Many Shades of One Man:
Heroic Personalities
in the Works
of
J.R.R. Tolkien

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On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this thesis.

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PREFACE

It's taken me a long time to get to the writing of this page. Like my fellow thesis writers, I have suffered countless mishaps, pursued false leads and been tempted to give up more than once. I didn't give up, though, and the path I have taken has been enlightening. I wound up in a completely different place than my original destination, but I actually like it better that way. Exploring Tolkien has been a joy for me, even when times got a little rough and the threat of deadlines loomed. I take pride in this work because it grew out of an appreciation for a group of works that hold a special place in my heart. If there's one thing that I hope shines through in this thesis, it's my deep love for the texts I have been working with and my unshakeable respect for the man who wrote them. If my reader can understand that, I will consider this thesis a success.

There are numbers of people to thank for their help in getting me here, and I hope I don't forget anyone. My family has helped me, pushed me and encouraged me--and my brother first gave me Tolkien--and for that I am grateful. Robert made me laugh when I wanted to cry, and all my friends encouraged me and told me I'd better finish soon, because they were starting not to recognize me. My fellow thesis writers provided me with much-needed sympathy and study breaks; I hope I did the same for them. Professor Dickens searched out a copy of a conference paper for me (which proved very helpful). Professor Craun provided me with the idea and the incentive to take on the whole thing in the first place, and he took the time to encourage me whenever I needed it (and I did!). Above all, though, I owe my thanks and praise to Professor Huntley. He gave me a subtle nudge when I needed it, but he also blessed me with his infinite patience for my continually evolving ideas. He has been both a teacher and a friend to me and has given me many an occasion to smile. I couldn't have found a better advisor. Thanks.

I. INTRODUCTION

My interest in J.R.R.Tolkien developed rather early in life, thanks to a complete set of *Lord of the Rings* (including *The Hobbit*) given to me by my brother for my tenth birthday. The more I read, the more fascinated I became. Tolkien's world of Middle-Earth seemed utterly complete; nothing had been left out of the story. His characters were what interested me the most: I had always heard stories about elves and dwarves, but here they were given a history, a personality and a meaning. Elves were not simply mischevious little sprites, but a noble race of beings who were closely connected to the workings of Nature. Wizards became much more than simple alchemists. Hobbits were something new altogether. My imaginative mind fell in love with the story, prompting me to read it over and over again.

As I grew older, I moved on to Tolkien's other works, even venturing into the realm of criticism regarding Tolkien himself. With each succeeding piece of literature, I learned not only about Tolkien himself but the genre of fantasy literature as a whole. This, in turn, broadened the spectrum of my reading to other works of fantasy and science fiction. The fresh viewpoints and alternative worlds presented in these stories gave my own creative mind a continual source for new ideas.

When the opportunity arose to write my honors thesis about fantasy literature, the chance to enjoy spending time studying a topic of which I was already very fond seemed too good to pass up. Since Tolkien was first and foremost in my heart, he became the focal point of my research. Once again, I delved into *Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, searching for clues which would lead me to some preeminent thesis statement. In reading, a curiosity arose as to who the real hero of

Lord of the Rings was. Everyone has a favorite character, of course, but who was the hero? I turned to a few critics for an answer--and was promptly confronted by a prickly debate. There seemed really little critical consensus as to who the hero was. Everyone has an opinion, of course, and no two answers are quite alike.

Faced with such questions, I decided to explore Tolkien's heroes as the subject for my thesis. I still felt immensely curious about the debate over the hero; why was it so difficult for everyone to agree on this subject? This significant division must rely heavily upon the characteristics of each of the heroic figures in Tolkien's works; why did each character appear more or less heroic to individual critics? My exploration looked more deeply into the character and personality of each heroic figure, searching for just what it was that made each hero appealing. Had Tolkien followed any sort of heroic trend, or were the heroes simply another mark of his ingenious craftmanship?

The answer to that question proved rather unsatisfying to anyone looking for a simple answer: both parts are true. However, this duality made the research infinitely richer. Tolkien does adhere to recognizable literary styles; these styles span the length and breadth of Tolkien's works, enriching the characters and giving them dimension. In fact, the characteristics of heroes in Tolkien's works follow two main paths of literary precedent: that of the knightly hero, who experiences a lifetime of preparation for his role as leader, and that of the common man, the unexpected hero, who rises above all previous actions and expectations when prompted by extraordinary circumstances. One critic noticed this dichotomy in *LOTR*, stating, "Tolkien saw these two kinds of heroic style as interdependent and complementary" (Purtill 45). These two trends are also prevalent throughout the fantasy literature which preceded Tolkien's own work.

Beyond this categorization, however, Tolkien leaves the influences of other

writers behind. He takes the common characteristics of each category and bestows them upon his characters as such, but then his own creative powers take over. Thus, although Tolkien's heroic figures are innately similar inasmuch as they are fighting on the same side, the similarity ends there. Each character instead goes though his own *personal* process of heroic growth, and it is through the literary creation and exploration of this heroic growth that Tolkien demonstrates his individual genius.

Tolkien's heroes appeal to the reader because the heroic development of the individual is so apparent; heroes progress in noticeable ways which are easy for the reader to follow and understand. Plus, no heroic figure goes without some type of improvement over the course of the storyline. This gives the reader a chance to see several characters evolve over time towards the common goal of character development. However, no two characters progress in the same manner; some maturation may seem, on the surface, to be greater than others. Nonetheless, the reader must look at each character independent of his companions; comparative growth in his heroes was not Tolkien's intent. Instead, each figure represents a different type of heroic growth, and it is the individuality of this heroism which separates the characters from one another. Purtill viewed the heroic figures in *LOTR* in this manner: "In many ways Tolkien 'facets' character: each individual . . . represents one aspect of a complete human being" (Purtill 45). Tolkien had a specific purpose, a particular message, which each character was meant to portray. In relaying his intentions, he creates a group of heroes unlike any other which had come before.

II. THE NOBLE HERO

The frequency of the medieval heroic figure in Tolkien's works can be attributed to much more than Tolkien's desire to juxtapose the two archetypal heroic types. Tolkien, like many other writers of his day, indicated a distinct longing to re-organize the chaotic century in which he lived. The years between the outbreaks of World War I and World War II presented nothing but disorder and uncertainty for anyone searching for stability or inspiration (Moorman 3). Hence, plagued by war and self-doubt, the modern writers often took it upon themselves to restore some semblance of order through their literature. This search for order often led these writers backwards down the path of literature--back to times when chivalric codes, courtly love, or strong concepts of honor ruled the day. Thus, many authors drew back to the early myths and legends of these times, centering, if not on the myths themselves, then at least on the time periods surrounding them.[1] Moorman states:

> Psychologically, the present interest in myth reflects a need and a search for order and certainty in the midst of the apparent chaos and disorder of the twentieth century. . . .The literature of these interbellum years is filled with a yearning for order, for a way out of what Eliot called a waste land and Gertrude Stein a lost generation. Order was sought everywhere; Hemingway sought it in the

[1] This tendency, brought about by the uncertainty of the between-war period, continued on long after World War II was a memory. Although the world was experiencing more order than had reigned for nearly forty years, the shadow of the uncertainty (possibly due to the imminent threat of the Cold War) loomed into the fifties. Writers still turned to more classical and structured themes, as evidenced by C.S. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces*, a retelling of the classical Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche, which was published well into the 1950's.

> strong man's allegiance to a tough code, Faulkner in a reassertion of the values. . . of an aristocratic society. . . . poets have stepped outside the contemporary scene into a world of myth. . . that contains order and meaning within itself. Myth offers the poet a complete and ordered cosmos. . . .
>
> (Moorman 2)

This ordered world of myth provided a rare stability for these authors, but it also provided an escape to a world where order, not chaos, reigned supreme. Here is where modern authors departed from their Victorian counterparts. The Victorians looked back to folk tales for inspiration and story content, but the modern authors were searching for something much deeper. As Manlove puts it, they were "looking to old medieval-type worlds and codes that no longer prevail"; thus, "there is an air of nostalgia in much modern fantasy that is not generally found in that of the nineteenth century" (Manlove 10). Searching for a deeper context in life, modern authors sought stability in their own world but were forced to escape to past worlds in order to find it.

Tolkien was no stranger to these concepts; he, too, was a member of this so-called "Lost Generation." The order of the past centuries vanished with the onset of the First World War, and Tolkien dealt with it by searching the past for an escape. Sale discusses Tolkien's search as a "withdrawal" from the modern world; in Sale's estimation, Tolkien expressed a desire to remove himself almost entirely from the troublesome era in which he lived (Sale 12). This statement may generally be regarded as an extreme interpretation; however, Tolkien's desire for some type of escape seems likely enough. In fact, Tolkien himself discusses the desire of man to escape his present circumstances in his essay "On Fairy-stories": "Though fairy-

stories are of course by no means the only medium of Escape, they are today one of the most obvious and (to some) outrageous forms of 'escapist' literature. . . I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories. . . Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic"(*Reader* 79). Even if Tolkien did not desire utter abandonment of the era, as Sale implies, Tolkien does agree with the basic view: man seeks this escape, this consolation, from the modern world by turning to past heroic codes and values. Tolkien saw these regulators as a positive aspect of life; Sale acknowledges, "Tolkien tried in many ways to bring ancient values to life" (Sale 198).

Nowhere are these ancient values more apparent than in Tolkien's crafting of what I refer to as the "noble hero." "Noble" refers not only to the characteristics of the knightly hero of classical literature, but one who carries with him a respected geneaology as well. Tolkien followed the pattern of heroes of the past--the more stable medieval world with its complete chivalric code--in the creation of the great heroes for his works. A hero of this caliber possessed many characteristics found in other great heroes; these characteristics were perhaps best described by Lord Raglan, a contemporary of Tolkien's, in his book *The Hero*. Raglan establishes the classical mythical hero as falling into a particular pattern, described in part as a man of royal lineage who is spirited away at birth (for various reasons) and raised by foster-parents. "We are told nothing of his childhood, but on reaching full manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom" (Raglan 178). After this return, the hero must triumph over a "king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast"; he also becomes involved with a princess, who is often related to a king with whom the hero has had earlier contact (Raglan 178-79). The hero must often undertake a journey of some length, and his battles often take place on this journey. The victories are all "single combats" against his enemy: the hero usually works alone (Raglan 193-94).

When his death finally occurs, it usually takes place, oddly enough, on the top of a hill; this often occurs after what Raglan describes as losing "favour with the gods" (Raglan 179). In addition to these many characteristics, the noble hero spends his whole life preparing for his moment as hero, whether or not he knows it at the time. In other words, he is prepared for his role as hero: his upbringing, his lineage, and his education (whether provided by teachers or by life) all focus on properly preparing the hero for his times of trial and triumph.

Any noble hero created in the old style would thus be expected to boast many or all of the above characteristics. Tolkien does not fail expectation here; he peppered his works with heroes created "after the classical fashion." Similarity abounds in these noble heroes, but only to the extent which is necessary. In other words, although these heroes are all innately similar, they possess individual attributes which set them apart from their "peers." These dissimilarities enrich Tolkien's plots and showcase his talent for character development. Tolkien's application of the medieval heroic standard to his own heroes creates a basic Tolkien hero which is enriched by personal variation.

THE SILMARILLION: MODEL HEROES

In order to find a good Tolkien model of a noble heroic figure, one needs only look as far as *The Silmarillion* in order to find several fine examples. Here, multiple heroic figures exist, many of whom set a historical precedent for the later characters in *Lord of the Rings*. Characters develop heroic aspects and act upon them, making *The Silmarillion* a historical account of one heroic act after another. In fact, *The Silmarillion* is just that: a history. Most of the heroes do not interact

with one another for more than a short period of time, at least not to the extent to which this occurs in *LOTR*. There, character development is individual but essential to the development of the story as a whole. In other words, a character grows heroically, but this growth in turn affects the other characters, even to the extent of influencing another character's development. Petty claims that "Tolkien consistently reminds his readers that the. . . heroes and their individual fates are inextricably bound together when he suspends the narrative line of one hero to reveal what is occurring simultaneously to the other members of the Fellowship. . . . Consequently, we find it next to impossible to talk exclusively about Frodo, then about Aragorn, and then Gandalf, for often the progress of one includes another" (Petty 48).

Contrary to this interactive development, *The Silmarillion* develops characters in a linear fashion, with one hero's development eventually giving way to the next, and so on throughout the book. Interaction with concurrent heroes is limited, if it occurs at all. Consequently, these heroic figures are affected more strongly by the past--binding vows, memories of other heroes' actions, previous wrongdoing--than by other heroes of the present day. The heroes develop as independent wholes, usually bent on fulfilling one single purpose; for example, the one purpose of the sons of Fëanor is to carry out their father's vow against any creature who attempts to possess the Silmarils (which were luminous jewels created by Fëanor to forever capture the light of the Blessed Two Trees of Valinor.) Because of this more isolated form of heroic development, *The Silmarillion* provides the analyst with a relatively pure form of the Tolkien hero to study. One can scrutinize this standard and then apply the concept of the hero as an independent unit to those heroes who appear in the more interactive setting of *LOTR*.

The Silmarillion, therefore, provides the reader with successive heroes, each

of whom completes a very different mission in the history of Middle-earth. However, they are similar in one respect: they virtually all exemplify the noble hero. The grandest heroes of this history are those who have been "to the manner born," so to speak. They grew to manhood in the high houses of Elves and Men, carrying within them noble blood. Because of this birth, however, the trials which they undertake are greater than those of any other dweller in these lands. They face seemingly impossible odds, taking on the desperate battles of entire races.

Tolkien used these often disproportionate odds to test the mettle and courage of his heroes. These great battles often revealed the true nature of the hero, something which may have only been glimpsed at before. Nowhere is this more true than in the character of Túrin Turambar, one of the great Men of the Edain, the noblest line of Man. Túrin emerges as Tolkien's "flawed hero," one who possessed all the typical heroic qualities but nonetheless was partially responsible for his untimely demise. Tolkien created Túrin in a manner reminiscent of the ancient Norse heroes--a noble and powerful breed, but one whose flaws were documented alongside its strengths. The use of a dubious protagonist had also become fairly common in every genre of 20th-century literature. One need only look at the characters of Edmund in Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and Maurice in Greene's *The End of the Affair* to see evidence of the changed nature of the protagonist. Therefore, Túrin reflects the traditions of both ancient and modern heroic literature, a citation that some things in humanity never change.

A significant part of Túrin's story, then, draws from ancient backgrounds: Norse myths, oral legends and stories centered around the prowess of one specific hero. Perhaps the greatest influence on Túrin's story comes from the ancient lay of *Beowulf* : it was "the single work which influenced Tolkien most" (Shippey 220). Tolkien himself acknowledged the strong connection between his works and the

revered hero, stating, "*Beowulf* is among my most valued sources" (*Letters* 31). Elizabeth Newhall traced the paths of the two stories and found striking similarities in the two. The noble background which prepares the two for their greatest challenges is relatively similar: both are of noble blood, both are raised in highly esteemed homes, and both fight for those who need their aid and prowess. "Túrin. . protects his kin, the People of Haleth [sic] from the orcs, and ultimately, from Glaurung the dragon. . . . Beowulf goes to help the Danes as soon as he hears of their problems with Grendel. . . thereby restoring peace and security to the Danes. . . " (Newhall 2). Their backgrounds concur in other ways as well, particularly the legendary status attached to both heroes: both names were known far and wide, albeit Túrin was known only under the name "The Black Sword of Nargothrond" (*Sil* 259).

The likeness between the two characters manifests itself in negative aspects of characterization as well. Tolkien makes no effort to hide the fact that Túrin is far from perfect, just as the lay of *Beowulf* clearly documents the shortcomings of Beowulf himself. Tolkien characterizes Túrin's pride in no uncertain terms, stating, "Túrin would by no means hearken to. . . counsels. . . for he was become proud and stern, and would order all things as he wished" (*Sil* 260). He also uses his reputation and comeliness to usurp the power of both Brandir and Orodreth, thus ensuring the execution of his will alone (Newhall 2). Beowulf exhibits similar characteristics, particularly his vaunting concerning his prowess in battle: "He speaks boastfully as he prepares to meet Grendel, laying aside his sword to keep the fight evenly matched" (Newhall 3). Beowulf harbors little doubt regarding his skills as a fighter, due to his past successes; Túrin grounds his pride in the same self-admiration.

Perhaps the most innate similarity between the two, however, emerges in the

ultimate battle for both of them: the battle against the dragon. Carpenter recognizes this in Tolkien's biography, stating, ". . . one may detect certain literary influences: the hero's fight with a great dragon inevitably suggests comparison with the deeds of. . . Beowulf" (Carpenter 96). Newhall categorizes several parallels between the battles, including protection of the hero's people, the fact that each man must face the dragon alone, and the burnt hand which both heroes incur from the battle (Newhall, 7-8). Most significant, though, is the fact that both hero and dragon slay each other; both Beowulf and Túrin found in the dragon their final, deadly foe (Newhall 9).

Túrin, however, suffers a much more painful death than Beowulf, for "Glaurung [the dragon] wounds Túrin with words" (Newhall 9). Here, Túrin as a character emerges as Tolkien's own creation. Instead of suffering fatal physical wounds (a relatively simple way to execute a hero), Túrin instead must endure excruciating mental torture. Unbeknownst to him, the wife he loves, Níniel/Nienor, is actually his sister; between them, they unwittingly created a child of incest. Glaurung himself created the whole situation; when Nienor encountered him in her search for her brother (whom she had never met), he cast a forgetful spell over her mind (*Sil* 268). Thus, she knew not her brother when they met, nor he her (*Sil* 270). Having thus known all along, Glaurung reveals these painful secrets to Nienor as his death-stroke for Túrin:

> Glaurung stirred for the last time ere he died, and he spoke
> with his last breath, saying: 'Hail, Nienor, daughter of Húrin.
> We meet again ere the end. I give thee joy that thou hast found
> thy brother at last. And now thou shalt know him: a
> stabber in the dark, treacherous to foes, faithless to friends,
> and a curse unto his kin, Túrin son of Húrin! But the worst

of all his deeds thou shalt feel in thyself.'

(*Sil* 275)

These words drive Túrin mad with grief and shame, particularly when coupled with the death of his wife/sister and child. He takes his own life, thus ending the tragedy which has followed him since birth (*Sil* 278). This dreadful demise reveals Tolkien's mastery. In Túrin he creates a haunting character, a noble hero who unwittingly sets the stage for his own torturous death. His true nature acts against him, particularly in his penultimate battle with his greatest enemy. He underestimates the power of his opponent while overestimating his own brilliance, and his ultimate downfall comes about through an act of kindness to an unknown woman he finds alone in the woods. His nature works against him in all counts; truly, as Túrin was once told, "The doom lies in yourself" (*Sil* 259).

Not all of Tolkien's *Silmarillion* heroes are so innately tragic. In fact, the man who is arguably Tolkien's greatest hero, tragic or otherwise, occupies a strong positive role in the history. The story of Beren son of Barahir is one in which "amid weeping there is joy and under the shadow of death light that endures. . . most fair still in the ears of the Elves is the tale of Beren and Lúthien" (*Sil* 195). Beren fulfills the model of the noble hero in a powerful and moving story--one which, incidentally, was Tolkien's favorite. It stemmed from his own love for his wife Edith and was therefore imbued with "a Wagnerian intensity of passion" (Carpenter 97). In Tolkien's biography, Carpenter notes, "Of all his legends, the tale of Beren and Lúthien was the one most loved by Tolkien, not least because at one level he identified the character of Lúthien with his own wife" (Carpenter 97). Small wonder, therefore, that Tolkien desired to make Beren the most epic and true hero that he had ever created.

Beren exemplifies many of the standard classical qualities of the noble hero:

he is of the highest blood of the race of Man, a son of the Edain; he is a great warrior, renowned and dreaded among his enemies; and he feels only one love, that for the fair elfin princess Lúthien Tinúviel. His love for Lúthien compels him, by will or by charge, to develop into the finest hero of *The Silmarillion*. Once again, Tolkien creates a classical hero, then adds his own ingenuity to set the character apart. All of Beren's bravest acts arise out of the love he feels for Lúthien, and for her he suffers greater pain than almost any hero in literature. Beren's destiny will change the course of the world forever; Lúthien is a part of that destiny, for their love is a new kind, not before seen in their world. Because of this fate, Beren must prove his bravery and loyalty beyond any previous hero known to man. Tolkien thus sends Beren through unbelievable trials in which Beren is proven worthy of both Lúthien and the fate to which he has been born.

Perhaps the bravest act Beren commits is his initial appearance before Lúthien's father, King Thingol, the elfin ruler of Doriath. Doriath is the last stronghold of the elves which remains untouched by Sauron and his evil. All unwanted creatures are repulsed from Doriath by the Girdle of Melian, a protective barrier conjured by Melian, Thingol's wife and a demi-goddess of a race even nobler than the elves. When Beren passes through the Girdle, this proves that great power lies within him, ". . . for a great doom lay upon him" (*Sil* 198). His destiny is stronger than any magic which Melian could conjure, a fact which foreshadows the dramatic struggle which Tolkien plans for him. Once Beren declares his love to Lúthien, he is captured by the Elves, to whom he is an impostor. He is then brought before Thingol to be judged, and here his bravery becomes apparent:

> Then Thingol looked upon Beren with scorn and anger. . . . "Who are you. . .and for what cause have you left your own land to enter this, which is forbidden to

> such as you? Can you show reason why my power should not be laid on you in heavy punishment for your insolence and folly?"
>
> Then Beren looking up beheld the eyes of Lúthien. . . and it seemed to him that words were put into his mouth. Fear left him, and the pride of the eldest house of Men returned to him; and he said: "My fate, O King, led me hither, through perils such as few even of the Elves would dare. And here I have found what I sought not indeed, but finding I would possess for ever. . . For Lúthien your daughter is the fairest of all the Children of the World."
>
> Then silence fell upon the hall, for those that stood there were astounded and afraid, and they thought that Beren would be slain.
>
> (*Sil* 200-201)

Beren will not be baited or insulted by anyone, no matter if he is a high King of the Elves. However, the reaction of the other elves in the hall shows what grave danger Beren is really in; King Thingol values his daughter above all possessions on Earth: to have her claimed by a mere mortal is virtually more than he can stomach. Nevertheless, Beren loves Lúthien above all else, and he will not be cowed, even by the legend of the mighty King of Doriath.

Fortunately, Thingol has already sworn to Lúthien that Beren would not be slain, so Beren survives this initial trial. Thingol is truly angry, though, and he insults Beren, calling him a thrall of Morgoth (*Sil* 201). Beren answers by showing him the ring of Felagund, which links, through friendship, Beren's house to that of the High King of the Noldor. He claims that this ring should at least prove him

above such an insult. Thingol will not be appeased, however, and in his wrath he sets Beren to what seems an impossible task. For Thingol desires the stolen Silmaril which sits in Morgoth's crown; if Beren will bring him this jewel, he will turn over his jewel of a daughter to Beren. He asks this believing that Beren could never accomplish such a feat; Thingol thus has no fear of losing Lúthien to a mortal. Thingol, however, underestimates the love of Beren and Lúthien and the noble courage which surges through Beren's blood. Beren overcame his fear of Thingol and spoke boldly before him, even when the King easily could have taken Beren's life. Beren is truly a hero of noble blood, for he holds honor and love above cowardice and shame, no matter what the cost. He looks death in the eye and does not quake. Hence, Beren sets out to challenge the power of the greatest evil which exists in his world--and he does it all for the love of Lúthien.

However, unbeknownst to Beren, he is not fighting merely for the love of Lúthien; Tolkien places a much greater burden on him than merely his own doom. Instead, Beren becomes the one mortal who controls the fate of the two races of Arda; the love of Lúthien and himself would forever tie Elves and Men to one another. In addition to this responsibility, the doom of Doriath is upon him. His fate and that of Doriath are intertwined, which is the reason he passed through the Girdle of Melian instead of being repelled. Melian realizes this and she tries to tell Thingol to be wary in his choice of words, for "far and free does his fate lead him in the end, yet it is wound with yours. Take heed!" (*Sil* 202). Unfortunately, Thingol does not listen, and because of this, he becomes the purveyor of his own doom. When he links Beren to the Silmaril, all of the races of Arda are trapped, for "[t]hus he wrought the doom of Doriath, and was ensnared within the curse of Mandos" (*Sil* 202). Indeed, long before the time of Thingol, the great god Mandos "foretold that the fates of Arda, earth, sea, and air, lay locked within [the Silmarils]" (*Sil* 73).

Thingol sets in motion that which Beren must complete--the eventual loss of Doriath.

Due to this great burden of responsibility, Beren will face trials greater than any man, before or since, has ever faced. Tolkien makes it quite clear that upon Beren's fate relies the future of all the races. Beren himself becomes aware of this when, upon coming to King Felagund and telling him his story, Felagund knows the fate which Beren controls:

> "It is plain that Thingol desires your death; but it seems that this doom goes beyond his purpose, and that the Oath of Fëanor is again at work. For the Silmarils are cursed with an oath of hatred, and he that even names them in desire moves a great power from slumber; and the sons of Fëanor would lay all the Elf-Kingdoms in ruin rather than suffer any other than themselves to win or possess a Silmaril, for the Oath drives them. . . ."
>
> (*Sil* 204)

Felagund's words prove true, for the sons of Fëanor turn Felagund's own people against him. Thus, the people of Felagund's kingdom Nargothrond unwittingly choose their doom; "they fell from the valour and freedom of the Elves of old, and their land was darkened" (*Sil* 205). Thingol's desire and Beren's fate have already begun their work. The magnitude of Beren's acts cannot be understated.

Despite this pressure, Beren cannot not be convinced to abandon his quest. He has sworn an oath and is thus bound by honor to fulfill it. Felagund understands his dedication and joins him in his quest. Tolkien makes a powerful statement here about the worthiness of Beren, for Beren is joined in his quest by the High King of the Noldor, the most powerful elf east of the Great Sea. This is no

small feat for a mortal in the world of *The Silmarillion* , even one whose father did Felagund great honor. Felagund, in his wise way, knows that Beren carries the heavy burden of fate on his shoulders, and thus stays by his side. Indeed, the nobility of Beren is so great that Felagund gives up his life for Beren. Sauron had captured the two and had sent a werewolf to devour each of their company: "But when the wolf came for Beren, Felagund put forth all his power, and burst his bonds; and he wrestled with the werewolf, and slew it with his hands and teeth; yet he himself was wounded to the death" (*Sil* 210). The elfin High King of the Noldor dies for the son of a mortal man who once served him--Tolkien could scarely offer Beren a greater honor. Any doubts to his nobility could be discounted by a sacrificial death alone, but Tolkien attests to Beren's truly heroic spirit through the voluntary death of the most mighty elf alive.

After Felagund's death, Lúthien manages to free Beren from the power of Sauron, and the two lovers flee to the heart of a great forest, where no creature can find them. There they are happy for a time, but after a while Beren realizes that he must fulfill his duty to Thingol and give Lúthien a proper life. Although they are happy, he knows that his quest is not complete until he has come to Thingol with a Silmaril in his hand. Once again, Beren dramatizes a classical heroic trait--a sense of honor--that is essential for a noble hero. Tolkien builds Beren's greatest test upon this basic trait by leading Beren from that simple desire to fulfill his pledge into any hero's worst nightmare: the Vale of Morgoth. To make matters worse, Beren has been made to realize that he can no longer be sundered from Lúthien; whatever evil he must face, she must join him. Instead of protecting the one he loves, he must take her with him into what can only be described as the pits of hell on Earth.

Indeed, the home of Morgoth is akin to none other evil place in *The Silmarillion*. A character who bears a remarkable resemblance to Lucifer, the fallen

angel, Morgoth evokes an evil more dreadful than any vice created by an earth-born being. Thus, his place of residence is less than attractive by normal standards. Tolkien describes it as a

> . . . drear dale that lay before the Gate of Angband [Morgoth's castle]. Black chasms opened beside the road, whence forms as of writhing serpents issued. On either side the cliffs stood as embattled walls, and upon them sat carrion fowl crying with fell voices. Before [Beren and Lúthien] was the impregnable Gate, an arch wide and dark at the foot of the mountain; above it reared a thousand feet of precipice.
>
> (*Sil* 217-18)

Angband defied approach simply in the horror of its existence, and furthermore was guarded by the most fell werewolf which had ever walked the earth. Beren and Lúthien approached disguised as creatures of Morgoth, so they eventually gained admittance to the seat of Morgoth himself. It is here, before Morgoth himself, that Beren and Lúthien "together wrought the greatest deed that has been dared by Elves or Men" (*Sil* 218).

There can be no denying the extreme importance of Lúthien to the success of Beren; without her, the mission will not be accomplished. Their two fates are bound together, and thus they must complete them together.[2] However, Beren's

[2] Lúthien is actually a remarkable heroine in her own right. Instead of allowing her beloved to fight and die alone for her sake, she accepts her fate and joins him in the fight against Morgoth. She has powers of enchantment and of healing, and she has the ability to change shapes at will. She uses all of these capabilities to help the man she loves, and together they capture the Silmaril and outwit Morgoth. She is essential to the fulfillment of the story, for only through the cooperation of the two races can Man and Elf be eternally joined in one race. Lúthien, then, is what might be called a noble heroine, a character very rare in Tolkien's works; in fact, only one such heroine appears in *LOTR*, and that is Éowyn, who is a princess of the Mark and a true warrior-maiden. She, too, accomplishes great deeds, defending her fallen father and slaying the Lord of the Nazgûl. She is one of many heroes from the Battle against Sauron, and being female she is all the more notable.

bravery at this point is all the more noticeable, for he is a mere mortal facing up to a creature not of the earth. Lúthien is a noble elf-princess, but her bloodline goes beyond elven to that of a demi-goddess; her mother possesses a power far greater than that of the elves, and this power courses through Lúthien's veins. In this way, Lúthien is more prepared than Beren to go before so great and dreadful a power as Morgoth. Besides Lúthien's companionship, Beren brings with him only what he has had before: the friendship of the elves, the nobility of man, and the courage which has served him in the past. Tolkien intends to inspire awe with this bravery, but his greatest and truest endorsement of Beren's true nature comes after Lúthien's powers have temporarily bewitched Morgoth into sleep. At long last, Beren takes his knife and cuts the Silmaril from the fallen crown of Morgoth. "As he closed it in his hand, the radiance welled through his living flesh, and his hand became as a shining lamp; but the jewel suffered his touch and hurt him not" (*Sil* 220-21). Indeed, the Silmarils were hallowed by the great queen who ruled over all Arda, and they held a nature of their own: "And Varda hallowed the Silmarils, so that thereafter no mortal flesh, nor hands unclean, nor anything of evil will might touch them, but it was scorched and withered" (*Sil* 73). When Beren closes his mortal hand over the surface of the Silmaril, *it does not burn him*. The Silmaril, this one time, tolerates the touch of one who is pure enough to overcome the limits of his mortality. The Silmaril recognizes that Beren bears no "evil will"; his intentions with the Silmaril are utterly noble, and thus the Silmaril acknowledges his strength of soul. It is a case of the Powers of the old ways endorsing a man of the new breed. Only through this endorsement can Tolkien be contented in giving life to the love between Beren and Lúthien; for Lúthien is of the old ways, and in giving them up, the one she loves must be equal to one of Lúthien's own race. Beren has proven, through his courage, his honor and his love, that he is worthy of the

privilege bestowed on him by the Silmarils, and eventually by Thingol in the form of Lúthien herself. Beren is a noble hero in his own right, but through him Tolkien connects the old world and the new with a link that can never again be sundered.

Thus, in the forms of Túrin and Beren, Tolkien has created his own race of heroes. His heroes suffer greatly in their deeds, expected always to execute the greatest deeds that man can face. They do so with skill and courage, as befits their noble background. They differ, though, even as they are alike. Túrin is more akin to a hero of old--modeled strongly on Beowulf--who carries with him distinct flaws in his character. These flaws are Tolkien's way of asserting Túrin's singularity: because Túrin demonstrates excessive pride and is too quick to anger, he suffers a great doom. He fulfills his duty as a hero, but the anguish he brings upon himself (with some help from a very powerful dragon) causes his untimely death. Beren, too, shows his singularity through that which he suffers. He must perform the greatest feats thinkable upon Arda in order to prove himself worthy of the love of Lúthien. Beren stays true to his word and his lady, no matter what the cost. There is no doubt that he would sacrifice all for his love and honor. However, by proving Beren's worth in love, Tolkien asserts Beren as the only man worthy of joining the two races of Arda. Through his line, the wisdom of the Firstborn, the Elves, is joined with the youth of Men; this is the line of the Half-Elven, which endures beyond the Change of the World to the creation of the legends of Middle-Earth. Thus, the heroic deeds of Beren carry on to the world of *LOTR*. The reader is reminded of his heroic ideal, and the power of the courageous, yet flawed, Túrin, throughout the heroic acts which the heroes of Middle-earth perform. Tolkien links the two stories in this manner, both through a physical manifestation of the past and through the heroic models which that past provides.

There is one last link between the two novels, one which bridges the gap of

elves and man in a rather mysterious fashion. When the change of the world comes about, the path to Valinor--the world of the Ruling Powers--is hidden from Middle-earth forever. Only those who are blessed by the Ruling Powers can cross the Sundering Sea to the Blessed Realm. However, the Ruling Powers still follow the events of Middle-earth, and they know of the power of Sauron and its threat to all of Arda. Through the Half-Elven and the few High Elves which still remain in Middle-earth, the might of Valinor manifests itself; however, the elves are doubtful as to what course to take concerning Sauron. It is then that the Istari appear--the Wizards. These wizards are great in power and knowledge, if their origins are mysterious. They appeared "in the likeness of men. . . old but vigorous" (*Sil* 372). They know many things about the ways of Sauron before the Change of the World, and they initially provide much help to Middle-earth concerning such matters. Their origins are not mentioned in *LOTR* , but *The Silmarillion* provides the answer:

> None at that time knew whence they were, save Círdan of the Havens, and only to Elrond and to Galadriel did he reveal that they came over the Sea. But afterwards it was said among the Elves that they were messengers sent by the Lords of the West to contest the power of Sauron, if he should arise again, and to move Elves and Men and all living things of good will to valiant deeds.
>
> (*Sil* 372)

These wizards, then, are a link to the old world of *The Silmarillion*. They have come from Valinor to advise and counsel; thus they are people of the Elves. They come in the guise of Men, though, knowing that such will be necessary to earn the trust of mankind. In this way they provide a link between the Two Kindred, one

which was only before seen in the Half-Elven. The wizards connect the Old World to the New and the Two Kindred--and in the midst of the Istari lies one who some critics believe to be the real hero of *The Lord of the Rings*.

GANDALF: A HERO OF GUIDANCE

Gandalf the Grey first surfaces in *The Hobbit* as a mysterious old wizard who convinces a reluctant Bilbo Baggins to join him on an adventure. His origins, in classical heroic style, are unknown and not discussed. Even in *LOTR* his background, though expanded, still remains mysterious. In *The Hobbit*, Gandalf appears to be an eccentric wizard who can play with fire and is skilled in manipulating people, but shows few other notable qualities. However, in *LOTR* he develops into much more than a mere firecracker wizard. Gandalf's noble character, implied by his origin in *The Silmarillion*, comes to the forefront during the course of *LOTR*. Gandalf himself foreshadows the change in the first book of the trilogy when he says, "There are many powers in the world, for good or for evil. Some are greater than I am. Against some I have not yet been measured. But my time is coming" (I, 290-1). Tolkien invests Gandalf with subtlety, strength and much more power than little Bilbo ever imagines. He demonstrates heretofore unknown attributes which surface continually throughout the quest. Gandalf uses these qualities to fulfill the multiple roles which Tolkien creates for him, being at once a parent, a teacher, an advisor, a savior and a friend. In the execution of these roles which are so important to the development of the others, Gandalf himself displays classical heroic elements which, some critics believe, single out Gandalf as the preeminent hero of *LOTR*.

Tolkien does hint at Gandalf's later importance by providing the reader with brief glimpses of the wizard's roles in *The Hobbit*. His role as parent is the first to emerge, which is appropriate, considering the fact that this role recurs continually in *LOTR*. As Purtill states, "To a certain extent Gandalf functions as a parental figure, pushing Bilbo to get him started but then stepping back to let Bilbo struggle and learn on his own" (Purtill 51). Indeed, Gandalf's parental aid proves essential to the maturation of many characters, Bilbo being only the first of many. Bilbo demonstrates rather effectively, however, the impact that Gandalf as parent (as well as his relinquishing of that role) will have upon the adventurers of *LOTR*. Nitzsche notes, "[Gandalf] encourages Bilbo by sparking his enthusiasm for the adventure with a few tales. Like any good parent, though, he realizes he must depart (in Chapter Seven) in order for Bilbo to develop his own physical, intellectual and spiritual qualities" (Nitzsche 42-3). Purtill agrees, "Gandalf soon removes himself entirely and lets Bilbo gradually take his place as leader and protector of the Dwarves. . . . Gradually Bilbo assumes the parental role in place of Gandalf until. . . 'he becomes the real leader in their adventures'" (Purtill 51). Gandalf fulfills his role and subsequently recognizes when he must abandon it for the independent development of his protege. Bilbo seems to be a "practice run" for the much more intertwined and complex role progression which Gandalf must assume in *LOTR*.

Gandalf performs the parental function again throughout the trilogy. He performs the role first for Frodo, albeit briefly. At first Frodo even reacts like a child by occasionally disregarding Gandalf's very sound advice (Purtill 52). He learns quickly, however, and begins to grasp the seriousness of the situation with adult gravity, thus changing Gandalf's role in Frodo's life. Gandalf appears more extensively as a parent figure for the younger hobbits, whose thinking is more child-

like due to their age. Pippin in particular is heavily impacted by Gandalf's parentage, for Pippin rides with Gandalf to Minas Tirith. Gandalf has guided Pippin in the past, but in Minas Tirith he begins to allow Pippin make decisions for himself. Gandalf states as much after Pippin swears his service to Denethor:

> Remember that! For now you are sworn to his service. I do not know what put it into your head, or your heart, to do that. But it was well done. I did not hinder it, for generous deed should not be checked by cold counsel.
>
> (III, 35)

Gandalf knows that Pippin has begun to develop into a mature hobbit, and thus he understands that Pippin must be allowed to go his own way, just as Gandalf's other "children" have in the past.

Eventually, then, Gandalf relinquishes the role of parent and assumes other, more appropriate roles. Once again, Tolkien first gives an account of Gandalf's role change in *The Hobbit*. Bilbo, as mentioned before, assumes the parent role that Gandalf has previously filled; when Gandalf returns, he must relate to Bilbo on a different level, that of the friend or companion. He praises Bilbo for his maturation and gently informs him that he has changed: "My dear Bilbo! Something is the matter with you! You are not the hobbit that you were" (*Hobbit* 284). He accompanies Bilbo on the long trek home, informing him at its conclusion, "You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you" (*Hobbit* 286-7). Bilbo no longer needs a parent; Gandalf recognizes this and assumes the now more appropriate role of Bilbo's friend.

Gandalf follows this pattern of role-changing again in *LOTR*, altering his response to individual characters as their progress demands. His change from the parental role to that of advisor and teacher highlights the gradual maturation of the

hobbits. Frodo, as seen before, understands the gravity of the situation more quickly than the other hobbits, and thus Gandalf turns to advising and teaching Frodo what he must know in order to succeed on the mission to Mordor. The two youngest hobbits spend the most time with Gandalf after the breaking of the Fellowship; once he relinquishes the parental role for them, he becomes their advisor, informing them of the ways of the Rohirrim and the men of Minas Tirith. He recognizes them now as independent creatures who can take his advice and counsel but will also act freely upon their own judgment. By changing his attitude towards the hobbits as they themselves change, Gandalf aids their maturation and hence aids the cause of the Free Peoples; after all, an immature and uninformed hobbit can often do much more harm than good, a fact which is proved throughout much of the first book.

In fulfilling his role as teacher, Gandalf often teaches not by speech but by example. He provides a model for the members of the company to emulate, and his own personal struggles often impress upon the members of the company more than Gandalf's often quizzical statements. For example, when Gandalf first informs Frodo of the nature of the Ring, he teaches Frodo both by word and example about the necessity of pity. Frodo has protested the fact that no one who has captured or encountered such a ghastly and malicious creature as Gollum has bothered to kill him. In fact, Frodo states outright, "Now at any rate he is as bad as an Orc, and just an enemy. He deserves death" (I, 92). Gandalf rebukes him, cautioning him to "feel, not wrath or hatred, but love as pity" (Nitzsche 102).

> Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he

> dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up in the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many--yours not least. In any case we did not kill him: he is very old and wretched.
>
> (I, 92-3)

Here Gandalf informs Frodo of the creed which Gandalf continually tries to exercise: in his own words, it is "Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need" (I, 92). One cannot foresee the worth or destructiveness in each and every creature; thus one must stay one's hand as long as possible. In this way, each creature plays out its destiny, and even evil may turn to benefit--as in Frodo's case. He remembers the teaching of Gandalf and stays his own hand (and Sam's) when Gollum proves treacherous. Having captured Gollum, Frodo speaks of disposing of him:

> "If we kill him, we must kill him outright. But we can't do that, not as things are. Poor wretch! He has done us no harm."
>
> "Oh hasn't he!" said Sam rubbing his shoulder. "Anyway he meant to, *and* he means to, I'll warrant. . . ."
>
> It seemed to Frodo then that he heard, quite plainly but far off, voices out of the past. . . .
>
> (II, 280-81)

Frodo then remembers in his mind the exact conversation that he had so long ago with Gandalf about pitying Gollum. Gandalf's teaching stays with Frodo, for even though Frodo is afraid, he will not kill Gollum. He answers Gandalf's distant admonition, fresh even now in his mind, by saying, "I will not touch the creature.

For now that I see him, I do pity him" (II, 281). Gandalf's example proves more beneficial than anyone (except perhaps Gandalf himself) ever imagines: Gollum is the one who at last saves Middle-earth--by saving Frodo from himself--by stealing the Ring and falling into the chasms of Mount Doom. Tolkien himself notes, "[Frodo's] exercise of patience and mercy towards Gollum gained him Mercy: his failure was redressed" (*Letters* 326). If Frodo had not learned Gandalf's timely lesson, the Ring would probably not have made it to Mordor in the first place. Thus, Gandalf's creed both aids Frodo's personal development and saves the people of Middle-earth.

Gandalf also provides another crucial example, this time for all the members of the Company. He does not teach by lesson but by the success of his own personal battle with the temptations of corruption. His initial, and perhaps greatest, temptation is Frodo's free offering of the Ring. Seeing that Gandalf possesses great power, Frodo asks if perhaps the Ring would not be better in Gandalf's hands. Gandalf reacts violently:

> "No!" cried Gandalf, springing to his feet. "With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly. . . . Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need of it. Great perils lie before me."
>
> (I, 95)

The great power of the Ring is a temptation to use it for the spreading of good in the world; as Purtill states, "Gandalf's temptation. . . is the desire to *make* those he is sent to help be 'good' in *his* way" (Purtill 86). Gandalf knows, however, that the evil inherent in the Ring corrupts all intentions, no matter how good they may be. Tolkien himself acknowledged this fact, stating, "Gandalf as Ring-Lord would have been far worse than Sauron. He would have remained 'righteous' but self-righteous. He would have continued to rule and order things for 'good'. . . . Gandalf would have made good detestable and seem evil" (*Letters* 332-33). Gandalf wisely and successfully resists the temptation, thus providing a model for others to resist such a temptation later.

Gandalf also resists the temptations of Saruman, who attempts to convince Gandalf that joining with Sauron is the only choice for wizards of their wisdom and power. Saruman was once Gandalf's companion, one of the Istari sent over the Sundering Sea to aid Middle-earth. Saruman fell into corruption, but he did not forget the powers of the other wizards, particularly Gandalf's. Gandalf's power would be a great aid to Saruman, who uses strong words and a soft voice in his attempts to win over Gandalf:

> The time of the Elves is over, but our time is at hand: the world of Men, which we must rule. But we must have power, power to order all things as we will, for that good which only the Wise can see. And listen, Gandalf, my old friend and helper! I said *we* , for *we* it may be, if you will join with me. A new Power is rising. . . . This then is the one choice before you, before us. We may join with that Power. It would be wise, Gandalf. There is hope that way. . . . the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at

> last to direct its courses, to control. . . all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish. . . .
>
> (I, 339-40)

Saruman knows how to tempt Gandalf, but once again the Grey Pilgrim resists and conquers his temptation. Saruman was once a wise companion, but Gandalf understands that his words are merely an echo of Sauron's temptations. Gandalf rejects Saruman, stating, "Well, the choices are, it seems, to submit to Sauron, or to yourself. I will take neither" (I, 341). By not taking Saruman's offer, Gandalf declares himself an enemy of one who used to be a friend--not an easy decision for anyone to make. However, Gandalf has only virtuous intentions, so he resists temptation; all the members of the company hear of his virtue (and subsequent imprisonment) and take it to heart.

The members of the company do benefit from Gandalf's example, for they themselves must resist the temptation of the Dark Lord at various times. Frodo not only rejects the opportunity to kill Gollum in cold blood, but he resists the probings of the Dark Lord as well. When the Ring attempts to overpower him with the will of Sauron, Frodo strives against it, even when the Eye of Sauron himself is aimed in Frodo's direction (Purtill 55). Not the least of that which influences Frodo's determination to struggle is the knowledge that other, greater people--Gandalf included--have overcome the same temptation. Indeed, Gandalf "constitutes a spiritual guide for Frodo" (Nitzsche 104). Aragorn's ability to struggle with Sauron through the palantír comes partly from Gandalf's successful resistance of Sauron, in addition to Gandalf's advice on how to deal with the Dark Lord. Gandalf teaches both openly and silently, and all the members of the Company grow and benefit from his examples.

Gandalf, then, fulfills several different roles, sometimes simultaneously, with

skill, finesse and good deal of care. In one role, however, Gandalf displays his most heroic and outstanding qualities, those which nominate him, in the minds of some critics, as the outstanding hero of *LOTR* : the role of savior. Above all other roles, Gandalf has been prepared to serve as a vessel of salvation for Middle-earth; after all, he came from the Maia in Valinor as an aide against Sauron. This calling as rescuer manifests itself continually, throughout all four books. He often performs as the *deus ex machina*, always arriving with salvation at a time when he is the least expected (Nitzsche 43). He appears, seemingly out of nowhere, at more than one place during the adventures of *The Hobbit*. For example, at one point Gandalf rescues the company from the clutches of the Orcs, and at the end of the novel he arrives just in time to aid in the war against the fell creatures of the North. He continues this unpredictable habit in the trilogy; in the first book, he tames the vicious flood from the Misty Mountains so that it will cripple the Ringwraiths but leave his own friends unharmed. As he claims, "I added a few touches of my own. . . . I was afraid that we had let loose too fierce a wrath, and the flood would get out of hand and wash you all away" (I, 296). He arrived, as usual, just in time to save his friends. He continues this habit throughout the remainder of the quest, fulfilling his calling as deliverer from evil several times over.

Despite this prowess as the "man with deep pockets," Gandalf's greatest and most selfless act comes during a time when he is not playing the *deus ex machina* ; instead, he is a present and permanent member of the Fellowship that is making its way to Minas Tirith. Within the mines of Moria, Gandalf must sacrifice himself for the good of the Company. Through this unselfish acceptance of the part of savior, Gandalf saves the Company from certain death. Beyond this, though, he performs a greater act: he selflessly executes his destiny as savior, and because of this he brings about his own epiphany and personal transfiguration. Just as Beren recognizes that

his destiny affects not just himself, but the fate of the world, so does Gandalf realize that he holds the only chance for the survival of those around him. Gandalf knows that the Company cannot fight the Balrog; only he, as a holdover from the First Age (when such evils as the Balrog were created), can possibly defend them from a terror beyond their ken. He knows he is the only hope, even if he must sacrifice himself. His actions prove his thoughts; after the Company sights the Balrog, Gandalf reacts accordingly:

> "Over the bridge!" cried Gandalf, recalling his strength. "Fly! This is a foe beyond any of you. I must hold the narrow way. Fly!"
>
> . . . The Balrog reached the bridge. . . . It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. But Gandalf stood firm.
>
> "You cannot pass," he said. The orcs stood still, and a dead silence fell. "I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. . . . Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass."
>
> (I, 428-9)

The Balrog makes no answer the the challenge except to fight. He and Gandalf clash, a battle of Darkness vs. Light. Boromir and Aragorn step up to join him, but Gandalf knows that they will not survive such a battle--so he destroys the bridge upon which he and the Balrog are battling.

> . . . Gandalf lifted his staff, and crying aloud he smote the bridge before him. The staff broke asunder and fell from his hand. A blinding sheet of white flame sprang up. The bridge cracked. Right at the Balrog's feet it broke. . . . the

> thongs lashed and curled about the wizard's knees, dragging him. . . . He staggered, and fell. . . and slid into the abyss. "Fly, you fools!" he cried, and was gone.
>
> (I, 429-30)

Fly they do, and thus they are saved. Gandalf has performed the ultimate sacrifice that anyone can perform: he has given up his life for his friends. Beyond the call of a typical noble hero, he has followed the example of one of the greatest heroes and saviors of all literature, Jesus Christ. One critic notes, "Tolkien, as a Christian, knew that when God became man to teach us, he asked us to follow him rather than imposing his will on us. . . . Gandalf, who gives up his life for his friends on the bridge of Khazad-dûm. . . is a free creature who freely answers the call to imitate Christ" (Purtill 87). Gandalf, too, has taught by suggestion, not imposition, so it is therefore all the more appropriate that he **chooses** to sacrifice himself for the ones he loves.

This choice is yet another heroic quality which endears him to critics--and makes him a uniquely Tolkien figure. As shown in *The Silmarillion* , the hero must endure seemingly impossible odds in order to prove his worth as a hero, and it is no different for Gandalf. As a vestige of the earlier times, Gandalf must suffer as did the heroes of old. It is through this battle, this "purification through fire," that Gandalf demonstrates the qualities necessary in a true noble hero. Indeed, as one critic puts it, ". . . the emphasis upon Gandalf rightly falls. . . on his apotheosis, his transformation through fire and death into the hero's incarnation as the White Rider, a force for good finally equal in power to the evil of Sauron" (Petty 63). The battle with the Balrog is the ultimate test for Gandalf, for through it he is born again as Gandalf the White. After Gandalf and the Balrog plunged into the abyss below the bridge, they encountered burning heat, then freezing water which "cold it was as

the tide of death" (II, 134). Deep in the bowels of the earth, "where time is not counted. . . and the world is gnawed by nameless things", they battled with one another. Gandalf finally forces the Balrog to flee, but instead of letting it go, he pursues it. Gandalf knows that he must defeat the Balrog at all costs; his time has come to prove himself. The Balrog in this situation is comparable to the typical dragon faced by many noble heroes, but in true Tolkien fashion, Gandalf must face one of the greatest evils that has ever cursed the earth with its presence. Just as Túrin faced his dragon, Gandalf must face his own penultimate enemy. In the spirit of the true noble hero, Gandalf follows the Balrog to the top of the Endless Stair, upon the pinnacle of the Silvertine.

On this peak Gandalf completes the test necessary for his transformation. He and the Balrog battle on the peak, forces of good and evil, darkness and light clashing in a whirlwind of thunder and lightning. Gandalf at last prevails and casts the Balrog down the mountain, using the last of his strength to do so. He is spent, and can no longer live as he was:

> Then darkness took me, and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered far on roads that I will not tell.
>
> Naked I was sent back--for a brief time, until my task was done. And naked I lay upon the mountain-top. . . . I was alone, forgotten, without escape upon the hard horn of the world. There I lay staring upward, while the stars wheeled over, and each day was as long as a life-age of the earth.
>
> (II, 135)

Just as many heroes in literature spend their last moments upon a hill, Gandalf dies upon the mountaintop and leaves the time known to living creatures. His task is

not complete, though, so he is returned the world of Middle-earth, reborn as a new creature, yet retaining the task of the old. As Petty notes, "The death and rebirth motif is plainly employed here. . . . In rebirth he is sent back from oblivion stripped of his former identity as the Grey Pilgrim" (Petty 66). Indeed, Gwaihir the Eagle, who bears him from the mountaintop, declares that "light as a swan's feather in my claw you are. The Sun shines through you" (II, 135). Gandalf no longer possesses the old body, for "the original Gandalf has been burned away" (Petty 66). Thus, as a newborn child he is born naked upon the mountain; when he is clothed, his clothes are no longer grey, but white. His figure is new and filled with light:

> His hair was white as snow in the sunshine; and gleaming white was his robe; the eyes under his deep brows were bright, piercing as the rays of the sun; power was in his hand. . . . "Yes, I am in white now," said Gandalf.
>
> (II, 125)

He is no longer the Gandalf of old. He endured purification by fire and has emerged with the fire within him. The change to pure white confirms his rebirth; he has now been born a part of the light which he formerly only wielded in lightning and fire.

Gandalf the White completes the mission for which he was returned from the halls of the dead. He faces the Lord of the Nazgûl directly, denying him entrance to Minas Tirith. All others flee before the terror of the Lord, but Gandalf holds the gate until the Riders of Rohan arrive to engage the creatures of Sauron in battle. Gandalf aids in the battle between the servants of Sauron and the Free Peoples of Middle-earth, inspiring the troops upon the battlefield. After the battle upon the plains, he rides to the very gates of Mordor and faces the Messenger of Sauron, eye to eye and mind to mind. He overcomes the will of the great, fell ambassador,

cowing him before the host of Mordor.

> [Gandalf] cast aside his cloak and a white light shone forth like a sword in that black place. Before his upraised hand the foul Messenger recoiled. . . . [Gandalf cried,] "Get you gone, for your embassy is over and death is near to you. . . Begone!"
>
> Then the Messenger of Mordor laughed no more. . . Rage filled him and his mouth slavered, and shapeless sounds of fury came strangling from his throat. . . and fear overcame his wrath. He gave a great cry, and turned, leaped upon his steed, and with his company galloped madly back to Cirith Gorgor.
>
> (III, 205)

Gandalf stalls for time while engaging the Messenger, thereby giving Frodo and Sam time to complete their mission. Not only does Gandalf have the courage to face both the Lord of the Nazgûl and the messenger of Sauron, but in doing so he distracts Sauron's eye and allows the hobbits time to seal Sauron's defeat. Once again, Gandalf helps to save the day, just as he has done so many times before.

Gandalf proves his worth as a hero, then, by helping others to test their own mettle. In every role which he fulfills, Gandalf brings guidance and strength to others through himself. At first he is the parent, controlling and protecting the charges which have become his children. He also acts as a teacher and a friend, aiding and advising with both word and deed. He fights on the side of the Light, disdaining corruption, as others will after him. Then, as he performs the ultimate sacrifice, he is reborn as a creature of the Light of Valinor, one who contests the will of Sauron and aids in the defeat of the Dark Lord. The path to his rebirth is hard; he

emerges heroic only after facing his nemesis, that which will be both his undoing and his redoing. Just as Tolkien decreed in *The Silmarillion* , the hero faced greater trials than ever before seen on earth (or beneath it) and emerged triumphant, proving himself worthy of a heroic title. He completes the mission which he was sent to accomplish, the ultimate defeat of Sauron. He does more than just defeat Sauron, however; he also contributes to the heroic development and personal maturation of many other Tolkien characters, including four hobbits who will never again be the same. Gandalf knows that this mission, too, has been completed, and in true knightly fashion he acknowledges the end:

> "I am with you at present," said Gandalf, "but soon I shall not be. I am not coming to the Shire. You must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for. Do you not yet understand? My time is over: it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor to help folk to do so. And as for you, my dear friends, you will need no help. You are grown up now. Grown indeed very high; among the great you are, and I have no longer any fear at all for any of you."
>
> (III, 340)

Gandalf passes on to the Undying Lands of the West, having completed all, and more, that he was sent to do. In the course of his mission, he exhibits those noble qualities which readily explain why some critics yet regard him as "the mythological hero of the age."

ARAGORN: THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

When Strider first arouses Frodo's curiosity in the Inn at Bree, the reader has little notion that such a "strange-looking weather-beaten man" will turn out to be anything other than a hindrance thrown in the way of the hobbits as they make their way to Rivendell. Strider appears imposing, and he knows far more than he should, for not having been included in the hobbits' itinerary. Indeed, Frodo feels "far from comfortable under the stare of those keen eyes" (I, 215). Whatever is behind those keen grey eyes remains a mystery for a good long while, even after Strider is revealed as Aragorn, friend of Gandalf and heir of Isildur. At first, in fact, Tolkien himself did not know what those keen eyes hid; he recalls in his introductory note to *Tree and Leaf*, "I had then no more notion than [the hobbits] had of . . . who Strider was; and I had begun to despair of surviving to find out" (*Reader* 31). Thus, Aragorn assumed his identity as Tolkien created it; the feeling of revelation woven into the novel grew out of Tolkien's own discovery of Aragorn's purpose in *LOTR*. This gradual development of character creates a connection between a slowly self-revealing Aragorn and the reader; it is as if the reader becomes better friends with Aragorn and consequently uncovers new aspects of his character as the friendship deepens. With each new attribute, one discovers why Aragorn is worthy of the kingly status which Tolkien has given him. Aragorn possesses many classical heroic qualities, but these characteristics provide only the foundation for Aragorn's personality; upon that foundation Tolkien gradually builds not merely a warrior-hero, but a strong and firm monarch capable of a reign over all of Middle-earth. Just as Aragorn's noble lineage and carriage establish him, with increasing firmness, in the minds of the Free Peoples as the true King, so do Aragorn's kingly aspects gradually shape for the reader Tolkien's "man who would be King."

As with the other noble heroes in Tolkien's works, Aragorn shares common traits with past literary heroes, including those of *The Silmarillion*. Indeed, Purtill calls him a "traditional kind of hero" (Purtill 45). His classical attributes are many. Aragorn's father was killed in a vicious battle, this time against the fell Orcs of the North. In the same heroic vein, Elrond spirited the baby Aragorn away and raised him under an assumed name; he did this in order to protect the heir of Isildur from capture by the Enemy. In addition, the reader knows little or nothing about Aragorn's childhood; in fact, one does not even receive information about much of Aragorn's adult life, either. What information there is in *LOTR* is usually cryptic and spare: the reader is told that Aragorn's life up to this point has been spent wandering as a Ranger, providing help wherever it has been needed. Aragorn's childhood is not even mentioned--and the origin of his whole relationship with the Lady Arwen is relegated to the Appendix of Book III. So, in typical heroic fashion, the hero appears on the scene with very little background to explain exactly how he got there.

By appearing on the scene, however, Aragorn is accepting his heroic call to action. He knows that his time has come (typically, after much wandering), and he accepts the heroic role (Petty 33). His connection with the Ring is intimate, and because of this he must be closely intertwined with its fate. He realizes that he must protect the Ringbearer to the best extent of his abilities; only in this way will he learn how best to advance his own situation and simultaneously foil Sauron's treacherous plans. With Aragorn's actions lie the fate not only of his own love and lineage, but the fate of Gondor and, consequently, Middle-earth--just as Beren accepted a much larger burden when he agreed to acquire the Silmaril for Thingol. Aragorn knows the gravity of the Ringbearer's situation, as it pertains to both himself and others, and thus dedicates himself wholly to Frodo's protection, stating,

"I am Aragorn son of Arathorn; and if by life or death I can save you, I will" (I, 233).

Even as Aragorn swears on his name that he will protect Frodo, he is already feeling the relief of having gotten through his initial heroic battle. He has followed Gandalf's example (given by Gandalf in his teaching role) and resisted temptation. Gandalf's role as teacher includes exemplifying the ability to fight the call of the Ring; Aragorn has his bout with temptation as well, and he passes through it. In the inn at Bree, when he is alone with the four hobbits, he says, "If I was after the Ring, I could have it--NOW!!!" He then stands and lays his hand on the hilt of his sword (I, 232). However, he resists what the Ring lays in front of him; as Kocher states, "Like every other leader of the West he is given one fateful chance to yield to its temptation. But he conquers it and is never bothered by it again" (Kocher 127). Aragorn has followed Gandalf's example and has not swerved from the path of righteousness. After winning his battle, he no longer even feels any ownership of the ring, even though, as Isildur's heir, it is rightfully his: "Aragorn immediately renounces all ownership in [the Ring]. . . . As far as he is concerned the Ring belongs to nobody" (Kocher 130). Aragorn defeats temptation, which is as much of a battle as Beren's first bout with Sauron's evil. Although Aragorn's battle is mental, not physical, it is just as difficult and just as significant. If Aragorn had given into the temptation of the Ring, all would then have been lost, or at least sorely complicated, for the Free Peoples of Middle-earth. Instead, he accepts the burden of responsibility charged to him and casts the Ring's temptation away. Thus, he comes through his first battle in true heroic fashion, conquering the enemy and remaining valiant.

In addition to these noble heroic qualities, Aragorn also becomes involved with a princess, as did his literary counterparts, Túrin and Beren, in their times. As explained in Appendix A of *LOTR*, Aragorn and the Lady Arwen fall in love and pledge their troth to one another. She is the beloved daughter of Elrond, Aragorn's

foster-father, and is called the Evenstar of her people; because of her high birth, Elrond will not release her to Aragorn until Aragorn assumes his rightful throne. Thus, he strikes out into the wild without her, searching for a way to gain his throne. They remain true to one another, and her memory is "a comfort to Aragorn in a time of little hope" (Kocher 128). Their story remains a secret until the Appendix, however, so one must detect the few hints which Tolkien throws out as to the relationship between the two. Just as Aragorn is at first secretive and mysterious, so is Tolkien when it comes to revealing that Aragorn indeed has a lady love. As Kocher notes, "Unless the reader is very alert to the few obscure references to Arwen scattered here and there. . . he can easily wake up somewhere in Volume III with a shock of total surprise at Aragorn's approaching marriage to the lady" (Kocher 123). Only minimally does Aragorn's connection to Arwen reveal itself, but it is there, for those who can see it. Tolkien drops hints through the seemingly innocent Bilbo, who asks Aragorn, "Why weren't you at the feast? The Lady Arwen was there" (I, 307). Also, Frodo sees something curious to him: "Near [Elrond] sat the Lady Arwen. To his surprise Frodo saw that Aragorn stood beside her; his dark cloak was thrown back, and he seemed to be clad in elven-mail, and a star shone on his breast. They spoke together. . ." (I, 313). There are other references as well, obscure though they are, and they leave little doubt that Aragorn, in true heroic fashion, has fallen in love with a princess of the highest order.

These similarities that Aragorn shares with noble heroes of the past provide Tolkien with the rudimentary characteristics for Aragorn's personality. Tolkien takes Aragorn far beyond the dimensions of the average classical hero, however, and makes him into not just a Tolkien hero, but a Tolkien hero-king. Through increasingly frequent glimpses in the text, Tolkien reveals Aragorn's kingly aspects as they come to the attention of the other characters in *LOTR*. The most notable and

identifiable are the changes which occasionally take place in Aragorn's appearance. The changes never last for very long, but they leave an impression both on the observer and the reader. Frodo is the first to notice any real change in Aragorn; as Frodo is the first one to see Aragorn with the Lady Arwen, he is consequentially the first one to see the change from "Strider" to Aragorn. Frodo also sees Aragorn reminiscing about pledging his troth to Arwen in Lothlórien:

> . . . in [Aragorn's] hand was a small golden bloom of *elanor*, and a light was in his eyes. He was wrapped in some fair memory: and as Frodo looked at him he knew that he beheld things as they once had been in this same place. For the grim years were removed from the face of Aragorn, and he seemed clothed in white, a young lord tall and fair. . . .
>
> (I, 456)

The concept of Aragorn as a lord recurs in Frodo's mind, for Aragorn's visage has changed to reveal not a weather-worn Ranger, but a man of the line of the Númenor, fair and noble. The whole company sees him revealed so as they leave Lothlórien, when Galadriel gives Aragorn the Elfstone and names him Elessar (Petty 57): "Then Aragorn took the stone and pinned the brooch upon his breast, and those who saw him wondered; for they had not marked before how tall and kingly he stood, and it seemed to them that many years of toil had fallen from his shoulders" (I, 486). They see this momentary change in Aragorn again as the Company floats downriver towards the Falls of Rauros; the Falls are guarded by "two great pillars of stone carved in the likeness of Isildur and his kinsman. The colossal images transfix Aragorn so for a suspended instant he is transformed from the weathered Ranger to a proud sovereign returning from exile" (Petty 57).

Tolkien knows that a king must seem a king in order to convince others that he is worthy of such a title. Consequently, Aragorn is first revealed in his glory to his friends, who are more apt to accept him; once they believe, Aragorn begins to appear lordly and powerful to all who see him, particularly in battle. When he speaks to the fell invaders of Sauron at Helm's Deep, "So great a power and royalty was revealed in Aragorn, as he stood there alone above the ruined gates before the host of his enemies, that many of the wild men paused, and looked back over their shoulders to the valley, and some looked up doubtfully at the sky" (II, 184). Through these glimpses of Aragorn's royal countenance, Tolkien allows the reader to see that this man is worthy of the esteemed throne which he has worked for years to earn. No amount of time in the wilderness can totally cover the noble visage of a true King.

Another striking aspect of Aragorn's personality is his ability to inspire people's love and trust in him. Without really knowing how or why, various characters find themselves drawn to Aragorn in undeniable ways. The hobbits put their trust in him at Bree (even with Gandalf's endorsement, they are still very wary) because Aragorn reveals his true name to them--a trusting move in and of itself--and declares his dedication to their cause. As Kocher puts it, "By confiding to the hobbits his true identity he puts his life in their hands" (Kocher 127). Because of his ability to trust them, they return the compliment. Once they place their trust in him, a growing attachment follows. For example, at Rivendell Frodo tells Gandalf, "I have become very fond of Strider. Well, *fond* is not the right word. I mean he is dear to me; though he is strange, and grim at times. In fact, he reminds me often of you" (I, 291). He cannot explain exactly how he feels, but already he feels affection for someone he barely knows. The other members of the Company later follow suit, placing their trust in Aragorn when he assumes leadership of the Company after

Gandalf's tragedy in Moria. They, however, have known him and traveled with him, and thus have something upon which to base their affection; however, Aragorn can also inspire love in those who do not know him. Éomer, for example, feels an inexplicable attachment to Aragorn immediately upon seeing him. Kocher explains that Éomer is moved by an affection for Aragorn, a loyal love that Éomer claims he has felt "since you rose up out of the grass before me" (Kocher 141). Aragorn's kingly nature affects those around him, whether they be acquaintance or stranger, friend or foe. Tolkien's king can do no less than inspire such love and loyalty: if he cannot inspire such trust before he is crowned, little luck will he have after the realm is his to rule.

Some of the trust which Aragorn inspires arises not just from his regal air, but from his intelligence as well. This intelligence enables Aragorn to appreciate the various customs of different races; hence, he has a gift for mediation and diplomacy which is well above that of the average man. He manages to avoid some harrowing events simply by asserting his skill at just the right moment. For example, when the Company enters Lothlórien and the Elves insist, by their law, that Gimli be blindfolded, Gimli protests loudly, calling it an indignity. Moods escalate, and trouble begins to brew. At this moment Aragorn steps in to calm both sides:

> "Come!" said Aragorn. "If I am still to lead this Company, you must do as I bid. It is hard upon the Dwarf to be thus singled out. We will all be blindfolded, even Legolas. That will be best, though it will make the journey slow and dull. . . . the Company shall all fare alike."
>
> (I, 450-51)

Although Legolas protests at first, he realizes that Aragorn is being fair, so he consents to the blindfold. Aragorn understands both the stubborn pride of the

Dwarves and the delicate malignancy of distrust which lingers between the Elves and the Dwarves; he uses this knowledge to work out a fair situation at a time when things could run extremely foul. Truly, "a man who can bring this off will make a fair and wise king" (Kocher 136).

Aragorn also knows how to deal with strangers in the same diplomatic fashion. When surrounded by the Rohirrim during his pursuit of the captured hobbits, Aragorn uses his knowledge and past anonymous interactions with the Riders to steer his diplomacy in the necessary direction. Not only does he stop the Riders from engaging in a battle with Legolas and Gimli (nearly brought about by an uninformed slight from Éomer regarding the Lady Galadriel), but he impresses them all with his brave declaration of his title and purpose.

> Aragorn threw back his cloak. The elven-sheath glittered as he grasped it, and the bright blade of Andúril shone like a sudden flame as he swept it out. "Elendil!" he cried. "I am Aragorn son of Arathorn, and am called Elessar, the Elfstone, Dúnadan, the heir of Isildur Elendil's son of Gondor. Here is the Sword that was Broken and is forged again! Will you aid me or thwart me? Choose swiftly!"
>
> (II, 43-4)

All who observe this declaration are awed by his strength and power. He knows what will touch the souls of the Riders of Rohan most keenly. As Kocher agrees, "With the bold be bold. The stance [Aragorn] takes appeals perfectly to the warrior Rohirrim. Éomer is impressed, even awed enough to accept the identification claimed. . ." (Kocher 140). Aragorn uses his past experience to color his reaction to the challenges of the Riders. He selects just the right shade, inspiring awe and

respect and, in some cases, love. His informed diplomacy brings him invaluable allies for the battle which lies ahead.

Aragorn also understands how to deal with the Enemy in a way that will eventually thwart Sauron's evil purposes. He has not wandered far and wide, pursuing Sauron's evil servants, and not learned anything: he knows much of how Sauron thinks and plots. He uses this knowledge to his advantage in several instances, allowing Sauron an open chance to hinder his own evil plots. Aragorn usually succeeds; for example, when Pippin makes the mistake of looking into the *palantír*, Aragorn realizes that Sauron now thinks that the Ringbearer is at Orthanc. Hoping to further distract Sauron's already misinformed assumptions, Aragorn decides to alarm Sauron by revealing his true name to the Dark Lord. As he says to his companions, "To know that I lived and walked the earth was a blow to his heart, I deem; for he knew it not till now. . . Sauron has not forgotten Isildur and the Sword of Elendil" (III, 62-3). In revealing himself to Sauron, Aragorn hopes to draw Sauron into battle before Mordor is totally prepared (Kocher 142). As he states, "The hasty stroke goes oft astray" (III, 63). Also, Aragorn action's draw Sauron's eye away from the Land of Mordor, allowing Frodo and Sam to slip unnoticed into the land of evil. Thus, Sauron misses that which would be most valuable to him. Aragorn repeats this "diplomacy of distraction" after the Free Peoples have defeated the Host of Mordor upon the Plain of Gondor. Knowing that Sauron holds many more fell creatures inside the Black Gate, Aragorn nonetheless brings a small company to the Gate, as if challenging the Great Host within. Instead, he hopes he is buying precious time for the Ringbearer by drawing Sauron's eye to the Gate and away from somewhere within. He succeeds, and the Ring is destroyed; Aragorn once again manipulates the follies of Sauron to the evil one's own undoing. The ability to work with whomever he encounters is a valuable asset to a king of Aragorn's

stature and power, and Tolkien knows it. Hence, Aragorn shows promising ability in all aspects of communication and diplomacy.

Another of Aragorn's strengths is his ability to temper his strong sense of justice with a forgiving compassion. Kocher speaks of the air of "stern justice" about Aragorn, a justice which sees the line between right and wrong very clearly. However, Tolkien knows that in order to sell the returning King to both the reader and the people of Gondor, the King must have a regard for fairness and mercy which tempers a keen sense of lawfulness. A first glimpse of this balanced viewpoint arises at the Council of Elrond, when Aragorn is explaining to Boromir the thanklessness of being a Ranger who protects others in secret:

> What roads would any dare to tread, what safety would there be in quiet lands, or in the homes of simple men at night, if the Dúnedain were asleep, or were all gone into the grave?
>
> And yet less thanks have we than you. Travellers scowl at us, and countrymen give us scornful names. "Strider" I am to one fat man who lives within a day's march of foes that would freeze his heart, or lay his little town in ruin, if he were not guarded ceaselessly. Yet we would not have it otherwise. If simple folk are free from care and fear, simple they will be, and we must be secret to keep them so.
>
> (I, 326)

Aragorn knows that in order to keep the simple folk protected, they can never know what sort of battle he wages in their stead. He has been hurt by the contempt of the people whom he protects, but his compassionate nature reminds him that it could

not be otherwise (Kocher 125). He does not blame them, knowing it is an uninformed disdain which the "simple folk" feel for him.

Aragorn's balance of justice and empathy includes a sense of redemption which allows one to redress previously committed wrongs. Aragorn knows that no man, including himself, can be totally free from fault, and thus he allows leeway for those who would reclaim his respect. One sees this most poignantly in the death of Boromir. Aragorn and Boromir are often at odds during the travels of the Company, even from the very beginning at the Council of Elrond. Tolkien implies that part of this skirmish lies in Boromir's thought that someone (perhaps himself) should wield the Ring, instead of destroying its power. The thought lies dormant in him for some time, but it controls his actions--and it is very possible that Aragorn senses as much. Aragorn warns Boromir when they enter Lothlórien that "only evil need fear [Lórien], or those who bring some evil with them" (I, 439). This warning stated once would probably be unremarkable, but the fact that Aragorn repeats it later alerts the reader to the possibility of a desire for the Ring lurking in the heart of Boromir. Boromir, having been tested by the Lady Galadriel in his heart, distrusts her because of his own discomfort at having been "found out." He tells the others that he is not sure of her, to which Aragorn replies sharply, "Speak no evil of the Lady Galadriel! You know not what you say. There is in her and in this land no evil, unless a man bring it hither himself. Then let him beware!" (I, 464). After Boromir succumbs to the temptations of the Ring and attempts to wrench it from Frodo, Frodo disappears, leaving Boromir to realize his own folly. However, when the others go in search of Frodo, Boromir falls defending Merry and Pippin from marauding Orcs. When Aragorn finds Boromir, Boromir confesses his sin, saying, "I am sorry. I have paid." (II, 18). Aragorn knows that Boromir honestly repents, and when Boromir claims his own failure, Aragorn tells him,

"No! You have conquered! Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace!" (II, 18). Boromir has redressed his wrongs by attempting to save the Halflings from the Orcs and giving his life in the process. As Kocher states, "[Boromir's] sincere repentance and heroic death in battle with the orcs completely redeem him in Aragorn's eyes" (Kocher 138).[3] Aragorn feels that justice has been served, but weeps at the death of one who was his subject. Because of his compassion for those near to him, Aragorn is truly saddened by the loss of Boromir, and he forgives what can be considered an honest mistake. This ability to forgive can be attributed directly to the sensible balance of justice and mercy which Tolkien was building into Aragorn's character.

Aragorn's compassion for others can also be considered independent of its conjunction with justice. Aragorn deals with those around him with a noticeable tenderness, particularly when he is worried about them. During the trip from Bree to Rivendell, Aragorn speaks gently to Sam when the hobbit's suspicions regarding Aragorn are rejuvenated after the attack by the Black Riders on Weathertop. Aragorn feels for Sam, whose foremost purpose is to protect his Master, who has been gravely injured. Aragorn understands Sam's confusion and deals kindly with him. This compassion rises to the surface again when Sam and Frodo are injured battling the Orcs in Moria. Having temporarily forgotten that fact, Aragorn turns to them with a face "full of concern" at their suffering and his own forgetfulness. He repents his mistake and helps them along, telling them, "We have done nothing to ease you, as we ought, though all the orcs of Moria were after us" (I, 435). He bathes their wounds and apologizes. The kindness he feels towards the Members of the Company arises at other times as well, leaving little doubt that Tolkien has

[3] Boromir here serves as the heir to Túrin ; just as Túrin failed and yet was victorious, so does Boromir succumb to the Ring and yet at last defeat the enemy. The two are not the same, however (Tolkien would never allow that); Túrin and Boromir both aid their own undoing, to be sure, but there similarities end. Boromir dies a noble death, defending his friends and paying his debt; he goes to death a forgiven man. Túrin, on the other hand, cannot forgive himself and suffers an anguished death by his own judging hand.

developed Aragorn into a man who truly cares for the lives of all creatures, even ones as small as a hobbit.

Aragorn's empathy for his fellow creatures, however, is probably best seen in his reactions to Éowyn and her love for him. Purtill claims that Aragorn's "gentle handling of Éowyn's love for him provide[s]. . . growth and development in his character" (Purtill 120). Aragorn is not dealing with the loyal affection of his comrades here, but instead with the very real feelings of a woman (other than Arwen) who feels more than friendship for him. Hence, he must rise to the situation, and here his store of compassion aids and supports him. He cannot do anything but thwart Éowyn's desires, for he loves only Arwen; unfortunately, he finds this task to be more difficult than he expects. As Kocher notes, "Out of courtesy and fear of hurting her feelings he cannot even acknowledge openly that [her infatuation] exists" (Kocher 144). Since he cannot speak directly to the problem, he must speak in signals and hope that she understands his meaning. Unfortunately, at their first parting she chooses not to accept his kind and subtle rejection. Aragorn is forced to reject her once again, but he does so kindly, never addressing her feelings as an actual subject. He knows that she wishes to ride with him to what she believes to be a sure death, but that he cannot approve (Kocher 145). Therefore, at their parting, he must rebuff her pleas to join him in a manner which is both gentle and firm. His compassion is evident here, for he desires in no way to hurt her:

> "Then wilt thou not let me ride with this company, as I have asked?"
>
> "I will not, lady," he said. "For that I could not grant without leave of the king and of your brother; and they will not return until tomorrow. . . . Farewell!"

> Then she fell on her knees, saying: "I beg thee!"
>
> "Nay, lady," he said, and taking her by the hand he raised her. Then he kissed her hand, and sprang into the saddle, and rode away, and did not look back; and only those who knew him well and were near to him saw the pain that he bore.
>
> (III, 69)

Aragorn knows how his response will pain her, so he is as merciful as possible in his complete rejection of her wishes. However, the ordeal is not easy for him, and he feels anguish at having to shatter her dreams. His affliction is obvious to those who know him as he rides away, and he confesses it later to Éomer in Minas Tirith: "Few other griefs amid the ill chances of this world have more bitterness and shame for a man's heart than to behold the love of a lady so fair and brave that cannot be returned" (III, 175). Aragorn's very real compassion stirs this pain in his heart; he desires to hurt no one, particularly those that love him as Éowyn does. He handles the matter, and her heart, with gentle and sympathetic feeling, allowing his tenderness to guide both his grief and his actions. Such heightened awareness of others and oneself is an integral part of the King that Tolkien is developing.

Of course, the reason that Aragorn must deny Éowyn the fulfillment of her wishes is the existence of the deep love between himself and Arwen. As mentioned earlier, Aragorn and Arwen share a patient and total love for one another, one which has endured the passage of decades of separation. Such a love between a future king and a princess fits the noble heroic pattern, but Tolkien once again elaborates upon a basic idea in order to achieve a higher literary purpose. Just as Lúthien chose her doom by agreeing to die with Beren, so must Arwen renounce her immortality in order to marry Aragorn. For Arwen is the daughter of Elrond

Half-elven, and her kin are Elvish people, direct descendants of Beren and Lúthien themselves. Arwen walks "in the likeness" of Lúthien, and some say that she is the reincarnation of Lúthien upon Middle-earth. Thus, it is appropriate that Arwen must eventually make the same choice that Lúthien made long ago. Her love for Aragorn surpasses all other worldly cares, and she follows Lúthien and becomes mortal. Thus, Aragorn loves a woman who loves him with the dedication of Lúthien, which renounces all but the love before her in him. Their love is splendidly Tolkien, and appropriate for Aragorn's kingly status: just as Aragorn must have kingly qualities above and beyond that of the average hero, so must the love that he shares with Arwen be greater and more poignant than most.

Since Aragorn must ask the woman he loves to make such a difficult choice, he must be ready to give her all that she deserves as a princess of the Elves. Aragorn must suffer through a separation from his lady in order to insure that he is worthy of making her choose, literally, between life and death. Just as Beren proved himself through trial, so must Aragorn prove his worth. He must leave her and slowly make his way along his predestined path to the throne. Hence, the time that they must be apart is substantial, and it provides a test for their love. After all, Arwen and Aragorn must suffer through a long separation which is in no way guaranteed to end in reunion; even if they can bear the test of time and its temptations, Aragorn might fail, in which they must remain sundered forever. But such is their fate, for they are the heirs of Beren and Lúthien; their love must prove to have the strength of those who came before, for Arwen and Aragorn will once again join the Races of Man and Elf in one bloodline. Once again, two people of different backgrounds seek to join their bloods as one, thus cementing the connection, almost faded, that Beren and Lúthien made long before. Arwen and Aragorn share such an affection, but they must finish what Beren and Lúthien

began--for both Arwen and Aragorn descend from that first union of Man and Elf. Arwen has descended in a direct line, for Lúthien was her great-great-grandmother, whereas the blood of the Elves has been tempered by that of many Men along Aragorn's line. Thus, although they were both descendants, it can be said that the blood of the Elves ran stronger in Arwen, and the blood of Man held sway in Aragorn. However, the line has not been diminished, as can be seen in Arwen's beauty and Aragorn's nobility; as Legolas remarks, "Never shall that line fail, though the years may lengthen beyond count" (III, 187). Their union, then, would revitalize and reconfirm the unbreakable bond which Beren and Lúthien created so long ago, and it is one of the many reasons that the future King is hailed as Elessar, "the Renewer" (III, 169). It is Aragorn's responsibility to make the marriage possible, and Arwen must have unwavering faith in Aragorn. Therefore, just as Arwen and Aragorn share a love which is reminiscent of the great dedication of Beren and Lúthien, thus must they carry on the lineage of the Half-elven in the same manner. Their long separation is their ultimate test, and they come through it; only then can they wed and become the King and Queen of Gondor and Renewers of the Union of the Children of Ilúvatar.

The promise of this love carries Aragorn through all of his trials, including that which, to an ordinary hero, would surpass both comprehension and possibility. Aragorn, like all noble heroes, must undergo his own "trial by fire" and face his personal dragon. Just as Beren, Túrin and Gandalf before him, so does Aragorn fulfill the heroic necessity for an ultimate test which proves the lasting worth of the hero. Tolkien, of course, cannot make this test easy for Aragorn, simply by virtue of the fact that he is a Tolkien hero; however, since Aragorn is both heir of Beren and the renewing King, he must face a great and riveting terror which thoroughly sounds his power and his worth as a hero, right down to the very core of his mettle.

Galadriel foresees the test which Aragorn must face, and she tells him, "*But dark is the path appointed for thee:/The Dead watch the road that leads to the Sea*" (II, 136). She reiterates in her verse a prophecy of Man from long before, which Aragorn has been born to fulfill: "*From the North he shall come, need will drive him:/he shall pass the Door to the Paths of the Dead*" (III, 64). Túrin faced the dragon and Beren faced the terror of Morgoth; Aragorn must surpass these feats and walk through the land of the undead. He must face the wandering, miserable ghosts of Men, passing through their world and calling them to him. The tormented specters broke an oath they made to Isildur, and he cursed them "to rest never until your oath is fulfilled. . . . you shall be summoned once again ere the end" (III, 64-5). Aragorn has come at long last to hold them to their oath and fulfill the prophecy.

In order to call the spirits to his aid, however, he must brave paths which have been shut to the living. He must summon his courage to face "the terror of the Sleepless Dead"; as he says, ". . . that way I now shall take. But I do not go gladly; only need drives me. . . . that way I must go, since there are none living to help me" (III, 64-5). If Aragorn is to defeat Sauron and gain the throne, he knows that the Paths of the Dead are the only way; if he succumbs to fear, he loses everything which he holds most dear to him and leaves the doorway open for Sauron's invasion. The overcoming of courage would alone be enough for most heroes, but Aragorn must also compel his entire Company to follow him through the peril; in addition, Aragorn must face the Dead and compel them, too, to follow him. At this moment, all of the kingly attributes which Tolkien has used to characterize his King come to the forefront; Aragorn uses everything in his power to fulfill the prophecy and gain his throne. An intelligent fighter, Aragorn knows that he has no other choice than to call the undead to fight the enemy; no one but the Oathbreakers can swell Aragorn's power and terrorize the warriors of the Enemy. As before, Aragorn

proves that he is a master of diplomacy and foresight. If Sauron desires a fight, then Aragorn will fight him with a terror to match his own. Still, Aragorn must first take his Company through the Door, and here Aragorn's ability to inspire love and trust aids him most readily. As they come before the frightening Door, "there was not a heart among them that did not quail," but "Aragorn led the way, and such was the strength of his will in that hour that all the Dúnedain and their horses followed him," as do Legolas and Gimli (III, 70). The reader here receives irrevocable proof of the power of Aragorn's trustworthiness, and of the love that those who know him feel for him. Kocher agrees, "His companions are drawn after him along the grim underground Paths of the Dead not only by the strength of his will but by their love for him, says Legolas. 'For all who come to know him come to love him after their own fashion. . .'" (Kocher 147). Aragorn needs the love and trust of his companions in order to complete his mission, and his inspirational nature brings him that which he has awoken in them.

Besides these feats, however, Aragorn must summon the Dead to his aid; he must convince them not to make him one of their own, but instead to follow him and become members of his Company. In doing so, he relies on his great power of tempering justice with compassion. After the Company passes through the Door, they soon hear "an endless whisper of voices all about"; it becomes readily apparent that "there could be no turning back; all the paths behind were thronged by an unseen host that followed in the dark" (III, 71). The undead are following, even before Aragorn has declared himself; they will let no man turn back who has ventured to cross the Threshold. Aragorn hears their voices and calls them, and they mount and ride behind. They hear the summons of a King, and they understand that he calls them to battle. Aragorn knows that they will not come if he is cruel, yet at the same time he must hold them to their vow. Thus he says to

the great host of spirits gathered around him:

> "Oathbreakers, why have ye come?"
>
> And a voice was heard out of the night that answered him, as if from far away:
>
> "To fulfil our oath and have peace."
>
> Then Aragorn said: "The hour is come at last. Now I go to Pelargir upon Anduin, and ye shall come after me. And when all this land is clean of the servants of Sauron, I will hold the oath fulfilled, and ye shall have peace and depart forever. For I am Elessar, Isildur's heir of Gondor."
>
> (III, 74)

He asks no small task of them, for the servants of Sauron are proliferous throughout all of Middle-earth; to clear the land of them presents a prodigious challenge. Yet, if they accomplish the task, they free themselves from the curse that has laid so long upon them. Aragorn seeks to carry out the sentence which the oathbreakers brought upon themselves, and as Isildur's heir he is justified in doing so; the undead could find no reason there to demur. However, Aragorn knows that if they have broken their vow once, they could do it again, if he seeks to punish them by asking for more than their due. Consequently, he grants them the prospect of that which they desire most: peace. He understands their torment and wishes to alleviate it. By confirming the bonding nature of the matter, while yet having mercy upon the persecuted specters, Aragorn compels them to accept him as their leader so that they may at long last come to rest beyond the end of the world.

As Aragorn traverses the path set so long ago for him, he proves his value as the Returning King and as a leader of unsurpassed might. He does not traverse the

path alone; his Company follows him out of love and respect, and the undead follow because of his majesty and his gentle judgment. Aragorn also takes the love of others with him, particularly that of Arwen; it is her love and faith, physically represented in the standard of hope that she sends to him, that help to carry him through the trial and defeat his terror. Just as Gandalf before him, he pursues his destiny, even though it means the possible end of his life--which, in a way, it does. As Gandalf died and was reborn upon the mountaintop, so does Aragorn venture into the Land of the Dead and yet return. Aragorn has his own spiritual form of rebirth: he becomes "the King of the Dead" once he crosses the Threshold, and he passes "into the darkness. . . and [is] lost to mortal sight" (III, 75). Indeed, Aragorn's purification by fire comes as he quenches the flame of terror and doubt within himself. He believes in himself, his love and his destiny, and this faith cleanses him of his trials and washes him as white as the Tree upon his standard. In that symbolic death, Aragorn leaves his old life behind; when he emerges from the Paths, he is reborn as Elessar, the Renewer and yet the Renewed. The King comes again, out of death into life--as did Beren and Gandalf before him.

Tolkien sends Aragorn through the Paths of the Dead not merely as an apotheosis for Aragorn, but as a summation of Aragorn's worth as a King as well. Aragorn proves himself by accepting his destiny, using all the kingly attributes which Tolkien has given him to cement his stature as a High King. These traits stay with him after his rebirth, for they are what cleanse him of his old life. They come to the forefront, leaving the trials which developed them behind. Tolkien confirms this in Elessar's coronation, for the King includes his companions in the ceremony, invoking his "modest and deeply felt recognition that 'by the labour and valour of many I have come into my inheritance'" (Kocher 149). Love, justice, diplomacy and a small dash of imperial nature prompt this thanks by Elessar, revealing in him the

regal characteristics which embellish the wayworn noble hero with whom both Tolkien and the reader began. Hence, in Tolkien's development of Aragorn the reader sees the emerging King grow before his eyes, giving both Tolkien and the reader an "excitement of gradual discovery of the truth about him" (Kocher 123). The excitement comes not just from the discovery but also from the recognition that in Aragorn Tolkien has developed a hero unlike any he has crafted before. In Aragorn, he conceives not just a noble hero, but a victorious and majestic King, whose emergence and subsequent rebirth cause many critics, including Kocher, to regard him as the most riveting character and the real hero of the drama of *LOTR*.

III. THE COMMON MAN AND HEROIC ELEVATION

The noble heroes of J.R.R. Tolkien do not develop alone, even if their final catharsis is a one-on-one battle with a penultimate enemy; there are other heroes, unwitting of the higher purpose they have yet to achieve (and usually substantially unprepared for it), who emerge from the quietude of their ordinary lives to make their mark upon the legends of Middle-earth. Tolkien's "other heroes" do not seem heroic at first glance, or even for a good while after that, but one always finds that "there is more to them than meets the eye," as Gandalf is so fond of saying. For these other heroes are hobbits: quiet, homebody creatures who are known for keeping to themselves, and allowing others to do the same. Without the intrusion of both Tolkien and Gandalf, there exists little doubt that their lives would have continued on in the same manner, with little change. The intrusion did occur, though, and hobbits have never been the same since.

Tolkien recognized the fact that although he wished to escape from the drudgery of the century in which he lived, such escape was not really possible. He created his noble heroes to address what he called man's wish to escape, but at the same time he recognized that total isolation from the world around him was impossible. Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, explained the modern world as having lost "the dream-web of myth"; he felt that the world's push into a mechanical and scientific mentality occurred because "the spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes" (Campbell 387). Campbell, a contemporary of Tolkien's, believed that the appeal of the old style of heroism, including its many traditions, was dwindling. The loss of tradition, which tends to connect humans to one another, caused the world to suffer; he saw humanity as rapidly losing its ability to communicate its

feelings. Because of this loss of communication, heroic emphasis came to be placed on the "self-expressive individual" (Campbell 388). The man who rose up out of obscurity appealed to those who felt obscured and isolated by a lack of contact with the world around them. Man certainly still wished to escape, and when he saw another accomplish a break with normality, it appealed to him. This world was certainly a change from the ideal heroic land to which so many authors wished to return. Tolkien did not like the situation either--he had what Kocher calls "a vendetta" against the machine age--but he did not abandon the world because of what he believed was wrong with it. Instead, he took what the modern world--with all its faults and upheavals--offered him, and he used it to his great advantage. He knew the appeal of the common and ordinary man to the modern world around him, and he built his hobbits upon that appeal. Using the normal and commonplace tendencies of the world, he created a different kind of heroism, one to which the everyday man could relate. The two heroic styles would not clash, but instead offset and enhance each other: ". . . without the high and noble the simple and vulgar is utterly mean; and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless" (*Letters* 160). The high and noble were in need of simple and ordinary companions.

Enter the hobbits. Small creatures, unbeknowst to many, and settled into a comfortable land known as The Shire, these hobbits lived complacently in relative obscurity. Sale calls them "recognizable" and comments upon their easy lifestyle (Sale 197). Indeed, they were recognizable, particularly to the modern reader, who saw in the hobbits much of his own complacency. Sale remarks that Tolkien encouraged the relationship between the reader and the hobbits, for Tolkien knew that "we respond to what is most like ourselves" (Sale 237). Thus, his hobbit-heroes are all considered by their fellow hobbits to be normal (except for Frodo, perhaps, but

then he was raised by that "odd and not-quite-right" Bilbo, who had already had his adventure). A dash of a curious experience, however, and each of them feels a longing for the outside world stirred within them--which surely many a reader has felt at one time or another. Tolkien understands intimately "the longing to get out," and in his hobbits sleeps that same desire.

Once the desire is awakened, Tolkien carries his hobbits out of The Shire, for the world calls to them. They "cast off. . . the snugness of living in The Shire, and move into the present and face it heroically" (Sale 213). The world asks great acts of each of the hobbits, and they do not shirk the call. Purtill admires the heroicism in the hobbits, stating that "Hobbits [represent] the kind of courage exhibited by the ordinary person who rises to heroism in the face of challenge" (Purtill 45). The common hobbit, risen from quietude, slowly develops his own brand of "simple, dogged heroism" (Purtill 45). After developing the ordinary aspects of the hobbits, Tolkien slowly begins to reveal how such a common creature could rise to such extraordinary heights. Once again, Tolkien exhibits his mastery of character development with the hobbits; each possesses individual heroic traits which rise to the surface and manifest themselves when needed. In creating the powerful out of the ordinary, Tolkien gives each hobbit an individual personality which excels in its own way. In doing so, he creates a battleground for the critics and a neverending enjoyment for the reader.

BILBO BAGGINS: THE FIRST HOBBIT

As seen earlier, *The Silmarillion* contains several noble heroes who provide comparative examples for the heroes found in *LOTR*. Tolkien introduces his

unexpected or "common" heroes in the same manner, using *The Hobbit* as a model for those hobbits who emerge in *LOTR*. Specifically, Tolkien models his later hobbits after "the first Hobbit to become famous in the world at large," one Bilbo, son of Bungo (I, 20). Bilbo is a very respectable hobbit (by hobbit standards), and he lives very comfortably. He has no idea that when Gandalf the wizard first strikes up a conversation with him, his life after that fine sunny morning will no longer be normal (by hobbit standards, that is). After many surprises, Gandalf whisks a breathless Bilbo away on an adventure, one for which Bilbo feels thoroughly unprepared (he hadn't even a pocket-handkerchief with him!). Unprepared by hobbit standards, yes--but by Tolkien standards, Bilbo is probably more prepared than any of the thirteen dwarves who accompany him on his adventure. Tolkien uses Bilbo's great journey to reveal the toughness and common sense of a heretofore ordinary hobbit; in doing so, he sets the standard for hobbit-heroes in days to come. In other words, the traits that Bilbo discovers in himself during the course of his ordeal are characteristics which not only prove his own mettle, but foreshadow the traits of the hobbits in *LOTR* as well.

Tolkien insinuates almost immediately the prospects possible in Bilbo for an "adventure." When Bilbo is first introduced, his family background is described as such:

> . . . the mother of this hobbit--of Bilbo Baggins, that is--was the fabulous Belladonna Took, one of the three remarkable daughters of the Old Took, head of the hobbits who lived across The Water. . . . It was often said (in other families) that long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife. That was, of course, absurd, but certainly there was still something not entirely hobbit-like

> about them, and once in a while members of the Took-clan would go and have adventures. They discreetly disappeared, and the family hushed it up; but the fact remained that the Tooks were not as respectable as the Bagginses. . . . it is probable that Bilbo. . . got something a bit queer in his makeup from the Took side, something that only waited for a chance to come out.
>
> (*Hobbit* 16-17)

Bilbo is half Took, then, and a queer lot of hobbits they tend to be. Not only do they disappear on what Bilbo calls "mad adventures," but the clan had also befriended Gandalf and often had him to the family home (*Hobbit* 19). Adventures, wizards and wizards' stories about elves: not what the average hobbit would call inviting. Bilbo, however, seemed to have found such things interesting. In Bilbo's long-dormant interest Tolkien plants the seeds of heroic traits which are waiting to germinate and grow. Bilbo's participation is reluctant at first--after all, he dismisses Gandalf's call to adventure with a pert "We don't want any adventures here, thank you!"--but his potential is there. With the blood of a Took and the purposeful intentions of a wizard, how could Bilbo not be roused to action? After all, he must set the example for those hobbits after him, who also have a bit of the queer blood in them. Tolkien explains in the Prologue to *LOTR* that the Tooks and the Brandybucks are both considered descendants of the adventurous, elf-befriending division of hobbits known as the Fallohides (I, 23). Bilbo himself is a Took, as is Peregrin in *LOTR*; Meriadoc is a Brandybuck, and Frodo is "more than half a Brandybuck, they say" (I, 45). Those three hobbits carry a dormant thirst for adventure in their blood--and Sam Gamgee grew up, as did Frodo, listening to Bilbo's exciting stories. Sam possesses what might be called an un-hobbit-like thirst

for strange things; after all, he dreams of meeting elves and someday seeing a real "oliphaunt" (I, 98). These desires may undoubtably be attributed to "Mr. Bilbo," but once they are aroused, they are difficult to quench, no matter how the spark came about. Hence, Bilbo not only provides the model for the hobbits' subsequent heroism, but he also seems to have had a hand in preparing them for the call.

Bilbo is also precursor to the later hobbits in another way: he is the original Ringbearer, the hobbit who brought the Ring out of obscurity and into the light of day once again. He is the first hobbit to encounter the temptations of the Ring, and he is the first to be subjected to its whims. Even though Bilbo never becomes fully aware of the Ring's power (over himself in particular), it does occasionally change some of his actions. As Tolkien notes in his Prologue to *LOTR*, "Gandalf, however, disbelieved Bilbo's first story [about how Bilbo had obtained the Ring], as soon as he heard it. . . . Though he did not say so to Bilbo, he. . . thought it important, and disturbing, to find that the good hobbit had not told the truth from the first: quite contrary to his habit" (I, 35). Bilbo lies about the Ring, which leads Gandalf to believe it may be the One Ring (Kocher 27). His suspicions are confirmed when Bilbo agrees to give the Ring to Frodo and then balks at the last moment. He threatens Gandalf at one point and speaks of the Ring as his "precious"; he also says that he feels as if the Ring was an eye, always looking at him (I, 59-61). Gandalf then knows the truth, and he helps Bilbo rid himself of the Ring. Bilbo does manage to give it up, which is more than most Ringbearers can claim; his battle, though, foreshadows the difficulties that the other Ringbearers will have when their times come. The Ring is an agent of Sauron's destruction, and it seeks to destroy all that is good; it did not succeed in destroying Bilbo's honesty, but it put up quite a fight--as it will with both Frodo and Sam, not to mention Gollum.

Gollum himself provides another connection between Bilbo and the others,

particularly Frodo. Bilbo is the first to encounter Gollum in the caves underneath the Misty Mountains. After "winning" the Ring from the creature, Bilbo realizes that he must escape through a tunnel which Gollum is blocking. Bilbo is invisible, and he must somehow get past Gollum, so Bilbo considers killing him. However, Bilbo decides that it is not a fair fight, because Gollum would have no warning. He feels more than just fairness, however:

> Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering.
>
> (*Hobbit* 92-3)

The same mercy that Gandalf speaks of, and that Frodo remembers after Gollum's attack, first begins in the passageway deep in the heart of the Misty Mountains. Bilbo feels a powerful surge of pity for the destitute Gollum, hinting at the same feelings of sympathy that Gandalf, Frodo and even the Elves will feel for Gollum in *LOTR* (Kocher 23). Bilbo simultaneously foreshadows Gollum's future and teaches a valuable lesson in hobbitarianism to those that come after him.

In addition to such heroic traits, Bilbo's gradual discovery of his own courage sets him apart as a true role model for the younger hobbits. At first, Bilbo decided against going on any sort of adventure, for those sort of things could "make you late for dinner" (*Hobbit* 18). However, he eventually finds himself declaring his courage to the dwarves by saying,

> I am quite sure you have come to the wrong house. As soon as I saw your funny faces on the door-step, I had my

> doubts. But treat it as the right one. Tell me what you want done, and I will try it, if I have to walk from here to the East of East and fight the wild Were-worms in the Last Desert.
>
> (*Hobbit* 31)

Here Bilbo feels the Took in him rising to the surface. Underneath he is a very tough little hobbit--as are those who come after him. Bilbo's statement foreshadows the declaration that Frodo must also make when a charge is laid upon him; Petty remarks, "Bilbo's words. . . serve as paradigm for the words Frodo is to speak on a fateful night in late October many years in the future" (Petty 20).[4] Bilbo's courage takes a firm footing here, one which will never be dislodged by anyone, including his successors.

Thus, despite his many protestations, Bilbo ends up on the journey anyway, and he does not go very long before he must first summon his courage from its dormancy. He does it gamely (and foolishly), however, jumping right into the midst of a trio of trolls. Stupid, yes, but a tremendous first step for a hobbit who at first could not even look at Gandalf for two minutes before wishing himself somewhere else. After that first step, Bilbo does not turn back. He goes back, alone, to rescue his companions from the Great Goblin (although Gandalf has already done so), traversing the dark goblin-paths by himself. He rescues the dwarves from the webs of the spiders and the dungeons of the Elvenking, using only his sword, his wits and the Ring to help him (Purtill 48). Bilbo is frightened along the way, and this is not hidden from the reader. Hence, one sees that although Bilbo is acting heroic, he is also a normal hobbit, with reactions recognizable to any reader. Purtill

[4] This declaration also foreshadows Bilbo's own words at the Council of Elrond. Let it not be forgotten that Bilbo is the first one to claim responsibility for the Ring at the Council, declaring, "Bilbo the silly hobbit started this affair, and Bilbo had better finish it, or himself. . . When ought I to start?" (I, 353). He declared his courage once before, and his heroic nature prompts him to do so once again.

agrees, ". . . because of Bilbo's very ordinariness, we are often reminded of the uncomfortable. . . side of adventure--and at the same time reminded that ordinary people can act heroically" (Purtill 48). Bilbo is the essence of one brought up from obscurity to greatness, and Tolkien shows this by emphasizing Bilbo's very normal reactions to situations.

Bilbo's developing heroics come to their peak when he must at last provide the service for which he was hired: burgling the dragon's lair. He waits on the doorstep to the lair for a short while, then gathers his courage and goes crawling in. As he follows the passageway downwards towards the dragon, he feels its heat and then hears the vast sound of its snoring.

> It was at this point that Bilbo stopped. Going on from there was the bravest thing that he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterward were as nothing compared to it. He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait.
>
> (*Hobbit* 207)

Once again, Bilbo battles his own fear. It is a personal battle--such as the other hobbits will face later--but he comes out victor in the end. Although he sits completely alone in the dark, with no one to encourage him, he defeats fear all the same. Shippey connects this heroic battle to the appeal of Bilbo's normality, commenting that "no one can fight a dragon, but everyone can fight fear" (Shippey 61). In overcoming that fear, Bilbo demonstrates a kind of courage that Shippey believes "our age is most prepared to venerate"--a personal, slumbering bravery that manifests itself when the need is most vital (Shippey 61). That courage supports and encourages Bilbo when there is no one else to do so.

After this peak of developing his courage, Bilbo shows his colors one last time in an important matter--but in quite a different manner than his previous demonstrations. After Smaug has been killed and the dwarves have reclaimed the treasure, Thorin becomes increasingly greedy, refusing to share the treasure with those who deserve a portion. Tempers flare, and Men, Dwarves and Elves suddenly find themselves on the brink of war with one another. Bilbo, deeply disturbed by what he sees, decides to step in. He "burgles" the Arkenstone, Thorin's greatest treasure, and delivers it to the enemy camp to give it a bargaining stance; he does so because he believes that Thorin is wrong. Purtill remarks that Bilbo shows a great degree of what he calls "moral courage" at this point; after all, "He has to make a lonely moral decision as to rights and wrongs in a complex situation, devise a plan with no help or support from those who should be his friends, and carry it out alone" (Purtill 49-50). Although he knows that his friends will disagree and abandon him, Bilbo knows that he must do what is right. He says to Bard and the Elvenking, "I may be a burglar--or so they say: personally, I never really felt like one--but I am an honest one, I hope" (*Hobbit* 257). Frodo faces much the same moral decision when he separates himself from the Company at Parth Galen; he only wishes to do what is right for everybody, happen what will to himself. Bilbo sets the precedent for wise and honorable courage, not simply that which will profit oneself in the end. The hobbits do well in emulating Bilbo's "moral courage," just as they find their bravery welling up from the previously undisturbed deeps of their souls.

As the first hobbit that Tolkien ever speaks of, it is both understandable and appropriate that Bilbo provides a model for those hobbits who come after him. Bilbo is seemingly normal, but in him sleeps the blood of an adventurous line of hobbits. Once this slumbering desire is wakened, courage quickly joins it. Bilbo

agrees to go upon a journey of great danger in order to aid those around him, as do all the hobbits in *LOTR*. The venture proves long and dangerous, and it calls up traits which attest to Bilbo's heroic spirit. He demonstrates loyalty and mercy, not to mention an honesty which will not be corrupted, not even by Sauron's Ring itself. The hobbits of *LOTR* demonstrate all of these qualities, led by an astonishing degree of courage which arises when least expected. These characteristics appeal to both the reader and the surrounding world because of their seemingly ordinary beginnings. The other characters of *LOTR* are surprised by both Bilbo and the four hobbits, and many remarks are made about their toughness and fortitude. Gandalf rightly labels Bilbo a hero who made his mark with great deeds (I, 353). However, a remark made by the Elvenking in *The Hobbit* encompasses all these remarks (and foreshadows them) in one powerful compliment: "You are more worthy to wear the armour of elf-princes than many" (*Hobbit* 258). So he does, and also those who follow him.

FRODO: THE RINGBEARER

As Bilbo's heir, Frodo Baggins knows that he will have a lot on his hands when Bilbo decides to literally disappear from the Shire for good; after all, Frodo serves as Bilbo's executor, in addition to having inherited a large amount of Bilbo's property. However, Frodo has no concept of how much responsibility Bilbo has truly given him, neatly contained in the innocent little packet resting on the mantelpiece. Bilbo has unknowingly given Frodo the key to the fate of Middle-earth, in the form of the One Ring. With the acceptance of that gift, Frodo begins his gradual development as the focal figure in *LOTR*. The story centers significantly around his quest to rid Middle-earth of the Ring and its power, hopefully

conquering Sauron in the process. The trek he undertakes is grueling, forcing him to traverse mountain and cave, wood and river, to reach the borders of Mordor. His progress along the way cannot be measured merely in miles, however; something heroic also moves inside Frodo himself. He finds new characteristics within himself, as did Bilbo before him; he also builds upon what Bilbo in many cases began, proving himself an extremely worthy hero. Since he is the Ringbearer, Frodo's heroic development is as crucial to the story as is his physical progress to and through Mordor. He shows strength unparalleled in any other hobbit, and he develops a unique form of heroism that only one who suffers under the true burden of the Ring could possibly develop.

Frodo develops one of his most remarkable traits significantly earlier than do the other hobbits, which is probably due to his age: he shows signs of a rapidly maturing courage, one which manifests itself in several ways. Long before he approaches Rivendell, he faces the first test of his bravery in his encounter with the Barrow-wights at the Downs. The Barrow-wights capture the four hobbits and lay them out in state, as if they are dead. Frodo, the last to be apprehended, awakens and thinks desperately of a way to free himself.

> He wondered if he put on the Ring, whether the Barrow-wight would miss him, and he might find some way out. He thought of himself running free over the grass, grieving for Merry, and Sam, and Pippin, but free and alive himself. Gandalf would admit that there had been nothing else he could do.
>
> But the courage that had been awakened in him was now too strong: he could not leave his friends so easily.

(I, 195)

Frodo's courage passes the test; no matter how tempting cowardice might be, he knows that is not the path he should take. He slashes at an approaching Barrow-wight with a handy sword and cuts off the creature's hand; doing so buys Frodo the time to call to Tom Bombadil for help. Bombadil comes and aids him, and Frodo's first real act of courage encourages him to face his fear in the future. For example, he faces the Black Riders during their attack on Weathertop and does not run. Instead, he flings himself at them, crying the name of Elbereth and piercing the emptiness of the Lord of the Nazgûl with his small sword (I, 263). Perhaps his greatest act of courage occurs during the Council of Elrond, when the Fate of the Ring finally must be dealt with. The Council has decided that the Ring must be taken by messengers to Mordor, where it must be destroyed. Bilbo asks who must take it.

> No one answered. The noon-bell rang. Still no one spoke. Frodo glanced at all the faces, but they were not turned to him. . . A great dread fell on him, as if he was waiting the pronouncement of some great doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. . . At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice.
>
> "I will take the Ring," he said, "though I do not know the way."

(I, 354)

Frodo makes his declaration firmly, just as Bilbo did so many years ago to the Dwarves assembled in his living-room: though he does not know all he has been

asked to do, he will bravely accept the heroic call. Frodo knows that he places his life on the line by accepting his task, but his heart will not let him falter. He himself calls it "a hopeless journey," and such feelings make his declaration all the more admirable (I, 356). His courage and toughness rise to aid him in the hour when he needs it most. Frodo makes mistakes and has his moments of weakness, but this proves to both the reader and Frodo himself that he is an ordinary hobbit who must take extraordinary measures to survive. Thus, his appeal lies not only in the fact that he is ordinary, but that he can rise above his common existence and stir a courage that is admirable by any standards.

Once this combination of newfound bravery and fortitude instills itself in Frodo, it stays intact, aiding his struggle against fear and the Ring. The Ring puts up quite a fight; whenever Frodo feels fear, the temptation to wear the Ring whispers to him. Beating down the temptation, time and time again, requires a special brand of courage. Frodo, unlike the other Ringbearers before him, takes on the Ring knowing all of its potential for harm, to both himself and others. Bilbo bore the Ring first, but he had no notion of the Ring's power; Gandalf suspects that the Ring chose to stay dormant with Bilbo until its time rose again. Hence, Bilbo only experienced one brief struggle with the grip of the Ring, and once it passes he feels fine. Frodo, on the other hand, must daily suppress the nagging strength of the Ring. Each morning dawns another day of battle with the personal devil in his pocket. He feels this even before he accepts the Ring for all it is; when the Riders attack the hobbits and Strider at the Ford of Bruinen, they will Frodo to put on the Ring, but he refuses (I, 286). This refusal requires a courage deep within Frodo to arise, for he already knows enough about the Ring to understand that he must give in to neither its will nor the wishes of the Riders (Nitzsche 110). He manages to resist them, and by doing so sets the standard for his future struggles with an outside

will. His courage has awakened, determined to fight the battle, no matter how difficult or hopeless it might seem.

Frodo experiences many more temptations from the Ring, and he occasionally sees it as best to don the Ring and vanish from sight. In doing so, no matter what the reason, he lays himself open to the mental manipulations of the Ring and its Creator. For example, Frodo must slip the Ring on when Boromir attempts to take it from him; it is the only way Frodo can escape the man's strong arms and long reach. After doing so, however, Frodo finds himself laid bare to the Eye of Sauron, which is searching for Frodo and the Ring. Frodo's will and the might of Sauron contend; Nitzsche remarks, "A battle is staged within his psyche, and he is pulled first one way, then another, until Frodo. . . exercises complete self-control" (Nitzsche 111). Frodo feels the strength of Sauron's will, but he realizes that he remains himself, no matter who attempts to take him: "Suddenly he was aware of himself again. Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose, and with one remaining instant in which to do so. He took the Ring off his finger" (I, 519). Frodo wins the battle with Sauron, remaining true to his own spirit. His ability to stay himself indicates a fortitude in Frodo which is truly remarkable; only those with stamina and the courage to fight could remain their own hobbit until the end. Sale attributes this ability to resist to the implicit goodness which exists in Frodo (Sale 230). In other words, he resists the continuing temptation of the Ring by being Frodo and staying that way, instead of pretending to be something he is not--such as a noble hero who has been prepared for such difficulty. He courageously fights to hold on to his will, and only he can wage such a battle, for only he knows the whispers of the Ring.

The development of Frodo's courage, however, is only a part of his unique heroism, as courage was only a part of Bilbo's. Frodo develops other heroic traits as

well which set him apart from the other hobbits. Since he is the Ringbearer and in that sense the perpetuator of the plot, he becomes the leader of the four hobbits from the outset. Ergo, he is rather abruptly thrown into the role of decision-maker. As Purtill phrases it, "So Frodo, like Bilbo earlier [with the Dwarves], finds himself thrust into a position of responsibility for others" (Purtill 53). He does not take kindly to the role at first; when Pippin presses him for a decision regarding the path they will take to Buckland, Frodo snaps, "And now leave me in peace for a bit! I don't want to answer a string of questions while I am eating. I want to think!" (I, 125). Eventually, however, he grows into the role, understanding that the responsibility of the Ring places many others in his care. He decides to leave the Shire without his friends at first, believing that they could not comprehend or face the danger ahead. They eventually change his mind, but not through force; they only reverse his decision because of their own knowledge and persistence. This demonstrates Frodo's developing ability as decision-maker: those who make decisions must be amenable to hearing all opinions in a pending matter, which Frodo does. Being the responsible party, though, it is Frodo who agrees to speak with Strider at Bree, and Frodo decides, alone and unaided, to take the burden of the Ring upon himself. The choice is his to make, and he handles it maturely. Tolkien strives to emphasize the importance of free will in any call laid upon someone, and Frodo is no exception (Kocher 36-7). Tolkien achieves a dual purpose in doing so: not only does he highlight the lack of freedom in Sauron's evil tyranny and willful control, but he illustrates Frodo's maturing decisiveness as well.

Frodo's ability to weigh all factors in his decisions gives readers a fair picture of the most important of Frodo's heroic traits, and one which each hero learns in his own way: the power and necessity of mercy. Frodo's comprehension of this concept cements all of his other traits; if he did not come to understand the necessity of

mercy in balancing courage and power, he would have no true heroic qualities at all. Aragorn carries just such a balance of traits within himself, and Frodo, as an "unprepared" hero, must learn this ability to balance on his own. The development of Frodo's concept of compassion is fairly simple to pinpoint, as mentioned in the chapter on Gandalf. Frodo feels at first that hideous creatures such as Gollum should simply be destroyed. However, following the examples of both Gandalf and Bilbo, Frodo takes pity on Gollum when he finally meets him. He does not base his decision against slaying Gollum just on what his forebears have done, though. He also sees Gollum's slavish connection to the Ring and understands it, for he himself fights a daily battle to avoid such addiction. Petty comments, ". . . at this stage of the quest, the Ring has brought Frodo new insight into the nature of suffering and pain; thus he overrides his companion's protests by showing mercy and pity to the wretched former owner of the Ring. He can fully comprehend Gollum's torment" (Petty 52). Gollum's miserable state arouses Frodo's pity, for in Gollum he sees his own possible future if he does not remain strong. Hence, his own compassionate sparing of Gollum aids Frodo in keeping his mind firm; with Gollum around as a continual reminder of what could be, Frodo's resolve to stay himself is strengthened. In addition, Frodo's loss of will at the end is saved by Gollum's own destruction of the Ring; thus, his very mission succeeds only by virtue of his compassion. As a necessity, then, mercy becomes a part of Frodo's heroic nature, which proves vital to the culmination of his mission, his own resolve and the higher consciousness of a hero who has risen above the ordinary.

Along with his compassion for others, Frodo learns one last lesson from his decision-making responsibility, one which underlies his entire being. The ability to understand the power of love emerges as one of Frodo's quietest but most important traits. He has always felt love--no one questions his undying dedication to Bilbo,

not to mention his friends--but he comes to see love in a whole new light. His friends Merry and Pippin prove their dedication to him on more than one occasion by refusing to allow Frodo to go on his quest alone. They overcome his wishes once in Buckland, and they stand firmly by him before Elrond. Sam proves in many instances that he loves his master wholeheartedly and would never leave him. The hobbits' dedication to Frodo is complete, and he feels this affection very poignantly. One sees his consequent understanding of love's power when he makes the decision at Parth Galen to continue on without any of his companions. In Boromir Frodo has seen the evil of the Ring at work in the Company, and he decides that "the Ring must leave them before it does more harm" (I, 519). He cannot see himself exposing those he loves to the corruption of the Ring, even if it means going on alone. As he says, "those I can trust are too dear to me" to be placed in such danger (I, 520). Purtill explains, "In other words, his motive for going on alone is the same as his motive for taking the Ring in the first place: to help those he loves and because he feels the responsibility has fallen on him. . . his greatest love is for his own folk. . . and his own friends" (Purtill 55-6). The power of love becomes clear to Frodo at this moment. He learns his lesson well, for he later uses the power of Gollum's love for him to discreetly keep Gollum in line. He knows that Gollum's dedication is mostly to the Ring, but he also sees an affection in Gollum's eyes for him. As Sale characterizes it, "Sméagol loves the specialness that is Frodo's care for him. . . it is. . . the tentative, unbelieving response to a caring so unlikely it seems heroic even to Gollum" (Sale 236). Frodo knows of Gollum's affection and he treats this love mercifully, thus combining his heroic traits of mercy and respect for the power of love into one. Frodo learns, through the dedication of his own friends, that the love has a strength which he did not heretofore suspect, and must be treated gently. In learning this lesson, he develops his heroic trait as a decision-maker and,

indirectly, his own courage: Frodo's task is easier, his bravery more secure, if he completes it for the protection of the ones he loves.

Frodo's role as a hero in *LOTR* remains unique due to his role as the Ringbearer; his heroic status could be confirmed by his undertaking of that cursed role alone. His heroism, though, encompasses more than just the quest to destroy the Ring. Along the way, Frodo grows from a generally ordinary hobbit into a valiant figure of higher consciousness, one who sacrifices his all to accomplish his mission. He matures into a hobbit who is courageous and wise, and he comes to appreciate the natures of love, compassion and dedication in both himself and others. Hence, he gives himself body and soul to his purpose, even when all hope has died (Sale 219). His self-sacrifice arises because of the love he feels around him, and he knows that he cannot give less than his whole self (Purtill 58). In doing so, he cannot wholly regain what he gives, and his return to the Shire does not provide the peaceful cure he has expected. He then realizes that, as Gandalf before him, his purpose in Middle-earth has been fulfilled, and he knows that he must say good-bye to the Shire. As he tells Sam, "I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me" (III, 382). Like the hero he has become, Frodo gracefully concedes that his time has passed. Sale explains, "He knows that this. . . is natural, that he was part of an age that is passing, that he was one of the instruments of its passing indeed, and a securer of the world's living" (Sale 233). He summons his last bit of courage to say good-bye to all that he loves. Then Frodo passes from Middle-earth, a common hobbit risen to the heights of a new heroism, the potential for which he found within himself.

SAM GAMGEE: THE HEROIC SERVANT

Although Frodo is Bilbo's lawful heir in *LOTR*, many critics would argue that his inheritance stops with the physical property of the Ring and Bilbo's *mathom*.[5] Frodo and Bilbo, though similar in bloodline, possess somewhat different backgrounds. After all, Bilbo was raised in the manner of an ordinary hobbit, whereas Frodo grows up listening to Bilbo's stories and meeting what the Shire calls Bilbo's "queer visitors": all manner of dwarves, and Gandalf popping in and out at odd moments. As he matures, Frodo develops a much greater concept of the world around him, and it is rumored among the hobbits that he often wanders far afield under the stars at night (some say meeting with the Elves). Hence, due to his knowledge of the outside world, Frodo proves much more prepared to answer his heroic call than Bilbo was. Bilbo stumbled rather blindly into the whole situation; Frodo walks in with his eyes open. In this manner, Sam Gamgee resembles Bilbo more strongly than does Frodo. Sam does not know too much about the situation when he first asks Frodo to take him "to see the Elves," and he does not receive all the important information until much later. He is an ordinary hobbit whisked away on a dramatic adventure without really knowing how it happened--just as happened with Bilbo.

In a sense, then, Sam is Bilbo's literary heir. Sam follows a path similar to Bilbo's and finds delight in simple things: for Bilbo it was food and pipe-weed, and for Sam it is gardens and flowers. Tolkien himself acknowledged the connection, stating, "Sam is the most closely drawn character, the successor to Bilbo of the first book, the genuine hobbit" (*Letters* 105). Sam is the most grounded of all the hobbits, and his heroism is the quietest and most provincial. As Tolkien's favorite, he

[5] *mathom* (from the hobbit): *extra stuff.*

progresses in a manner different from the other heroic hobbits; he develops recognizable heroic qualities, but he never loses the unmistakable hobbitness of his personality. Hence, Sam accomplishes a dual purpose in the trilogy: he rises from the ordinary to achieve heroic stature, and yet at the same time retains a recognizable, common air about him that indicates his ability to grow while yet remaining himself.

At first, Sam's purpose in the trilogy seems to be comic relief; he finds himself in awkward situations and humorous difficulties on a regular basis. Humor is a necessity in a work that contains some very grave moments, for it provides a balance in the work and keeps it from being too serious. Purtill recognizes that Sam is, in the beginning, a "comic character" who is meant to complement Frodo and lighten the tone of the trilogy (Purtill 51). From the very beginning, Tolkien highlights Sam's comic purpose; the best example is Sam's first comic situation, when Sam is discovered covertly listening to Gandalf's very serious conversation with Frodo. Gandalf reaches out the window, grabbing at Sam's ear and hauling him up.

> "Well, well, bless my beard!" said Gandalf. "Sam Gamgee is it? Now what may you be doing?"
>
> "Lor bless you, Mr. Gandalf, sir!" said Sam. "Nothing! Leastaways I was just trimming the grass-border under the window, if you follow me." He picked up his shears and exhibited them as evidence.
>
> "I don't," said Gandalf grimly. "It is some time since I last heard the sound of your shears. How long have you been eavesdropping?"
>
> "Eavesdropping, sir? I don't follow you, begging

your pardon. There ain't no eaves at Bag End, and that's a fact."

(I, 97)

Sam's replies are simple yet funny, particularly since Sam is desperately trying to avoid getting into trouble (especially with a wizard of unknown magical powers). Throughout the text, he makes jokes (whether or not he knows it is debatable, for Sam is more shrewd that he usually lets on) and often acts in a way that is very determined for him, but amusing for the reader. He amuses and cheers Frodo as well, which seems to be one of Tolkien's purposes in creating Sam's character. Frodo himself remarks on Sam's ability to entertain, when Sam makes him laugh about a story just before they enter Mordor: 'Why, Sam,' he said, 'to hear you somehow makes me as merry as if the story was already written. . . [the children will say] "I want to hear more about Sam, dad. Why didn't they put in more of his talk, dad? That's what I like, it makes me laugh"' (II, 408-09; Shippey 201). Sam inspires Frodo in some of his darkest moments, fulfilling the ideal role of a comic character: he can make someone laugh who really wants to cry. He retains this ability even after achieving his heroic status. Also, he remains a somewhat comic character to the very end, for even after becoming much wiser he is still the same old Sam underneath.

Within the comic and somewhat blundering character presented in the beginning, though, Tolkien places the potential for the great achievements which are to come. Like the other hobbits before him, Sam accepts his heroic call gamely; in fact, he accepts it several times, due to Frodo's stubbornness. He agrees to go with Frodo when Gandalf appoints Sam as Frodo's companion, then tells Frodo again at Crickhollow that he will not leave him. Sam declares his intent to accompany Frodo to Mordor in front of the Council of Elrond, and he refuses to allow Frodo to

go on alone from Parth Galen. Sam means to stick by his Master, and he will not be thwarted, no matter how many times Frodo says otherwise. As he says to Frodo on the road to Rivendell, "I know we are going to take a very long road, into darkness; but I know I can't turn back. . . . I don't rightly know what I want: but I have something to do before the end, and it lies ahead, not in the Shire. I must see it through, sir, if you understand me" (I, 127). Sam determines that something is calling him out of the Shire, and he responds with acceptance--no matter what the cost (Kocher 34). Sam's determination and assertiveness indicate the independent judgment which Tolkien has given him, something which will aid him during the last tortured steps through Mordor (Purtill 66). This independent thought also encourages Sam's bravery, for as he matures he understands the risks the trek entails and the consequent courage he must summon to face it. His brave acts are occasionally humorous and always meant well, and they mark "a development in his character" (Purtill 68). Even while becoming brave and intelligent, Sam retains his comic attributes and good intentions, which serve to enhance the positive steps he takes toward heroism.

As the third hobbit hero, Sam does follow some trends of heroism that Frodo and Bilbo achieve before him.[6] He learns lessons as they do, improving his character and his morality. In particular, Sam comes to understand the importance of mercy to the heroic mindset. He, like Frodo, feels an aversion to Gollum at first, for he recoils at Gollum's disgusting past. Although Frodo changes his attitude towards Gollum after seeing him, Sam continues to view Gollum as despicable and would gladly rid Frodo of such an ominous pest at a moment's notice. After Sam

[6] One may question why I have not included Merry and Pippin in the list of hobbit heroes. I do not deny that these two hobbits achieve grand heroic status; in fact, I admire them for their achievements, especially while still so young. However, neither of these hobbits is a candidate for the position of "real hero" in the trilogy, for they are supporting actors in a cast filled with other heroes vying for the title role. Hence, since they are not subjects of critical debate, I must leave them out of this particular discussion.

assumes the burden of the Ring, however, his attitude toward Gollum changes. He still does not trust him, but knowing the temptations of the Ring, Sam understands him.

> It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved; and also it seemed the only safe thing to do. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's shrivelled mind and body, enslaved to the Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again.
>
> (III, 273)

Sam appreciates at last the power that drove Gollum to such an insane desire for the Ring (Nitzsche 125). Like Bilbo and Frodo, he learns that wretchedness should be pitied, not hated, and compassion upon the forlorn should be valued. As Purtill remarks, "At this moment, Sam rises nearly to the height Frodo has risen to, the ability to see 'the nobility of service to the unlovable, and of perception of damaged good in the corrupt'" (Purtill 72). The lesson is a hard one for Sam to learn, and only the strength of the Ring's evil can convince Sam that Gollum is not entirely to blame for his folly; however, he marks the lesson well, and by doing so saves the Quest to Mordor.

Sam's greatest heroic trait, though, proves to be the accomplishment of what he intended to do from the outset: to stay with Frodo until the bitter end. Sam, however, does not simply accompany Frodo to Mordor; instead, he stays his loyal, trusted servant and friend, going well beyond what his promise ever implied.

Nitzsche calls Sam's dedication an "exemplary love for his master Frodo. . . [which] transcends all normal bounds" (Nitzsche 119). Indeed, Sam passes all expectation by the end of the ordeal, and it is his love for Frodo that pushes Sam to heroic deeds. His greatest joy comes from serving Frodo, and he strives to do so as often and as well as possible. In *The Dyer's Hand*, W.H. Auden describes the ideal relationship between master and servant as "of a kind which is not affected by the passage of time or the fluctuations of mood and which makes it plausible that wherever one of them is, whatever he is doing, the other should be here [sic] too" (Purtill 72). Sam and Frodo are a team, and Sam desires to make the team as loving and effective as possible.

Sam also longs to see his master accomplish the deed that he has taken upon himself. Besides believing that Frodo is eminently capable of such a task, Sam knows that failure means that they will never return to the Shire, which remains Sam's greatest wish. With these two thoughts in mind, Sam takes the Ring upon himself when he believes Frodo has been killed by Shelob's venom. He cannot let his master fail, so he takes on the burden that no one expected anyone other than Frodo to bear. As Petty says, "the quest must go forward" (Petty 54). Purtill agrees, claiming that since Sam is Frodo's servant, Sam therefore feels "it is his duty to carry on Frodo's quest" (Purtill 69). Sam's love for Frodo causes him to act in Frodo's name; he "transcends all bounds" by taking upon him the greatest burden in all of Middle-earth. He realizes that he is free to make the choice to bear the Ring; as he says, "Ah well, I must make up my own mind" (II, 434). He has matured enough to assume Frodo's role as decision-maker, if only for a little while. Tolkien allows him the choice, just as Sauron would not.

Sam bears the Ring well, and spurns its temptations. Not that the Ring does not try; Sam is tempted, like every other hero, to use the Ring for its power. He sees

himself as a glorious figure who turns all the world to a garden--an appropriate temptation for Sam, indeed. He endures the temptation for two reasons:

> In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a cheat to betray him. The one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm. . . .
>
> "And anyway all these notions are only a trick," he said to himself.
>
> (III, 216)

The duality of Sam's heroism shines forth from this passage. Sam resists the Ring because of the deep and transcendent love he feels for Frodo, one which goes beyond that of the average servant and master. As Nitzsche remarks, "The real hero spurns the Ring out of love for and obedience to his master Frodo" (Nitzsche 23). Yet at the same time, Sam shows the ordinary side of himself which has not been lost, the "plain" and rational hobbit within. Sam heroically carries on and leaves the Ring alone out of dedication to his master, but he relies on his hobbit-sense to remind him of the necessity of staying himself.

Sam does stay himself throughout the entire story, and the virtue of such a feat affects Frodo more than Sam can know. Sam generally considers himself an optimistic hobbit, one who does not lose hope easily. Beauty often gives him hope when it seems that all is lost, and by having hope himself he spurs Frodo onward. For example, when Frodo and Sam are resting one night in the desolation that is

Mordor, Sam finds hope where he little expects it:

> . . . the night-sky was still dim and pale. There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach. . . . Now, for a moment, his own fate, and even his master's, ceased to trouble him.
>
> (III, 244)

Sam realizes that he and Frodo can find "hope beyond despair" (Nitzsche 125). When all is lost, or seemingly so, an unquenchable beauty--as simple as a star--inspires Sam and reminds him of the optimism and joy deep inside his soul. By feeling this hope and letting it shine through, Sam encourages Frodo to carry on to the bitter end. Even on the slopes of Mount Doom after the destruction of the Ring, when all Mordor seems to be falling on them, Sam says to a hopeless Frodo, "But after coming all that way I don't want to give up yet. It's not like me, somehow, if you understand" (III, 281). Sam feels his Shire roots welling up, as they do continually in times of trial, and he relies once again on his "plain hobbit-sense."

There comes a time, though, when even Sam's encouragement and hope cannot carry Frodo any further. Without any hope or strength, Frodo at last collapses on the Plain of Gorgoroth, unable to walk any further. He needs Sam at this hour more than any other, and here Sam fulfills his calling as hero. Even though his master has lost hope, Sam stays with him, for he "had stuck to his

master all the way; that was what he had chiefly come for, and he would still stick to him" (II, 310). Frodo now needs something more than just encouragement; he has an "essential. . . need for love and support" (Petty 104). Beyond what any servant could be expected to do, Sam serves both the physical and spiritual needs of his master by actually bearing the Ringbearer to the final destination. He assumes his master's burden in a different way than before, when he took the Ring: now Sam goes without water and food so that Frodo can make the final steps, and he pushes Frodo as far as Frodo can go (Nitzsche 124). He assumes Frodo's mental anguish, too; Purtill remarks, "Sam 'carries' Frodo, psychologically, emotionally, and toward the end, literally" (Purtill 70). After Sam's mental encouragement fails and Frodo collapses, Sam physically takes Frodo upon his back and carries him to Mount Doom. Even after having gone without any sustenance, Sam pulls the strength out of somewhere deep inside in order to serve his master's final need. When Frodo most needs a hero of his own, Sam steps in and valiantly accepts the role. In doing so, Sam exhibits " the moral character which reveals him to be, as [both]. . . hobbit and character in the epic, the most heroic" (Nitzsche 124). That task which Sam realized, so long ago in the Shire, that he must complete has finally been accomplished; he has served his master and become a hero.

Sam's heroism, as mentioned before, does not change him nearly as much as it changes the other hobbits. Merry and Pippin became valiant warriors, who are forever after sworn to be knights for their Kings; Frodo's wounds are too great, and he sails into the True West to find comfort. Sam, however, as Bilbo's real heir, comes back to the land he loves and settles down, just as he always wished. Long before the trilogy was finished, Tolkien suspected it would be so; as he says in a letter, "The book will probably end up with Sam. . . [he] will settle down to the Shire and gardens and inns" (*Letters* 105). Sam also receives much praise from his fellow

hobbits in the Shire (unbeknownst to him) and eventually becomes Mayor, serving for many years. Without his adventure, Sam would probably never have achieved his great fortune; his trials with Frodo enabled him to acquire "the virtue and wisdom he needs to eventually become the leader and ruler of the Hobbits" (Purtill 69). So, in hobbit terms, Sam accomplishes the greatest feat of heroism: he goes off and makes his name in foreign lands, then comes back and leads his own people. Really, after all, he never wished for any more.

Sam does eventually fulfill the last great deed that he must do as one who was a Ringbearer. Up until the end of his days, he has served his people with the wisdom and compassion that he learned on the long, toilsome path to Mordor. He has been "lovable and laughable," as Tolkien once said he was meant to be (*Letters* 329). He learned the virtues of pity and of hope, and he encouraged his master when he felt no more courage. He determined not to let Frodo fail, and he bore every burden possible in order to accomplish what he set out to do. He served Frodo with undying love and loyalty, and because of him the mission succeeded. Then, he came back and gave his people what he had learned, enriching his land and his family with his accomplishments. But at the end of it all, Sam must depart from Middle-earth, for he is the last of the Ringbearers left in Middle-earth; like Gandalf and Frodo and the Elves, he comes from a time now faded. Like those before him, he accedes when his time comes, and he says good-bye to Middle-earth and sails into the True West. With him, the reader says goodbye to the hobbits, for Sam's story is the last; with him goes the last model of the common hero, one who found within himself the strength "to be tempted to weep and despair, but then to defy, to weave active and new human possibilities out of all the unraveled threads of the cloth that was once whole, to insist that the human spirit need not be overcome despite all that is eager to annihilate it" (Sale 11). Out of ordinary

beginnings Sam becomes what many critics call "the real hero"--one who rose above, yet never forgot.

IV. CONCLUSION

The creation of *The Lord of the Rings* took Tolkien many years to complete, and he put his heart and soul into the work. He defined a new age in the genre of fantasy literature (some would gladly call it "The Age of Tolkien"), and he has made an indelible mark on the minds and hearts of many people. His characters appeal to countless readers and have often become talismen for the virtues they possess (perhaps one may still find an old lapel button that reads, "Frodo Lives!"). These virtues, however, while delighting the reader, have given critics headaches for decades. These critics try valiantly to argue the superiority of one hero over another. They discuss the hero's accomplishments in detail, claiming the hero's superiority and "proving" as much by citing remarkable attributes; then another critic cites an equally admirable virtue in another hero, and everyone ends up back where they began.

The critics seem to be missing Tolkien's point. While the virtues of his heroes can be compared and contrasted, the personalities of each hero as a whole are not meant to be comparable. Instead, these heroes complement each other, with each special attribute offsetting the virtues of another. Indeed, the heroes cannot do without each other; since the story centers around companionship, these heroes could not exist without standing by one another and helping one another to heroism. Sam would not have grown in the manner that he did if there had been no Frodo to admire and serve; Frodo would have been lost without Gandalf's teaching and advice, and so on. Each hero owes part of himself to another, and at the same time retains individual characteristics that make him notable in his own right. These traits may be recognizable in earlier heroes, or even in other heroes in *LOTR*; Tolkien used certain upstanding virtues in all his heroes, no matter what

their situation. Even when sharing traits among his characters, though, Tolkien incorporates a virtue into a hero's personality and then modifies it to fit the individual mindset of the hero. For example, each hero finds within himself the ability to be compassionate, but each hero discovers the virtue for very different reasons and in various circumstances; plus, each character capitalizes on his discovery in different degrees. Thus, not only are personal attributes individualistic, but shared virtues become personalized elements of each personality as well. Tolkien purposefully proves each character's heroic singularity and consequently will not tolerate a comparision between such accomplished individuals.

So where does that leave the critics? Will there never be one, supreme, final answer to that recurring question, "But who's the real hero?" No--but the heroic lesson, which all the heroes teach together, can still be found. One critic, Purtill, seems to have caught on, for he recognizes that each character represents one side of a multifaceted personality. Tolkien's lesson lies in that recognition: each heroic development in a hero's personality, no matter how small or how great, contributes to the growth of an overall heroic ideal. The world in which Tolkien lived had become disillusioned, so he created a work which would perhaps remind the world that possibilities for heroism still existed. He reminded the world of things past and things present through two types of heroes, each of which gives the reader the potential to grow with that part of the heroic ideal which most suits him. Thus, Tolkien did not create just one hero, for only through the recognition that within each of us there exists a little Frodo, a little Gandalf, a little Aragorn, and (thank goodness) a little Sam can we appreciate that the hero does not lie only on the page, but also within ourselves; like them, we are only waiting for the call.

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