounting for novel or highly creative metaphors (Evans, 2007; Kövecses, 2020).

Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), also known as Conceptual Integration Theory, was proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (1994, 1998, 2002) as an extension of Mental Spaces Theory. Whereas CMT explains metaphor through relatively fixed mappings between a source and a target domain, CBT argues that meaning construction often involves the dynamic integration of multiple conceptual structures (Evans, 2007). CBT therefore provides a more suitable framework for analysing creative metaphors whose meanings cannot be fully explained by conventional conceptual mappings alone. Unlike CMT, which takes conceptual domains as its basic analytical unit, CBT adopts mental spaces, i.e. temporary conceptual structures constructed during discourse or reasoning to represent particular situations (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Grady et al., 1999). A typical blending network consists of two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space. The generic space captures the shared abstract structure of the inputs, while the blended space selectively integrates elements projected from the input spaces. Through this integration, the blend develops emergent structure, namely meanings that are absent from any individual input space but arise from their interaction (Grady et al., 1999).

Rather than replacing CMT, CBT complements it. Conceptual metaphors provide stable conceptual correspondences that often serve as inputs to conceptual blending, whereas blending explains how these conventional mappings are elaborated into more creative and context-dependent meanings (Crisp, 2003; Grady et al., 1999). This complementary relationship makes CBT particularly useful for literary analysis, where conventional metaphors are frequently developed into more elaborate conceptual structures. Drawing on both theories, the present study argues that Tolkien first employs conceptual metaphors linking morality with light, darkness, and colour, and subsequently develops these mappings into more elaborate blends. This approach makes it possible to explain not only how goodness and evil are metaphorically conceptualised, but also how these abstract values acquire physical form within Tolkien's fictional world.

2.2 Light, darkness, and colour in the conceptualisation of morality

According to CMT, morality is grounded in embodied experience and is therefore commonly conceptualised through source domains rooted in bodily interaction with the physical world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Among these source domains, vision is particularly salient because it provides one of the primary means through which people perceive, interpret, and evaluate their surroundings. As a result, visual phenomena such as light, darkness, and colour have become important sources for representing moral concepts across languages and cultures. Within this framework, the conceptual metaphors GOOD IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS emerge from recurring patterns of visual experience. Light is typically associated with visibility, safety, warmth, and

clarity, whereas darkness is associated with concealment, uncertainty, danger, and fear. These recurring experiences motivate the conventional association of light with positive moral values and darkness with negative ones (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Colour is closely related to this experiential opposition because colour perception depends on the presence or absence of light. In particular, white and black occupy opposite ends of the light–dark continuum and are conventionally associated with positive and negative moral evaluations, respectively. In the present study, these colour mappings are treated as elaborations of the more general conceptual metaphors GOOD IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS, with white and black providing more specific linguistic and conceptual realisations of the underlying light–dark opposition.

Previous studies have provided empirical support for these conceptual associations. Yu (2022) demonstrates the widespread occurrence of the conceptual metaphors GOOD IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS in everyday English. Likewise, Sherman and Clore (2009) show that white and black systematically influence moral evaluation, with white being associated with moral purity and black with immorality, thereby providing psychological evidence for the conventional association between colour and moral judgement. Together, these studies support the view that light, darkness, and colour function as embodied source domains for the conceptualisation of morality. This theoretical perspective provides the conceptual basis for examining how these embodied conceptual metaphors are realised and elaborated in literary discourse.

2.4 Previous studies on metaphors in *The Lord of the Rings*

Previous studies have examined metaphor in *The Lord of the Rings* from diverse theoretical perspectives, including literary theory, CMT, and CBT. Overall, these studies have demonstrated the importance of metaphor in Tolkien's representation of morality while approaching the phenomenon from different analytical perspectives.

Kullmann (2014) examines metaphor in *The Lord of the Rings* from a literary perspective by drawing on Jakobson's distinction between metaphor and metonymy. The researcher argues that Tolkien combines the metaphorical mode characteristic of fantasy, which expresses abstract ethical concerns, with the metonymic mode of realist fiction, which connects the fictional world to readers' real-world experience through detailed descriptions of landscapes, objects, and everyday settings. This interplay between metaphor and metonymy enables the novel to remain imaginatively fantastic while maintaining meaningful connections with readers' real-world experience. The study, however, approaches metaphor primarily in terms of its literary and communicative functions rather than as a cognitive mechanism. As a result, it does not examine the conceptual organisation of morality or the relationship between conventional conceptual metaphors and more complex fictional representations.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, Podhorodecka (2013) examines linguistic metaphors of evil in *The Lord of the Rings* within the framework of CMT. Specifically, Tolkien's metaphors form an internally coherent system consistent with the conception of evil in his mythology. Central to this system is the opposition between light and darkness, which functions as a pervasive conceptual pattern underlying a network of related metaphors. The analysis further demonstrates how the SHADOW metaphor interacts with ontological, orientational, event-structure, and metonymic mappings to produce a coherent conceptual representation of evil. However, the study remains within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and does not examine how these conventional conceptual structures may develop into more elaborate fictional representations through conceptual blending.

Whereas Podhorodecka approaches Tolkien's metaphors through CMT, Sullivan (2013) examines them mainly through the framework of CBT. The results show that the One Ring is a metaphoric blend derived from the conventional Object Event-Structure metaphor, in which power is conceptualised as a physical object. The study further demonstrates that the same conceptual pattern recurs throughout the trilogy in metaphorical representations of power, authority, responsibility, and the moral evaluation of characters. These recurring patterns consistently differentiate good and evil through contrasting representations of power, responsibility, and object imagery, creating a unified conceptualisation of power and morality across the trilogy. The analysis, however, focuses on explaining fictional blends and their systematic extensions rather than examining how these blends are grounded in broader systems of conventional conceptual metaphors.

Taken as a whole, these studies demonstrate the importance of metaphor in Tolkien's representation of morality from literary and cognitive perspectives. Nevertheless, they tend to examine either conventional conceptual metaphors or fictional conceptual blends in isolation, leaving the relationship between these two levels of conceptual organisation insufficiently explored.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to investigate the metaphorical conceptualisation of morality in *The Lord of the Rings*. It combines CMT and CBT to examine both the conventional metaphors underlying moral representation and their elaboration into conceptual blends.

3.1 Data source

The corpus consists of the complete text of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy published by HarperCollins in 2009, including *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Tolkien, 2009a), *The Two Towers* (Tolkien, 2009b), and *The Return of the King* (Tolkien, 2009c). The entire trilogy was selected in order to capture the full range of metaphorical representations of morality across Tolkien's fictional world rather than relying on a selected sample of passages. The unit of analysis comprises all linguistic metaphorical expressions related to morality, including expressions representing goodness, evil, corruption, moral transformation, redemption, and other morally evaluative concepts. Analysing the complete trilogy makes it possible to identify recurrent conceptual patterns as well as more elaborate fictional representations of morality across the narrative.

3.2 Data collection procedure

Metaphorical expressions were identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) developed by Steen et al. (2010). Unlike the original Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), MIPVU extends the identification process to include not only indirect metaphors but also direct metaphors, such as similes. This broader scope is particularly appropriate for the present study, as similes are frequently employed in Tolkien's depiction of moral qualities throughout the trilogy.

The analysis was conducted by examining individual lexical units in the corpus in accordance with the MIPVU guidelines. For each lexical unit, its meaning in context was determined and subsequently compared with its more basic meaning. A lexical unit was classified as metaphorical when its contextual meaning contrasted with its more basic meaning while remaining interpretable through the comparison between the two meanings. Applying MIPVU to the complete corpus ensured a systematic and transparent identification of morality-related metaphorical expressions for subsequent conceptual analysis.

3.3 Data analysis procedure

The data analysis was conducted in two consecutive stages corresponding to the two research questions.

The first stage examined how morality is metaphorically constructed in *The Lord of the Rings* within the framework of CMT. Following the identification of linguistic metaphors, the data were analysed with reference to Steen's (1999, 2011) five-step procedure to formulate the conceptual metaphors underlying the identified metaphorical expressions. The procedure provided a systematic framework for relating linguistic metaphors to their underlying source-target correspondences through the identification of metaphor-related words and propositions, the establishment of analogical structures, and the reconstruction of cross-domain mappings. Linguistic metaphors exhibiting similar source-target correspondences were subsequently grouped together, from which the underlying conceptual metaphors were formulated to represent the dominant patterns of moral representation in the trilogy.

The second stage investigated how CMT and CBT complement each other in explaining Tolkien's metaphorical representation of morality. Metaphorical representations that could not be fully accounted for by conventional conceptual metaphors alone were further analysed using CBT. The conceptual metaphors established in the first stage served as conceptual inputs for the construction of blending networks. For each representative example, the relevant input spaces, generic space, blended space, and emergent structure were identified to explain how meaning arises through selective projection and conceptual integration. The analysis therefore progresses from linguistic metaphorical expressions to conceptual metaphors and subsequently to conceptual blends. CMT explains the conventional conceptual organisation underlying Tolkien's representation of morality, whereas CBT accounts for how these conventional conceptual structures develop into more elaborate fictional representations.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the metaphor analysis from the perspectives of CMT and CBT. It proceeds in two stages. Section 4.1 identifies the conventional conceptual metaphors underlying the representation of morality in *The Lord of the Rings*, while Section 4.2 examines how these metaphorical structures are elaborated into more complex blends.

4.1 Conceptual metaphors of morality

4.1.1 GOOD IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS

The analysis shows that Tolkien consistently constructs the moral opposition between good and evil through the complementary conceptual metaphors EVIL IS DARKNESS and GOOD IS LIGHT. Darkness is repeatedly associated with Sauron, his servants, moral corruption, and the expansion of evil, whereas light represents goodness, moral integrity, and resistance to corruption.

The association between evil and darkness is established at the very beginning of the trilogy through the Ring Verse:

"One for the *Dark* Lord on his *dark* throne
In the Land of Mordor where the *Shadows* lie." (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 66)

This passage provides one of the clearest instantiations of the conceptual metaphor EVIL IS DARKNESS. Within only two lines, Tolkien repeatedly employs the lexical items *Dark*, *dark*, and *Shadows*, which make darkness the dominant conceptual frame through which Sauron and Mordor are introduced. None of these expressions merely describes physical illumination; instead, *dark* functions metaphorically to represent Sauron's moral corruption. While *dark throne* associates the authority he exercises with negative moral qualities, the reference to Mordor as the land "where the Shadows lie" further projects this conceptualisation onto the space governed by Sauron. The repeated use of darkness-related language therefore constructs an entire moral landscape in which the ruler, his authority, and his realm are understood through the source domain DARKNESS.

Having established this metaphorical framework, Tolkien systematically projects darkness onto increasingly abstract concepts throughout the trilogy. Tolkien refers to Sauron's "*dark thought*" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 73), "*dark mind*" (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 777), the Númenórean rulers who had fallen into "*dark wickedness*" (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 905), and Saruman's "*dark master*" (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 757). Since these expressions do not describe literal physical darkness, the adjective *dark* cannot be interpreted literally. Instead, these expressions instantiate the conceptual mapping from the concrete source domain DARKNESS onto the abstract target domain EVIL, allowing readers to understand moral corruption through the embodied experience of darkness.

The metaphor is further elaborated by presenting darkness as an active force that continually expands its sphere of influence. The narrative states that "*the Shadow grows and draws nearer*" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 314), "*the Shadow has crept northward all about us*" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 453), and "*darkness gathers between us*" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 462). The growth, approach, and movement of darkness represent the increasing political, military, and psychological influence of Sauron. Besides, Frodo imagines "*dark fingers stretching out to seize*" the Ring (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 209), while "*Shadows rose behind and reached out long arms*" (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 552) and "*the dark hands of the East stretch out to take you*" (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 761). These expressions combine the conceptual metaphor EVIL IS DARKNESS with personification, which transforms darkness into an agent capable of growing, reaching, and seizing. The repeated use of metonymy related to body parts such as fingers, hands, and arms further reinforces the image of evil as an invasive force that actively extends its control over Middle-earth rather than merely existing as a static moral condition.

An interesting lexical distinction can also be observed between *Shadow* and *shadow*. Within the metaphorical expressions identified in the corpus, the capitalised form *Shadow* functions as a personified representation for the pervasive influence of Sauron and the forces of evil rather than for physical darkness itself. Expressions such as "*the Shadow grows*" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 314) and "*under his great Shadow*" (Tolkien, 2009a, pp. 67–68) present evil as an expanding force whose influence gradually spreads across Middle-earth. By contrast, the lower-case form *shadow* more commonly refers to localised manifestations of this darkness, as in "*a shadow against the stars*" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 182) and "*the shadows have grown longer*" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 462). Although both forms instantiate the conceptual metaphor EVIL IS DARKNESS, they operate at different levels of conceptualisation: the capitalised form tends to represent the overarching and metaphysical power of evil, whereas the lower-case form more often evokes its concrete manifestations in particular characters, places, or situations.

In contrast, Tolkien consistently conceptualises goodness through the source domain of light. This metaphor is particularly evident in Gandalf's description of Frodo: "*He may become like a glass filled with a clear light for eyes to see that can.*" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 291). Here, *light* does not refer to physical illumination but metaphorically represents Frodo's inner moral and spiritual qualities. The simile compares Frodo to a transparent vessel filled with clear light, suggesting that these qualities may become increasingly perceptible. The adjective *clear* further reinforces this conceptualisation, as clarity conventionally evokes purity and the absence of moral corruption. Likewise, the image of glass highlights transparency, allowing what is within to be revealed rather than concealed. Thus, goodness is conceptualised not merely as light but as light that is clear, visible, and capable of shining through a transparent medium. The experiential properties of light, e.g., clarity, brightness, and visibility, provide the concrete source domain through which Frodo's abstract moral qualities are understood, thereby instantiating the conceptual metaphor GOOD IS LIGHT.

The same metaphor appears in Tolkien's depiction of the remaining moral self within Gollum: "*There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark: light out of the past*" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 53). Here, the contrast between the small opening through which light enters and the surrounding darkness metaphorically represents the conflict between Gollum's remaining moral self and the corrupting influence of the Ring. Rather than suggesting that goodness has disappeared entirely, the image implies that a fragment of his former self remains capable of receiving "light out of the past." Darkness therefore represents the domination of corruption, whereas light evokes the lingering possibility of moral awareness, memory, and redemption. Through this contrast, Tolkien once again instantiates the conceptual metaphor GOOD IS LIGHT, portraying moral goodness not as completely extinguished but as temporarily obscured by the pervasive influence of evil.

This moral opposition is resolved after the defeat of Sauron: "Awake! The *shadow* is gone and [...] all *darkness* is *washed clean*!" (Tolkien, 2009c, p. 1136). The disappearance of shadow and the cleansing of darkness metaphorically represent the removal of evil and the restoration of moral order rather than a simple change in illumination. The verb *washed* additionally associates evil with contamination, suggesting that darkness is something from which the world must be cleansed before peace can be restored. The passage therefore combines EVIL IS DARKNESS with MORAL RESTORATION IS CLEANSING. The trilogy therefore begins with the emergence of darkness in the Ring Verse and concludes with its removal, completing a coherent conceptual system in which the conflict between good and evil is consistently structured through the opposition between light and darkness.

Overall, these examples demonstrate that GOOD IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS constitute the primary conceptual framework through which Tolkien represents the moral opposition between good and evil. By systematically mapping the perceptual experience of light and darkness onto abstract moral values, Tolkien enables readers to understand goodness, and corruption through embodied experience. This conceptual system is further elaborated through the recurrent use of colour metaphors, particularly the opposition between white and black, which is discussed in the following section.

4.1.2 Colour elaborations of GOOD IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS

The analysis indicates that colour terms do not constitute an independent metaphorical system in Tolkien's moral universe. Instead, white and black function as semantic elaborations of the more fundamental conceptual opposition between GOOD IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS. Whereas light and darkness provide the primary experiential basis for conceptualising moral values, colour further specifies these values by assigning them visually salient qualities. In other words, whiteness and blackness do not introduce new conceptual mappings but strengthen and refine the existing moral meanings associated with light and darkness.

The colour black consistently functions as a marker of moral evaluation. Tolkien repeatedly modifies abstract concepts with the adjective *black*, referring to "a *black* traitor," "a *black* evil" (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 616), and "the *black* arts" (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 886). These expressions are particularly significant because *traitor*, *evil*, and *arts* possess no inherent colour. Blackness therefore cannot be interpreted literally but serves to intensify their negative moral evaluation. Rather than simply identifying betrayal or evil, Tolkien presents them as the darkest manifestations of moral corruption. In this way, the adjective *black* specifies the degree of evil already conceptualised through darkness, transforming a general moral judgement into a more vivid and emotionally salient image. The same mechanism operates in "a *black shadow* seemed to pass like an arm above him" (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 523), where blackness amplifies the threatening nature of the shadow itself. Darkness already signals evil; blackness further heightens its intensity, making the danger appear more immediate and oppressive. Colour thus functions not as a new source domain but as a semantic intensifier of the conceptual metaphor EVIL IS DARKNESS.

The role of white differs in an important respect. Rather than intensifying moral evaluation, whiteness renders positive moral qualities visually perceptible. This pattern appears in descriptions of Galadriel, the Elven Lady of Lothlórien, and Éowyn, the noblewoman of Rohan, who are compared to "a *white* daffadowndilly" (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 888) and "a *white* flower standing straight and proud, shapely as a lily" (Tolkien, 2009c, p. 1134), respectively. Although both comparisons employ the imagery of white flowers, their metaphorical force emerges from the interaction between floral imagery and the colour white. Through these comparisons, Tolkien foregrounds qualities of purity, moral excellence, and incorruptibility rather than merely the characters' physical appearance. Whiteness therefore functions as a visual specification of the positive moral values already conceptualised through light. Rather than introducing a new conceptual mapping, white serves as a colour elaboration of GOOD IS LIGHT, giving concrete visual form to the positive moral values already associated with light.

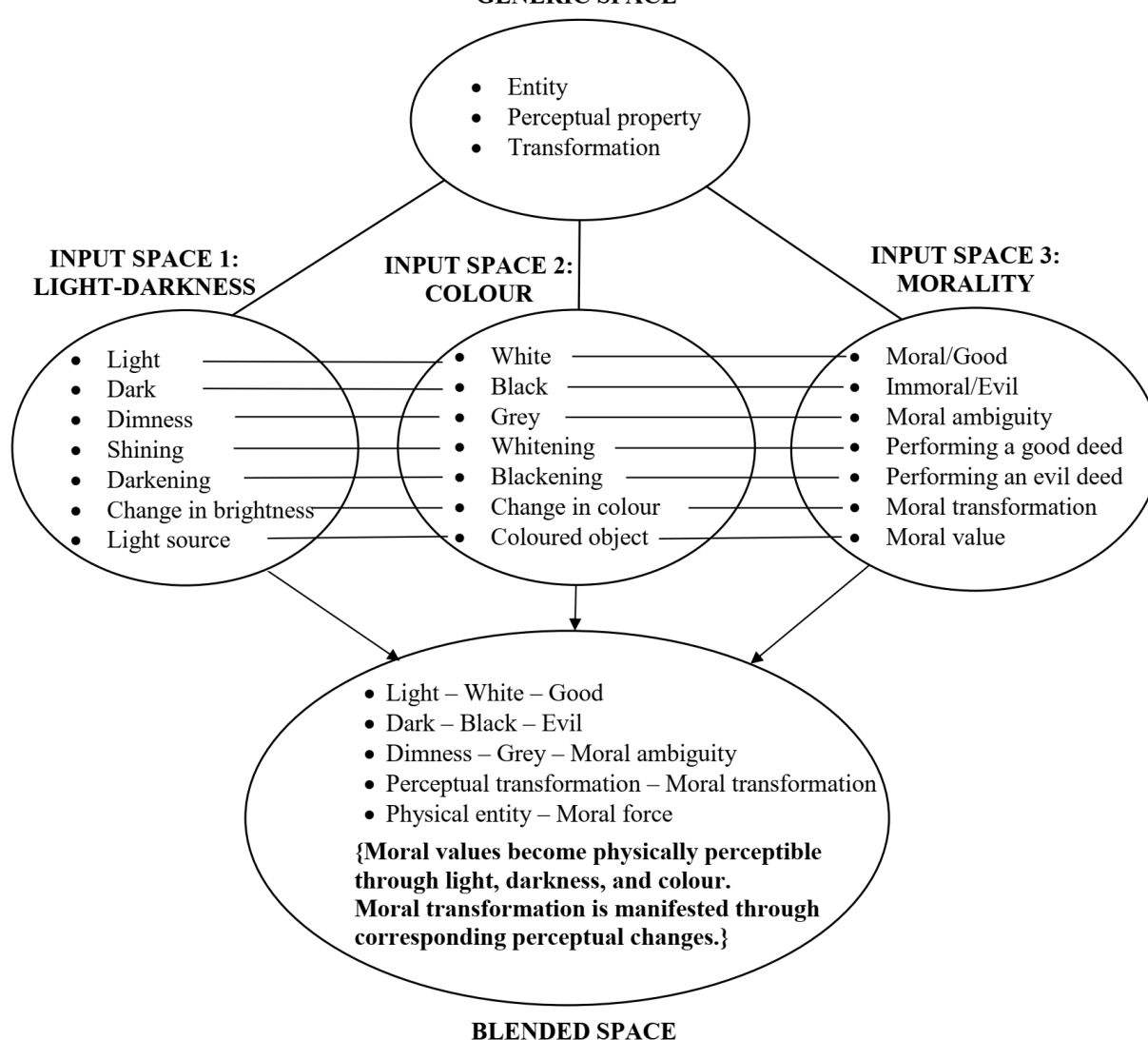
An asymmetry can therefore be observed between the metaphorical functions of black and white. Black primarily serves an evaluative function by intensifying moral corruption and emphasising the destructive nature of evil. White, by contrast, serves an idealising function by foregrounding purity, nobility, and moral excellence. Despite these functional differences, both colours remain conceptually dependent upon the broader opposition between light and darkness. Black derives its negative associations from darkness, while white inherits its positive associations from light. Colour consequently operates as a secondary level of metaphorical elaboration, refining rather than replacing the underlying conceptual system established in the previous section. Overall, the findings suggest that Tolkien constructs moral meaning through a hierarchical metaphorical organisation. At the most fundamental level, the experiential opposition between light and darkness structures readers' understanding of good and evil. At a more specific level, the opposition between white and black elaborates this conceptual framework by assigning visible colour attributes to the moral values already established through light and darkness.

4.2 Conceptual blends of light, darkness, and colour

Although the conceptual metaphors analysed in the previous section account for the dominant patterns in the corpus, they cannot fully explain a number of more complex representations in which light, darkness, and colour are realised as physical properties of characters and objects. In these cases, moral values are no longer conceptualised merely through metaphorical mappings but emerge through the integration of multiple mental spaces. Such representations are more adequately explained by CBT.

Figure 1 presents the multiple-scope blending networks proposed for the present analysis. The network integrates three input spaces representing morality, light/darkness, and colour. Through selective projection and integration, these inputs generate a blended space in which perceptual properties such as light, shadow, whiteness, and blackness become inseparable from the moral identities of fictional characters and objects. Consequently, goodness and evil are not merely understood through metaphorical mappings but are experienced as physically embodied in characters or materialised in objects within Tolkien's fictional universe.

Figure 1. Multiple-scope blending networks for morality, light, and colour



The following sections examine two major manifestations of this blending process identified in the corpus, including embodied morality and materialised morality.

4.2.1 Embodied morality

In this manifestation, moral identity is physically realised through the appearance of fictional characters. Unlike the conventional conceptual metaphors MORALITY IS LIGHT and MORALITY IS COLOUR, where light and colour merely function as source domains for understanding abstract moral concepts, the blended space fuses the three input spaces of morality, light, and colour

into a single conceptual structure. As a result, perceptual properties such as brightness, whiteness, darkness, and blackness are no longer symbolic descriptions of morality but become inherent physical characteristics of characters themselves. Moral identity is therefore directly observable through characters' physical appearance in Tolkien's fictional world.

This blending process is clearly illustrated in the portrayal of Gandalf after his return as Gandalf the White:

"His hair was *white as snow in the sunshine*; and *gleaming white* was his robe;" (Tolkien, 2009b, tr.645)

"Before him stooped the old figure, *white, shining now as if with some light kindled within*, [...]" (Tolkien, 2009b, tr.653)

Rather than simply describing Gandalf as morally good through metaphor, these passages present his moral nature as inseparable from his physical appearance. His white hair, white robe, and radiant body are literal features within the fictional world, while simultaneously expressing his purity, wisdom, and moral authority. In blending terms, the perceptual properties projected from the light and colour spaces are integrated with Gandalf's moral identity to produce a blended representation in which physical whiteness and inner goodness constitute a single conceptual entity. The source of light is likewise internalised, "some light kindled within," suggesting that moral virtue originates from within the character rather than being externally attributed. Consequently, goodness is not merely understood through light; it is embodied as light.

The opposite side of the same conceptual blend is represented by the Nazgûl, Sauron's most feared servants:

"Frodo and Sam staring at the sky, [...], saw it come: a small cloud flying from the accursed hills; a *black shadow* loosed from Mordor; a vast shape winged and ominous." (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 823)

"three or four tall *black* figures were standing there on the slope, looking down on them. So *black* were they that they seemed *like black holes in the deep shade* behind them." (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 255)

In these examples, darkness and blackness likewise function as literal physical properties rather than metaphorical descriptions. In other words, the Nazgûl are not merely associated with darkness; they literally exist as black shadows and even as "black holes" that absorb the surrounding light. The blend therefore integrates the perceptual absence of light with the complete loss of humanity and moral corruption. Darkness becomes the very substance of their existence, making evil visually tangible within the narrative world.

Overall, Gandalf and the Nazgûl demonstrate how conceptual blending transforms conventional metaphorical correspondences into embodied fictional realities. In the blended space, outward appearance and inward morality become inseparable, which allows readers to perceive ethical identity through visible bodily characteristics rather than infer it through metaphor alone.

4.2.2 Materialised morality

While embodied morality concerns the fusion of moral identity with the physical appearance of characters, materialised morality involves the projection of moral qualities onto material objects and physical substances. Within the blended space, light and colour no longer merely describe moral values but become tangible entities that can be possessed, transmitted, fragmented, or manipulated. Moral force is therefore conceptualised as a material phenomenon capable of existing independently of human agents.

This phenomenon is exemplified by the Phial of Galadriel, a crystal vial presented to Frodo by Galadriel before the Fellowship departs from Lothlórien. Filled with the light of Eärendil's star, the Phial does not simply symbolise hope or goodness; rather, it literally contains light as a physical substance capable of illuminating darkness and resisting evil. Within the blending network, the integration between the light space and the moral space produces a blended object in which moral power is materialised as a visible and powerful source of light that can be possessed, carried, and deployed within the fictional world. This materialisation is particularly evident when Frodo and Sam are trapped in Shelob's lair. Facing the giant spider in complete darkness, Frodo raises the Phial in an attempt to resist the creature:

"Slowly [...] he held aloft the Phial of Galadriel. For a moment it *glimmered, faint as a rising star* struggling in heavy earthward mists, and then as its power *waxed*, and hope grew in Frodo's mind, it began to *burn*, and *kindled to a silver flame*, a minute heart of *dazzling light*, as though Eärendil had himself come down from the *high sunset paths* with the last Silmaril upon his brow. The darkness receded from it, until it seemed to *shine* in the centre of a globe of airy crystal, and the hand that held it *sparkled with white fire*." (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 942)

In this example, light functions as a tangible physical force that can be possessed, carried, and deployed to transform the surrounding environment within the fictional world. As the Phial shines more intensely, darkness physically recedes while Frodo regains the resolve to continue resisting evil. The blended space therefore integrates physical illumination with moral resilience into a single experiential reality. Goodness is no longer conceptualised through light; it exists as light.

The material agency of this blended light is further demonstrated when Shelob's eyes are overwhelmed by its brightness:

"One by one they dimmed, and slowly they drew back. No *brightness* so deadly had ever afflicted them before. From sun and moon and star they had been safe underground, but now *a star had descended* into the very earth. Still it approached, and the eyes began to quail." (Tolkien, 2009b, p. 944)

Rather than merely representing moral goodness, the Phial's light actively participates in the conflict between good and evil. It possesses agency: it advances, overwhelms darkness, and forces Shelob to retreat. The object therefore does not simply signify moral power but exerts it. Through conceptual blending, the physical properties of light and the abstract values of goodness are integrated into a single material artefact whose physical function and ethical significance are inseparable. Consequently, moral force is experienced not as an abstract concept but as a tangible reality capable of affecting both characters and the fictional environment.

A contrasting manifestation of materialised morality appears in the portrayal of Saruman's robe. Originally the leader of the Istari and known as *Saruman the White*, Saruman gradually abandons his former moral alignment in pursuit of power. This moral transformation is reflected in his rejection of the title *the White* and his declaration that he is now *Saruman of Many Colours*:

"I looked then and saw that his robes, which had seemed *white*, were not so, but were woven of *all colours*, and if he moved they shimmered and changed *hue* so that the eye was bewildered." (Tolkien, 2009a, p. 337)

Unlike Gandalf, whose whiteness embodies a stable moral identity, Saruman's robe presents a fragmented spectrum of colours that continually shifts and refracts. Within the blending network, the morality space contributes Saruman's moral transformation, while the colour space contributes the perceptual transformation from white to a multiplicity of unstable colours. Through selective projection, these elements are integrated into a blended representation in which perceptual transformation corresponds directly to moral transformation. Consequently, the robe does not merely symbolise corruption; it materialises Saruman's altered moral state, allowing readers to perceive moral change through visible changes in colour. This therefore instantiates the emergent structure illustrated in Figure 1, in which moral transformation becomes perceptible through changes in light and colour.

Overall, the analyses of embodied and materialised morality instantiate the emergent structure illustrated in Figure 1. Whether realised through fictional characters such as Gandalf and the Nazgûl or through material objects such as the Phial of Galadriel and Saruman's robe, moral values become directly perceptible through light and colour. Rather than merely functioning as conceptual metaphors, light and colour are integrated with moral values into blended structures that render abstract ethical meaning physically accessible within Tolkien's fictional world. This demonstrates that CBT extends the explanatory scope of CMT by accounting for the emergence of blended structures in which moral values become directly perceptible through light and colour.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined how morality is metaphorically represented in *The Lord of the Rings* by integrating CMT and CBT. Drawing on the complete trilogy, it analysed metaphorical expressions associated with morality to explain both the conceptual organisation underlying Tolkien's moral imagination and the cognitive processes through which these conceptual structures are elaborated into fictional representations.

The analysis demonstrates that Tolkien systematically constructs morality through the embodied experiential opposition between light and darkness. The conceptual metaphors GOOD IS LIGHT and EVIL IS DARKNESS constitute the primary conceptual framework underlying the representation of moral values throughout the trilogy, while the opposition between white and black functions as a more specific conceptual elaboration of this broader experiential contrast rather than as an independent conceptual metaphor. These findings indicate that Tolkien's moral universe is grounded in conventional embodied conceptualisations that enable abstract moral values to be understood through perceptual experience.

The study further shows that conventional conceptual metaphors alone cannot fully explain the more elaborate representations of morality found in Tolkien's fictional world. Through CBT, moral values are shown to become physically embodied in fictional characters and materialised in objects, producing conceptual structures that extend beyond conventional source-target mappings. The analysis of embodied morality and materialised morality demonstrates how conventional conceptual metaphors provide the conceptual inputs for fictional blends in which abstract ethical values become directly perceptible within the narrative world.

The principal contribution of this study lies in demonstrating, through a systematic analysis of *The Lord of the Rings*, how CMT and CBT can be integrated to explain the construction of moral meaning. Although previous research has recognised the theoretical compatibility of the two frameworks, this study shows how conventional conceptual metaphors concerning morality provide the conceptual foundation for the construction of conceptual blends in Tolkien's fictional world. Rather than functioning as competing approaches, CMT and CBT explain different but interconnected levels of meaning construction. Whereas CMT

accounts for the embodied conceptual organisation of morality through conventional metaphorical mappings, CBT explains how these conceptual structures are elaborated into more complex blends in which moral qualities become materially embodied in characters and objects. By integrating the two frameworks, the study offers a more comprehensive cognitive account of moral representation in *The Lord of the Rings*.

This study is subject to certain limitations. The analysis is confined to *The Lord of the Rings* and focuses specifically on metaphorical representations of morality associated with light, darkness, and colour. Other conceptual domains involved in Tolkien's representation of morality remain beyond the scope of the present research. Future studies may extend the analysis to Tolkien's other works, examine additional source domains associated with morality, or compare Tolkien's metaphorical conceptualisation of morality with that found in other works of fantasy literature. Such research would contribute to a broader understanding of how conventional conceptual metaphors are developed into complex fictional conceptualisations across literary traditions.

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