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Structural Polarities In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Department of English
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Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my loving and superhumanly supportive husband, Brian Upshaw, and my erudite parents, who first inspired in me a love of reading, writing and life-long learning.

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The Lord of the Rings

Quincey Upshaw

ABSTRACT

My thesis reflects an assessment of *The Lord of the Rings* centering on the idea of a structure of opposites. For each place, race, character and object in *The Lord of the Rings,* J.R.R. Tolkien included an element which serves as an antithesis. In addition, the style, pacing, and language of the work also contain antithetical pairs which continually engage and propel the reader to the work's conclusion. I contend that this deliberate pairing of opposing elements adds depth and verisimilitude to the work.

Tolkien was an avid student of what his contemporaries would have called "fantasy" or "fairy tales." While dismissed by many scholars as juvenilia, Tolkien and his predecessors the trailblazing folklorists and philologists the Grimm brothers took these works seriously as both serious narratives and fragments of a time for which the historical record is spotty. In examining these Old English, Old Norse, Old Germanic and folkloric works, Tolkien built a professional reputation as a literary critic. He studied the formalist elements of these tales such as plot, diction, characterization and pacing the same way other literary critics studied contemporary or "mainstream" historical works. I contend that Tolkien's work as a critic informed Tolkien as a writer in form and structure. My thesis highlights the deliberately shaped formalist element of antithetical pairs of races, places, objects and characters. In addition, the narrative pacing and style of the works reflect and author concerned with a deliberate paring of polarities.

As my thesis examine the text for elements of plot, setting, pacing and characterization I primarily approach Tolkien from a formalist and narratological standpoint. Many of the points I mention are not new; critics have noted in passing some of the elements before essays or books that focus on another method of criticism. However, I believe that in pulling together a final tally of Tolkien's structural polarities I can explain how a work derided at its publication by critic Edmund Wilson as "juvenile trash" has endured to become the best selling work published in England, aside from the Bible.

[W]ithout the high and noble the simple and vulgar is utterly mean;
and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless.
-J.R.R. Tolkien, Letter 131, to Milton Waldman of Collins (c.1951)

Chapter I: Introduction

Rationale

In J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the most potent thematic symbol

in all three volumes is not the Ring, although the destruction of the Ring of Power is

clearly the goal of Frodo's quest. Rather, the central symbol of the trilogy is the Mirror of

Galadriel, which most accurately embodies the reflective nature of the work, for it is the

mirror of Galadriel that shows characters what they may be or might have been. In a

larger sense, the structure of the work itself reflects back to the reader all of Middle

Earth; through its shimmer the beings, landscapes, and characters of the Third Age can be

discerned by the reader as inverting one another, reinforcing through correspondence or

opposition the themes and structure of the tale. This thesis focuses on this inverted

reflection and parallelism; for when we look into Galadriel's mirror to see the glorious

final days of the Third Age as they unfold, we also see the symmetry of Tolkien's sub-

creation shining back at us.

In *The Lord of the Rings,* Tolkien spins for the reader a tenuous web of reflective

images. At once delicate and durable, the fictional world of Middle Earth becomes real

for the reader by virtue of its sophisticated structure and subtle oppositions, which both

enhance familiar themes from previous works and create an entirely new cultural

mythology. Tolkien describes the fictional world authors create as a subcreation, which

he defines as an " . . . achievement of expression, which gives (or seems to give) 'the

inner consistency of reality'" (*The Tolkien Reader* 68). Spinning a consistent tale is

difficult for any novelist, but Tolkien's construction of Middle Earth takes this complex

task a step further, creating a world at once familiar to the reader yet unfamiliar,

populated by creatures recognizable from traditional fairy tales existing side-by-side with

human beings; Middle Earth both invites the reader to recognize the familiar and

mentally construct the unfamiliar. Tolkien scholar Tom Shippey comments that the

trilogy's "air of solidity and extent both in space and time" (*The Road to Middle Earth*

103) contributes to its success.

In order to develop my discussion, however, I must establish what is meant by

reflection. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien hints that Middle Earth is a self-

reflective place; species of beings are said to be "abominated" versions of another, and

characters, alike in thematic function (i.e. the leaders of a people) often reflect

personalities or virtues which prove to be polar opposites. These inverted reflections are

evident in nearly every aspect of the trilogy: themes, style, places, species or beings,

events, and characters. At other times, elements of the books parallel one another, and

these reflective and parallel qualities unite the books structurally, creating a sense of

unity for Tolkien's sub-creation. Reader response critic Wolfgang Iser explains Shippey's

sense of an "air of solidity" when describing the mental processes that the reader

experiences while reading:

We look forward, we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form

expectations, we are shocked by their nonfulfillment, we question, we muse, we

accept, we reject; this is the dynamic process of recreation. This process is steered

by two main structural components within the text: first, a repertoire of familiar

literary patterns and recurrent literary themes, together with allusion to familiar

social and historical contexts; second, techniques or strategies used to set the

familiar against the unfamiliar. ("The Reading Process" 62-63)

This act on the part of the reader of reflecting and deciding, creating and re-creating,

questioning and supplying answers echoes the antithetical structure of *The Lord of the*

Rings trilogy. Each new character recalls another familiar one; each object encountered

by the reader reflects another; and for each land in which the characters interact, there

exists an antithesis. Reader response theorist Louise Rosenblatt in her seminal work

Making Meaning with Texts asserts that "[t]he . . . reader pays attention to–savors–the

qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities, and emotions that are

called forth [by a work] and participates in the tensions, conflicts and resolutions of the

images, ideas, and scenes as they unfold" (11). Tolkien's careful construction of

polarities subconsciously reminds the reader of the act of reading itself, thereby

bestowing on the work additional meaning for the engaged reader. Northrop Frye

comments on the reader's grasp of the writer's constructions when he declares, "[w]e

hear or listen to a narrative, but when we grasp a writer's total pattern we 'see' what he

means" (1451).

In this thesis I will address six aspects of this idea—themes, style, places, species

or beings, events, and characters—all of which provide examples of this symmetrical,

reflective construct. In *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century,* Shippey comments on the

structure of the trilogy and observes: "Symmetry is… unmistakable, if you look for it" (*The Author of the Century* 51).

<center>*Survey of Criticism*</center>

The critical history of *The Lord of the Rings* is divided into several methodologies, although biographical, historical, and linguistic approaches dominate Tolkien criticism. However, most Tolkien scholars combine multiple approaches in their observations. Biographical scholars endeavor to align elements of Tolkien's fiction with many aspects of his life: his service in World War I, his family environment, his scholarly output and vocation as a philologist, or his conversion to Catholicism. Critics adopting this approach in whole or in part include Roger Sale and Leslie Jones. While it is true that many aspects of Tolkien's childhood and adult life, as documented by his letters and later in *Tolkien: A Biography* by Humphrey Carpenter, appear in various forms throughout *The Lord of the Rings* epic and other writings, it is difficult to reduce Tolkien's fictional works to a strictly biographical format. Consequently, critics such as Tom Shippey draw on aspects of Tolkien's life as partial inspirations for his work, but these critics wisely tend to view Tolkien's biography not as the "key" that unlocks their meaning or as the chief influence behind Tolkien's writing but as an important element that cannot be ignored. I agree with this measured view; Tolkien's journals and letters attest to a man very involved with his creation and eager to reflect upon its design and reception. However, the evidence of incidents in Tolkien's life influencing elements of his fiction remains speculative at best. I concur with other critics who are skeptical of drawing a one-to-one parallel between Tolkien's life and fiction. Instead, I view

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Tolkien's interests and deeply held religious and social opinions as influences, rather than parallels, to his work.

Historical critics, including Marjorie Burns, Jane Croft, Jane Chance, John Garth, and Stuart Lee, attempt to link *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy to aspects of either medieval or early twentieth-century history. These critics also often employ Tolkien's life and career as a prologue to historical discussion. Of special interest to this group of critics are the texts from the Middle Ages that Tolkien studied, as some of the medieval sources exercise a strong direct or indirect influence on Tolkien's fiction. While these works can lend valuable insight into the unique world that Tolkien created, they do not explain the vast scope of Middle Earth. Additionally, historical critics often cite Tolkien's service in World War I and his sons' service in World War II as possible influences on his depiction of war and on some of the imagery in the works. Again, although this scholarship greatly enhances our knowledge of the complicated origins of Tolkien's creation, it leaves many aspects of these origins unexplained. Historical criticism remains crucial for later Tolkien scholars in establishing the context for the author's life and work, but I hesitate to draw a direct parallel between global and/or personal history and Tolkien's fiction. The world of Middle Earth is far deeper, richer, and imaginative than a simple allegorical parallel to a personal biography or historical sources.

Linguistic critics, such as Tom Shippey, Elizabeth Kirk, and Leslie Jones, dissect Tolkien's professional and personal interest in Old English, Old Norse, and other ancient languages and bodies of literature as sources and inspirations for his literary productions. Tolkien's profession as a philologist and his work on the *OED* clearly informed his creation of the many complex languages of Middle Earth, which include substantial

bodies of vocabulary and regulated syntax and grammar systems. Tolkien reveals his fascination with these languages in a confession to his publisher that he "wished he could have written [it] in Elvish" (*Letters* 54). While places, character names, and other elements of the work are plainly drawn from the corpus of literature that Tolkien examined as a philologist, a sole focus on language ignores other nuanced and original narrative elements that Tolkien included in his novels. While the body of criticism regarding this aspect of the trilogy is fascinating, it is not my area of expertise and does not correspond with my interests for this paper.

Other pervasive critical methodologies include formalist, religious and/or mythological, gender studies, queer studies, and reception theory. Anne Petty, Michael Brisbois, Verlyn Flieger, and other formalist critics concentrate on elements of plot and character to discern meaning. Formalist studies also often focus on the treatment of nature or the elements from world cultures that possibly influenced Tolkien's mythopoeia. Religious critics, such as R.J. Reilly, Gunnar Urang, Richard Purtill and Ralph Wood, examine both the pagan and Christian sources for Tolkien's texts. This body of criticism often compares the narrative arc of *The Lord of the Rings* to the religious stories and doctrines of Christianity and earlier European belief systems. Gender studies critics such as Lynette Porter and others examine the interplay of sex and gender in the novels, primarily showing how these elements pertain to medieval and ancient sources. Anna Smol and Mark Hooker, while both utilizing and critiquing ideas drawn from queer studies theory, explore the complex web of male relationships in *The Lord of the Rings.* Reception theory critics, such as Brian Rosebury and Tom Shippey, consider the ways in which the wider culture has been changed by *The Lord of the Rings* and *The*

Hobbit. Moreover, some reception theory critics collaborate with theorists in education to integrate *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* into a contemporary literary education at the secondary level. These educators and theorists strive to bring Tolkien into the secondary school canon as they contend *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy represents fiction that both entertains and proves challenging for emerging readers.

My thesis concerns the formalist element of structural polarities, which, for some unknown reason, have not been examined in the corpus of Tolkien criticism. The only explanation that I can offer for this neglect is the relatively recent phenomenon of Tolkien's fictional output being viewed as "serious" enough to warrant literary study. While some authors experience critical acclaim during their lifetimes, Tolkien did not. It was not until the 1970s that critics began to view Tolkien's work, which had always been "popular" literature, as the stuff of "great" literature, and by that time the formalism of the 1950s had been replaced by historicism and postmodernism as the dominant critical approaches. Formalist-dominated examinations such as my own have only just begun to reenter critical favor. However, while my perspective may be primarily formalist, the polyvocal nature of contemporary criticism allows my thesis to encompass several approaches to serve my formalist goals.

Many critical schools, particularly the historical and biographical, reinforce my interpretation of Tolkien's trilogy, so I am particularly interested in examining those critical viewpoints. Finally, some of the articles or books written from a religious perspective lend additional shades of meaning to my analysis of the trilogy, so I will explore those positions as well. Tom Shippey's work, which engages in many diverse critical approaches to Tolkien, is especially helpful to my central thesis, as are the works

of Michael Drout, Marjorie Burns, and J.S. Ryan. In addition, my thesis draws on the reader response theories of Wolfgang Iser and Louise Rosenblatt, as well as the feminist theories of masculine and feminine binaries posited by Hélène Cixous and Marilyn French.

Two critics specifically deal with ideas of duality in *The Lord of the Rings*, but the respective focus of each work, while informing aspects of my thesis, differs from my primary concentration. Michael Brisbois's article "Tolkien's Imaginary Nature: An Analysis of the Structure of Middle Earth" presents Tolkien's representation in his subcreation of nature as either passive or active; in many ways, Brisbois's ideas of activity and passivity in the novels correspond to and enhance the feminist theories of Cixous and French that I utilize in my thesis. Finally, in a chapter entitled "Binary Opposition in Middle Earth" from the book *One Ring to Bind Them All: Tolkien's Mythology*, Anne Petty also recognizes duality in Tolkien's creation. Petty analyzes global mythology to contextualize attitudes toward life and death in *The Lord of the Rings*. Petty's work does not overlap with mine; I interpret and articulate the sense of a binary tension in Middle Earth in a different fashion.

Critical Approach

Why would a novel consisting of a careful construction of opposites resonate so deeply with the reading public? And why, in an era when experimental modernist literature was fashionable, would a writer strive to create balance and symmetry in his fiction? I offer the following explanations: first, Tolkien's scholarly focus was the

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European Middle Ages, and the order and balance of both the medieval worldview and its literary conventions affected his creation of Middle Earth. Next, Tolkien's Catholicism profoundly influenced his imagination.

The Catholic theology in which Tolkien was devotedly immersed exhibits reassuring balance for the believer; the fall of humanity into a sinful world initiated by the Devil is balanced by humankind's deliverance to salvation through belief in the Savior, and the grace of God saves all who believe from the evil of sin. Moreover, Catholic theology juxtaposes not only salvation and damnation, Christ and Satan, but also heaven, purgatory, and hell. In a letter that Tolkien wrote to his colleague and friend Robert Murray, an early reader of the work, Tolkien writes, "*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion,' to cults and practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism" (*Letters* 172). Although Tolkien later seemed to contradict this statement in 1955 when he wrote to his American publishers Houghton Mifflin that *The Lord of the Rings* "certainly . . . has *no* allegorical intentions, general, particular, or topical, moral, religious, or political" (*Letters* 220), I believe that the two statements reinforce rather than cancel out each other. Any "religious" intent that Tolkien had in mind when crafting the storyline for *The Lord of the Rings* embodied a generalized, ethical thought, not strict Catholic or Protestant dogma. In an author steeped in Catholic theology, this morality-based cosmology is "absorbed" and consequently manifests itself in ways that are at once recognizable to a reader familiar with Christian theology and alien from those tenets. Critic J.S. Ryan contends that in

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crafting a detailed subcreation Tolkien wished to echo his own Creator and draw

attention to what Tolkien called in the essay "On Fairy Stories" "the eucatastrophy of

Man's history": the birth of Christ (*The Tolkien Reader* 88). Ryan states that " . . . it was

Tolkien's artistic purpose in his sub-creating to provide an analysis for his own

generation, and those to follow, of the point of fusion of all creation and of its

implications for the duty and destiny of humanity" (117). Thus, an exact one-to-one

parallel between Tolkien's work and Christian theology is impossible to draw, and

Tolkien correctly points this out in letters in which he expresses his disgust for those who

reduce his works to a fantastical religious tract. However, intimations of Tolkien's

Christian ethics illumine the text, and this tension between unfamiliar and familiar worlds

further involves the reader in the complexities of Middle Earth.

Although the lives of human beings in Tolkien's Catholic philosophy hang in a

delicate balance between sin and virtue, religious scholars throughout the ages

consistently affirm the almighty power of God. Moreover, in creating Middle Earth,

Tolkien does not present a Manichean world view, which would pit equal and opposing

forces against each other, since ultimately, as in the Christian narrative, good does

triumph over evil. However, throughout Tolkien's narrative, we are never sure of this

triumph. Part of Tolkien's great gift as a storyteller is his ability to keep his readers in

continual suspense concerning the ultimate outcome in the struggle between good and

evil. Like the Quest itself, the reader of the trilogy has a sense of the tale balancing on

the precipice of doom, and this contributes to the fascination of the work. Indeed, Middle

Earth is a world where the forces of evil initially appear stronger than the forces of good;

significantly, the God-figure of Middle Earth, Illúvatar, is absent from the narrative and

in his stead the divine figures of Sauron, Saurman, Gandalf, and Galadriel clash with

their respective forces for the fate of the Free People. In this, Tolkien seemingly subverts

the paradigm of an omnipotent God, and this sense of uncertainty regarding the outcome

of the story provides the suspense that drives his work and shapes his subcreation. The

four battling, divine figures in the work exhibit their own human-like character flaws, but

for the majority of the three novels the odds look dire for the Free Peoples. The forces of

evil could win and, indeed, almost do. Therefore, Tolkien's genius lies in giving the

reader enough hope to identify with the seemingly overmatched forces of good while

never "stacking the deck" in favor of those forces. These long odds keep the tension of

the lengthy saga running high throughout the novel. In his construction of the narrative,

Tolkien privileges the mortal and divine forces of good by repeatedly demonstrating the

nobility, righteousness, and desperation of the Free Peoples' cause while simultaneously

presenting the forces of evil as potent, omnipresent, and insidious, thereby aligning the

reader with good, initially presented as the "underdog" in this epic battle. Ultimately,

Tolkien depicts Middle Earth as a divine and mortal battlefield as fraught with peril as

the mortal world of Catholic theology.

　　　　Moreover, Galadriel's statement that "[the] Quest stands upon the edge of a knife.

Stray but a little and it will fail, to the ruin of all" (*FOTR* 348)[1] recalls the theoretical

worldview of the Great Chain of Being, which stretched from classical antiquity well into

the early modern era. Although contemporary medieval scholars question the extent to

which the culture of the Middle Ages adhered to this rigid construct, it is clear that

Tolkien doubtless imbibed the idea through his professional work, and some of Tolkien's

[1] Hereafter, all of the quotes from *The Lord of the Rings* novels that I use come from the 1987 Houghton Mifflin edition of the works. For the in-text citations, I abbreviate the works' titles as follows: *FOTR* for *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *TT* for *The Two Towers*, and *ROTK* for *The Return of the King.*

contemporaries, including C.S. Lewis, played a role in reifying the idea of the Great

Chain of Being. In this concept, the world is divided into a hierarchical order, with all

beings descending down the Chain from perfect and almighty God to the lowest

inanimate mineral or element. There are three categories in descending order on the Great

Chain: the Spiritual universe, ruled by God and including His angels; the Middle State of

human beings; and the Physical Universe of animals, plants, and inanimate objects such

as metals and stone. These divisions are further subdivided and ranked; for example, as

God rules in heaven the King, reigning by divine right, occupies the pinnacle of the

Middle State of humanity. But this Middle State remains a tenuous position for individual

men and women; pulled spiritually towards heaven yet subject to the demands and

mortality of the flesh, human beings daily walk the "edge of the knife," fearing the fall

into sin and disorder. In the medieval worldview it is impossible to escape one's place on

the Great Chain; violation of the cosmic order is considered a grave sin. This theology

informs both the contemporary religious practices in which Tolkien actively participated

and the early Christian texts that he encountered as a scholar. In fact, Tolkien wrote the

Silmarillion, a kind of biblical text for Middle Earth, and wished to have it published with

The Lord of the Rings trilogy. In a lengthy letter to his publisher, Tolkien summarizes the

cosmology of Middle Earth and the creation of this master mythology by stating "The

whole of the 'world politics,' outlined above, is of course there in [the readers'] mind[s],

and [*The Lord of The Rings* text] also alludes[s] to [it] occasionally as to things elsewhere

recorded in full" (*Letters* 158).

But in Middle Earth, the structure of the Great Chain reveals other characteristics

in addition to the medieval concept of order. Jane Chance asserts that, "If love binds

together the heavens and the hierarchy of species known in the Middle Ages as the Great Chain of Being . . . then hate and envy and pride and avarice bind together the hierarchy of species under the aegis of the One Ring of Sauron and the fallen Vala" (151). Just as people in the Middle Ages understood their place on this Great Chain of Being as a tension between the saving grace of God and the damning sin of the fallen angel Satan, so too the residents of Middle Earth are caught between the congregated forces of the Free Peoples, who look to the all-powerful One or Ilúvatar, while warring with the ultimate destructive evil of Sauron, a fallen Ainu or "angel" figure, and his mustered forces of destruction in Mordor. Gandalf, a Valar or "archangel" in the cosmology of Middle Earth, works tirelessly to thwart the machinations of Sauron, the fallen Ainu, to take over Middle Earth. But if the forces of Sauron are chained by fear, Chance observes that "the hierarchy of good characters [are] linked by the symbolic value of friendship into an invisible band or chain of love . . ." (151).

In addition, many scholars have argued that balance and symmetry are a hallmark of literature from the classical, medieval, and early modern periods, and Tolkien, as a significant medieval scholar, would have been engrossed in the works of these eras. Scholars such as Cedric H. Whitman discern a number of parallelisms in Homer's *Iliad* and other classical works. Moreover, many critics have discussed the double plot construction, which includes the careful assembly of balance and antithesis, in medieval works such as *The Second Shepherd's Play*. Finally, commentators over the centuries have examined Shakespeare's use of foils, parallels, and symmetry in the double plots of many of his plays. Therefore, in my thesis I propose that because of the confluence of a number of elements, both personal and professional—Catholicism, the medieval world

view of the Great Chain of Being, and the prevalence of symmetry and antithesis in classical, medieval, and early modern literature—Tolkien demonstrates a natural inclination to view the world in terms of polarity and balance, and this worldview manifests itself in his creation of his own secondary world, or subcreation, Middle Earth.

Some contemporary feminist critics contend that the tendency to view the world as a set of binary pairs stems from the culturally inculcated division of the sexes. In the essay "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays," French feminist Hélène Cixous articulates the deeply rooted cultural divide of the masculine and feminine principles, and contends that "[i]f we read or speak, the same thread of double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection. Thought has always worked through opposition, Speaking/Writing, Parole/Escriture, High/Low" (348). Cixous discerns this cultural inclination to polarity as a universal principle, and declares that "Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law organizes what is thinkable through oppositions . . . . And all these pairs of oppositions are *couples*" (348). Writing in 1975, twenty or so years after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings,* Cixous discusses both the historical and contemporary propensity to divide the world into antithetical pairs, a theory that further affirms Tolkien's dualistic worldview.

Marilyn French in her book *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* also contends that the worldview of early modern writers operated along a dualistic divide, which she refers to as the masculine and the dual outlaw and inlaw feminine poles or principles. The goal of the masculine principle is power in the world, and while this principle encompasses all that is violent, destructive, and aggressive, it also incorporates the

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orderly, the hierarchical, and the rational; the goal of the inlaw feminine principle is community and cooperation, and this principle encompasses nurturing, the creative force of childbirth, passivity, and the emotional; lastly, the goal of the outlaw feminine is pleasure, and this principle encompasses the rebellious, hedonistic, passionate, unreasoning, and sexually threatening aspects of femininity. French insists that these cultural views " . . . rest on perceptions that have been forgotten by the conscious mind, but which are perpetuated by the conventions of our literature, art, and language" (31). French asserts that "[Shakespeare's] work represents a lifelong effort to harmonize moral qualities he did associate with the two genders, and to synthesize opposing or seemingly opposed states and qualities" (17). By this, French argues that in Shakespeare's works the "best" characters reveal a blending of gender duality; the unflinchingly masculine are doomed to tragic ends, and the unmitigated feminine are often victims. However, the characters that combine aspects of both polarities exhibit growth and change. For example, Macduff in *Macbeth* demonstrates both masculine courage when he fights nobly against the usurper Macbeth for Scotland and feminine emotion when, upon hearing the news of the murder of his wife and children, he states that he must "feel it as a man" (Shakespeare, *Macbeth.* 4.3.223) before he can enact vengeance. This hermeneutic of balancing masculine and feminine traits can also be applied to Tolkien's fiction; certainly characters such as the uncompromising and destructive Denethor embody a strict masculine principle, while Aragorn, who heals his companions with herb lore, protects the Shire from invaders, and ascends into his regal bearing as a warrior and king, blends the inlaw feminine with the masculine. Additionally, the disgusting, predatory female monster Shelob represents all that is horrific in the outlaw feminine

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principle, while the gentle, nurturing Arwen exemplifies the inlaw feminine pole. Galadriel melds her immense magical and political power in the Elven world with a deep concern for nature and the fate of all living things, thereby exhibiting both masculine and inlaw feminine principles. Conversely, Éowyn combines all three of the principles, blending her rebellious spirit (outlaw feminine) with a nurturing care for her sovereign Théoden and the Hobbit Merry (inlaw feminine), while displaying the valor and fortitude of a patriotic warrior (masculine). French's feminist theories of a deeply rooted masculine/feminine duality in literature help to legitimate Tolkien's creation of Middle Earth as a reflective world.

Neither Cixous nor French claims an essentialist point of view regarding gender polarities; that is, they do not assert that this schism represents the true nature of men and women. Rather, these feminist critics stress that societal forces such as religion, the separation of the public and domestic sphere, and economic forces lead people to perceive the genders as split and polarized. As Cixous declares, this way of seeing the world is so engrained in human beings that " . . . the same thread or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, [and] centuries of representation and reflection" (348). Certainly Tolkien experienced this "double braid" leading him through the works of medieval literature and Christian theology that so profoundly affected his imagination, and that same "double braid" of polarized opposition extends throughout his work in many ways.

In this hermeneutic of opposition, one side always triumphs or is privileged over the other; such is the nature of the dyad. Cixous calls this the "universal battlefield" (349) and as a feminist scholar laments the inevitable triumph in Western culture of masculine

ideals over those aligned with the feminine. Previously, in his essay "Différance" Jacques Derrida argued that since the coupled parts of oppositions cannot exist independent of one another, since they define themselves by what they are not, these elements are therefore generated by their opposite and contain elements of alterity. Derrida asserts that "[e]very concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences" (285). Tolkien's oppositions function in a similar way; the concept of good is heightened and foregrounded by the forces of evil present in the texts, although these forces of good, such as Galadriel or Gandalf , are not unblemished by evil because of their admitted temptation to use the ultimate instrument of evil, the One Ring. Conversely, figures such as Gollum demonstrate that even in evil there may exist some good; acting as half of his fractured self, the hobbit-like Sméagol, Gollum pledges fidelity to the will of the Master of the Ring. Although the treacherous Gollum may subsequently betray, mislead, and attack Frodo, because he ultimately fulfills his pledge the Ring is finally destroyed. Therefore, throughout my thesis, I will follow Derrida and Cixous by employing the terms "polarity," "opposites," and "balance" not to imply equality but to signify difference and opposition.

My approach primarily examines the text for elements of plot, setting, pacing, and characterization, so I would identify my methodology as formalist. Many of the points that I mention are not new; critics have previously commented on some of these elements in essays or books that employ different methodologies, and I intend to cite these comments in some instances and expand upon these observations in others. However, my ultimate goal is to understand why readers respond to Tolkien's work with such

enthusiasm, and I believe that in analyzing polarities I can construct a primarily

formalistic argument that answers that question. To do so, I must additionally employ

two seemingly antithetical critical stances: biographical criticism and reader response

theory. A biographical reading of Tolkien is almost inescapable; as both a towering

contributor to the field of philology and an endless critic of his own work in letters to

friends, family, and colleagues, Tolkien developed a unique voice in his novels and any

critic wishing to study his literary production must also be knowledgeable about his life,

personal writings, and scholarly essays. But that approach leaves unanswered the central

question: why do readers embrace the complex world of Middle Earth that Tolkien

creates? I believe that including elements of reader response theory, which dissects how

readers interact with literature and how that interaction shapes the text, provides the best

answers to this question. By categorizing and thoroughly analyzing Tolkien's structural

polarities, I can perhaps explain how novels classified as derivative juvenile fiction at

their initial publications have endured to become best-selling works for fans of all ages

and nationalities.

Reader response criticism, although not yet articulated when Tolkien was creating

his masterpiece, comments on the act of reading that each reader must undergo while

interacting with Tolkien's world or with any literary work. Iser remarks that in order to

construct an understanding of the text, the reader must have ". . . a consistent,

configurative meaning [which is] essential for the apprehension of an unfamiliar

experience, which through the process of illusion-building we can incorporate into our

own imaginative world" ("The Reading Process" 60). Reflective structures such as

Tolkien's antithetical constructions prove important in creating this "imaginative world,"

as the pairs of opposites bind the narrative together to create a cohesive whole. Iser notes

that in the act of reading the individual "links[s] the different phases of the text together,

it will always be the process of anticipation and retrospection that leads to the formation

of the virtual dimension, which in turn transforms the text into an experience for the

reader" ("The Reading Process" 56). Jane Tompkins assesses reader response as a

culmination of the author's efforts, asserting that "[t]he reader's experience, then, is the

creation of the author: he enacts the author's will" (xvii).

Chapter II: Polarities

Themes

Much critical ink has been spilled regarding Tolkien's overarching themes: free will versus destiny, the small versus the mighty, and the triumph of generosity over Faustian self-interest. My character-based thematic focus centers around how two or more characters, often inverted reflections of each other, react in nearly identical situations. The first situation I will examine concerns an act of pity leading to mercy. Often, an act of this kind initially appears to be an error, as when Frodo spares Gollum, only to have Gollum lead him treacherously into Shelob's lair. However, this can eventually be seen as a felicitous mistake or "felix culpa" resulting in an unexpected happy turn of events, what Tolkien termed *eucatastrope* (*The Tolkien Reader* 85). Clearly, mistakes and happy endings are generally diametrically opposed; traditionally a hero's mistake or failing, the *hamartia,* results in tragedy. But Tolkien relied on religious precedent to develop this idea: he states in "On Fairy Stories" that "[t]he birth of Christ is the eucatastrope of Man's history" (*The Tolkien Reader* 88) By this, Tolkien meant that the fall of humanity from the paradise of Eden turned out to be a fortunate fall, because it necessitated God's sending his Son, Jesus Christ, who taught, led a model life, and

ultimately redeemed humankind.[2] Thus, the tragedy of Christ's later sacrifice on the cross

became the salvation and "good news" or "gospel" of heavenly redemption for all

humankind. However, Tolkien takes the idea of "felix culpa" and turns it to his own

thematic use in the characters of Frodo and Gollum. Tolkien does that by transforming

the theme of redemptive pity that Christ felt for wayward humanity, which led to his

sacrifice, into the redemptive pity that Frodo feels for the wretched creature Gollum. This

clever echoing of the powerful Christian tenets of mercy and sacrifice drives much of the

plot and heightens the tension of both action and character development between three

characters, the traveling "trinity" of Frodo, Sam, and Gollum.

The fates of Frodo and Gollum are clearly intertwined: one bore the Ring for

many years, and in the chapter "The Shadow of the Past" Frodo learns that he will be the

next to bear the Ring. Gandalf tells the story of the Ring and the imminent danger in

which Frodo finds himself because Gollum uttered the words "Baggins" and "Shire" to

his Orc tormentors. In response to Frodo's assertion that it is a pity that Bilbo did not

stab Gollum when he had the chance, Gandalf replies, "Pity? It was Pity that stayed his

hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo.

Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began

his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity" (*FOTR* 58). This establishes the fundamental

difference between Bilbo's reaction to the Ring and that of Gollum. Because one of the

first deeds performed by Bilbo while bearing the Ring was an act of pity, he receives a

kind of mercy; the Ring leaves him relatively unscathed. By contrast, Gollum, as the

reader later learns, gained possession of the Ring through murdering his cousin Dèagol,

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[2] Of course, Milton also outlines this idea in *Paradise Lost*.

who had initially found it, and Gollum's wretched state reflects this treachery. This lesson is not lost on Frodo. Later in the same passage Gandalf speculates: "My heart tells me that he has yet 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 the least" (*FOTR* 58).

Frodo assimilates this lesson as well. The pity of Bilbo, as the reader sees, becomes the pity of Frodo; time and again Frodo is given the chance to rid himself of the "footpad" that follows the Ring, but mercy stays his hand. Even after the Gollum's betrayal of Frodo and Sam that leads the two to Shelob's lair, neither Frodo nor Sam, who despises Gollum intensely, kills the wretched creature when they next encounter him. (*ROTK* 922-923)

Gandalf's final lesson concerning the value of mercy and his prophecy of Gollum's ultimate role to play in the trilogy prove true: at the final moment of expected triumph Frodo has become too affected by the Ring and cannot cast it into Mount Doom. "'I have come,' he said, 'But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!'"(*ROTK* 924). The mercy that Frodo has shown Gollum by allowing the miserable creature to live now reveals its value, and the ultimate end, a happy or unlooked-for positive turn of events, occurs when:

> Suddenly Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm's edge. But Gollum, dancing like a mad thing, held aloft the ring, a finger still thrust within its circle. It shone now verily as if it were wrought with a living fire. (*ROTK* 925)

Gollum's dance of joy leads to a subsequent tumble into Mount Doom, and he thereby

accomplishes what Frodo proclaimed minutes earlier that he could not: destroy the Ring.

Frodo reminds Sam of the lesson of pity and mercy and he turns this lesson into one of

forgiveness: "'[y]es,' said Frodo. 'But do you remember Gandalf's words: *Even Gollum*

may have something yet to do? But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring.

The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him!'"(*ROTK*

926)

Early in the trilogy, Gandalf comments, that Gollum ". . . became sharp-eyed and

keen eared for all that was hurtful. The Ring had given him power according to his

stature" (*FOTR* 52). This idea is critical, for it sets the standard for a character's

individual reaction while in close personal proximity to the Ring of Power. While Bilbo,

protected by his first act of mercy, appears shielded from the Ring's full wrath, Frodo too

gains a sort of grace by continuing this mercy and his initial revulsion to the concept of

an all-powerful weapon. "I wish it need not have happened in my time" (*FOTR* 52) Frodo

asserts. While the Ring which, according to Gandalf, can "look after itself" (*FOTR* 54)

remains in Frodo's custody, it does work on him. However, Frodo resists until the bitter

end all attempts by the Ring to possess his mind and soul. On the Seat of Seeing, Amon

Hen, Frodo reacts to the call of the Ring to bring it back to its master:

> Two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their
>
> piercing point, he writhed, tormented. 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. (*FOTR* 392)

Other characters fall on a spectrum of reaction to the Ring in accordance to their

inner motivations and agendas; for them the Ring also operates "according to his [or her]

stature" (*FOTR* 52). When offered the ring by Frodo, both Gandalf and the Elf-queen Galadriel first hesitate then reject the opportunity to wield the all-powerful weapon. This hesitation complicates both of these characters; while each is chiefly concerned with Middle Earth's continued survival, each too has a specific agenda. Galadriel wishes for her people to ensure the survival of Middle Earth so that the Elves may retreat in peace to the Havens, while the drive to organize the Free Peoples in resistance to Mordor consumes Gandalf. Both characters hesitate as the Ring offers immediate power to fulfill those respective goals, but each possesses the wisdom to know that the short-term gain of using the Ring would be followed by dire, long-term consequences, and thus each refuses.

Mortal characters also react according to their natures in proximity to the Ring. One pair of mortals exhibiting antithetical reactions to the Ring is Boromir of Gondor and his younger brother Faramir. Boromir cannot be alone with the Ring-Bearer without falling under the spell of the Ring, on Parth Galen, in the only scene in which the two are alone together, Boromir tries to wheedle Frodo into bringing the Ring to Minas Tirith so it can aid Gondor in fighting Mordor's forces. When words do not work, Boromir cries, ". . . I am too strong for you, Halfling," and he "sprang over the stone and leaped at Frodo. His fair and pleasant face was hideously changed; a raging fire was in his eyes" (*FOTR* 390). In the end, desire for the Ring, combined with courage and devotion in protecting the Hobbits, lead to Boromir's destruction; while later defending Merry and Pippin on Parth Galen, Boromir is killed in a hail of Orc arrows. In his dying words to Aragorn, Boromir accepts his death as a just punishment for his attack on Frodo.

Indeed, throughout *The Fellowship of the Ring* Tolkien creates in Boromir an

internally warring character whose opposing motivations often appear as either temperamental outbursts or maudlin sentiment. Although Boromir's bravery is undeniable—he plays a critical role in helping the party survive the dangerous trek around the mountain Caradhras, for example—his courage and his loyalty to his oath to protect the Ring Bearer seem at odds with his personal goal of saving Gondor from Mordor's forces through the expedient use of the Ring of Power. Frequently, Boromir waxes sentimental and exhibits genuine pride in his ancestors, the great Men of Westernesse, and in his glorious country, but his craven action in cornering Frodo on Parth Galen is at odds with the noble sentiments that he espouses. Holly Crocker notes that ". . . in his ploy to take the Ring Boromir identifies the promise of masculinity that actual Men have not been able to realize since Isildur's failure" (112) Crocker perceives that Boromir at once embodies the best and worst of mankind, and this type of figure, one who is both noble and admired yet overreaches to his doom, has not been seen since the legendary Gondorian King Isildur. Boromir represents a complex combination of opposites, and his death, which is a result of both a treacherous betrayal of Frodo and a noble defense of Merry and Pippin, reflects this contradiction.

Boromir's brother Faramir has the initial advantage of not knowing what Frodo possesses, but even after he understands the enormity of the Ring Bearer's task he treats Frodo with respect, courtesy, and kindness. Exhausted mentally and physically from the trek, Frodo breaks down and confesses to Faramir that he must ". . . find the Mountain of Fire and cast the thing into the Gulf of Doom" (*TT* 666). Faramir's immediate reaction to the exhausted Frodo after he confesses his task is critical: "Faramir stared at [Frodo] for a moment in grave astonishment. Then suddenly he caught him as he

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swayed, and lifting him gently, carried him to the bed and laid him there, and covered him warmly" (*TT* 666). In sharp contrast to his brother, Faramir does not attempt to take the Ring by force or by rhetoric. Commenting on the moral "stature" that Faramir demonstrates when in proximity to the Ring, Sam remarks:

'Good night, Captain my lord,' he said. 'You took the chance, sir.'

'Did I so?' said Faramir.

'Yes sir, and showed your quality: the very highest.' (*TT* 667)

Pride and despair are two interwoven emotions experienced by the leaders of the Free Peoples in Middle Earth; after all, the odds against them seem long as ultimately their hope for victory lies in two small creatures creeping secretly towards the stronghold of the enemy. How the leaders of men react to the intertwined emotions of pride and despair in battles provides an index not only of their intrinsic fitness as leaders but of their legacy in the tale.

Théoden and Denethor represent the reflective opposites in this case. Although both do not survive beyond the Battle of Pelennor Fields—an important parallel between the two—the Free People venerate Théoden after his death for his pride in the face of despair, while Gandalf chastises Denethor for abandoning his post as Steward and sinking into despair as a result of Faramir's (supposed) death. Gandalf scolds Denethor, "Whereas your part is to go out to the battle of your City, where maybe death awaits you. This you know in your heart" (*ROTK* 834). Denethor's response provides an index of his fitness as a leader; he abandons his pride and sinks into despondency. Furthermore, he has annihilated any satisfaction in victory that he might have felt in becoming a traitor and aligning himself with the Dark Tower:

'Pride and despair!' he [Denethor] cried. 'Didst thou think that the eyes of the

White Tower were blind? … For thy hope is but ignorance. Go then and labour in

healing! Go forth and fight! Vanity. For a little space now you may triumph on

the field, for a day. But against the Power that now arises there is no victory.'

(*ROTK* 835)

Michael Drout comments that this total dereliction of duty "In a medieval context would

be the sin of 'wanhope,' of abandoning faith in God and refusing to believe that one can

be saved even in the darkest circumstances" (147). Shippey summarizes this polarity of

duty and abandonment when he observes, "One may say that the wise characters in *The

Lord of the Rings* are often without hope and so near the edge of despair, but they do not

succumb. That is left to Denethor, who will not fight to the last, but turns 'like a heathen'

to suicide and the sacrifice of his kin" (*The Road to Middle Earth* 158). In abandoning his

people in their hour of need, relinquishing all pride in Gondor's martial puissance against

Mordor's forces, and immolating himself in such a violent way, Denethor represents a

brutal breakdown in Middle Earth leadership.

This rabid adherence to despair, refusal to admit mistakes, and tendency towards

violence exemplifies what French would designate as the most destructive aspects of the

masculine principle. Denethor's foil, Théoden of Rohan, successfully blends the

masculine and feminine principles in his courage, determination, and pride (masculine

principle) and his kindly treatment of the Hobbit Merry and his devoted protection of his

people (in-law feminine principle). While Denethor sinks into self-indulgent misery,

Théoden perseveres against long odds in order to nurture a better future for his beloved

nation. Théoden never abandons hope, nor does he take the advice of his successor,

Éomer, to return home and let the younger men do the fighting. Théoden knows that the

worst offence that a king can commit is the loss of personal pride as a leader in battle and

the loss of hope for his people—in short, despair.

> 'But if you would take my counsel,' said Éomer in a low voice, 'you would then
>
> return hither, until the war is lost, over or won.'
>
> Théoden smiled. 'Nay my son, for so I will call you, speak not the soft words of
>
> Wormtongue in my old ears!' He drew himself up and looked back at the long
>
> line of his men fading into the dusk behind. 'Long years in the space of days it
>
> seems since I rode west; but never will I lean on a staff again. If the war is lost,
>
> what good will be my hiding in the hills? And if it is won, what grief will it be,
>
> even if I fall, spending my last strength? … Let us ride on!' (*ROTK* 775)

Woven throughout the trilogy are many examples of characters overreaching their

grasp and attempting to manipulate events. Characters who overreach with the intent to

deceive inevitably experience a negative outcome, while characters who overreach with

no set intent or with beneficial intentions achieve positive results. Saruman believes that

he can know Sauron's thoughts through looking into a palantír, one of the connected

gazing stones used for communication and prophesy. Thus, as Gandalf explains,

Saruman gazes too far, and finally when ". . . he cast his gaze upon Barad-dûr. Then he

was caught!" (*TT* 584) Saruman becomes a traitor and eventually suffers the attack on

Orthanc by the Ents and his ultimate diminishment of power. His act of overreaching

betrays Saruman yet again when his confederate Gríma in ignorance and spite throws the

palantír at Gandalf and his companions after the Ent invasion of the White Tower.

Gandalf quickly assumes custody of the palantír, much to the distress of Saruman.

Pippin and Sauron both overreach in relation to the palantír, but because Pippin's ultimate intentions are good, his mistake results in positive outcomes, while for Sauron the hubris has dire consequences. The palantír formerly owned by Saruman that Gandalf later guards draws Pippin irresistibly to it, as its master Sauron searchers through the gazing stone for Gandalf's halfling companion. When Pippin gazes into the stone, he exclaims that he "saw things that frightened me. And I wanted to go away, but I couldn't. And then he came and questioned me; and he looked at me, and, and, that is all I can remember" (*TT* 579). In the questioning, Sauron learns that this is a Hobbit companion of Gandalf's and he "gloated" (*TT* 579) over this information. What Sauron, who also overreaches in this scene, does not realize is that this is not *the* Hobbit, the one who bears the Ring. Pippin's act of overreaching misdirects Sauron's gaze so that it concentrates upon the action of the remaining members of the Fellowship, not upon Frodo and Sam as they plod toward Mount Doom. For the Free Peoples, Sauron's overreaching proves beneficial, but for Sauron it is deadly: misreading what he sees leads Sauron to focus on the actions of Gandalf and the assembled armies of the Free Peoples; until it is too late, he overlooks Frodo and Sam's quest to Mount Doom. Thus, Pippin's rash act, because not motivated by evil, turns out to be one of the many "felix culpas" of the trilogy; whereas Sauron's overreaching, which is motivated solely by evil, acts as catalyst to his doom.

Crucially, Gollum overreaches in relation to Ring when he breaks the covenant that he makes to Frodo by swearing on the Ring. Frodo and Sam bind Gollum with the elf-rope when they lead him from Faramir's lair, and Gollum shrieks that the rope " . . . freezes, it bites!" (*TT* 603); but Frodo and Sam refuse to unbind him without a promise

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that he will not betray them again. The subsequent scene establishes the ultimate outcome of the trilogy:

'No, I will not take it off you,' said Frodo, 'Not unless'—he paused a moment in thought— 'not unless there is any promise you can make that I can trust.

'We will swear to do what he wants, yes, yess,' said Gollum, still twisting and grabbing his ankle. 'It hurts us.'

'Swear?' said Frodo.

'Sméagol,' said Gollum suddenly and clearly, opening his eyes wide and staring at Frodo with a strange light. 'Sméagol will swear on the Precious.'

Frodo drew himself up, and again Sam was startled by his words and his stern voice. 'On the Precious? How dare you?' he said. 'Think! *One Ring to rule them all and in the Darkness bind them.* Would you commit your promise to that, Sméagol? It will hold you. But it is more treacherous than you are. It may twist your words. Beware!'

Gollum cowered. 'On the Precious, on the Precious!' he repeated.

'And what will you swear?' asked Frodo.

'To be very, very good,' said Gollum. Then crawling to Frodo's feet he groveled before him, whispering hoarsely: a shudder ran over him, as if the words shook his very bones with fear. 'Sméagol will swear never, never to let Him have it. Never! Sméagol will save it. But he must swear on the Precious.'

. . .

[Frodo said] ' . . . not on it. Swear by it, if you will . . . . Down! Down!' said Frodo. 'Now, speak your promise!'

30

'We promises, yes, I promise!' said Gollum. 'I will serve the master of the

Precious.' (*TT* 603-604)

Gollum wins a temporary victory through this action since Sam releases him from the

rope; however, this deed has consequences more profound than just Gollum's release. In

swearing by the Ring, Gollum in his greed underestimates the power with which he is

now contending; when he does betray Frodo, "the Master of the Ring," by leading Frodo

and Sam to Shelob's lair, Gollum seals his doom. Although his final act of stealing the

Ring by biting it off Frodo's finger and tumbling into the fiery pit saves Middle Earth, it

kills Gollum. To the end, Gollum does serve the Master of the Ring by doing what Frodo

wishes to do but what, at the end, he is too weak and ravished to accomplish: annihilate

the Ring. But, at the same time, the Ring extracts its revenge on Gollum. As Chance

observes, ". . . Gollum's battle with Frodo is motivated not by the loving desire to support

his lord but instead by his selfish desire to become his Lord—an act of disobedience"

(10). In developing his plot, Tolkien exploits the medieval concept of an attempted

usurpation of place on the Great Chain of Being: Gollum's punishment for his

disobedience to his lord is death.

Two characters in the trilogy, through their actions, descriptions, and words,

comment on the duality of power, covert and overt, and of danger, covert and overt in

Middle Earth. Aragorn, the "King" of the title of the third novel, first appears to the

travelling Hobbits as a Ranger, a sort of homeless, roving guardian for Middle Earth

whose main job consists of fending off Orc attacks. The Rangers are in fact more than

they seem; they represent the last male descendants of the Men of Westernesse, the

ancient kingdom of legendary warriors beyond the sea. Aragorn in particular is more than

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he seems, and in him resides more power than the Hobbits initially realize. Early in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, presenting himself as "Strider," Aragorn forces an audience with the Hobbits at the Inn of the Prancing Pony in Bree. While the other Hobbits, especially Sam, express fear and distrust of this man, Frodo hesitantly states, "'[y]ou have frightened me several times tonight, but never in the way the servants of the Enemy would, or so I imagine. I think one of his spies would—well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand.' 'I see,' laughed Strider. 'I look foul and feel fair. Is that it?'" (*FOTR* 168)

This statement echoes Act I scene i of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In the ironic structure of that scene, Duncan, Malcolm, and the Captain enter praising Macbeth directly after the Witches chant, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair / Hover through the fog and the filthy air" (1.2.11-12). Astute viewers of the play draw a parallel between the two contradictory descriptions of Macbeth. While Aragorn, according to his rewording of Frodo's assessment, looks foul and feels fair, the usurping king Macbeth looks fair yet feels, and acts, foully. The idea of nature commandeered and the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being undone, as presented by Shakespeare in *Macbeth*, results in chaos for Scotland. Conversely, as an inversion of Macbeth, Aragorn, disguised as a Ranger, hides his kingly destiny to all but the few, like Frodo, who can discern it. Aragorn is a potent power, who as a warrior represents great danger to the Enemy, but because his power and danger are hidden, the Enemy remains unaware of the threat from this humble Ranger until too late. But steered to the correct place on the Great Chain of Being, Aragorn's power ultimately manifests itself in kingly, not destructive, ways, leading not to chaos, as in *Macbeth*, but to a just and orderly rule.

The Elf-Queen Galadriel also represents both covert and overt power in Middle Earth. Sam, who visits Galadriel in Lorien, describes her to Faramir in a series of polarities that parallel Frodo's previous statement about Aragorn:

> 'Beautiful she is, sir! Lovely! Sometimes like a great tree in flower, sometimes like a white daffadowndilly, small and slender like. Hard as di'monds, soft as moonlight. Warm as sunlight, cold as frost in the stars. Proud and far-off as a snow-mountain, and as merry as any lass I ever saw with daisies in her hair in springtime. But that's a lot o' nonsense, and all wide of my mark.'
>
> 'Then she must be lovely indeed,' said Faramir. 'Perilously fair.'
>
> 'I don't know about *perilous*,' said Sam. 'It strikes me that folk take their peril with them into Lorien, and finds it there because they've brought it. But perhaps you could call her perilous, because she's so strong in herself. You could dash yourself to pieces on her, like a ship on a rock . . .' (*TT* 664-665).

This evaluation of Galadriel is, of course, as accurate as Frodo's of Aragorn above. As an ancient immortal resident of Middle Earth, Galadriel exercises power in her command of the earth-tending elves and her possession of Nenya, the Ring of adamantine, but her power is disguised in a beautiful female form. Marjorie Burns cautions the reader against the traditional critical view of Galadriel as simply a "restrained fertility figure" and reminds the reader of " . . . the box of soil that she gives to Sam, soil that sends waves of riotous fertility throughout the Shire, in tree and grass, in vegetation in general, and— most significantly—in the birth of Hobbit young" (111). Galadriel's overt power resides in her authority as co-ruler of Lorien; her covert power lies in her vast reserves of generative force, in her knowledge of the inner working of Middle Earth alliances and

history, in her keen insight into the current danger posed by the Enemy, and in her immortality. If she chose to use the Elf-magic that she possesses, Galadriel would present a potent threat to the Enemy; from the beginning, her machinations with Gandalf in preparing to battle Sauron have served as catalyst to Frodo's quest. Thus, like Aragorn, Galadriel is both more and less than she seems: overtly and covertly forceful, both characters embody immense power in calculated disguise.

Although Aragorn and Galadriel embody this polarity, Gandalf points out to Gimli in a conversation about Fangorn that many characters represent the parallels of overt and covert power: "'Dangerous!' cried Gandalf. 'And so am I, very dangerous: more dangerous that anything you will ever meet . . . . And Aragorn is dangerous, and Legolas is dangerous. You are beset with dangers, Gimli son of Glóin; for you are dangerous yourself, in your own fashion'" (*TT* 488).

Style

Tolkien's style and pacing of the book also have a reflective symmetry that lends situational and dramatic irony to his plot. After Book II, readers of the trilogy alternate between the storylines of characters in the dissolved Fellowship: Merry and Pippin as they are abducted by the Orcs; Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli as they pursue the kidnapped Hobbits; and Sam and Frodo as they trudge to Mordor. The storylines of the members of the Fellowship may intersect or break apart again, but over the course of *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* there are really two speeds at which Tolkien operates: the plodding pace of Sam and Frodo and the sweeping epic sprint of the rest of the characters. Shippey observes: "All the way through the later Books there is moreover a

deliberate alternation between the sweeping and dramatic movements of the majority of

the Fellowship and the inching, small-scale progress of Frodo, Sam and Gollum. The

irony by which the latter in the end determines the fate of the former is obvious,

remarked on by the characters and by the narrator" (*Author of the Century* 52).

Richard C. West notes that in demonstrating both the close-focus and panoramic

views of Middle Earth, "Tolkien uses a structural technique similar to that of medieval

interlace" (78). West defines interlace as "seek[ing] to mirror the perception of the flux of

events in the world around us, where everything is happening at once. . . . The paths of

the characters cross, diverge and recross, and the story passes from one to another . . .

Also, the narrator implies that there are innumerable events that he has not had time to

tell us about . . ." (79). While this style of narration seems chaotic, West asserts that ". . .

it actually has a very subtle kind of cohesion. No part of the narrative can be removed

without damage to the whole, for within every given section there are echoes of previous

parts and anticipations of later ones" (79). Indeed, West points out that small references

to lore or prophecy early in the work reflect later actions in the narrative, "[t]he grisly

detail of Isildur cutting the Ring of Power from the hand of Sauron is repeated as Gollum

bites off Frodo's ring finger and is borne into the fire by the weight of the Ring" (84). But

why would Tolkien bother with this esoteric and difficult style of narration? West posits

that the readers' sense of Middle Earth is profoundly affected by this technique. He calls

the effect "openendedness," which he defines as the reader "[having] the impression that

the story has an existence outside of the confines of the book . . . . Since Tolkien's

romance is a section only (however large) of a vast mythology, it is just such an effect he

wants" (90). This interlace technique intrigues and enchants the reader, beguiling a reader

response of acceptance for the solidity of the fantastical Middle Earth. From the very beginning of his Middle Earth novels, Tolkien gives the reader a sense of *in medias res* by dropping him or her off in an unfamiliar world; while the narrative voice guides the way, the reader must sort out what Iser calls the "blanks" ("Interaction" 1677) and create the world for him or herself. In this, Tolkien takes a medieval techniques and uses it to solicit a modern reader response.

Aristotle in the *Poetics* asserts that this careful but seemingly artless type of construction was the optimal mode for artistic creation; he argues that a work " . . . ought to be so constructed that, when some part is transposed or removed, the whole is disrupted and disturbed" (97). Tolkien's carefully structured plot, which consists of several interweaving narrative threads, embodies this Aristotelian concept of a unified whole. Aristotle, who is also concerned with the poet "consider[ing] how many ways [constructions] might signify" (115) acknowledges the audience's response to a work; in this way, Aristotle may be the first reader response critic.

Within the very fast-paced and active scenes of the novels, Tolkien also carefully inserts quiet moments of reflection, or introspective scenes, which comment thematically on the larger meaning of the scene and book. In *The Two Towers*, Sam, Frodo and Gollum attempt to hide from a skirmish between Faramir's men and forces loyal to Mordor. In the heat of the battle scene, as arrows fly thick and the sound is like "…a hundred blacksmiths smithying together" (646), Sam takes time to muse on the capricious nature of warfare as he watches the battle:

> Then, suddenly straight over the rim of their sheltering bank, a man fell, crashing
> through slender trees, nearly on top of them. He came to rest a few feet away, face

downward, green arrow-feathers sticking from his neck below a golden collar….

It was Sam's first view of a battle of Men against Men and he did not like it

much. He was glad that he could not see the dead face. He wondered what the

man's name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart, or

what lies or threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would

not rather have stayed there in peace—all this in a flash of thought which was

quickly driven from his mind. (*TT* 646)

This scene is strikingly modern and reminiscent of perhaps the most famous World War I

novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. In the heat of a battle, the narrator Paul

contemplates the similarities between himself and the French soldier he has just killed:

If you jumped in here again I would not do it, if you would be sensible too. But

you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and

called for its appropriate response. It was that abstraction I stabbed. But now, for

the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, or

your bayonet, or your ride; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship.

(Remarque 223)

It is remarkable that Tolkien uses this technique; since, as Drout notes, Tolkien attempted

to position himself "…deliberately outside the fashionable currents of his day" (148).

Indeed, in his letters Tolkien disavows any connection between the war of his fictional

world and the wars through which he lived. However, as Remarque did in *All Quiet on

the Western Front,* Tolkien clearly constructs a stylistic narrative polarity in juxtaposing

a fierce battle description with a character's internal monologue. Additionally, Tolkien

employs this introspective scene as a reminder for the reader that unless Frodo and Sam

succeed in their quest, all the Free Peoples of Middle Earth will meet a fate similar to the one of the unfortunate young man whom Sam sees killed; they will either die or be enslaved to an evil ideology, which will result in an untimely end.

Later, as Sam and Frodo near Mount Doom, Tolkien provides respite from anxiety for both the characters and the reader. The Hobbits walk through Ithilien, the ancient "Garden of Gondor," which because of its proximity to Mordor has been deserted and gone to seed. However, natural beauty still clings to the land, and "As they walked, brushing their way through bush and herb, sweet odours rose about them. Gollum coughed and retched; but the Hobbits breathed deep, and suddenly Sam laughed, for heart's ease not for jest" (*TT* 636). The Hobbits' wonder at the wild beauty of Ithilien and the peace that they experience there is a brief, albeit welcome, respite from the atmosphere of trepidation and impending doom established by the trek to Mordor.

Places

Places are reflective in *LOTR* in two ways: first, Tolkien demonstrates the effect that alien lands and nature have on each character. Characters in Tolkien are tied to place, regardless of social station or position in the narrative; as characters moves from their homeland to an alien place, they change. Crocker aligns character with place when she asserts "[k]ind . . is a social and moral category that takes corporeal and geographic root . . . " (112). Also, while Tolkien eloquently describes landscapes, he also creates lands and architectural structures that are reflective opposites of each other thematically. Regarding characters and their reaction to landscape, Michael Stanton notes that "moral worth [is] measured by closeness to, or distance from, the world of nature" (37).

38

Frodo clearly diminishes the longer he bears the weight of the Ring, but he also becomes more vulnerable the farther he journeys from home. Conversely, Sam ascends in nobility and assumes more responsibility, including bearing the Ring for a short while, the farther that the Hobbits plod from the Shire. Once in Mordor, Frodo's strength is almost totally incapacitated by the Ring; Sam acts almost as a valet for Frodo, caring for him in every way. As Mark T. Hooker comments: "As Frodo awakens in the Tower of Cirith Ungol, for example, Sam tries 'to sound as cheerful as he had when he drew back the curtains at Bag End on a summer's morning.' (*ROTK* 987) This phrase evokes an image almost straight out of Jeeves and Wooster" (128). However, even as he becomes Frodo's caregiver, Sam achieves greater strength and authority. The journey to Mordor becomes a crucible for the characters of Sam and Frodo; while Frodo withers away and becomes purely a servant to the goal of the journey, Sam's doubts and insecurities wither away and he becomes a strong, noble servant to his master and the goal of the quest.

Earlier in the trilogy, Aragorn and Boromir demonstrate a similar inflation and deflation of character: as Boromir nears Gondor, his restraint diminishes and his fervor for the Ring increases, so much, in fact, that he frightens Frodo into fleeing and thus breaks the Fellowship. On Parth Galen, Boromir confronts Frodo, proclaiming: "It is not yours save by unhappy chance. It might have been mine. It should have been mine. Give it to me!" (*FOTR* 390) Tolkien indicates that Boromir's actions might be due to the influence of the Ring itself: "For a while he was as still as if his own curse had struck him down; then suddenly he wept. He rose and passed his hand over his eyes, dashing away the tears. 'What have I said?' he cried" (*FOTR* 390). Boromir's subsequent self-sacrifice in defending Merry and Pippin is clearly atonement for the Ring-influenced crime of

frightening Frodo, but this act is also, in Gandalf's words, the Ring "looking after itself" (*FOTR* 54). Frodo intends to bring the Ring closer to its Maker in Mordor, while Boromir wants to use the Ring for the defense of Gondor, which would not serve the Enemy's agenda nor the Ring, which desires to return to Mordor.

Aragorn, as he nears Gondor, begins to reveal his true regal nature. In both word and deed, Aragorn becomes a leader when he nears the kingdom that he is destined to lead. "'Fear not!' said a strange voice behind him. Frodo turned and saw Strider, and yet not Strider; for the weatherworn Ranger was no longer there. In the stern sat Aragorn son of Arathorn, proud and erect … a king returning from exile to his own land" (*FOTR* 384). After the breaking of the Fellowship, Aragorn demonstrates this newly-revealed leadership by making what will ultimately be the correct choice: he, Legolas, and Gimli follow Merry and Pippin and allow Sam and Frodo to continue to Mordor alone. Significantly, while Aragorn admits that he feels tempted by the Ring's potential to assist Men in their struggles against Sauron, as the party nears Gondor, he does not react to the Ring in a violent, self-serving way as does Boromir. Shippey comments that the differences between the two characters are highlighted by the way that they "strike sparks off each other through their ways of speech" (*The Road to Middle Earth* 121). Boromir's awkard attempt to seize the Ring mirrors his "slightly wooden magniloquence" while Aragorn's language is "deceptively modern, even easy-going on occasion, but with greater range" (*The Road to Middle Earth* 121). Aragorn's language and manner reflect the ease with which he slips into a leadership role, while Boromir's "wooden" demeanor and stilted speech reveal him as a pretender.

Fangorn and Ithilien represent two thematically important landscapes, although in

all other ways they constitute opposites. Fangorn, on the edge of the Riddermark, is vast

and totally wild, inhabited by creatures of legend to Middle Earth inhabitants, the Ents

and Hurons, but none of the races of Free People. But, as Merry and Pippin learn, the

survival of Fangorn proves critical, as Treebeard and company, the fierce guardians of the

trees and nature, naturally align themselves with the Free People against the destructive

forces of Mordor. The Ents turn the tide of battle at Helm's Deep and effectively destroy

Saruman's power and the fortress of Isenguard. Burns comments that "[i]n Middle Earth,

physical nature is awake; trees and mountains are capable of choosing sides . . ." (45).

Ithilien, by contrast, represents an entirely man-made place that also celebrates

nature. The so-called "Garden of Gondor" bordering Mordor is so striking beautiful that

even the bedraggled Sam and Frodo are awed by its wonders. "Here spring was already

busy about them: fronds pierced moss and mould, larches were green-fingered, small

flowers were opening in the turf, birds were singing" (*TT* 636). In Ithilien, beautiful, wild

nature provides a nurturing, sustaining quality that the Hobbits sorely need, as well as

thematically offering a contrast with the desolate, wintry landscapes of Mordor through

which they must travel. The reaction of each character to Ithilien is also notable; as

Michael Stanton remarks, "One's closeness and respect for nature becomes a measure of

one's goodness, as a distance from and disrespect for nature is a measure of evil." (17)

While Ithilien represents the good of nature shaped by the hand of humankind

bringing hope to Frodo and Sam on their critical quest, Fangorn figures the wild power of

nature on its own let loose against the forces of evil. Stanton observes: "Both Ithilien and

Fangorn stand in affirmation of life, and in their difference, in affirmation of life's variety

and richness" (71). Ithilien remains a passive place in the novels, a garden "gone to

seed" by its proximity to evil, redeemed at the end of *The Return of the King* when Faramir is named lord of the area by Aragorn. Michael Brisbois calls this kind of representation of nature in Middle Earth "Passive nature" and argues that spaces such as Ithilien, which Tolkien clearly celebrates, represent the author "advocating stewardship rather than dominion, [he] puts his villains on the other side of the coin. Saruman and Sauron are not caretakers, they are destroyers" (203). Fangorn, conversely, functions as the center of frenetic activity caused by the "villains" Saruman and Sauron. In response to the despoliation of nature, Treebeard and his companions, the other Ents and the Hurons, march out of the forest to attack Saruman's destructive military manufacturing operation at Orthanc. Fangorn represents the power of nature infuriated to act by wanton destruction and evil. Brisbois calls Fangorn "active nature" which he asserts is "[nature in a] more fantastic form," suggesting that "[a]ctive nature has a level of intelligence, if not outright sentience, in its process" (204). This balance of nature portrayed on the one hand realistically and on the other fantastically has a specific impact on the reader. Brisbois delineates this effect when he asserts "[i]t is important for . . . nature not to contradict the phenomenology of our world too sharply. In this way, the reader can more actively interact with the signs of the real and the fantastic. These two elements in juxtaposition create the verisimilitude of Middle-earth. If the setting were too fantastic, too unnatural, it would not be believable" (205). Hence not all trees march to battle, but when they do, Tolkien's provides enough realism in describing other aspects of nature that the reader remains absorbed in the narrative.

The clearest example of two contrasting lands is the Shire and Mordor; as Stanton succinctly comments: "There is a moral geography here as well: good flows from, and

returns to, the West. Evil lurks in the East where its chief stronghold is; attack upon evil comes from the West" (11). Tolkien wrote in a letter to Milton Waldman--who worked for Tolkien's publisher Collins--that he wished to write ". . . a body of more or less connected legend . . . which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country" (*Letters* 144). Of all the European nation, except for Ireland, England is located the furthest west. Therefore the "moral geography" Tolkien creates was a result of his Anglophilia; he centers all that is good and "redolent of [English] air" (*Letters* 144) in the far west of his creation, Middle Earth. The Shire, located westernmost in Middle Earth, represents all that is good: the beings coexist peacefully, nature is abundant and giving. "Everything looked fresh, and the new green of Spring was shimmering in the fields and on the tips of the trees' fingers" (*FOTR* 45). Throughout the narrative, despite measurable personal growth and experience, all four of the Hobbits long for the peace that the Shire brings. This celebration of nurturing and growth establishes the Shire in the minds of the four Hobbits of the Fellowship as a permanently verdant place in spring-time glory, populated with beings that are continually underestimated by the other species that they encounter. Although small, the chosen Hobbit Frodo bears the Ring, and his success against all odds validates Gandalf's faith in this resilient race of beings.

Mordor has the opposite effect on all who enter its borders. Spring never seems to touch Mordor; it remains a land of permanent winter. More than merely depicting an inhospitable landscape, the diction that Tolkien selects to describe this ghastly land implies deeper truths; Mordor is a moral as well as physical wasteland:

Hard and cruel and bitter was the land that met [Frodo's] gaze. Before his feet the highest ridge of the Ephel Duath fell steeply in great cliffs down a dark trough, on

the further side of which there rose another ridge, much lower, its edge notched

and jagged with crags like fangs…from it rose in huge columns swirling smoke,

dusty red at the roots, black above where it merged into the billowing canopy that

roofed in all the accursed land. (*ROTK* 878)

By sending the Hobbits on the Quest to Mordor to rid Middle Earth of the Ring, Tolkien

highlights the imminent destruction that Middle Earth faces; even the best, remote

western lands, as embodied in the Shire-figures of Frodo and Sam, will be destroyed if

Sauron is allowed to triumph. Additionally, for a Christian such as Tolkien, this

description of a moral wasteland echoes traditional depictions of hell ruled by Satan.

Interestingly, Tolkien selected a title for the middle work of the series which

reflects a polarity of places, although the author himself could not decide exactly what

that polarity was. In a letter to Rayner Unwin, the son who took over the publishing

duties of Tolkien's works from his father Stanley Unwin, Tolkien remarks, "*The Two*

Towers gets as near as possible to finding a title to cover the widely divergent [storylines

of the individual books]; and can be left ambiguous—it might refer to Isenguard and

Barad-dûr, or to Minas Tirith and B[arad-dûr]; or Isenguard and Cirith Ungol" (*Letters*

170). Indeed, the several towers that loom large for the narrative confuse the issue as to

what exactly the title refers, so perhaps that polarity is best left ambiguous. Perhaps the

best explanation is to view the towers of the title as the two warring forces in the book:

Sauron's armies and the assembling Free People who fight him. Chance declares that "the

two towers in Tolkien express division in a more microcosmic sense, in terms of the

separation and perversion of the two parts of the self" (163). This concept recalls the

Middle State of humanity on the Great Chain of Being: all of the characters in the novels

must choose between the dark, looming powers of Sauron or the diverse, constructive forces of the Free Peoples just as the human readers, in Tolkien's Christian worldview, must choose between sin and salvation.

Species / Beings

Species or groups of beings in the trilogy reflect opposing thematic purposes, generally associating one group with a positive purpose and one with a negative goal. Merry and Pippin learn of the idea of "counterfeit" during their time with Treebeard: "Maybe you have heard of Trolls? They are mighty strong. But Trolls are only counterfeits made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as Orcs are of Elves" (*TT* 474). Here Treebeard refers to the creation of Orcs from Elves—as well as other nasty things such as trolls and dragons—by Melkor, the Ainu who "fell from grace" and set about disrupting the creative work of the Elder Children of Ilúvatar. Thematically, the Ents represent the wise, constructive force of nature; they serve as the shepherds of the forest: "We are tree-herds, we old Ents. Few enough of us are left now. Sheep get like shepherds and shepherds like sheep…. It is quicker and closer with trees and Ents, and they walk down the ages together" (*TT* 457). But Trolls, the "counterfeit" Ents made by Melkor, do not nurture; they merely destroy. Trolls are both of nature and disconnected from nature, as Bilbo discovered in *The Hobbit*. In that tale, Bilbo and the party of Dwarves are attacked by Trolls, and Gandalf defeats the Trolls by tricking them into staying outside of their caves until the sun rises, whereupon the sunlight turns them into stone. Because something so natural destroys them, Trolls represent the inherently unnatural; further, their affinity with stone demonstrates that unlike the Ents, who are related to growth and wisdom, the Trolls are rock-like and stupid, one of the types of

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beings incapable of goodness or wisdom in Tolkien's bestiary. They are markedly

different from the Ents, as Treebeard echoes the noble sentiment of Théoden when he

says: "…likely enough that we are going to our doom: the last march of the Ents. But if

we stayed at home and did nothing, doom would find us anyway, sooner or later. That

thought has long been growing in our hearts; and that is why we are marching now" (*TT*

475).

This "species" duality clearly embodies French's masculine/feminine schism. The

Ents simultaneously meld the inlaw feminine principle with the masculine polarity as

they both nurture the forests and passionately fight those, such as the Orcs and Saruman,

who threaten nature. Trolls, however, only destroy and wreak havoc on the landscape,

which demonstrates a strict adherence to the most violent of masculine principles—

destruction. The same can be said of the Elves and the Orcs; Elves blend masculine and

feminine traits as they tend the natural world yet fight the deleterious forces of Sauron,

while Orcs only kill other beings and ravage the landscape.

In *The Return of the King*, Frodo comments on the polarity of the Orcs and the

Elves. According to *The Silmarillion,* the Elves, the creation of Ilúvatar, exist only to

nurture and protect all living things. Conversely, Orcs, Frodo states, arise from a very

different circumstance, "[t]he Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not

real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the Orcs, it only ruined them and

twisted them . . ." (*ROTK* 892). Indeed, in many ways the Elves and the Orcs serve

opposite functions in the plot even in small details: for example, the Elven waybread that

Galadriel bestows on the Fellowship sustains Frodo and Sam for almost the entire

journey, and it also sustains Merry and Pippin physically and emotionally after they

escape their Orc kidnappers: "[t]he cakes were broken, but still good, still in their leaf-wrappings. [Merry and Pippin] each ate two or three pieces. The taste brought back to them the memory of fair faces, and laughter, and wholesome food in quiet days now far away. For a while, they ate thoughtfully, sitting in the dark, heedless of the cries and sounds of battle nearby" (*TT* 447). Earlier in this same chapter, Pippin is forced by his captors to drink an Orc concoction that provides the same physical nourishment but opposite emotional effects: "Uglúk thrust a flask between his teeth and poured some burning liquid down his throat: [Pippin] felt a hot, fierce glow flow through him" (*TT* 438).

Animals as well, particularly the Eagles and the winged beasts of the Nazgûl, serve reflective functions in the novels. Both appear periodically throughout the works but with opposite effect. Although both are wild animals, the Eagles remain nobly loyal to the Free Peoples, while the winged creatures are enslaved to the will of the Nazgûl, or Nine Riders. The Eagle chief Gwaihir aids Gandalf and consequently all of the Free Peoples three times during the War of the Rings: first, he frees Gandalf from Saruman's entrapment at Isenguard; next, he rescues Gandalf from the peak of Zirakzigil after Gandalf's epic battle with the Balrog; and last he delivers Sam and Frodo from the slopes of Mount Doom after the Ring has been destroyed. The Eagles, like the Ents, represent the majestic and noble in nature, which would be destroyed if the forces of the Enemy prevailed. The Eagles help Gandalf and the Free Peoples willingly; conversely, the winged monsters of the Nazgûl are magically bound to their masters, the Ring-wraiths or Nine Riders, and the fear that they strike into the hearts of the Free Peoples reflects the horror evoked by the sinister Nine Riders themselves. The terror that the cry of the

Nazgûl's winged beasts inspires plays a key role in the psychological warfare waged on the city of Minas Tirith:

> The Nazgûl came again, and as their Dark Lord now grew and put forth his strength, so their voices, which uttered only his will and malice, were filled with evil and horror. … More unbearable they became, not less, at each new cry. At length even the stout-hearted would fling themselves to the ground as the hidden menace passed over them, or they would stand, letting their weapons fall from nerveless hands while into their minds a blackness came . . . . (*ROTK* 805)

The major steeds of the works constitute another type of polarity. Snowmane, Théoden's noble horse, dies with his master during the final battle and is laid to rest with great honor. The narrator notes that forever after "[g]reen and long grew the grass on Snowmane's Howe" (*ROTK* 827). By contrast, the horrific steed ridden by the Witch-King of Angmar into the final battle also dies with his master, but the earth on which he expires will never be the same. The land under which this winged monster is buried is forever "black and bare where the beast was burned" (*ROTK* 827); the winged steed's presence in the earth curses the spot.

Two minority groups of men in Middle Earth, the Corsairs and the Wild Men, acting in thematically similar although antithetical ways, serve parallel yet opposite functions in the critical battle of Pelennor Fields. The Corsairs, an old-fashioned word for "pirate" that Tolkien appropriated, were hired by Sauron to attack Minas Tirith by the "back way" of the coastline. Aragorn foils this treachery by directing the Oath-Breakers to overwhelm the Corsairs' ship and terrify the Corsairs into fleeing, so the troop of the undead can surprise the forces attacking Gondor by arriving in the Corsair ships,

overwhelming the battlefield. This act terrifies Sauron's forces—as Aragorn asserts, "[no] one would withstand them" (*ROTK* 858)—and paves the way to victory for the Free Peoples. Thus Sauron's tactic of hiring the Corsairs to attack the forces of the Free people by the "back way" backfires and contributes to his defeat at the Battle of Pelennor Field.

The "Wild Men" of Gondor, who, as Merry observes, resemble the crudely piled rocks dotting the highway, are hired by the Rohirrim to show them a "back way" to the besieged Minas Tirith through Druadan forest, thus avoiding the mass of Orcs stationed on the main road. The Wild Men fulfill this promise and lead the Rohirrim to Minas Tirith, which results in success for the Free Peoples at the Battle of Pelennor Fields. According to Robert Foster's *Tolkien's World from A to Z: The Complete Guide to Middle Earth,* as a reward for his fidelity, the leaders of the Free People reward Ghân-Buri-Ghân's by promising that the "Wild Men" may exist unmolested by outsiders (203).

These two incidents involving minority groups accentuate the progression of the trilogy: the group that chooses altruistic goals is allowed to prosper, while amoral mercenaries are punished. This parallel reinforces the theme that benevolent and "unlooked for help" invariably aids forces of good, while twists of fate and failures in character inevitably foil the forces of evil.

The two sets of "undead" beings of Middle Earth that interfere with the affairs of the living also demonstrate reflective qualities: although both groups contribute to the plot in key ways, they interact with the living in very different manners. The first set that the Hobbits encounter is the Barrow-wights. Early in the trilogy, after the departure from Tom Bombadil, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin are captured by Barrow-wights, ghosts of kings and warriors who fought and died in a great battle against Sauron on the field that

the Hobbits now cross. Previously, Tom Bombadil provided the Hobbits information

about the Barrow-wights in his roundabout, poetic style: "Barrow-wights walked in the

hollow places with a clink of rings on cold fingers, and gold chains in the wind…. The

Hobbits shuddered" (*FOTR* 128). The Barrow-wights are the restless, nobly-born dead

who try to bring down the living into their marshy purgatory, as they mistakenly believe

they can still win the battle and destroy Sauron, if only they had more help. The Hobbits

escape this fate because at the last moment Frodo calls to Tom Bombadil to save them

and he appears, but in the process the noble ghosts give the Hobbits very important gifts

which Tom Bombadil distributes:

> For each of the Hobbits [Tom] chose a dagger….They gleamed as he drew them
>
> from their black sheaths, wrought of some strange metal, light and strong, and set
>
> with many fiery stones. Whether by some virtue in these sheaths or because of the
>
> spell that lay on the mound, the blades seemed untouched by time, unrusted,
>
> sharp, glittering in the sun….Then [Tom] told them that these blades were forged
>
> many long years ago by Men of Westernesse: they were foes of the Dark Lord . . .
>
> . (*FOTR* 142)

Aragorn summons the other group of unquiet dead, the "Oath Breakers," to do

battle at Pelennor Fields, and the troop of ghosts arrives in secret via the ships coerced

from the Corsairs. The Oath Breakers represent the ignoble dead who swore fealty to

Isildur, the founder and King of Gondor but, as Aragorn states:

> 'when Sauron returned and grew in might again, Isildur summoned the Men of the
>
> Mountains to fulfill their oath, and they would not: for they had worshipped
>
> Sauron in the Dark Years. … Then Isildur said to their King: "Thou shalt be the

last king. And if the West prove mightier than thy Black Master, this curse I lay

upon thee and thy folk: to rest never until your oath is fulfilled. For this war will

last through years uncounted, and you shall be summoned once again ere the

end.'" (*ROTK* 765)

This group of ghosts, unlike the Barrow-wights, died dishonorably, but in death they can

turn their disgrace to virtuous ends by turning the tide of battle at Pelennor Fields. The

Oath-Breakers do not provide the tools, they *are* the tools of victory; the living King who

wields that tool is the Oath-Breakers' only hope to be freed from Isildur's curse and

eventually rest in peace. Of course, the irony of the inclusion of these two groups rests in

the fact that both groups fought Sauron ages ago, and that same battle still rages for the

Free Peoples during the course of the narrative.

<center>*Events*</center>

Actions and events have counterpoints in the trilogy; and these parallel groups

function in thematically similar ways: that is, while the first incident parallels the second,

the second incident invariably has vastly greater consequences for the outcome of the

narrative.

The first set of thematically reflective scenes is "The Council of Elrond" in *The

Fellowship of the Rings* and the "Last Debate" in *The Return of the King*. Tolkien

highlights both meetings by giving them separate chapters, and their respective

placements near the beginning and end of the trilogy further emphasize the parallel

qualities of these scenes. Although the first council is far lengthier than the second, both

scenes underscore the importance of cooperation as a weapon leading to victory. Despite

the bickering of Gimli the Dwarf and Legolas the Elf in "The Council of Elrond," during this council, the Fellowship forms and guides Frodo on the beginning of his quest. Similarly, in "The Last Debate" Prince Imrahil of Gondor and Gandalf wrangle concerning the appropriate tactics of the assembled Free Peoples; while Gandalf cautions that "'victory cannot be achieved by arms,'" Imrahil barks, "'Then you would have us retreat to Minas Tirith, or Dol Amroth, or to Dunharrow, and there sit like children on sand-castles when the tide is flowing?'" (*ROTK* 860) Aragorn quells this exchange, explaining that via the palantír he has revealed himself as the true king to Sauron and that the group "'. . . must at all costs keep his Eye from his true peril . . . . [b]y arms we can give the Ring-bearer his only chance, frail though it be'" (*ROTK* 862). The leaders of the Free Peoples assent to this plan of distraction, thereby giving Frodo and Sam time to accomplish their quest. The squabbling and subsequent unity foreshadowed in "The Council of Elrond" adumbrates the cooperation of the races of Middle Earth throughout the book, especially in the final battles that decide the fate of Middle Earth: The Battle of Pelennor Fields and the Battle at the gates of Mordor.

The next set of incidents concern the blindfolding of the Hobbits: the blindfolding of the entire Fellowship as they enter Lorien parallels and contrasts with the blindfolding of only Frodo and Sam as Faramir's men lead the Hobbits to their hideout. In the incident at Lorien, Gimli the Dwarf is so offended at the blindfolding that Legolas offers to be blindfolded as well, although as an Elf he does not need this restraint. This results in the entire company volunteering to wear blindfolds as they traipse into Lorien, but, most importantly, it represents a turning point in the relationship between the Dwarf and the Elf. Here Gimli and Legolas overcome their cultural prejudices towards each other and

become true companions; this tight friendship serves them well in later battles and has long-lasting implications for later negotiations between Dwarves and Elves in Middle Earth.

In the second incident, Frodo and Sam are led to the secret hideout of Faramir and his group of Rangers who protect the borders of Gondor. While Sam and Frodo remain blindfolded, they ascertain that the proximity of the Ring does not tempt Faramir; unlike his brother Boromir, Faramir does not attempt to take the Ring by force or attack the two Hobbits as a result of the malevolent influence of the Ring. Faramir passes this test, an index of his character, while Boromir fails. Faramir thus remains a faithful and useful servant to the Free People, while Boromir dies as a result of his selfish attempt to snatch the Ring, and therefore a measure of glory, from Frodo. On the one hand, this incident does reveal the unity between species—in this case, the Hobbits and Faramir—while at the same time, the contrast between Faramir and Boromir highlights for the reader the schisms that exist between the motivations of Men: some seek glory while others seek peace.

The next series of parallel incidents involve the small slipping past the gaze of the powerful. In the first, Merry rides unnoticed in Éowyn's saddle to the Battle of Pelennor Fields. This proves to be crucial, since in the climactic scene in which Éowyn faces the Witch-King of Angmar, the leader of the Ring-wraiths brushes the Hobbit aside to battle Éowyn disguised as the young man "Dernhelm." When Éowyn seems doomed to defeat, Merry stabs the Witch-King in the back of the knee with the sword that Tom Bombadil had recovered from the Barrow-wights. This ancient blade, forged and imbued with magic by the Men of Westernesse to battle Sauron's forces, has been magically

preserved. Indeed, its owner only came to be a restless ghost because of the betrayal of the men who became the Ring-wraiths; thus, through Merry's hand the ancient sword takes its revenge. The blade leaves the Witch King vulnerable for just long enough for the female Éowyn to fulfill the prophecy that "no man" can kill the Witch King, who is slain by the two individuals regarded as "weakest" or most vulnerable by the leaders of the Free People: a Woman and a Hobbit. The contrast between the mighty Witch-King and the duo of Éowyn and Merry serves as a symbol for the entire trilogy: the cooperation of ostensibly weak forces, through dint of a combination of nerve, cleverness, and the positive intervention of fate, battle and win against the forces of evil. The resultant cry of the Witch King and his dying steed informs the assembled forces of Mordor that the tide of the battle has turned in favor of the Free Peoples. Burns remarks the effect achieved by this pitting of the weak against the mighty:

> Given the sheltering attitude towards Hobbits and Éowyn, [shown by Théoden and the Rohirrim] it is quite ingenious of Tolkien to use a halfling and a maiden (innocence in two forms) to defeat the Nazgûl lord—the pitting of these two unlikely warriors against the greatest adversary of the Battle of Pelennor Fields so effectively increases the horror, and poignancy, and the final victory. (145)

Even through this incident is critical in the destruction of Mordor's troops on Pelennor Fields, the next incident of the small slipping past the view of the strong holds far greater significance.

Throughout the narrative, Frodo bears the Ring toward Mordor without being sure why he is destined to bring about its destruction. However, readers and many of the main characters gradually ascertain that while the great "Eye" of Sauron is busy hunting

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Middle Earth for the Ring of Power, it fails to notice two tiny Hobbits trudging closer and

closer to the furnaces on Mount Doom. This oversight proves fatal for Sauron, as Frodo

and Sam, led by Gollum, eventually do arrive at Mount Doom and destroy the Ring.

Although Merry and Éowyn's triumph over the Witch King indicates that the tide has

turned against the forces of evil, the two small Hobbits deal Sauron his fatal blow.

Smaller incidents reinforce the idea of the small slipping under the gaze of the

mighty. After the attack at Parth Galen, Frodo resolves to start alone towards Mordor so

as not to further endanger his companions. While Frodo attempts to slip away invisibly

by wearing the Ring, the other members of the Fellowship search for him desperately,

calling his name and fearing the worst. Amidst the commotion, Sam ". . . passed his hand

over his eyes, brushing away the tears. 'steady, Gamgee!' he said. 'Think, if you can! He

can't fly across rivers, and he can't jump waterfalls. He's got no gear. So he's got to get

back to the boats. Back to the boats! Back to the boats, Sam, like lightning!'" (*FOTR*

396). Only later do Aragorn and Legolas realize what Sam has already deduced: Frodo

made his escape via one of the elf-boats, and Samwise Gamgee has joined him.

Characters

The polarities exhibited by Tolkien's characters generally play variations on one

key concept, that is, for each of his "big ideas," Tolkien creates two sets of characters,

who sometimes serve as parallels, sometimes contrasts to each other. Burns remarks that

". . . Tolkien establishes character teams whose members, taken together, represent the

intricacy and inconsistency which lie within any human being" (94). I have already

discussed the duos of Boromir and his brother Faramir (opposites), Denethor and

Théoden (opposites), Aragorn and Galadriel (parallels), and (through their mercy) Bilbo and Frodo (parallels). The remaining sets of antithetically constructed characters represent standards of conduct that Tolkien establishes as crucial to success in Middle Earth and to the plot of *The Lord of the Rings* novels.

Looming over every action of the story in person or in memory, Gandalf plays a monumental role in the entire schema of the trilogy. Gandalf grows both in understanding and power throughout the course of the novels, and, for Burns, part of his allure for the reader lies in his paradoxical character. He ". . . is neither saintly nor always peaceable. There is a certain amount of self-satisfaction, irascibility, and sarcasm within Gandalf's character, all of which adds to his appeal" (98). Yet, for all his irascibility tempered with kindness, Gandalf never loses faith in the goodness of Middle Earth or its inhabitants.

In French's hermeneutic, Gandalf combines all of the best and most potent aspects of the masculine and inlaw feminine poles. He is unquestionable a physically and magically powerful being, which he demonstrates through battling and defeating the horrific Balrog. He defends Middle Earth through organizing the Free Peoples into an army, and he often has to play political games, an aspect of the masculine sphere, in order to accomplish these goals. Gandalf's conversations with Denethor in particular highlight the differences in masculine strength between the two; while Gandalf advocates power and defense in unity, Denethor is clearly intimidated by the fatalistic vision of destruction offered to him by Sauron. Shippey's assertion that Aragorn and Boromir "strike sparks" (*The Road to Middle Earth* 121) off one another holds true for Gandalf and Denethor as well.

Gandalf also exhibits traditional inlaw feminine characteristics throughout the

novels. First, he is the only wizard concerned with "Hobbit-lore" and the defense of the Shire, which marks him as nurturing towards these small creatures. But in this nurturing lies great wisdom; Gandalf correctly ascertains that Hobbits are made of stronger stuff than they might outwardly appear, and he convinces Frodo that he must be the one to bear the Ring to Mordor. Also, Gandalf's statements regarding mercy towards Gollum prove both prescient and apt; this quality of mercy, always an inlaw feminine trait, allows for the triumph of the Free Peoples over Sauron.

In Tolkien's mythopoeia, Gandalf is a Vala, or "archangel" figure, and, according the Foster, these figures were "concerned with the completion of Arda (the Earth) according to their individual knowledge of various portions of the Vision (of Ilúvatar)" (516). Gandalf continues this mission of formation in working to protect Middle Earth so that it may continue to manifest Ilúvatar's creation. Early in the narrative, when Frodo mourns that "I wish it need not have happened in my time," Gandalf stoically counters, "'So do I,' said Gandalf. 'And so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us'" (*FOTR* 50). This decision to do "right" in the "time that is given us" distinguishes Gandalf's character: as a potent but not omnipotent being who exercises all of his powers to protect the inhabitants of Middle Earth from the threat of Sauron, he chooses to do what is difficult in order to accomplish what is morally selfless and right.

Saruman, conversely, chooses what seems a guaranteed success over an arduous noble endeavor. Prior to the opening of the trilogy, Gandalf explains that Saruman, as the head of the Wizard Order, delays reacting to the threat of the "Necromancer" (Sauron) in Mirkwood, and this plays into the Enemy's hands. Building strength, Sauron eventually

turns the ancient palantír into a trap, and Saruman's greedy, overreaching gaze leads to his ensnarement. Gandalf comments to Pippin, "Easy it is now to guess how quickly the roving eye of Saruman was trapped and held; and how ever since he has been persuaded from afar, and daunted when persuasion would not serve. . . . How long, I wonder, has he been constrained to come often to [the palantír] for inspection and instruction . . ." (*TT* 584).

Significantly, Saruman, despite the difficulties of ensnarement by the palantír, had a choice. Certainly Gandalf made a choice when trapped by Saruman in the tower of Orthanc; at that time, Gandalf spurned complicity in order to continue his protection of Middle Earth. Saruman too could have chosen to fight Sauron rather than become a loyal soldier for the Enemy, but he does not, and because of this, Saruman suffers a reduction in power and Gandalf becomes "[as Saruman] should have been" (*TT* 484): a mighty force for good in Middle Earth. This corruption and complicity is repaid in the narrative by the Ents' devastation of Orthanc and Saruman's eventual physical dissolution. Although Saruman manages to create trouble for the Shire before his end, the ultimate repayment for Saruman's deception is obliteration.

The Elf maiden Arwen and Éowyn of Rohan represent the antithetical views of passive and active femininity in Middle Earth. Although each plays a crucial role in the plot structure and eventual outcome of the narrative, they too function in opposite ways. The reader meets Arwen early in the trilogy as she presides over a banquet at her father Elrond's home, the Last Homely House in Rivendell. In this scene, the description of Arwen echoes medieval literary conventions:

In the middle of the table, against the woven cloths upon the wall, there was a

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chair under a canopy, and there sat a lady fair to look upon, and so like was she in

form of womanhood to Elrond that Frodo guessed she was one of his close

kindred. Young she was and yet not so. The braids of her dark hair were touched

by no frost; her white arms and clear face were flawless and smooth, and the light

of stars were in her bright eyes, grey as a cloudless night; yet queenly she looked,

and thought and knowing were in her glance . . . . (*FOTR* 221)

According to Appendix A of *The Return of the King*, this is the Elf-maiden promised to

Aragorn when he "becomes king of Gondor and Arnor" (342), although, as Burns

observes,

 . . . first-time readers often fail to recognize his attachment until somewhere near

the end. The entire concept of romance, in fact, works in much the way the figure

of Arwen does in Elrond's council hall; both hover indistinctly and unobtrusively

in the background, never disrupting the basic story line, never distracting from the

focus of the quest, never quite fully in view. (141)

Arwen's key contribution to the plot comes via the domestic arts: she weaves the banner

of Elendil for Aragorn that he unfurls at the Battle of Pelennor Fields, thereby

punctuating the turning point in the battle. She also demonstrates kindness, always a

traditionally feminine trait, by giving Frodo her amulet as a beacon through hard times

and she demonstrates the power of sacrifice when she relinquishes her seat on the ship to

Valinor to Frodo, if he wishes to go. To reinforce Burns's assertion, Arwen is both

present and obscured in the battle and in the main storyline; unfurling her banner turns

the battle for the Free People, but, in this scene, we are more aware of her absence than

her presence. Later, her most notable contribution concerns the relinquishing of a

powerful object rather than the performing of a memorable feat, as Éowyn does by slaying the Witch King. For the reader, Arwen exemplifies the inlaw feminine pole while remaining an elusive figure: while we receive lavish physical descriptions of her beauty we know little of her deeds, thoughts, or loyalties.

Éowyn, conversely, represents all three principles: the rebellious outlaw feminine pole balanced with some of the domestic, inlaw qualities that Arwen possesses and the masculine trait of strength in battle. After first encountering Éowyn in Théoden's hall as a prototypical peace-weaving, mead-cup bearing maiden in the Anglo Saxon mold, we next hear that she may be a possible regent for the Rohirrim when Théoden departs to fight the forces of Mordor at Helm's Deep. Interestingly, Háma, a warrior who is not related to Éowyn, nominates her to the King for this duty. "There is Éowyn, daughter of Éomund, [Éomer's] sister. She is fearless and high-hearted. All love her. Let her be as lord to the Eorlingas, while we are gone" (*TT* 512). Théoden quickly announces "It shall be so" and "Éowyn knelt before him and received from him a sword and a fair corslet." (*TT* 512) Defying Burns's image of the female figure in the novels "never distracting from the focus of the quest, never quite fully in view," (141) Éowyn steps forward from the background and comes quite fully into the reader's view.

Éowyn next emerges when she wishes to ride with the assembled Eorlingas to assist Gondor as the Orcs besiege the city of Minas Tirith. Éowyn is again chosen to lead the few Rohirrim remaining around Edoras rather than ride into battle, and she chafes bitterly at this ruling. Aragorn reminds her of her duty to help with "the last defense of your homes" and assures her "[those] deeds will not be less valiant because they are unpraised" (*ROTK* 767). When Éowyn counters that she can fight like a man and fears

neither "pain nor death," Aragorn inquires, "What do you fear, lady?" She replies, "[a] cage," and expresses fear of ". . . stay[ing] behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and all the chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire" (*ROTK* 767). Here, significantly, a female character laments "use and old age accept[ing]" the bars constructed against women who wish to fight alongside men. Éowyn's disobedience, often paralleled with Háma's defiance of a direct order as reinforcing the idea of a "faithful" servant disobeying a direct command in order to better serve a Lord, in fact, represents much more. Yes, Éowyn is driven to serve her Lord and kinsman Théoden, but fear of inaction and obsolescence in the passive female role also spurs her action. During her recovery in the House of Healing Éowyn speaks with Faramir, and bids him to ". . . command this Warden, and bid him let me go" (*ROTK* 938). When Faramir avows that he does not have that power, "[a] tear sprang to her eye and fell down her cheek . . . . Her proud head drooped a little" (*ROTK* 939) and Éowyn laments that the healers have told her she must remain in bed for another week. This quiet image of a woman yearning for masculine action yet tempered by feminine weeping portrays Éowyn as celebrating an active femininity while acknowledging her passive role. Lynettte Porter cautions the reader that while Éowyn does indeed demonstrate active, heroic qualities she "is not created to represent a feminist perspective" (91). However, Éowyn's balance of the active and passive is not evident in Arwen; while Éowyn steps forth with Merry to protect her Lord and home, Arwen retreats from warfare and only indirectly reveals her presence. Using French's polarities of feminine depiction, one might argue that Arwen clearly represents the nurturing, quiet, domestic, inlaw feminine principle while Éowyn mingles active, warrior masculine qualities with rebellious inlaw feminine characteristics

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and nurturing, family-centered inlaw feminine traits.

Sam and Gollum/Sméagol reflect the idea of a servant; Sam represents the good servant, and his faithfulness highlights the treachery of Gollum's role as the bad servant. However, with Tolkien, these surface comparisons often dissolve in the course of the story line; previously I discussed how the deceitful overreaching of Gollum causes him to inadvertently serve his master Frodo. What Sam and Gollum also demonstrate is the ascension and deflation of a character under adversity while in service to a lord, in this case, that service is defined as aiding Frodo on the difficult hike to Mordor to destroy the Ring. For Sam, this duty entails acting as a companion, servant, and protector for the older Hobbit Frodo, while Gollum's duty includes showing the two Hobbits the best road into Mordor. While Sam remains loyal to Frodo and assumes more and more responsibility as the quest to Mount Doom increases in difficulty, Gollum's character deflates; he becomes increasingly perfidious as the Ring nears its destruction.

Throughout the journey, Sam remains deeply suspicious of Gollum; for the reader, this vacillation between Sam's suspicions and Gollum's avowals of honesty throw each character into relief. For each of his assertions of sincerity Gollum performs an act of betrayal; with each of his acts of loyalty, Sam becomes more aware of Gollum's treachery. An astute reader will ascertain that Gollum's deception is a foregone conclusion; he has lived too many years with the Ring to lead Frodo to destroy it. Sam, however, demonstrates the true meaning of service. According to West, when Sam believes that Shelob has killed Frodo, he "heroically, though reluctantly, assumes responsibility for the quest. Sam's dilemma—that he must leave his master though he is inseparable from him—has been a motif all along" (85). This act of loyalty proves crucial

and exemplifies what Tolkien meant by eucatastrope. After the grieving Sam takes

Frodo's belongings including the Ring, from his body, he learns from the Orcs that bear

Frodo away that Shelob has not killed him; the great spider has just put Frodo in a

temporary "sleep" from her venom. Sam's action is critical to the success of the quest,

because when the servants of the Enemy find Frodo he *does not have the Ring in his*

possession. If he had, the Ring would have been delivered immediately to Sauron and the

entire narrative would have ended tragically. In addition, the entire history of Middle

Earth would be drastically altered for the worse if Sauron received the ring. Thus by his

actions, Sam quite literally saves the world. But as soon as he begins to bear it, the Ring

begins it seduction of Sam; it entices him with visions of "Samwise the Strong, Hero of

the Age" (*ROTK* 880). Unlike Gollum, however, Sam perceives the deception in these

visions; humility, always a virtue for Tolkien, saves Sam, since 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 mere cheat to betray him" (*ROTK* 881).

In marked contrast to Gollum, however, Sam's time with the Ring enhances his

fierce loyalty rather than leading to deception and destruction. As he charges up the

Tower to rescue Frodo from Orc captors, Sam reveals his presence to Orc guards.

However, what the guard perceives reflects Sam's inner resolve rather than his physical

presence, " . . . it saw not a small frightened Hobbit trying to hold a steady sword: it saw

a great silent shape, cloaked in a grey shadow looming against the wavering light behind .

. . ." (*ROTK* 883). The Orc flees, warning others of the "great Elf warrior" in the tower

and Sam, through this incredible act of fidelity, is able to rescue Frodo. Therefore, Sam

proves his loyalty most vividly when he does the most disloyal thing of all: bearing the

Ring in Frodo's stead. For the reader, this image of a "great warrior" reinforces what we have known all along: considering the seemingly insurmountable obstacles and increasingly bleak odds that he faced and the fortitude that he consistently showed in acting anyway, Sam becomes, perhaps second only to Frodo, the bravest character in the trilogy. Sam's actions under these dire circumstances are the fulcrum on which the outcome of the narrative pivots; some critics argue that he is the true hero of the novels.

The Hobbits Pippin and Merry present the most apparent set of character parallels. Porter, in her book *Unsung Heroes of The Lord of the Rings*, includes a chart detailing Merry and Pippin's analogous development in the narrative. Both offer service to the leader of a people, both perform duties for that lord, both continue to serve that lord faithfully after being released from service, both save the lord's child (or surrogate child), both remain with the that lord during his death, and both are recognized by that lord's successor for heroic deeds (Porter 84). To this list I would add: both Merry and Pippin face a "monster" during battle and, with the assistance of a human companion, aid in that beast's slaughter. Merry assists Éowyn in the slaying of the leader of the Nazgûl, the Witch-King of Angmar at the battle of Pelennor field, and Pippin helps a Gondorian warrior slay a troll at the battle of Cormallen field.

Perhaps more than any other characters, Pippin and Merry grow and mature during the course of the three novels. Porter notes that "Tolkien uses the Ent draft [which makes the two grow taller] as a device to illustrate how much Merry and Pippin literally grow up during their adventures" (26). The effect of this clear point-by-point reflection and obvious symbolism for growth is twofold. First, tracing Merry's and Pippin's individual storylines as they cross, separate, and reunite allows the reader to keep track of

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the intricacies of Tolkien's plot in a subtle way; the reader can remember the storyline of one Hobbit while the narrative focuses on the other one. Indeed, Merry and Pippin are involved with and knowledgeable of each turn in the divergent storylines of Rohan and Gondor. Next, the separation of the two Hobbit companions reinforces for the reader the wide-reaching consequences of the Free People's war on Sauron; the far-flung physical locations in which each Hobbit finds himself illustrates the vastness of Middle Earth, and the enormity its destruction would be if Sauron were allowed to win.

What Tolkien implies through his characters is a template for living a moral and successful life, and he does this through skillfully employing compelling character examples of virtue and opposing characters with undesirable qualities. The characters teach the following lessons though parallel qualities or paired opposition: one must act for the greater good and eschew self-interest (Faramir and Boromir); lead with integrity (Théoden and Denethor); show strong leadership yet nurture the weak (Aragorn and Galadriel); show mercy (Frodo and Bilbo); choose the right path even if it is difficult (Gandalf and Saruman); always offer your assistance despite being underestimated (Eówyn and the Hobbits); and loyally serve a cause greater than yourself (Sam and Gollum). This diverse list underscores the vastness of Middle Earth; its characters are complex and compelling and the challenges they face individually and collectively are intricate and imposing. Therefore, Tolkien constructed a vast, balanced, yet multi-faceted world that is capacious enough to hold these resonant characters.

Chapter III: Conclusion

Much of the joy of reading literature operates subconsciously; the vast majority of readers do not assimilate the entire work and concurrently search for structure, themes, and a cohesiveness of style. Iser calls the gaps between the information given in the text "blanks" and asserts that ". . . the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on the terms set by the text" ("Interaction" 1677). However, it is this seemingly artless element that creates the overall sense of transportation to another realm and time, one that seems to exist with its own rules and laws. Iser explains how description can create this sense of transportation: "the reader's wandering viewpoint travels between all these segments, its constant switching during the time flow of reading intertwines them, this bringing forth a network of perspective . . . . In the time flow of reading, segments of the various perspectives move into focus and are set off against preceding segments" ("Interaction" 1679). This active operation inherent in Tolkien's work engages the reader deeply and continuously; while other works of fictions merely ask the reader to imbibe the text Tolkien asks his readers to help in its construction.

Clearly, Tolkien's fiction was shaped by the same forces that fashioned the fiction that he studied; this led to the creation of a world that demonstrates an interwoven,

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balanced structure of antithetical pairs. What Cixous and French might perceive as a

balance between masculine and feminine, Tolkien, through the lens of his Catholicism

and literary background, might term a carefully structured opposition between the

polarities of good and evil, right and wrong, heathen selfishness and Christian altruism.

In constructing these dualisms, Tolkien harnessed a Western literary tradition of

antithesis already resonant in the minds of his readers and employed it in a way that few

had done with such stunning success: he created out of his rich imagination a "brave new

world / That has such people in it!" (Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 5.1.185-186) and one that

feels as real to the readers as their own country.

  This powerful ebb and flow of perception, a growing vision of a palpable world,

creates what Tolkien terms "the subcreation." Chance affirms that throughout the

interlacing narrative and reflective patterns of character, race, place, object, and theme ".

. . all of Tolkien's work manifests a unity, with understanding of its double and triple

levels . . ." (182). The effect on the reader of this unity, of this seamless subcreation, is a

reality so vivid that the reader feels as if she or he could journey to Middle Earth and live

there; readers can imagine themselves in Tolkien's world by filling in the "blanks" Iser

speculates engages readers in works of art. This world, in its elusive tangibility, invites

the readers in to collusion with the author. Shippey describes this reader response as "a

kind of complicity" and elaborates that reader satisfaction with the wholeness of Middle

Earth stems from the fact that "every time another piece of the picture is [filled] in [by

the reader], another part of the mental map[of Middle Earth] [is] disclosed" (*Author of*

the Century 20). This complicity hands partial ownership of the text to the reader; small

wonder, then, that audiences for generations responded and continue to respond so

powerfully and passionately to Tolkien's vision. Tolkien's effective use of reflective

elements builds the foundation of his subcreated world of Middle Earth; the reader can

peer into the mirror reflected by the novels, see the multitude of elements flashing back,

and be dazzled by the spectacle.

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About the Author

An "almost native" Floridian, Quincey Vierling Upshaw grew up from the age of one in Winter Park, Florida. She received two bachelor's degrees from the University of South Florida in 2001: a fine art degree in photography and a degree in literature. In 2006, Quincey re-entered USF as a graduate student in Literature, and a class she took her first semester as a graduate student, "Tolkien's Theory of Fiction" taught by Dr. John Hatcher, inspired the idea for this thesis.

Quincey lives with her husband Brian in Tampa. At the time of this thesis's acceptance and the completion of her M.A. in Literature, she is expecting her first child, a girl. Pending the little one's arrival, Quincey is taking a break from her teaching career, which includes six years as an English teacher at Florida public high schools and one year as an instructor for the First Year Composition program at USF.