“October creeps into my heart and I can’t force it out.”
—Grace Burgett, pg. 40

“However, if evil must be fought against, it must take something outside of oneself to defeat evil.”
—Alexander Hurla, pg. 49

Non-Fiction Essay Winners Included
Live Ideas: Undergraduate Primary Texts Journal

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Organizational and Management Failures of the Challenger Tragedy

MaKenna Eilert

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First Place Winner – Nonfiction Essay Competition

Keywords: NASA, Challenger, Space, Tragedy
The failure of the Challenger was a horrific tragedy within an administration that was blind to its wrongdoings. In its creation in 1958, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), had no intention of permitting administrative evil to prosper within their organization. Administrative evil refers to the characteristic “that ordinary people within their normal professional and administrative roles can engage in acts of evil without being aware that they are doing anything wrong” (Balfour, et al. 4 XIV). NASA’s original goal was to develop technology to rival that of the Soviets’ first satellite, Sputnik I. Then, in May of 1961, President John F. Kennedy directed NASA to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade (NASA Created). Shortly after, NASA accomplished this goal through their Apollo 11 mission, allowing Neil Armstrong to be the first man to set foot on the moon. Once the race to the moon was over, NASA progressed in space exploration, but not without experiencing fatal setbacks.

The interest and support for the NASA program decreased significantly after their victory in the space race. The organization no longer had the attention of the American people. NASA had completed one of the greatest feats of mankind, how could they possibly outdo themselves now? As a result, NASA formulated the idea of a new space shuttle that would bring to light “a whole new way of space flight” (Romzek 231). Through this change, NASA was able to secure the support of President Richard Nixon in 1972. For this reason, the organization was now reliant on political accountability and maintaining general support to guarantee their continued existence. Under Nixon, the organization became just another domestic program, transforming into an agency centered on commercial-like enterprise instead of individual and time-sensitive program goals. Under these circumstances, crucial information was suppressed to keep up with the demands and expectations of the program. While the direct cause of the Challenger tragedy was a technical error, the true issue stems from the management and organizational failures within NASA itself.

The two key constraints that accelerated the road to the Challenger tragedy were budget cuts and privatization. By the mid-1970s, NASA’s budget was cut in half, leading to a 40% staff cut, including a 71% cut in safety and quality control staff (U.S. Congress 176-177). With this new budget, the agency was forced to conserve its assets, focusing on efficiency and saving money while attempting to maintain the same outcomes as its previous budget. To accomplish this, NASA utilized contractors to design and build the Challenger space shuttle. Specifically, they contracted the Morton Thiokol company for their design of the solid rocket boosters (SRB) due to its substantial cost advantage.
However, NASA engineers in the 1970s described the design as “unacceptable” (Balfour 87). Concerns were raised again in 1977 and 1978 by NASA engineers due to its design flaws. Not only did the contracting allow for a serious design flaw to be overlooked, but it allowed a destructive hierarchy to proliferate throughout the agency (Romzek 232). A contract lays out clear responsibilities and deadlines, allowing those at the top of the hierarchy to push for improved performance. These more ‘efficient’ measures discourage deference from top management in acknowledging expert opinion when something is dysfunctional or underdeveloped. The new hierarchical arrangement resulted in drastic changes in methods of accountability throughout the agency.

Another cause of administrative failure in the Challenger tragedy was political pressure. As stated by William Richter and Frances Burke in *Combating Corruption, Encouraging Ethics: A Practical Guide to Management Ethics*, “…politics and administration are not two mutually exclusive boxes, or absolute distinctions…they are two closely linked pieces of the same process” (Richter 36). This connection is displayed through the relationship
between politics and the NASA Challenger tragedy. Through the shuttle program, NASA gained federal funding to support their endeavors, but not without increased political accountability. To maintain funding, the agency now had to cater to the political realm, specifically the President, Congress, and the media. These pressures included high expectations for a fully operational system while abiding by a strict budget in the shortest amount of time possible. As a result, NASA created a highly unfeasible schedule of events that eventually overwhelmed the administration. The external pressures and political relationships caused management at NASA to underreport its issues and setbacks.

Before the budget cuts and increased political pressures, NASA used a professional accountability system to ensure the success of their projects and missions. Within this system, there is a relationship between a layperson and an expert. To be successful, however, complete deference to the expert is essential. They have the knowledge necessary to understand how to get the job done, and done well (Romzek Table 1). Experts within NASA were authorized to make decisions based on their profession. In its inception, NASA managers “knew the spacecraft from the ground up” and if “an order to launch came down from on high, they wouldn’t do it without first giving everybody the bottom line” (Henry S. F. Cooper, 93). As can be seen, the original professional accountability system utilized by NASA allowed the true experts control of project activities.

Due to these pressures, NASA began to reconstruct their accountability methods into a more bureaucratic fashion. Their new system emphasized position over expertise (Romzek Table 1). More specifically, the division of management now resembles a hierarchy, which causes problems in project coordination. As explained by Richter and Burke, hierarchical accountability allows superiors to “remove subordinates from office, constrain their tasks and room for discretion, and adjust their financial compensation” (Richter 43). In NASA’s case, the top management grossly underestimated project costs and overestimated outcomes. Superiors under this system pushed for increased production to meet deadlines without taking into account the associated dangers. All in all, this new system allowed NASA to ignore a fatal flaw in the system in order to meet budgetary restrictions and satisfy political pressures.

Negligence in the construction of the Challenger space shuttle design caused its ultimate demise. From a technical standpoint, the reason for the failure of the Challenger was the erosion of the O-rings of the Solid Rocket Boosters (SRB) (Presidential Commission). O-rings are “rings of synthetic rubber designed to seal a gap in the aft field joint of the shuttle” (Vaughan 3). They are essentially a larger version of the O-ring used in a
faucet. These rings did not do their job and allowed hot gas to exit the SRB and enter the primary fuel tank, causing the explosion (Allen, et al. 2). Authors Dan- ny Balfour, et al. said, “...the Presidential Commission noted: ‘The space shuttle’s Solid Rocket Booster problem began with the faulty design of its joint and increased as both NASA and contractor management (Thiokol) first failed to recognize it as a problem, then failed to fix it, and finally treated it as an acceptable flight risk’” (Balfour 88). The issue caused by the O-rings was not an isolated incident and could have been prevented. The emphasis on political and bureaucratic responsi-
bility eclipsed professional accountability from experts.

The problems began at the beginning of the project, through the shuttle program contractor, Morton Thiokol. Originally, NASA had rejected the design for the Solid Rocket Boosters, but ultimately accepted the bid to maintain their budget. Many red flags took place after this decision, but the first was that of the failure of the O-rings in a previous shuttle launch. During this launch, an unexpected cold front blew in the night before. The frigid temperatures affected the rubber within the O-rings, making them less flexible and less likely to seal properly or fast enough to prevent the hot air from escaping (Robison 62). Consequently, it led to the failure of this test launch. Unfortunately, these same weather conditions transpired on the eve of the Challenger launch, leading to its failure.

In response to the failed test launch, engineers at Morton Thiokol neglected to transfer this information correctly to engineering experts, a fatal flaw supported by their new hierarchical accountability system. This system “reduced the cross-cutting communication channels which once characterized the less hierarchical and flexible matrix structure at NASA” (Romzek 233). There was a hierarchy of people (supervisors) given the information on the issue before telling the people (experts) who could address it. In fact, according to Barbara Romzek and Melvin Dubnick in Accountability in the Public Sector: Lessons from the Challenger Tragedy, “The company’s management did not want to jeopardize their relationships with NASA. As a result, rather than emphasizing deference to the experts who worked for them, Morton Thiokol deferred to the demands of NASA’s top managers who, in turn, were under a self-imposed, politically derived launch schedule” (Romzek 233). The “top management” being referred to is that of the Marshall Space Center. Their management had responsibility for launch decisions and reporting mistakes and errors, without the knowledge or expertise on how the shuttle actually works. Then, as deadline pressures increased, there was intense reluctance from “top management” to be the one who threw a wrench in the plans. Through this belief, those at Marshall felt a sense of competition between themselves and the other centers. Their center could not suggest that anything was going wrong, or that they may be inferior in any way. In effect, lower-level managers handled situations as best they could without notifying higher-ups.

The issue of the O-ring was a detrimental piece of the Challenger puzzle that fell through the cracks of the NASA administration. After the completion of the tenth shuttle mission in 1984, Morton Thiokol again noted and reported on the incident occurring with the O-ring design of the shuttle. It was then determined
that the eleventh shuttle would not be launched until the issue was further examined. However, this examination never took place and was simply swept under the rug. As explained in *Accountability in the Public Sector: Lessons from the Challenger Tragedy*:

“A decision was made to launch the shuttle, but not before it was determined by the Associate Administrator, James Abrahamson, and NASA’s Deputy Administrator, Hans Mark, that the 0-ring problem had to be solved. A meeting to discuss the problem with relevant officials from the different NASA centers was called for May 30. It was a meeting that would have drawn attention to the technical factor that would later cause the shuttle tragedy; it was a meeting that never took place. By May 30, Abrahamson had left the agency to work on President Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative, and Deputy Administrator Mark cancelled the meeting to visit Austin, Texas, where he was being considered for the position of University Chancellor. Abrahamson’s successor, Jesse A. Moore, was never informed of the problem, and Mark’s successor was not appointed for a full year. Thus, the 0-ring problem was never communicated to the relevant experts for action” (Romzek 234).

In summary, this situation was the direct outcome of a failed bureaucratic system within an organization. The system prioritized the progress of the project over the potential failure of the project.

Along with the blatant disregard for concerns regarding the safety of the Challenger space shuttle, there were major flaws in the “facts” created within NASA. To explain, NASA assessed the probability of a shuttle crash to be that of 1 in 100,000. This estimate is shown to be incredibly improbable when placed next to the assessment done by the air force. Their probability of a shuttle crash was found to be 1 in 35 (Balfour 85). These numbers vary in major respects and further show the administrative failures within the system before the Challenger tragedy even happened.

These administrative shortcomings were foreshadowing a more major issue within the agency. NASA was having difficulties in launching the space shuttles within the oftentimes unrealistic deadlines they created to stay within budgetary constraints and external pressures. To compensate for their faults, managers at NASA would adjust the flight criteria on the space shuttles to ensure they launch on time. These shuttles are often not completed on time with the necessary adjustments to guarantee the highest safety report. As stated by Richard Feynman, Nobel Prize winning physicist and member of the Presidential Commission
on the Challenger, “In these situations, subtly, and often with apparently logical arguments, the criteria are altered so that flights may still be certified in time. They, therefore, fly in a relatively unsafe condition; with a chance for failure of the order of a percent (it is difficult to be more accurate)” (Balfour 85). The management at NASA understood that the risk for failure would increase, but they had a wildly inaccurate probability due to their calculative failings. In short, these organizational deficiencies greatly increased the possibility of a tragic accident.

Additionally, NASA deals with what has been coined as the “many hands” problem (Richter 6). There are so many pieces to the space shuttle program puzzle that it is easy for people to disconnect themselves from their role in the Challenger tragedy. As a larger organization, NASA’s employees can get lost in the mindset of the machine. They are just a simple piece to the much bigger puzzle and their actions could not greatly affect anything. Namely, this mentality is seen directly from the Thiokol engineers themselves. When asked about the lack of com-
munication about the O-ring problems to the Program Manager of the National Space Transportation System, the manager of the SRB Project answered: “that he believed it was an issue that had been resolved at his level in the organization” (Romzek 234). This lack of responsibility to see the problem through ultimately led to the destruction of the Challenger.

Technical rationality also played a crucial role in the outcome of the Challenger space shuttle. As explained by Danny Balfour, et al. in *Unmasking Administrative Evil*, “Technical rationality underlies a way of thinking and living (a culture) that emphasizes the scientific-analytic mindset and the belief in technological progress” (Balfour, et al. 4). This state of mind is what allows for administrative evil to develop, most notably covered by a mask. The mask is usually a state of unawareness of the wrongdoings one is partaking in. In the case of the Challenger, employees were actively rejecting the true nature of reality to look through the technical lens of their creation. The facts and figures they were following were nowhere near correct, but the numbers came from a technical standpoint so therefore they were legitimate in their eyes. Technical rationality paired with organizational issues helped lead the Challenger space shuttle down the path of ruin.

There are many ways in which NASA could have decreased the probability of the Challenger tragedy. Never-
found to not be accomplishing their job adequately, they will accept the consequences, whether that be a strict reprimand or fired from their job. All things considered, the key to NASA’s continued success is the return to the professional accountability system with deference to the experts within the organization.

Second, launch criteria should not be considered flexible under any circumstances. In allowing higher-ups the ability to change this criterion, you are allowing for administrative evil to continue. When there is no accountability to the requirements of safety, there is little communication about the pitfalls of the shuttle itself. Without proper identification of the problems, and to the right people, the issue will not be fixed and therefore continue to persist. In this case, the issue carried on until multiple human lives were taken. The O-ring situation should not have been allowed to get that far. To ensure the safety and security of all future space shuttle launches, the launch criteria should be entrusted to the hands of the individuals who know the shuttle from the inside out. These people should also be a part of a team that works together to ensure nothing is missed or skipped over. They can be held accountable for issues that were overlooked should they arise on launch day and cause harm to individuals. Also, launch dates should not be seen as the end all be all deadlines. The specification of a certain date for launch might encourage faster working, but it does not guarantee that the work is accurate or acceptable. The launch date should be viewed as an anticipated time frame for launch instead of a due date. When the launch date is nearing, the shuttle should be assessed for its weaknesses. Then, based on this information, the shuttle launch date should be adjusted to ensure sufficient work is being done.

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The Unrecognized Green Wave: Environmental Policy and Political Currents in 21st Century Brazil, Uruguay, and Bolivia

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junior | political science

Second Place Winner – Nonfiction Essay Competition

Keywords: environmental policy, Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia, energy, political
The governing bodies of Latin America, a region rich in natural resources, respond diversely to the effects of mining, carbon-emissions, underdevelopment, and a myriad of other environmental issues important to the livelihoods of many citizens. Likewise, a range of political ideologies with their corresponding political parties in power prioritize different policies and projects across the region. In the 21st Century, three specific cases—Uruguay, Brazil, and Bolivia—underwent infrastructural changes in energy, food production, and conservationist aspects of environmental policy. These changes were applied by governing parties of different ideological currents. Some were part of a political phenomenon known as the “Pink Tide”: a name given to center-left and left-wing governments that came to prominence at the turn of the century.

Environmental politics is often overlooked when studying the “Pink Tide”; thus, the concept of an unrecognized “Green Wave” is presented. Through an analysis of Bolivia, Uruguay, and Brazil in terms of their environmental policies, how they affected the population, as well as other social, economic, and political factors, a relationship in methods and policies can be found. This relationship focuses on policies and governments that implemented environmental and energy reforms alongside important social reforms, including the protection of ecosystems and of indigenous and rural populations. Political currents and political history are also studied.

Latin America’s history with environmental thought begins with the belief systems of indigenous Americans, many of whom hold land to be sacred. Many in the region still live in very traditional ways, working the fields and living in towns and villages with limited to no state help. In 2019, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean reported that the percentage of people in extreme poverty – those living without basic necessities like water and shelter – rose to 10 percent (Giraldo 2019). In 2018, the UN concluded that around 18 percent of Latin America’s population lived in rural areas (UN 2018). After the large-scale propositions for land reform and redistribution throughout the 20th century, environmental policy in Latin America was renewed for the 21st century. Traditional dynamics and ways to create, administrate and distribute energy and food were modified. More importantly, environmental consciousness mixed with the nationalization and modernization of certain industries aimed to protect ecosystems, local industries, and economic wellbeing.

Brazil

Brazil, which holds approximately 58 percent of the Amazon and the largest economy in Latin America, applied various environmental policies since the turn of the century. Under ex-president
Lula da Silva, Brazil underwent changes to promote social equality and protect its natural environment. Lula, who governed from 2003 to 2011 with the ‘Partido dos Trabalhadores’ (PT) or the Worker’s party, left office with a nearly 80 percent approval rating according to various polls. The PT would continue to govern in the executive until 2016, gradually losing support due to corruption scandals. In 2018, ex-military officer Jair Bolsonaro was elected president after more than a decade of left-wing coalition control in the executive. Bolsonaro was elected with the Social Liberal Party, a conservative neoliberal party. Amidst the campaign process for the election, ex-president Lula, who was hoping to run against Bolsonaro, was arrested for alleged corruption charges concerning an apartment he received while in office. In November 2019, Lula was released from prison due to a supreme court decision.

Lula’s terms as head of state were exemplified by several policies concerning food production, energy, and environmental protection. His food program ‘Zero Hunger’ aimed to end food insecurity by investing in agriculture. Lula lifted more than 20 million Brazilians out of extreme poverty in eight years by helping small farm owners access seeds and credit lines. Through this policy, the lives of the people in rural areas changed for the better. Policies toward land use included
the ‘expansion of protected areas that recognize ethnic communities, to promote historical justice and social inclusion, and to help fulfill carbon mitigation targets... expansion of production areas, including small farms, agribusiness and extractive activities, to meet increased national and international demand; and... infrastructural development to promote regional integration and energy generation, and to facilitate transport of primary goods’ (Castro, 2014, 235).

However ‘rapid expansion of agribusiness... caused impacts on both protected areas and peasant territories’ (Castro, 2014, 238). Though a participatory and active approach toward the environment was a critical part of Lula’s political and social thought, energy demands and industrial development conflicted with the conservationist focus prevalent among the left in Brazil. Still, reduced income inequality and national economic growth accompanied the important environmental focused policies.

When current president Bolsonaro was elected, there was a turn in policy decisions concerning the environment. Economic growth through deregulation in multiple industries was the administration’s focus. In his first year in office, fires in the Amazon increased by 84% according to the National Institute for Space Research. His campaign promised to dismantle environmental governmental programs, and even get rid of the environmental ministry altogether. Having gained international criticism for his actions, Bolsonaro retracted some of his antagonism for environmental programs. Embodying a militaristic nationalism, epitomized by a defense of Brazil’s period of military dictatorship in the previous century, Bolsonaro aimed to empower conservative values and individual liberties. His policies pushed for higher gun ownership and an expansion in land available for the extraction of minerals. Meanwhile, he supported the cutting of funds for environmental education, spoke out against climate change, and opposed that certain lands should be reserved for indigenous and rural peoples, as was happening in Lula’s presidency. The political context in Brazil is bound to become lively again as Lula, now a free man, is set to compete in the upcoming 2022 presidential elections against a probable Bolsonaro reelection campaign.

**Uruguay**

Uruguay, governed by the left-wing Broad Coalition Party for 15 years, underwent tremendous advancements in the 21st century. Achievements included reducing its carbon footprint and transition to renewable energy. These came with improvements in the life of the poorest sector of the country and improvements in the average citizens’ standard of living. Alongside other economic and social factors were an improved partnerships between the public and private sectors,
policies protecting the LGBT+ community, the legalization of abortion, and the legalization of cannabis for recreational use. Overall, human development increased.

This achievement was grounded in an environmental policy that runs on a supportive regulatory strategy that Ramon Mendez, former head of energy, said was key to Uruguay’s energy transformation. A change of focus and infrastructure, to export energy instead of importing it, prompted economic growth. “We used to be reliant on electricity imports from Argentina, but now we export to them. Last summer, we sold a third of our power generation to them.” Melendez has said (Watts 2015). Uruguay now produces over 50% of its total energy from renewable sources; most European countries have only achieved about 15-20% (Watts 2015). Uruguay’s electricity is also made up of over 90% clean energy.

The negative consequences of this transformation have been minimal, without an increase of price in common goods. The actions taken by the Broad Front Coalition (Frente Amplio), constituted of several parties in Uruguay’s political sphere such as the Socialist Party of Uruguay, The Christian Democratic Party, and other Social-Democratic groups, have made this possible. The presidencies of Jose Muji-
ca, who governed from 2010 to 2015 and Tabare Vasquez, who ruled as head of state for two terms, between 2005-2010 and 2015-2019, were crucial in this process. Mujica was an advocate for environmental regulations on mining and taxes, yet, like Lula in Brazil, faced criticism for his stance that mining was necessary to diversify an economy (2014). The Broad Front lost the 2019 presidential election by less than one percent of the popular vote, giving way to a right-wing neoliberal government led by the National Party.

Bolivia

Bolivia, governed in large part by ex-president Evo Morales since 2006, has applied progressive environmental and energy policies throughout multiple election cycles. Morales belongs to the Party for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo–Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos), a party that was started to organize and protect rural farmers. A big focus of the Morales administration was keeping the surplus profits of important industries in Bolivia, rather than being taken by foreign multinational companies. He nationalized industries such as oil, gas, and electricity, seeking higher economic growth and autonomy. Morales was reelected three times, including in 2019, where under an alleged suspicion of voter fraud, he was pushed out by the military. In 2020, the Party for Socialism reclaimed the presidency and the legislature through a general
election allowing Morales to safely return to Bolivia after exile in Mexico.

Under Morales, Bolivia, historically one of the poorest countries in Latin America, became an international representative for environmental policy, carrying out infrastructural changes that, like Brazil, lifted citizens out of extreme poverty by developing food production and, like Uruguay, transformed to cleaner energy. Unlike Brazil, however, Bolivia managed to achieve permanent institutional political change. The country’s constitution was established during the first Morales administration, promoting among other things, a secular and ‘plurinational’ country representing all citizens; the latter being a feature adopted by Ecuador as well in their constitutional process.

Morales achieved being the first indigenous leader of Bolivia, a country which has always been largely indigenous. Generational conflicts were resolved in historic ways, though in subsequent terms Morales would also be criticized much like Lula. Regardless, Bolivia and Morales were regarded as successful figures in environmental and social politics, bringing electricity to 66% of rural homes, as well as calling for an international climate court of justice, a statement that was celebrated around the world by environmentalists. Morales was also able to cut deforestation by 64% from 2010 to 2013 and achieve a claim that Bolivia ‘emits 0.01% of the world’s greenhouse gases while its trees clean 2% of the world’s carbon dioxide, resupplying that as oxygen’ (Coha 2018).

**Conclusion**

The 21st Century has witnessed Latin America instantiate different versions of social democracy, socialism, conservative neoliberalism, and other political movements. Analyzing the progress of Bolivia, Brazil and Uruguay throughout the 21st Century, certain similarities and differences are detailed. Political movements and governments that empowered and benefited its citizens in rural regions were more likely to create environmental regulations and policies for the wellbeing of the land, and of indigenous people, as in the case of Bolivia and Brazil. Social Democratic (Uruguay, Brazil) and Socialist (Bolivia) governments advocated for social wellbeing with progressive environmental policies, though with different approaches to the economy. This relationship is shared with Morales, Mujica/Vasquez, and Lula in contrast to a case of conservative liberals like Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Finally, a timeless problem even the most successful Latin American governments have, apart from intraparty power struggles and international economic market complexities, is the conflict between advocating for the development of industry in order to alleviate social and economic inequality, and the conservationist focus on protecting land and ecosystems from contamination, over-extraction,
and overall degradation from industry. This may be a problem in other parts of the world where a political ideal based on ecology and environmentalism is attempted. Nonetheless, the examples provided open up a realm of political thought which may contribute to the ongoing debate over how to advocate for and apply environmentalist policies in our hemisphere.

**Work Cited**


Cold Wars and Rumors of Cold Wars
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Third Place Winner – Nonfiction Essay Competition

Abstract

This essay explores the tendency to compare Washington’s growing competition with Beijing within the context of the Cold War. This trend has also been applied to the heightened tensions between the US and the Russian Federation. The essay will explore why the Cold War is a poor example to use as a comparison, and why the current geopolitical competition may prove to be both safer in some ways, but more dangerous in others.

Keywords: Russia, China, History, War, USA
Cold wars are all the rage these days. Op-ed pages across the world warn of an imminent cold war between the United States and Russia, or the United States and China. Whatever country America is on the precipice of contending a geopolitical crucible against depends on the news coverage. Both China and Russia will be adversaries of the US for years to come, but why are so many determined to compare these rivalries with the most dangerous geopolitical competition in history?

The learned experience of history is a popular, and mostly useful, tool of comparison, especially if that learned experience is also a lived experience – which the Cold War was for many. Every international incident seems to resemble World War II, just as geopolitical rivalries, no matter how modern or ancient. They also find themselves compared to the first and only Cold War that raged for less than 50 years.

This is a historical fallacy: not every gunshot will lead to the dropping of an atomic bomb; not every geopolitical rivalry will lead to a competition that nearly ends in nuclear annihilation. There will only be one Cold War. And what the US is experiencing with Russia and China won’t amount to it. In many ways that’s a good thing – and in many ways it’s not. Here’s why.

Russia

Moscow’s strategic influence is a shadow of what it was during the Soviet Union. Whereas the USSR directly con-
fronted the West on nearly every corner of the globe, Russia now seeks to exploit regional cavities of American indifference. Whereas the Soviet Union had a series of coerced allies in the Warsaw Pact, Russia now finds itself mostly isolated, with its former Warsaw Pact allies being Moscow’s most committed adversaries. Whereas Moscow was once the ideological capitol for Marxist-Leninism with global adherents, Russia no longer has an exportable ideology that appeals to the dispossessed masses of Asia and Africa.

If not for the rusted carcasses of Soviet naval ships resting along the shores of the Black Sea, or the graveyards of MiG fighter jets or T-55 tanks in the Russian interior, one would be hard-pressed to believe that Russia was once second-in-line to global hegemony. There will be no redux of the Cold War with this country anytime soon.

The Russia of today has come to resemble the dead and dying industrial towns of the Rust Belt on a much more macro scale. Its population is declining, and its economy is no larger than Italy’s. For more than two decades after the USSR fell into the ash heap of history, global Russian influence waned. Russians looked to the past for glory instead of the future.

Ironically, Russia’s weakness is what makes it so threatening to the West today. One can interpret Moscow’s strategy against the West as capitalizing on this asymmetry, focusing on where the West is weak or absent as a method of clawing its way back to strategic relevance.

One area of strength is energy exports. Trade with the European Union was not the weapon of the USSR that it is for the Russian Federation today. Russia is a vital supplier of energy to the EU, and its vehicle for delivering energy to Europe is being weaponized as a strategic tool for Moscow. Through its Nord Stream 2 pipeline, Russian gas exports can run directly under the Baltic Sea to Germany and gives Moscow power over the lifeforce of the European economy.

Americans are already intimately familiar with another Russian tactic: influence operations. This usually manifests as social media accounts inflaming the extreme wings of partisan factions, with the aim of causing social unrest and discontent. The irony of Russian efforts in the US is that the damage done to America has been done by other Americans without direction from Moscow. Despite modern Russia’s weakness, it found a way to undermine the US in a way that the legions of the Red Army never could.

Russian influence also finds itself where Western influence isn’t. Moscow recruited a willing partner in Syria, where the Assad regime found itself isolated after executing chemical weapons attacks on its own people. Or in the Central Africa Republic, where Russian security contractors train government troops, and a Russian national serves as the national security
advisor to the president. Private military contractors have become the characterless face of Russian power, extending deniability to the country whose grand strategy is predicated on manipulating truth.

**China**

While Russia may be defined by its past, China is consumed with its future. As the American public became cognizant of China’s increased global posture, it too became subject to signs of another Cold War. However, unlike Russia, China could soon be strong enough to serve as a challenger to the US. The intensifying Sino-American geopolitical rivalry more closely resembles the Cold War, but it is still too different to be an accurate comparison. For Americans, this can both be encouraging and devastating.

The threat from China is hardly a military one, at least for the time being. When the Cold War ignited in 1947, the USSR controlled all territory between Berlin and Moscow. Although the Red Army had lost millions fighting the Third Reich, it was positioned to bring all of Europe under Soviet influence. The USSR would be militarily active throughout the Cold War, sending its troops to crush rebellions in Hungary or support communist regimes like in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Soviet advisors could be found from Cuba to North Korea.

China has not followed that pattern. The only overseas deployment of
People’s Liberation Army (PLA) troops is in Djibouti on an anti-piracy mission, one shared with Japanese, French, and American personnel. The benchmark the PLA is trying to reach is becoming powerful enough to overtake Taiwan, which officials in Beijing are still unsure they could do.

China also finds itself without allies. Through its “Wolf Warrior diplomacy,” Beijing has managed to ostracize and anger its neighbors, pushing them further away from China and closer to America. The closest thing China has to an ally is North Korea, which is more of a liability than a partner.

In terms of raw strategic strength, the former Soviet Union was more dangerous than the People’s Republic. But what China lacks in traditional power, they more than make up for in different ways. The Chinese economy is the second largest in the world, and many economists believe it will soon surpass the United States. Through its Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing is investing in infrastructure projects in developing states.

A long list of countries across Asia and Africa have opted for Chinese money, and those countries who cannot pay back their loans have their assets seized by Beijing. What China lacks in coerced allies, it compensates for in bought-for friends. The Soviet Union never wielded an economic threat like that.

Developing countries aren’t the only ones subject to Chinese influence. Even citizens in the most powerful economy in the world are willing to alter their behavior to meet Beijing’s wishes. An obvious example is the film industry, where references to Taiwan or even criticism of China are censored so that major film companies may have access to the Chinese market. The NBA is no exception to this. When Daryl Morey, the former general manager of the Houston Rockets voiced his support of protests in Hong Kong, the
Chinese government banned all references of the team from the country. Later, the NBA was blacklisted for several months.

Not wanting to be permanently barred from the Chinese market, the NBA censored references to Hong Kong at their games and prominent figures such as basketball star LeBron James sided with Beijing. That is a level of influence that leaders in the Soviet Union could never dream of having.

The vast resources of the Chinese economy is also used to bar criticism. When Australia signaled it wanted an inquiry into the origins of COVID-19, the Chinese government tariffed wine and beef imports from Australia, a major blow to those industries. Beijing’s investments in predominantly Muslim countries have also helped suppress criticism of the Chinese government’s policies in Xinjiang.
In many ways the threat posed by the People's Republic is less than the Soviet Union. And in many ways China is a greater threat than the USSR. Whereas the Soviet Union wanted to combat global institutions, China wants to remake them in its own image. And while China does not yet have the strategic capabilities of the former USSR, it is hard at work to gain them. For three decades, Americans have taken their military superiority for granted. That military advantage may not endure much longer.

More Cold Wars

The advantage for Americans is that the new “Cold Wars” are in their relative infancy. Russia is still weak, and China is yet to directly challenge American power. None of these countries compare to the victorious Soviet Union of 1945. Then again, the United States of 2021 is not the victorious United States of 1945. The trajectory of 21st century conflicts will be defined by whether Americans and their leaders will realize their holiday from history is over.

A commonality found between the Cold War and current competitions is that they will be defined by the technology of the time. For the Cold War it was nuclear weapons. Now, it is the digital technology of the information age. Spheres of influence will be fought over in arenas that did not exist 30 years ago.

Through a combination of witful diplomacy, wrathful deterrence, and probably some willful divinity, civilization survived long enough to be granted another opportunity to destroy itself. Should this series of “cold wars” end as peacefully as the last, there will no doubt be warnings of another Cold War between whoever wins the Sino-American competition and whichever country rises to challenge the new global order. That state may not exist yet, or it may be a developing country pawned in the current geopolitical duel.

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La Tierra Negra

Cadence Ciesielski
senior | philosophy & spanish

Abstract

This work is a poem written in English and Spanish that tells the story of the forced displacement of an indigenous community that I have studied during my time of working with a Mexican human rights organization during the summer of 2021. Oaxaca, a southern Mexican state, is among the most diverse in the country with over 450 villages inhabited by people with indigenous and ethnic backgrounds. Because of this, many indigenous groups in Oaxaca face the danger of forced displacement for political, financial, and territorial reasons. The goals of this work are to translate stories of Mexican indigenous culture and hardships into universal struggles that resonate with US audiences, detail the consequences resulting from these instances of forced displacement, and incorporate international ideas about human rights from texts like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As a white author, I feel it’s important to express that while the narrator is a young Mexican Mixe woman, I am not trying to take credit for her story or pretend that it is my own experience. I am simply sharing a fictional account of these events based on publicly available and accurate information.

Key Words: human rights, Oaxaca, Mexico, indigenous cultures, bilingual
La Tierra Negra
They showed up early in the morning.
I woke up to the noises,
the sounds of destruction.

They ruined it.
First, the earth with their immense trucks
and their threatening weapons.

I said to my sister,
“Get up already, ‘manita’.”
With sleep-filled eyes,
she awoke to the violence.

I didn't know why they were here,
I only knew their danger.
I recognized the mob of people,
it was a political group, a powerful one.

According to the election he should have lost,
but he took power anyway.
Because we didn’t choose him,
he chose to come for us.
We walked to the kitchen looking for her, and then we saw her—our mom. Her eyes wide and scared to death, she was panicking and packing up some food.

Yelling in our native language, she told me to pack up some clothes for me and my little sister. For two weeks, just two weeks.

I glanced outside toward the cargo house. That’s when I saw the second thing they ruined. The peace. I watched as they beat my uncle to the ground, laughing.

I shouted “What’s going on?” in Mixe. She looked at me, nodded to our room, and told me to pack our bags. I stomped off to my room and asked my sister to help me.

She asked me what was happening, scared. I didn’t know what to say. “We’re leaving,” she looked at me confused. “Just for a little while, it’ll be fun. We’ll visit the cities, practice our Spanish.”

Why me? It’s Saturday, I was going to help Dad at the market. I’m not even old enough to vote. What did I do wrong? I thought as I shoved some clothes into my bag. I stopped to stare out at the mountains and breathe the fresh air.

I thought of Poj ’Enee. “She will protect us, she always does,” I whispered as it began to drizzle. Finally, I turned and grabbed my Ts’ok.

We ran out to find our mother again, and she grabbed my sister’s hand. She handed me some cash, “Wait for the next cab, they know where to go.”
I looked outside and saw people from my village, jumping into cabs with whatever they could grab. Leaving houses, cars, pets, our land. Leaving lives, love, and peace all behind them.

They were gone and I was next. I took a deep breath and looked around me. My home. Here and gone within the hour. It’ll only be two weeks, right?

—

What was just a day, turned into the worst day. And what was only two weeks, turned into four years.

Right now, I’m where we have lived these four years. The streets of Matias Romero, forever far from home.

Because I could speak Spanish I got a job as a waitress. I have been able to provide, but only so much.

I feel guilty. I can earn money, I can buy us food, but I can’t take us home.

I thought I lost a lot that day, but the truth is I’ve lost a lot more in the last four years.

I was supposed to go to college. After the move, that was impossible. Then, so were my dreams.
I was supposed to be raised Mixe.
But it's hard to maintain
the culture of your blood
when you're so far from your land.

I was supposed to be married by now.
Most of the Mixe women I know
fall in love at the age I left.
Now they think I'll never marry.

I was supposed to respect my government,
because they were supposed to keep us safe.
But it seems like they only care about the indigenous
when they use us to make money.

Since we were forced out
I have done some research:

What happened to inherent human dignity?
What happened to freedom from fear?
What happened to being recognized as a person?
What happened to protection from exile?

What happened to the right to property?
What happened to the protection of privacy?
Of family?
Of home?

It turns out Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has a lot to say
about what happened to me, but strangely the Mexican government doesn’t.
Resumen: Esta obra es un poema escrito en inglés y español que cuenta la historia del desplazamiento forzado de una comunidad indígena que he estudiado durante mi tiempo de trabajo con una organización mexicana de derechos humanos durante el verano de 2021. Oaxaca, un estado del sur de México, es uno de los más diversos del país, con más de 450 pueblos habitados por personas de origen indígena o étnico. Debido a esto, muchos grupos indígenas en Oaxaca se enfrentan al peligro del desplazamiento forzado por razones políticas, económicas y territoriales. Los objetivos de esta obra son traducir las historias de la cultura indígena mexicana y sus dificultades en luchas universales que resuenen en un público estadounidense, detallar las consecuencias resultantes de estos casos de desplazamiento forzado e incorporar ideas internacionales sobre los derechos humanos de textos como la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos.

Como autora blanca, creo que es importante expresar que, aunque la narradora es una joven mixe mexicana, no intento atribuirme el mérito de su historia ni pretender que sea mi propia experiencia. Simplemente estoy escribiendo un cuento ficticio de estos eventos basado en información pública disponible y confiable.
**La Tierra Negra**

Ellos llegaron temprano en la mañana. 
Me levanté a los ruidos, 
ruidos de destrucción.

Ellos la arruinaron. 
Primero, la tierra con sus grandes camiones 
y sus agraviantes armas.

Le dije a mi hermana, 
“Levántate ya, ‘manita,’” 
Con los ojos pesados, 
se despertó ante la violencia.

No sabía la causa, 
sólo el peligro. 
Reconocía a la multitud, 
era un grupo político, poderoso.

Debería haber perdido, 
pero tomó el poder. 
Porque nosotros no lo elegimos, 
él nos eligió a nosotros.

Fuimos a la cocina 
y vimos a nuestra mamá. 
Estaba muerta de miedo 
y empacando comida.

Gritando en nuestra lengua materna, 
me dijo que empaquara ropa 
para mí y mi hermanita, 
para dos semanas, sólo dos semanas.

Miré afuera, hacia la casa del cargo⁶, 
y vi la segunda cosa que habían arruinado. 
La paz. Vi como golpeaban 
a mi tío en el suelo y se reían.
Grité "¿Qué está pasando?" en mixe⁷. 
Ella me miró, señaló nuestro cuarto, 
y me dijo que hiciera las maletas. 
Me fui enfadado a mi habitación y pedí ayuda a mi hermana.

Ella me preguntó qué estaba pasando 
y no supe qué decir. 
"Nos vamos," me miró confundida. 
"Sólo por un tiempo, será divertido. Visitaremos las ciudades, practicaremos nuestro español." 

¿Por qué yo? Es sábado, quería ayudar a papá en el mercado. 
Ni siquiera tengo edad para votar, ¿qué he hecho mal? 
pensaba mientras metía la ropa en mi bolsa. 
Me detuve para mirar las montañas y sentir el aire fresco.

Pensé en Poj 'Enee⁸. 
"Nos protegerá, siempre lo hace." 
susurré mientras empezaba a lloviznar. 
Finalmente, me giré y cogí mi Tso'ok⁹. 

Salimos corriendo a buscar a nuestra madre, 
agarró la mano de mi hermana. 
Ella me dio algunos pesos, 
"Espera el próximo taxi, ellos saben a dónde ir." 

Miré fuera y vi a la gente de mi pueblo, 
saltando a los taxis con lo que pudieron agarrar. 
Dejando casas, coches, mascotas, nuestra tierra, 
Dejando vidas, amor y paz, todo detrás de ellos. 

Se habían ido y yo era la siguiente. 
Respiré profundamente y miré a mi alrededor. 
Mi hogar. Aquí y se fue en una hora. 
Ojalá sólo dos semanas, ¿no? 
—
Lo que era sólo un día,
se convirtió en el peor día.
Y lo que eran sólo dos semanas,
se convirtió en cuatro años.

Ahora mismo estoy donde
hemos vivido estos cuatro años.
Las calles de Matías Romero,
siempre lejos de casa.

Porque sabía hablar español
conseguí un trabajo de camarera.
He podido mantener,
pero sólo un poco.

Me siento culpable.
Puedo ganar dinero,
puedo comprarnos comida,
pero no puedo llevarnos a casa.

Pensé que había perdido mucho ese día,
pero la verdad es que he perdido
mucho más en los últimos cuatro años.

Se suponía que iba a ir a la universidad.
Después de la mudanza,
eso fue imposible.
Entonces, también lo fueron mis sueños.

Se suponía que iba a criar a Mixe.
Pero es difícil mantener
la cultura de tu sangre
cuando estás tan lejos de tu tierra.

Se suponía que ya debía estar casada.
La mayoría de las mujeres mixes
se enamoran a la edad que yo dejé.
Ahora creen que nunca me casaré.
Se suponía que debía respetar a mi gobierno, porque se suponía que debían mantenernos a salvo. Pero parece que sólo se preocupan por los indígenas cuando nos utilizan para obtener beneficios.

Desde que nos obligaron a salir he investigado un poco:

¿Qué pasó con la dignidad humana inherente?
¿Qué pasó con la libertad del miedo?
¿Qué pasó con el reconocimiento como persona?
¿Qué pasó con la protección contra el exilio?

¿Qué pasó con el derecho a la propiedad?
¿Qué pasó con la protección de la intimidad?
¿De la familia?
¿Del hogar?

Porque el artículo 12 de la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos tiene mucho que decir sobre lo que me sucedió, pero extrañamente el gobierno mexicano no lo hace.

**Endnotes**

1. *Little sister*
2. *The person who occupies the municipal presidency in a Mixe or indigenous community*
3. *The language spoken by the Mexican Mixe indigenous communities*
4. *Thunder Wind is a Mixe god protector of rain and fertility*
5. *The individual is made up of two "souls", one mortal and one immortal, which corresponds to the indigenous vision. This immortal soul is represented by an animal, or combination of animals, which serves as a spiritual protector in the form of a Tso'ok made of wood.*
6. *la persona que ocupa la presidencia municipal en una comunidad mixe o indígena*
7. *la lengua hablada por la comunidad indígena mixe mexicana*
8. *Viento del Trueno es un dios protector mixe de la lluvia y la fertilidad*
9. *El individuo está formado por dos "almas", una mortal y otra inmortal, lo que corresponde a la visión indígena. Esta alma inmortal está representada por un animal, o una combinación de animales, que sirve de protector espiritual en forma de Tso'ok de madera.*
ALONE
Grace Burgett
freshman | secondary education

ABSTRACT

As I sit in my dorm bed listening to a big group of friends play sand volleyball on the courts outside my window, it strikes me that I haven't spoken yet today. It's 6pm.

Keywords: Loneliness, Friendship, School, Autumn, Anxiety
the hum of it weighs me down
the a/c in the background, sweet laughter lit the fire
she calls me only after midnight
the only time i let myself think is when i’m way past fine

made a hasty decision based on everyone else
the money did its business and dragged me along with it
i didn’t care about hurting, i just didn’t want to be
alone

i close the blinds
you don’t get to see what happens deep inside
i think i’m glad to be unhappy
at least my mistakes tell me i should be

october creeps into my heart and i can’t force it out
i loved autumn in the country until i lived outside the city
bad days don’t matter to me, i just don’t want to be
alone
The Importance of Acknowledging Evil in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Farmer Giles of Ham

Alexander Hurla
senior | humanities

Abstract

The titular character in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Farmer Giles of Ham is a simple farmer who wants only to keep to himself. Yet, when a dragon named Chrysophylax threatens his village, he is the one who must stop it. The king’s knights, with their mockery of the dragon and disbelief in it, fail to do so. The nearby parson who tries to proselytize to it also fails because he does not understand the dragon is inherently evil. These two means of subduing the dragon have disastrous outcomes, leaving the town to fend for itself. With the aid of a magical sword and a stubborn old mare, Farmer Giles is able to control the dragon because he acknowledges that it is evil. This understanding, along with help from his sword and mare, leads to him being the victor because he approaches the dragon with grave respect as to its evil nature.

Keywords: Tolkien, Good and Evil, Medieval, Fable
In the foreword of J.R.R. Tolkien’s story, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, the author tells us that he has translated the tale out of the original Latin into “the modern tongue of the United Kingdom” (Tolkien 101). Taking readers back in time to a world of knights and dragons, Tolkien then introduces the protagonist and namesake of the story, Farmer Giles, as the man (quite by accident) defends his farm and the village of Ham against a clumsy giant by using his old blunderbuss. After such a feat, the townsfolk call him the “Hero of the Countryside,” and he even receives a letter of commendation and a sword from the King of the Middle Kingdom. (Tolkien 112-113). The weapon is later discovered to be the legendary – yet almost forgotten – dragon-slaying sword called Tailbiter. With such praise heaped upon him, the people of Ham naturally expect Giles to defend them when the dragon, Chrysophylax, leaves a wake of destruction as he approaches the village. Despite the odds stacked against him, Giles spares the life of the dragon in exchange for the beast’s treasure. Of course, the king gets word of this exchange, and declares that as lord of the land, the treasure is actually his. When Chrysophylax fails to return with the trove, the king’s knights and Farmer Giles march to the dragon’s lair to claim the prize. After a series of blunders from the knights, it is Giles who claims the prize and brings the dragon under his control. Through these riches, coupled with Chrysophylax obeying his orders, Giles is anointed a king himself in the newly created Little Kingdom, where he “became at length old and venerable and had a white beard down to his knees, and a very respectable court” (Tolkien 162).

Despite the respectability earned later in his life, none of it would have been possible without what occurs in this tale. Even while being a simple farmer with neither a seminary education nor a royal bloodline, Giles is able to accomplish subduing the dragon while the king’s knights and, earlier in the story, the parson of the nearby village of Oakley attempt to do so in their own ways but fail. This is because
Farmer Giles, with the luck found in his sword Tailbiter and his grey mare (who goes unnamed throughout the story), first recognizes that Chrysophylax exists and then acknowledges that he is evil, while the knights do not believe dragons are real and the parson of Oakley fails to acknowledge the dragon’s evil nature. Despite the common sense utilized by Giles to overpower the dragon, it takes elements outside of himself to finish the job.

When news reaches the parson of Oakley that the dragon has entered his village, he immediately goes towards the beast. His plan is told by Tolkien as follows: “Rather rashly the parson had sought to dissuade him from his evil ways” (Tolkien 121). In writing about this event, an author could have described the parson as being brave and heroic while trying to use non-violent means to end the dragon’s rampage. Had the parson been eaten anyway, he could have been made out as a martyr. Imprudent or not, it takes some pluck to stand tall and proselytize to a dragon. This, however, is not how Tolkien describes him. Instead, he writes that the parson acts “rashly.” The parson understands that Chrysophylax is evil, yet he does not understand that something inherently evil cannot be turned good – even by sound preaching. This is a dragon,
not a human being that the parson is dealing with. This is a small part of the story, yet in conjunction with the other elements that follow, it shows how vital this concept is to grasp. Because the parson does not understand this, he is devoured by the same evil being he is trying to dissuade.

Moving to the next of Chrysophylax’s victims, the knights are defeated by the dragon because it has been so long since they have fought a dragon that they have caricaturized them (Tolkien 114). While tradition called for a knight to go on a hunt for “Dragon’s Tail to be served up at the King’s Christmas Feast” (Tolkien 114), the knights have replaced the real tail with the Mock Dragon’s Tail made of cake. In fact, it might even be worse if they are making a joke out of a very real danger instead of outright denying it. Someone can believe something exists and still downplay its importance and power. We are also told that “there was no one now living in all the realm who had had any actual experience in dealing with dragons and their tricks” (Tolkien 136). It is not a far cry to think that many knights who had only ever eaten the Mock Dragon’s Tail would not think dragons are dangerous. Because of their ignorance in appreciating how destructive a dragon can be, when the knights finally go to Chrysophylax’s mountain, they are woefully unprepared to fight him and foolishly confident in their success. This recipe for disaster brings about the following result: “Several of the knights were killed before they could even issue their formal challenge to battle, and several others were bowled over, horses and all” (Tolkien 147). Since they have forgotten what dragons are like or choose not to believe they are powerful, the knights never stand a chance against Chrysophylax.

This brings us to exactly why Farmer Giles is able to do the task that no one else can do. First of all, he has a reaction most anyone would expect when hearing a dragon is near: “The farmer choked on his beer” (Tolkien 118). This shows that even as a farmer, he knows what a dragon can do and that they are not creatures to be trifled with. Indeed, once he stumbles upon Chrysophylax at their first encounter, Giles realizes he is no match and tries to get out of the dragon’s presence. He is not going to stand around preaching to a dragon and trying to reason with it because he understands the nature of the beast that stands before him. He is well aware that within Chrysophylax’s chest beats “a wicked heart” (Tolkien 132) and therefore while Giles is trying to flee on his grey mare “he kept his eye on the dragon, even while he was trying to mount” (Tolkien 132). A bit of hesitancy and common sense helps keep Farmer Giles from falling prey to the dragon.

Yet, it is not Farmer Giles alone who subdues the dragon. He needs the power of Tailbiter and the fortitude of the grey mare to finish the job. As the parson of
Ham explains to Giles before he sets out for the dragon, Tailbiter “will not stay sheathed, if a dragon is within five miles; and without doubt in a brave man’s hands no dragon can resist it.” (Tolkien 124). It is this sword that saves Giles at their first meeting with Chrysophylax. “The dragon sprang,” writes Tolkien as Chrysophylax tries to attack Giles. “But not as quick as Tailbiter. As soon as it was in the farmer’s hand, it leaped forward with a flash, straight at the dragon’s eyes” (132). This swift reaction from Tailbiter puts a stop to the dragon’s attack. Without that magic weapon, Giles would have had the same fate as the parson and the knights. In fact, it is only because he wields Tailbiter that he is able to order the dragon around. Next, at the dragon’s lair, the king’s knights on their mighty steeds are either vanquished by the dragon or flee for their lives, leaving the treasure in the dragon’s cave. Yet, “the old grey mare did not budge” in the fiery face of Chrysophylax as Giles is prepared to take the treasure (Tolkien 147). At this pivotal moment, the dragon sees the power of Tailbiter wielded by a man whose mount stands its ground, and he yields his treasure to Giles. Without these two helpers, Giles could have respected the dragon all he wanted, and it still would not have been enough to defeat him.

Along with the power of Tailbiter and the stubbornness of the grey mare, there is also a bit of luck that played into Giles’s success. As Tolkien says: “It must
be admitted that Giles owed his rise in a large measure to luck, though he showed some wits in the use of it,” (162). Had the king not sent the sword that he did not know was Tailbiter, Giles would have had no chance against Chrysophylax. Again, if the grey mare (who presumably never went through combat training) would have been as flighty as the knights’ noble horses, Chrysophylax could have been invigorated to kill Giles. These forces outside of Giles’s control aided him in subjugating the dragon. Tolkien calls it luck, but whatever the source, Giles could not have succeeded with its help.

Finally, it is worth noting that Farmer Giles never successfully converts Chrysophylax as the parson of Oakley intended to do. Upon being released, Chrysophylax’s stance is described in this way: “In his bad heart of hearts the dragon felt as kindly disposed towards Giles as a dragon can feel towards anyone. After all there was Tailbiter,” (Tolkien 164). This shows that the dragon is merely tamed for a while, not that he has become good. In fact, the text suggests that Chrysophylax only feels this way towards Giles because of the power of Tailbiter. This ending shows that while good can and will con-
quer evil, it does not mean that evil can or will be made good. If something is evil by nature, it cannot be made good. Possibly an inherently evil thing can do good things, as when the king comes to Ham to demand the treasure, only to be denied by Giles through the frightening Chrysophylax in what came to be known as the Battle of the Bridge of Ham (Tolkien 158-160). Yet, the dragon only does this because Giles has Tailbiter. In this, Tolkien argues that something inherently evil would not do something like this on its own accord. This shows that no matter how hard the parson would have tried to convert the dragon, he would not have changed at all and probably would not have even appeared to have changed without force.

In Farmer Giles of Ham, the protagonist is successful in subduing Chrysophylax, and others are not because he knows what power the dragon possesses, and he also knows that the dragon is evil. Because he has this helpful fear, he respects the dragon and does not rashly try to change its nature as the parson does, nor does he make the dragon into a parody of itself as the knights have done by eating the Mock Dragon’s Tail. This respect along with luck and the fantastical elements of Tailbiter and the grey mare gives Farmer Giles the upper hand and proves that he is the hero of the story. Through the Giles’s story, Tolkien shows readers that there are some things best left alone because of their evil nature.

However, if evil must be fought against, it must take something outside of oneself to defeat evil. Giles’s luck led him to receive Tailbiter and have the brave gray mare. Whether Tolkien uses “luck” as a metaphor for something else such as divine intervention is open to interpretation. Yet, what Tolkien does not leave ambiguous is that Farmer Giles, the hero of this story, could not have been such without that outside help.

Works Cited
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