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SAURON AS GORGON AND BASILISK

It is surprising how little has been written on the Lidless Eye in *The Lord of the Rings*. After all, imagery of the Eye is ubiquitous and it is the only form in which the arch-antagonist, Sauron, manifests himself. Sauron *is* the Eye. Besides, Sauron's Eye is his most important means of attack, and nearly all his other weapons are connected with it. The Ring is a conduit for the Eye's power and is felt as an eye by its keeper (I, 43)¹ long before the connection is known. The Ringwraiths were originally drawn to the Eye by means of similar rings and have, in effect, become lesser Eyes under Sauron's domination; they are the only other beings in the trilogy said to have "lidless eyes" of their own apart from Sauron (II, 302). All of Sauron's various slaves have the Eye marked either upon their armor (I, 18), their banners (III, 164) or their bodies (III, 198). These facts suggest that the Eye somehow represents the essence of the evil forces at work in the trilogy. Perhaps most of Tolkien's critics have found the Eye's role too overt and unambiguous to require much analysis. Yet, like many obvious things, it can profit from a closer look. In the trilogy Sauron's Eye works to produce two separate effects: the Gorgon effect and the Basilisk effect. Examination of this can enrich our understanding of the trilogy.

On the one hand, Sauron's Eye insinuates a vision upon his victims which it is fatal to *see*; that is, it is destructive to interpret the world in its terms. On the other hand, it is fatal to *be seen by* the Eye, that is, to be both physically and psychologically comprehended by Sauron. It is easier to explain how these operations are distinct, and yet complementary, if we say that Sauron is a literary descendant of both the Gorgon and the Basilisk. Although the properties of these two mythological creatures have been nearly conflated by modern writers such as Edward Gifford,² who is chiefly interested in studying the Evil Eye, they were originally distinct. It was fatal to *see* the Gorgon; it did not matter whether the Gorgon was aware of the viewing. On the other hand, it was fatal to meet the eye of the Basilisk; sometimes the Basilisk's eye could be fatal even when the victim was unaware of it. The early myths concerning these creatures make this clear.

The sight of the Gorgon turned the beholder to stone, a power which is closely analogous to Sauron's power to freeze and paralyze the imaginations of his victims. The Gorgon's power is attached not just to her eyes, but to her whole head and face, and most especially to her snaky locks. Ovid calls her head, "the spoil of the viperous monster" (*viperei . . . spoliium . . . monstri*)³ and "the face haired with dragons (or serpents)" (*crinita draconibus ora*);⁴ and he says that her victims are "statues changed from themselves by the sight of Medusa" ("*simulacra . . . ex ipsis visa conversa Medusa*").⁵ What did the Gorgon's petrification represent in psychological terms? In classical times

Medusa herself and Gorgon poison were associated with several kinds of madness—war madness and love madness among them⁶—and perhaps the petrification she caused represents the subjective shock which the perception of a world unbalanced imposes on a sensitive mind. In Christian times another kind of madness, the madness of despair, became more important, and Dante Alighieri, in his *Inferno*, uses the terror of the Gorgon's sight to dramatize this state.

Dante is in danger of seeing the Gorgon (Medusa's head) in Canto IX when he and Virgil are trapped before the City of Dis through the obstinacy of the fallen angels who will not let them through on their divinely ordained journey. Meanwhile, the snake-headed furies appear on the walls and call to one another:

“Vegna Medusa: sí 'l farem di smalto”
dicevan tutte riguardando in giuso:
“mal non vengiammo in Teseo l'assalto.”

“Let Medusa come and we will turn him to stone,” they all cried, looking down; “we avenged ill the assault of Theseus.” (*Inferno* IX, 52-54)

Virgil is exceedingly alarmed by this threat, as Dante reports:

“Volgiti in dietro e tien lo viso chiuso;
chè se il Gorgòn si mostra e tu'l vedessi,
nulla sarebbe del tornar mai suso.”
Cosi disse 'l maestro; ed elli stessi
mi volse, e non si tenne alle mie mani,
che con le sue ancor non mi chiudessi.

“Turn thy back and keep thine eyes shut, for should the Gorgon show herself and thou see her there would be no returning above.” My Master said this and himself turned me round and, not trusting to my hands, covered my face with his own also.⁷

How can Medusa be so dangerous as to render necessary these fourfold barriers to her sight, any one of which would normally suffice: Virgil's hands over Dante's hands, Dante's hands over his own eyes, his eyelids closed, and his whole body turned away from her? Could the Gorgon really annul the overwhelming power of God's mercy, which has given Dante permission to travel through all of Hell unharmed? Since no external power could defeat God, Medusa must somehow have been able to operate on Dante's psychology to prevent him from seeking or receiving God's mercy. (Dante notes in the *De Monarchia* that not even God can pardon an unrepentant sinner.)⁸ Wallace Fowlie suggests that looking on Medusa's face produces disbelief in the reality

of God.⁹ H. F. Tozer wrote in more detail about the vision conveyed by the Gorgon:

The Furies represent the recollection of past sins, and the Gorgon's head which turns men to stone is the despair produced by recollection, which permanently hardens the heart.¹⁰

But however this alienating vision of despair is described, its impact is instantaneous. Entering through the unwary eye, it immediately transmogrifies the imagination, so that it can perceive only a distorted universe, uncurable and uncheered by any hope of salvation. For it is a *distorted*, not a true, vision of evil which the sight of the Gorgon conveys; this is amply demonstrated when Dante finally encounters Lucifer, source of all evil, at the base of Hell. If a true vision of evil could cause psychological destruction, it is here, rather than above, that we would expect it. However, the gigantic, ruinous figure of Lucifer is planted firmly in the center of the earth and cannot escape. Dante looks his fill and even climbs up against the body without suffering ill effects, demonstrating that in true perspective, evil (however ugly) is limited, overcome, bound in place and (once Dante has passed it) wrong side up. Hence, Medusa must represent the vision, not of evil as it is, but evil as evil sees itself and as it wishes to be seen, in isolation from divine love, horribly distorted and suffering, but also all-encompassing. That is why the vision can be equated with imaginative and spiritual death and why it would keep Dante in Hell forever.

Such is also the vision of the world as Sauron sees it, and as his Eye, with its conduits, the Rings and other instruments of sorcery, such as the Morgul blade, attempts to impose upon his victims, and eventually on all of Middle Earth. True, the Gorgon aspect of Sauron's vision is not communicated instantaneously as in the older myth. There is the possibility for some resistance as it is insinuated a little at a time; nevertheless, the vision itself, once fully established, has the same effect as the Gorgon-vision: to freeze the imagination permanently in an attitude of despair and alienation.

Sauron's vision for Middle-earth is most graphically portrayed in the actual environment of Mordor and the "desolation," which Frodo and Samwise first see in all their horror at Cirith Gorgor, outside the valley of Gorgoroth. These lands are "defiled, diseased beyond all healing" (II, 239). But even before Sauron succeeds in transforming all Middle-earth along these lines, his Eye has a Vision of its own which looks upon the same world which the Free Peoples do and sees something quite different. This is both his weapon of attack and his chief weakness, for it prevents him from guessing the actual strategy which the Council of Elrond has devised against him; he perceives all the parts of it which have to do with lust for sadistic power, but not those which deal with sacrifice, loyalty and compassion. "[T]he only measure he knows is desire, desire for power, and so he measures all hearts," says Gandalf (I, 282).

So, indeed, he measures the whole world, and such is the vision he seeks to impose upon his victims. We see Frodo afflicted by this most vividly when he is made to perceive Bilbo (I, 244) and, then, Samwise (III, 188, 214) as despicable creatures utterly enslaved to their desires for the Ring of Power. Until that last moment on Mount Doom he never quite loses his ability to withdraw from this perception and reassume his own, but as the story advances, it becomes harder and harder for him to do so. Others are likewise afflicted. The deeper Gollum, Saruman, Bilbo and Samwise fall into Sauron's power, the more they too see the world in his despairing light: the only realities are mastery and slavery; one either controls and torments slaves, or is controlled and tormented by a master. When all is complete, there will be no vitality left for such peripherals as abundance, beauty or delight. Nor will there be pleasant comradeship when, as the Barrow-wight puts it, "the Dark Lord lifts up his hand/over dead sea and withered land" (I, 252).

We see the operation of the Eye in spreading this vision most intimately through the mind of Frodo. Before Frodo puts on the Ring on Weathertop, the true place of Sauron's creatures in his natural vision is made quite clear; apart from their menace they are vague and felt most as an absence or a deficiency rather than a presence:

[F]our or five tall 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. Frodo thought that he heard a faint hiss as of venomous breath and felt a thin piercing chill. Then the shapes slowly advanced. (I, 207)

But when Frodo puts on the Ring at the urging of the Eye, their properties are revealed:

Immediately, though everything else remained as before, dim and dark, the shapes became terribly clear . . . There were five tall figures . . . In their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helmets of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel. Their eyes fell on him and pierced him, as they rushed towards him . . . The third was taller than the others: his hair was long and gleaming and on his helmet was a crown. In one hand he held a long sword, and in the other a knife; both the knife and the hand that held it glowed with a pale light. (I, 208)

To natural sight the wraiths are not even visible. Within the Vision of Domination they are luminescent with their own vitiated light. The attributes displayed reveal strength and power (they are tall; the leader is the tallest and wears a crown), force of will (their eyes pierce Frodo) and menace (they are merciless; they carry weapons). They also display attenuation, almost weariness. Their faces are "white", their light is "pale", their "hairs" are grey

and their hands are “haggard”. They have been able to maintain enough reality in the physical world to be a terror and a threat. Nothing else remains to them, not even pleasure in the event of their triumph. Should they succeed in converting all Middle-earth to their use, they would be no more contented than the Barrow-wight, in whose cry, “The night was railing against the morning of which it was bereaved and the cold was cursing the warmth for which it hungered” (I, 152).

After the Morgul wound, Frodo is drawn more and more into Sauron’s vision, so that the natural world begins to fade to him and “all the woods and the land about [him] receded into a mist” (I, 225). Only wraiths remain “dark and solid” (I, 225). Analogously, as he approaches Mordor, even his memory of his pleasant past fades and only the “wheel of fire” (III, 181) representing both the Ring and Eye, remains. However, it is not the end of him in either case. It is possible to resist, as Frodo does by crying the names of Luthien and Elbereth (II, 226) at the Ford. It is also possible to rebound out of the vision, as Frodo does at the end of the trilogy after he is rescued. The only way for the Gorgon-vision to gain permanent ascendancy over him is for him to give up his creative struggle against it (which he never does) or for him to be discovered by the Eye within this vision and “pinned” “under its deadly gaze, naked, immovable” (II, 238). For this the Basilisk effect is required.

In distinction to the Gorgon, the Basilisk can kill with a glance. Eye to eye contact is most deadly,¹¹ although in medieval versions it was not necessary. The powers of the Basilisk were always analogous to those of the human bearer of the evil eye, or *fascinator*. The fascinator could hurt with an evil look. Awareness of the look on the part of the victim is not necessary; however, it obviously helped.¹² In classical times the powers of human fascinators to harm without a victim’s awareness of a glance was explained by the visual ray; in medieval times the help of demons accounted for it. Eye to eye contact, however, had a psychological resonance not included in the powers of the indirect glance: through it evil people were able to feed painful thoughts directly into the minds of their victims. The Inquisitorial tract of the late 1500s, *Malleus Malificarum*, explains the mechanism:

[T]he mind of a man may be changed by the influence of another mind. And that influence which is exerted over another often proceeds from the eyes . . . [I]f anybody’s spirit be inflamed with malice or rage . . . then their disturbed spirit looks through their eyes . . . And so it may happen that some angry and evil gaze, if it has been steadfastly fixed and directed upon a child, may so impress itself upon that child’s memory and imagination that . . . he may lose his appetite and be unable to take food, he may sicken and fall ill.¹³

The despair induced by contact with the Basilisk-like fascinator may not be utterly unlike the despair induced by the vision of the Gorgon, with one important distinction: the Gorgon *is* what she conveys to the consciousness,

and need only *be* in vision in order to convey it, but the Basilisk-fascinator schools his mind to *inflict* a particularly concentrated dose of hatred or rage (which may not be permanently a part of *his* consciousness, at least to the same degree) upon his victim's imagination. Sauron both *is* the despair of his vision and *inflicts* it deliberately on others.

But eventually the idea of control was added to the original power of the Basilisk-fascinator to harm. Roughly at the time hypnotism was discovered, the power of *fascination* (exercised both by Basilisk and human) was associated with it and regarded as the power of certain animals or people to control "by their eyes the movements of intended victims".¹⁴ In other words, *fascination* came to be associated more with the subtle destructiveness involved in intimate psychological control than with simple destructiveness (however psychologically mediated). This view of the Basilisk powers most closely approximates Sauron's use of them. In his position as Dark Lord over all within the Vision of Domination, Sauron wishes to stand in the relation of hypnotist to his victim. As hypnosis is explained in one treatment intended for laymen:

The hypnotized individual *appears to heed only the communications of the hypnotist*. He seems to respond in an uncritical, automatic fashion, *ignoring all aspects of the environment other than those made relevant by the hypnotist*. Apparently *with no will of his own*, he sees, feels, smells, and tastes in accordance with suggestions *in apparent contradiction to the stimuli that impinge upon him*. (Italics mine)¹⁵

Sauron, too, wishes to cut off his victims from all perception except that of the reality he endorses, the Gorgon-vision of Domination. But to bring other beings to this state, he needs *both* his Gorgon powers *and* his Basilisk powers. Neither can succeed in isolation. We have already seen how Frodo, though hurt by the Gorgon-vision, rebounds from it; besides, even were a being conquered by the Gorgon powers into accepting the Vision of Domination, unless quelled by the Basilisk effect, he might conquer Sauron and replace him as Dark Lord. This is the fate Gandalf and Galadriel fear for themselves (I, 70-1; I, 381-2). Similarly, Sauron cannot win with just his Basilisk powers. As we see during the "encounter" on Amon Hen, Sauron's Eye cannot "see" his victims effectively unless they are psychologically within his vision; he loses Frodo when Frodo takes off the Ring (I, 417). Pippin emerges unenslaved and with very little psychic damage from a direct encounter with the Dark Lord *via* Palantir (II, 199), even though that device had been an important means in corrupting Saruman; Denethor, though badly damaged by the same means, remains undominated, and Aragorn actually wrests the stone temporarily from Sauron's control (III, 53), so strong is his grip on his own vision.

The fact that the Eye's power is not completely irresistible, that it cannot control those who are not within its own vision, gives the trilogy much of its

psychological and moral complexity. Tolkien is testing the limits of free will perceived in conjunction with modern ideas about the mind and mind-control. Genuinely unwilling victims cannot be hypnotized, and subjects of hypnotism cannot be compelled to do things which are actually against their principles. However, uncomfortable questions arise as to how an unwilling subject can be identified (one who *says* he is unwilling is apparently not always unwilling) and how one can be certain (without being hypnotized) just how strong one's principles about certain matters really are. But when Sauron's victims can be induced to accept his vision, these factors simply do not come into play. When they see things as Sauron does, there is no longer any moral conflict; they cannot perceive the Dark Lord as wrong, only as more powerful than themselves, if they meet him. Nothing he requires can be against their principles, because there is no hope of betterment and all beings, including themselves, are seen as evil and disgusting and lusting for power. They have no further reason to oppose Sauron.

Hence, if they are to resist Sauron, the Fellowship must determinedly avoid not only accepting Sauron's vision, but also meeting Sauron, especially while in the grips of his Gorgon-vision. Then indeed can an encounter with the Eye render both the vision and domination permanent; then the Eye really can "pierce all shadows of cloud, and earth, and flesh, and . . . see you: to pin you under its deadly gaze, naked, immovable" (II, 238). Hence the first step in resisting Sauron's Basilisk effect is resisting the Gorgon effect which his Ring, his servants and the environment he creates all tend to foster. Tolkien's main characters take this strategy in hand vigorously, and the inner struggle it causes in them when they are under attack is vividly dramatized.

Sauron's ability to insinuate his vision into the imaginations of the Free Peoples (the Medusa effect) seemingly cannot be stopped. He apparently can (at least when aided by Ring or Palantir) reach into the unconscious, bypassing the will, and rearrange its contents, surprising Frodo with images from his own distorted world. That is how Frodo suddenly finds himself interpreting the world in Sauron's terms and unable to help it for the moment; this begins immediately in "The Shadow of the Past" when the Ring presents itself to him as too desirable to be destroyed (I, 70), long before he begins to see his dear friends Bilbo and Samwise in the forms Sauron gives them. However, as Tolkien says, "A man is not only a seed . . . ; a man is both a seed and in some degree also a gardener, for good or ill",¹⁶ and his characters do not take this interference passively. Instead they consciously root up the seeds of the false vision implanted in their minds and seek insight into the Vision of Harmony in an attempt to overcome it. So Frodo successfully shakes off the false Bilbo and Samwise images and is reconciled to their true personalities. Indeed, since the ultimate Vision of Harmony in Frodo's world, the pattern of the universe as created by God, must somehow be reconcilable to the experience of evil and sorrow, Frodo's struggles against this effect result in his true insight being increased. He is able to grow in understanding despite Sauron's inroads into

his mind, so that at the Fords he perceives Glorfindel, as well as the Riders (I, 235), and when he reaches Lorien, he is able to perceive the Elven Ring (of whose location Sauron is as yet uncertain) on Galadriel's hand (I, 382), while it remains invisible to Samwise.

However, Frodo later loses ground. Sauron can marshal many forces to batter the minds of his enemies in order to gain the "assent" they must give to his Gorgon-vision before he can dominate them (the Basilisk effect). In the most advanced stages, the conflict between what Sauron is trying to make of his victims and what they are trying to make of themselves becomes so intense that two distinct personalities emerge. The most obvious example of this is the character of Sméagol-Gollum, who, years after being mastered by the Ring and succumbing to the Gorgon-effect, is drawn somewhat back into the Vision of Harmony by Frodo's kind and gracious treatment. His "Sméagol" and "Gollum" personalities have separated so fully that they argue out loud with each other. Though the division is never as complete, Frodo also begins to develop two separate personalities, "free" Frodo, who adheres to the Vision of Harmony, and "Sauronic" Frodo who capitulates to the Gorgon-vision of domination on Mount Doom. The first clear manifestation of the latter is in the scene on Amon Hen where, sensing that the Eye is trying to find him, Frodo hears two inner voices and is unsure which one really represents himself. "He heard himself crying, *Never, never!* Or was it: *Verily I come, I come to you?* He could not tell." (I, 417)

In this scene, Gandalf's telepathic intervention sets him free to recognize himself, but the conflict grows more intense as he approaches Mordor. The thicker and faster the psychic blows fall, the harder it is for Frodo to muster his creative powers, and the more the Medusa effect wins by default. Because he carries the added burden of the Ring, Frodo is not only deprived (like Sam) of beautiful things in his environment to encourage the Vision of Harmony, but also of the memory of those he has already seen. He mourns, "As I lay in prison, Sam, I tried to remember the Brandywine, the Woody End, and The Water running through the mill at Hobbiton. But I can't see them now." (III, 195)

Later he admits that he is "naked in the dark". For a time, Frodo continues on sheer will; however, with the Medusa effect so far advanced, inevitably he comes to see the world more and more as Sauron does. In the scene where Frodo confronts Gollum before Mount Doom, the "Sauronic" personality certainly is in control, as Frodo's language and Sam's perceptions show:

"Down, down!" [Frodo] gasped, clutching his hand to his breast, so that beneath the cover of his leather shirt he clasped the Ring. "Down, you creeping thing, and out of my path!" . . .

Then suddenly, as before under the eaves of the Eryn Muil, Sam saw these two rivals with other vision. A crouching shape, scarcely more than the shadow of a living thing, a creature now wholly ruined and defeated, yet filled with a hideous lust and rage; and before it stood stern, untouchable now by pity, a figure robed in white, but at

its breast it held a wheel of fire. Out of the fire there spoke a commanding voice.

“Begone, and trouble me no more! If you touch me ever again, you shall be cast yourself into the Fire of Doom.” (III, 221)

Apparently Frodo has acceded to Sauron’s Vision. With full knowledge of what it means, he is using Sauron’s power, the power of the Ring, to control Gollum. His attitude, the viewpoint from which the holder of power is stern and pitiless and its subject dehumanized and called a “creeping thing”, has nothing to do with the Vision of Harmony and everything to do with the Sauron’s distorted vision, the Medusa effect. Even the apparent whiteness of Frodo’s garments helps build the picture because within the false vision, the Nazgul also appear in “white and grey” (I, 226).

On the other hand, a close analysis of this passage will show that the “free” personality is still there at the back of Frodo’s mind and still has some input. Frodo is still determined to go on to the Crack of Doom. He no longer knows quite why, but grandly declares, “On Mount Doom, doom shall fall.” The “free” personality has kept the focus on Mount Doom while allowing the Sauronic one to perceive the achievement of the goal as a personal triumph rather than the consummation of a sacrifice. Again the pronouncement that Gollum would fall into the Fire indicates a strong intention on the part of the submerged “free” personality that the Ring should fall there, and the Sauronic personality, not able to expunge the intention altogether, gives it some release by applying it to Gollum. The “free” personality still manages to apply it obliquely, through the words omitted but implied in the utterance: “you shall be cast *yourself* [like the Ring] into the Fire of Doom.” Thus Gollum’s death is made contingent upon his continued wicked behavior, which satisfies the “free” personality, and the Sauronic personality is pleased at this first opportunity actually to use the Ring for domination, for it impresses a command as powerful as post-hypnotic suggestion on the reluctant, but subject mind of Sméagol-Gollum. (Frodo has already twice threatened to use the Ring in such a way—II, 248; 296—but this is the first time he actually does.) In this way, the “free” Frodo wins a side-swiping victory over the “Sauronic” personality at this moment, even though it seems to lose the direct clash at the Crack of Doom. However, the earlier, indirect victory achieves the quest since in accordance with the earlier command imprinted on Gollum’s mind through the Ring, Gollum does stumble and fall into the Crack of Doom after he has bitten off Frodo’s finger with the Ring.

The direct instrumentality of the Ring in its own demise has not been noted before, though Gollum’s has, and others have remarked on the providential element in this development; as Spacks says, “an act of virtue has become part of Fate”¹⁷ because Gollum would not have been alive to attack Frodo if he, Bilbo and Sam had not all been compassionate enough on several occasions to spare him, even though he was ungrateful and obviously dangerous. The

providential power can, as Spacks says, certainly be detected at key points throughout the trilogy and the main characters depend on it to help them in what otherwise is said to be an apparently hopeless conflict of the gentle and weak against the cruel and strong. The Free Peoples attribute apparently fortuitous coincidences such as Bilbo's finding the ring (rather than an Orc) (I, 65) and Pippin's looking in the Palantir (rather than Gandalf) (II, 200) to its operations. However, providence in the trilogy evidently prefers to keep its interventions as subtle and as closely attuned to the wills and personalities of its allies and enemies as possible, the better to permit the intentions and labors of the Fellowship to carry the quest as far as they can by themselves, and for the self-destructiveness of evil to be as clearly manifest as possible. So despite the important providential element in the conclusion, it is well not to ignore the effect of the final blows struck by the "free" Frodo personality even as it is, at last, being choked by the Sauronic one on Mount Doom.

Such is Tolkien's portrayal of Sauron's attack. He has endowed the idea of fascination with a new complexity by linking the vision of the potential victim to the vision of the Basilisk-fascinator and making them complementary. The Medusa-vision can be resisted, and if it is resisted successfully, resistance to the Basilisk-domination is also possible. The freedom of the individual to struggle creatively to realize his own insights even in a society which is almost completely lost, and to strike decisive blows against the fascinator even on the edge of his own collapse, adds depth, as well as hope, to the previously rather deterministic myth of the fascinator. Indeed, Tolkien's version of the fascinator is linked to one of the deepest fears of the twentieth century—a vision of totalitarian domination in which ideas and behavior are imposed upon individuals from the outside, leaving them no chance for resistance. Naturally anything which offers hope is seized upon eagerly. No wonder the trilogy had such great appeal for young people when it first came out. May it continue to enthrall them for years to come, and may they not forget its message.

Gwyneth E. Hood

Notes

1. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, collector's edition, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), Book I, line 43. All subsequent references to the text are included by Book and line numbers.
2. Edward S. Gifford, *The Evil Eye: Studies in the Folklore of Vision*, (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 65.

Gifford speaks of the Gorgon as if she were simply one more possessor of the Evil Eye. That is why, he reasoned, images of her (the gorgoneion) were so popular as charms against the Evil Eye. Images of the eye, after all, were and still are used against the Evil Eye. (I have one which was brought to me from Turkey.) However, various other charms are also useful, and it is just as reasonable to assume that the

Gorgon was an effective charm against the Evil Eye because she was dangerous to stare at.

3. Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso), *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller, (London: Heineman, 1951), 2 vol., Book IV, line 615.
4. *Ibid.*, Book IV, line 771.
5. *Ibid.*, Book IV, line 781.
6. Vergil (Publius Vergilius Maro), *Aeneid*, ed. by R. D. Williams, (London: Macmillan, 1973).

In the *Aeneid*, Allecto is infected with Gorgon poisons (“Gorgoneis . . . infecta venenis,” Book VII, line 341). She drives Amata and Turnus mad with hate so that they will oppose Aeneas. In one version of the Medusa myth, told by Ovid, Medusa received her hideous form as punishment for using the temple of Minerva as a site for a passionate assignation (Book IV, lines 774–803), which suggests love-madness. A quotation by Xenophon also suggests some associations in Greek minds between the petrification caused by Medusa and love-madness:

It is no wonder that the Greek historian Xenophon (c. 430–355 B.C.) treasured a warning he received from Socrates and set it down in the *Memorabilia*. “O fool,” said Socrates, “do you not think that beautiful persons instil some poison into their lovers which you see not? Do you not consider that this animal, which they call beautiful and in its bloom, is so much more terrible than the Tarantula, since the latter by actual contact, the former not even touched—nay, even if one should behold it from a long distance—instils some charm so potent as to cause madness? . . . And I advise you,” said Socrates, “when you see a beautiful person to retreat without once looking behind.” (Gifford, p. 181)

7. Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia: The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. by John D. Sinclair, 1936; (rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), Canto IX, lines 55–60.
8. Dante Alighieri, *The De Monarchia of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. by Aurelia Henry, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), Book III, Chap. VIII.
9. Wallace Fowlie, *A Reading of Dante's Inferno*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 71.
10. Rev. H. F. Tozer, *An English Commentary on Dante's Divina Commedia*, (rpt. New York: Cooper, 1975), p. 49.
11. Pliny the Younger (C. Plinius Secundus), *Naturalis Historia*, Venetis 1469, (Courtesy of the British Museum. Landmarks of Science, Reodex Microprint, 1975: New York), Book VII, Chap. 21.

The Historie of the World—commonly called, “The Naturall Historie of C. Plinius Secundus”, trans. Philemon Holland (d. 1637), Londini 1601, (Courtesy of Science Collection, University of Oklahoma. Landmarks of Science, Reodex Microprint, 1975: New York).

Note: anyone wishing to consult Holland's translation should be aware that its book numbers are consistently one greater than those in the Latin text I have used, and the chapter numbers correspond fairly well, but not exactly.

12. In the original classical myth the mechanism of the Evil Eye was partly explained by a scientific belief in a visual ray; it was believed that an effluence actually went out of the eye and mingled with the effluence proceeding from an object in order for vision to be possible. (See A. C. Crombie, *Augustine to Galileo: The History of Science*

A.D. 400-1650, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1953, p. 17.) Poisonous objects gave off poisonous effluences and poisonous animals gave off poisonous visual rays.

In the original myths these are just two of the ways in which the Gorgon and the Basilisk shed their poison. Ovid recounts that blood dripping from Medusa's head falls onto the sands of Libya and causes it to generate poisonous snakes (see Ovid, note 3, Book IV, lines 614-620); polyps are hardened to coral not from *seeing* the Gorgon's head, but from coming into contact with it.

As for the Basilisk, as Pliny says (see Pliny, note 11, Book VII, Chap. 21):

[N]ecat frutices non contactas modo verum et afflatas exurit: herbas: rumpit saxa: talis vis malo est: creditum quondam ex equo occisum hasta et per eam subeute vi, non equitem modo, sed equum quoque assumptum.

He kills not only the shrubs which he touches, but also the ones he breathes on, and burns up grass and herbs. He breaks boulders apart, so great is his power to harm. It is believed that at one time, [a basilisk] was killed from horseback by means of a spear, and its power, having climbed [the spear], consumed not only the horseman, but also the horse.

As for human fascinators, Pliny records that those who could cause illness or death with their eyes tend to have poison all throughout their systems and can also kill with their speech and their sweat (Pliny, note 11, Book VI, Chap. 2). They were more dangerous when angry, either because anger was regarded as a kind of poison or because it increased the effluence. Thus, it is easy to see that a glance from a fascinator, being poisonous, could injure even someone who was unaware, but eye to eye contact would be more effective, since the eye is also intended to receive visual rays and would be more apt to absorb the poison.

The 10th-century Arabian mathematician, Alhazen (965-1039), is given credit for teaching that "visual rays pass not from the eye to the object, but from the object to the eye," in which opinion he was followed by Averroes (1126-ca 1196) (See H. W. Hofstetter, *Optometry: Professional, Economic and Legal Aspects*, (St. Louis: C. V. Mosby, 1948), pp. 21-22) and Roger Bacon (1214-1294), who made a distinction between the operation of seeing, brought about by the eye's reception of light rays, and the psychological act of looking, which can be thought of as going out of the eyes (see Crombie, p. 76). Nevertheless, folk belief in the visual ray lingered much longer than that.

13. *Malleus Malificarum*, compiled by James Sprenger and Henry Kramer, trans. by Montague Summers, 1928, (rpt. New York: Benjamine Blom, 1970) p. 18.
14. See "Fascination," *Encyclopedia Americana*. (New York, 1953).

The heading "fascination" has been dropped from the most recent editions of the *Encyclopedia Americana*. As best I can tell, this view of "fascination" gained ascendancy during or after Mesmer's century (the 1700s), at which point it was applied retroactively to the Basilisk and other snakes and to certain gifted people. In the medieval bestiaries, the power of the Basilisk was still to kill instantly, nor was the power to control rather than simply to injure. It would seem, then, that this concept of subtle psychological domination is a relatively modern phenomenon. But in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, "fascination", according to this definition, was observed in the animal kingdom (see Fredrick Thomas Elworthy, *The Evil Eye*,

(London: John Murray, 1858; rpt. New York, Julian Press, 1958) p. 43), and literary examples of it are not hard to find. Two relatively well-known ones are the witch Geraldine in Coleridge's "Christabel", whose eyes are compared to a snake's (see Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Christabel", *The Portable Coleridge*, ed. by I. A. Richards (New York: Viking Press, 1950), pp. 105-127) and the title character of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, whose power to control victims with his eyes is likened to that of the Basilisk (see Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, 1879, (rpt. New York: Dell, 1965), p. 63).

15. *Ibid.*, *Encyclopedia Americana*, "Hypnosis".
16. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. by Humphrey Carpenter, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981) p. 240.
17. Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Power and Meaning in *The Lord of the Rings*", in *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, ed. by Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 88.