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**The depiction of the fight of legendary powers for virtue in J.R.R.  
Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings"**

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## INTRODUCTION

Since gaining its independence, Uzbekistan has been extensively developing all its faculties concerning both its inner and outer politics. The latter mostly constitutes its economical, political, and cultural relationship with other countries. This interrelation greatly aided our country to establish its place among the other countries of the world. Our leader Islam Karimov repeatedly says: “The future of the country is in the hands of the youth”, thus, consequently the growing youth in our country must know the history, culture, traditions and literature of not only their own country but also those of the developed and developing countries, as without this knowledge the progress would be unimaginable. This way we have the opportunity of introducing our country to the world’s most highly developed states such as the USA, France, Great Britain, Japan and other countries of this level. Thus such laws by the Republic of Uzbekistan as “On education”<sup>1</sup> and “On preparation of personnel”<sup>2</sup> draw our attention to how much they helped to realize such great ideas and how the youth of our country succeeded in deepening their knowledge of foreign cultures.

**The actuality of the work** is mostly depended upon the fact that despite the popularity of Fantasy genre in both literary circles and the media, the range of serious research done on it is truly insignificant. Especially considering the great amount of aspects waiting to be studied and made available to a broader specter of readers and scholars, it is of utmost importance to enlighten however small portion as possible. Thus, this dissertation deals with the most important message that embodies this particular genre: the eternal fight between good and evil by an example of J.R.R. Tolkien’s “The Lord of the Rings”. Although there are a number books and articles written related to this aspect in this work, there are still two

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<sup>1</sup> Ўзбекистон Республикасининг “Таълим тўғрисида”ги Қонуни.// Баркамол авлод — Ўзбекистон тараққиётининг пойдевори. —Т.: Шарқ, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Ўзбекистон Республикаси “Кадрлар тайёрлаш миллий дастури”// “Баркамол авлод—Ўзбекистон тараққиётининг пойдевори”.Т.:Шарқ, 1997.

main factors which show us, why we can find this dissertation important. Firstly, the theme of Good versus Evil in “The Lord of the Rings” is mostly studied from philosophical point of view rather than literary, as during research done for this thesis very little information was found concerning literary features of this aspect. Secondly, this outbreak of literary interest in Fantasy genre has not yet fully been recorded in the coursebooks of our universities, mainly due to our inclination towards mostly classicism and realism. Moreover, while focusing on this particular theme of good fighting evil, some ever-present themes such as of friendship and heroism and their significance in the outcome of the battle will be discussed.

**The object and subject of the work.** J.R.R. Tolkien’s greatest masterpiece “The Lord of the Rings” is chosen as the **object** of the dissertation, while its **subject** is the fight between legendary powers of good and evil for virtue.

**The aims and tasks of the dissertation.** The aims of this dissertation are to highlight the importance of virtues Good has in “The Lord of the Rings” and how these virtues aid it to fight and defeat Evil. Moreover, its another aim is to point out how Fantasy genre in the hands of Tolkien altered people’s perception of it. The tasks of the dissertation are:

- To study the development of Fantasy genre starting from its origins;
- To point out the differences between Fantasy and Modern Fantasy;
- To show the discrepancies between Fantasy and other genres with fantastic elements;
- To describe the main characters and themes in “The Lord of the Rings”;
- To describe the most important features two main characters, Frodo and Sam, have and how this changes the outcome of the novel;
- With the help of the exploits done by men in the last battle of the book, to show how Good fights Evil for the sake of virtue.

**The degree of studiedness of this topic.** The amount of work done on this topic is truly abundant, however as already mentioned mainly from philosophical point of view. Although “The Lord of the Rings” has been extensively and still in

fact is discussed, due to the largeness and weightiness of the novel, there are a number of aspects that have not yet been studied properly in literary circles. Among the many books that did study the novel are Trevor Hart's "Tree Of Tales: Tolkien, Literature, And Theology", Don D'ammassa's "Encyclopedia Of Fantasy And Horror Fiction", Douglas A. Anderson, "Tolkien Studies", Michael D.C. Drout's "J.R.R. Tolkien. Encyclopedia Scholarship and Critical Assessment" and Michael N. Stanton's "Hobbits, Elves, and Wizards".

### **The main problems and points of the dissertation**

1. The origin and development of the Fantasy genre and its new form – Modern Fantasy;
2. The differences between Fantasy genre and other genres of similar themes and fantastic elements;
3. The life and literary creativity of J.R.R. Tolkien;
4. The characters and themes in "The Lord of the Rings";
5. The themes of friendship, virtue and courage in the novel.

**The methodological basis of the dissertation.** The works of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov on science, education and learning foreign languages, the laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On education" and "On preparation of personnel" and the works of such authors as Trevor Hart, Don D'ammassa, Douglas A. Anderson, Michael D.C. Drout and Michael N. Stanton have served as the methodological basis of the work.

**The methods of the dissertation.** In the process of doing research and writing the dissertation work descriptive and comparative methods have been applied.

**The practical and theoretical importance of the dissertation.** The practical use of the dissertation is that it can serve as a lecture or seminar in such subjects as History of English Literature or Criticism. Its theoretical importance is that students in the following years can use it in their qualification works or course works.

**The scientific novelty of the dissertation.** J.R.R. Tolkien is a very well-known author and critic and Fantasy genre is one of the most ancient genres in the world and consequently a lot of research has been done on both of them in many parts of the world. However, despite this fact very little research or thesis has been conducted on them in Uzbekistan, in fact, this dissertation is the first one on Tolkien or his novel “The Lord of the Rings”, which asserts its novelty.

**The structure of the dissertation.** This dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and the list of used literature.

# CHAPTER I

## THE FANTASY GENRE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### **1. The definition of fantasy genre and its roots in ancient times**

Fantasy has the longest and richest literary heritage of all of the forms of genre fiction. Indeed, fantasy could be said to be the progenitor from which the other forms came. It is also perhaps the most ubiquitous of the genres, as there are fantasy elements in most fiction, almost regardless of how realistic the story is. As it is a very ancient form, the genre of myth and legend, as well as of the fairy tales and stories of our childhood, the world of faerie, and magic, sorcery, and enchantment all live on in Fantasy.

Like Westerns and Historical Fiction, Fantasy novels create specific landscapes. These are world-building books, and it is important that readers be able to see, hear, and feel the worlds in which the authors place them. Fantasy novels tell a wide range of stories, but the success of each is dependent upon the author's skill in creating a believable, even though magical, world populated by characters to whom readers relate<sup>1</sup>.

Fantasy is not easily defined in a single phrase or two. If, for instance, Science Fiction emphasizes ideas, and most fictional novels depict realistic situations and human inherent feelings, Fantasy delves more into relationships. The stories it tells appeal more to the emotions than to the intellect. Fantasy deals with otherness of time or place; settings may be contemporary or historical but something is out of kilter – the train platform in Rowling's "Harry Potter" or the potion which Alice drinks in Lewis's "Alice in Wonderland". Fantasy exists in a world that most people believe never could be, while, take for example, Science

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce G. Saricks. *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. ALA Readers' Advisory Guide Series. American Library Association, Chicago, 2009, p. 23

Fiction worlds are those we accept as possible, even if improbable. It frequently takes a familiar story, legend, or myth and adds a twist, a new way of looking at things that brings it to life again. The key to Fantasy, however, is the presence of magic. If there is no magic, the story may fit in the Horror, Science Fiction, Romance, Historical Fiction, or Adventure genres. When magic is integral to the story, it must be Fantasy<sup>1</sup>.

Although Fantasy most frequently overlaps with Science Fiction, the connection between which we will properly discuss later, there are significant links to Horror, Romance, and Adventure as well. Both Fantasy and Horror draw on everyday fears and feature realms and creatures that are larger than life and often not of this world. However, while Horror creates a nightmare situation in which characters strive to survive and temporarily defeat the evil, Fantasy is more affirming, giving protagonists a chance to win the battle against the dark and permanently end the reign of evil. Like Fantasy, Science Fiction presents a challenging unknown, but, unlike Fantasy, it offers technical explanations and ways to “know,” to discover through science and empirical tests. One finds alternate realities in both Fantasy and Science Fiction, but in Fantasy these alternate universes and histories depend on magic, while in Science Fiction the roots are logical, not magical. Horror and Fantasy share an intuitive approach to the world, in contrast to the rational outlook of Science Fiction. Like Romance, Fantasy may have a romantic tone, and some stories certainly project the same emotional appeal, but magic supplants the romantic interest as the most important element. Adventure abounds in many types of Fantasy, but again it is secondary to the magical nature of the story<sup>2</sup>.

There are a number of characteristics, if to be precise six of them, of Fantasy that I would like to delineate:

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce G. Saricks. *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. ALA Readers' Advisory Guide Series. American Library Association, Chicago, 2009, p. 25

<sup>2</sup> *Literary Movements for Students*. Gale, Cengage Learning, 2009, p.364

1. Detailed settings depict another world, often Earth, but out-of-time or invisible to most people. Magic frames the story.

2. Story lines feature Good versus Evil, as protagonist's battle and ultimately conquer the evil forces – although victory does not come easily or cheaply. Titles are frequently part of a series with a continuing story told over several books.

3. Mood ranges from humorous to dark, but it is ultimately optimistic. Despite this, a melancholy tone pervades much of the genre even when victory is achieved.

4. Characters, clearly defined as good or bad, often attain special magical gifts, and the story lines explore ways to discover one's own potential, magical or otherwise. Even good characters will find themselves challenged, both physically and ethically. Characters may include mythical creatures – dragons, unicorns, elves, wizards – as well as more familiar ones.

5. In general, books start slowly as the author sets the scene, presents the challenge, and introduces the cast – frequently involving a group of diverse characters who are brought together solely to fight a new or resurging evil in an unfamiliar world. Pacing increases later as more adventure elements appear.

6. From the stylized language of High Fantasy to the jargon of Urban Fantasy, language and style run the gamut. Language creates verbal pictures of characters and landscape, and illustrations sometimes enhance both adult and children's Fantasy<sup>1</sup>.

In fantasy, it is clear from the start that things are not as the reader knows them from his own experience. The presence of magic or enchantment is the element that most clearly distinguishes Fantasy from other genres. The amount differs throughout the genre, but its presence, to some extent at least, ensures that readers understand they are in a Fantasy world. Magic may manifest itself in the existence of a magical sword or magical powers; there may be creatures that

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce G. Saricks. *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. ALA Readers' Advisory Guide Series. American Library Association, Chicago, 2009, p.126

readers know can exist in none but a magical world; or there may be a feeling of otherness, a sense of enchantment that grows throughout the story. Just as Merlin practices magic in the myriad Arthurian tales<sup>1</sup>, so do the wizards of Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" conjure up this otherworldliness that magic engenders<sup>2</sup>. The presence of magic may be explicit, as in Arthurian stories and Tolkien, or it may simply be hinted at and expanded as the story develops. All in all, enchantment or magic may take unexpected forms, but if it drives the plot, this is Fantasy.

The emphasis on landscape and the creation of a fantasy world are crucial in this genre. Detailed settings ground the stories. These authors, referred to as *world builders*, create elaborate, easily visualized settings for their stories, whether for a single title or a series. Among these are classic authors such as Lloyd Alexander (The Chronicles of Prydain, of which "The Book of Three" is the first), Ursula K. Le Guin (Earthsea Trilogy, beginning with "A Wizard of Earthsea"), and J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" ("The Fellowship of the Ring" is the first of his trilogy). Newer series by authors like Patricia Wrede (Lyra series, beginning with "Raven Ring") and David Anthony Durham's Acacia series ("The War with the Mein" comes first) follow in this tradition. Others use contemporary real-world settings, but alter them slightly to create that sense of otherworldliness. In J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter the real and unreal worlds intersect, and some characters live in both.

Fantasy is a genre of contrasts – good and bad, light and dark. In Horror a trace of the evil always survives to rise again, but in Fantasy there is the expectation of ultimate victory over evil forces, and that is very satisfying for fans. Fantasy is ultimately an optimistic genre, with the forces of good eventually conquering evil. The pattern of the genre leads to a hopeful outcome, no matter how grievous the trials along the way.

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<sup>1</sup> Drout Michael D.C. Rings, Swords, and Monsters: Exploring Fantasy Literature. Course Guide. Recorded Books, LLC, 2006, p.35

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.235

In addition, Fantasy usually tells a continuous story, even if it is broken into sections and published in a series of separate books. Fantasy often tells a single story, but instead of being published as one unwieldy volume, it is broken into several, often leaving the reader hanging, waiting a year or more to take up the story again. The end of the second volume of Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy is a good example; the closing scene of "The Two Towers" is a literal cliffhanger, with Frodo hanging on for his life!<sup>1</sup>

Fantasy novels frequently involve a quest of some sort with a band of characters embarking on a dangerous mission and, after a series of adventures, succeeding in attaining their goal. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" is certainly the modern archetype of this story; however, although the quest appears in many forms, at the heart of the story the fate of the world (ours or that of the story) is always at stake, and the final confrontation involves a pitched battle against evil. Tolkien's such characters as Frodo, Gandalf, and their band come into their own powers and join the battle to save the world<sup>2</sup>.

If to pay attention to mood and tone, it is important to note that Fantasy novels also provide various moods and tone. Although the genre is generally optimistic, an elegiac tone pervades many titles, as the victories are not accomplished without loss. Every Fantasy fan has mourned the death of a favorite character, one who has been sacrificed, albeit willingly and knowingly, to ensure victory. Still, the mood ranges from dark and bleak tales of Dark Fantasy and Urban Fantasy to uproariously humorous ones, with much in between<sup>3</sup>.

At one end of the spectrum are Dark Fantasy novels that feature a bleak outlook. These are not Horror, but they are stories filtered through a dark worldview, where the stakes are seen as too high for much levity, and the price

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Two Towers*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.122

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.233

<sup>3</sup> Trevor Hart and Ivan Khovacs. *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature, and Theology*. Baylor University Press, 2007, p.189

paid for victory is severe. Generally these are more atmospheric, more densely written, and directed toward weightier themes than their more humorous opposites. Stephen King's "Dark Tower" series is a good example. All elements combine to underline the mood of the book: short sentences, terse dialogue, desert landscape, and a haunted hero on an obscure mission (an anti-quest perhaps). As the hero explains, parodying Tolkien's words and theme, "There are quests and roads that lead ever onward, and all of them end in the same place – upon the killing ground."<sup>1</sup>

All these above mentioned features and elements are of the main characteristics of Modern Fantasy genre. It is crucial to bear in mind that the first fantastic works in literature, which are often accepted as Fantasy genre by some and rejected by others, have some specific disparities from contemporary fantastic works. Even the most fantastic myths, legends and fairy tales differ from modern fantasy genre in three respects<sup>2</sup>:

Modern genre fantasy postulates a different reality, either a fantasy world separated from ours, or a hidden fantasy side of our own world. In addition, the rules, geography, history of this world tend to be defined, even if they are not described outright. Traditional fantastic tales take place in our world, often in the past or in far off, unknown places. It seldom describes the place or the time with any precision, often saying simply that it happened "long ago and far away." A modern, rationalized analog to these stories can be found in the Lost World tales of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The second difference is that the supernatural in fantasy is by design fictitious. In traditional tales the degree to which the author considered the supernatural to be real can span the spectrum from legends taken as reality to

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce G. Saricks. *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. ALA Readers' Advisory Guide Series. American Library Association, Chicago, 2009, p.235

<sup>2</sup> Sandner, David. *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004, p.145

myths understood as describing in understandable terms more complicated reality, to late, intentionally fictitious literary works.

Finally, the fantastic worlds of modern fantasy are created by an author or group of authors, often using traditional elements, but usually in a novel arrangement and with an individual interpretation. Traditional tales with fantasy elements used familiar myths and folklore, and any differences from tradition were considered variations on a theme; the traditional tales were never intended to be separate from the local supernatural folklore. Transitions between the traditional and modern modes of fantastic literature are evident in early Gothic novels, the ghost stories in vogue in the 19th century, and Romantic novels, all of which used extensively traditional fantastic motifs, but subjected them to authors' concepts.

By one standard, no work created before the fantasy genre was defined can be considered to belong to it, no matter how many fantastic elements it includes. By another, the genre includes the whole range of fantastic literature, both the modern genre and its traditional antecedents, as many elements which were treated as true or at least not obviously untrue by earlier authors are wholly fictitious and fantastic for modern readers. But even by the more limited definition a full examination of the history of the fantastic in literature is necessary to show the origins of the modern genre. Traditional works contain significant elements which modern fantasy authors have drawn upon extensively for inspiration in their own works.

It is true that it is possible to find fantastic elements in literature back to the very beginnings. "The Epic of Gilgamesh" has the monstrous giant Humbaba. The works of Homer have monsters, magic, and the actions of the Olympian gods. "Beowulf" includes the monster Grendel, his mother, and a fire-breathing dragon. However, as already mentioned they are not immediate roots to the modern fantasy and it is accurate to trace the roots of the fantasy genre to the nineteenth century and its flowering of popular literature of all kinds. The Victorians developed differentiated and specialized markets for different kinds of literature. Children's

literature, adventure literature, and the almost stereotypically popular Victorian ghost stories all form the foundations for the twentieth-century genre of fantasy literature.

Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" is often called the greatest children's story of all. One of Carroll's great tricks – subsequently adopted by other writers of fantasy – was his ability to roll one adventure along after another without the pauses and elaborate justifications found in much other fantastic literature. Charles Kingsley's "The Water Babies" also just piles one fantastic idea on top of another. George MacDonald's "The Princess and the Goblin" is nearly as fully in the children's genre as "Alice", but some developments in this book show how fantasy could cross over into other areas: the violence in "Princess and the Goblin", for instance, occurs in battles and military engagements, very unlike Grimm's fairy tales<sup>1</sup>.

If we were arranging a continuous sequence, we might put "Alice in Wonderland" at one end: entirely a children's book, although loved and appreciated by adults. Then we could add MacDonald's "The Princess and the Goblin", which adds to the fantastic elements of Alice's heroism, violence, and elements of boy-girl romance. At the further end, we might have H. Rider Haggard's adventure novels, which are strongly grounded in heroism and romance but at least attempt to depict violence realistically, where the fight scenes are vividly done. And Haggard, on occasion, enters into the fantastic.

Haggard's adventure stories were aimed at boys and men. Although Haggard was enormously influential through novels like "She and King Solomon's Mines". I want to talk about one of his less famous novels: "Eric Brighteyes". In this novel, Haggard pulls together material from all of the major Old Norse sagas and weaves it into one exciting story. Tolkien himself said that it was as good or better than all other "historical fiction" treatments of the early medieval period. Eric Brighteyes is

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<sup>1</sup> Drout Michael D.C. Rings, Swords, and Monsters: Exploring Fantasy Literature. Course Guide. Recorded Books, LLC, 2006, p.53

a stereotypical Nordic hero: very handsome, very young, very strong, very brave – and rather stupid. Eric loves the sweet, kind Gudruda and is coveted by the evil Swanhild, thus adding a romance element to the adventure story. His strength and fearlessness allows him to accomplish many feats, including climbing impossibly high falls and defeating Skallagrim the berserker – a character who is only tangentially similar to his Old Norse namesake, Egil Skallagrimsson. At every turn, Eric’s heroic qualities are met by the evil magic of Swanhild, until in the end, all three lives end in tragedy.

Haggard, like William Morris, was able to stitch together a great variety of fragmentary tales from the Icelandic sagas and from Icelandic and Germanic history. Haggard and Morris both showed how the northern materials needed to be reconfigured from their disordered medieval form into narratives that are palatable for the modern audience. They are thus the originators of a long tradition of fantasy stories that attempt to make sense of the confusing and incomplete narratives of the Middle Ages.

Charles Kingsley’s “The Water Babies” adapts the Irish story of St. Brendan’s voyage to the west of west, and as such it was particularly interesting to Tolkien, who is just the most famous writer in a long-standing British tradition of imagining a paradise far to the west of England. “The Water Babies” begins on a very Dickensian note, telling of a young, deprived chimney sweep named Tom, who is eventually turned into a water baby and then swims through the rivers, to the sea, to the furthest west of west, where he forgives his old, evil master and brings about his conversion. Kingsley, who was a clergyman, demonstrated that a fantasy story could have strong religious ideals (his “Mother Carey” is a nickname for the Virgin Mary) and still contain fairies and magic. Some of the style of Kingsley’s book, particularly his rather bizarre and funny lists, can be found in T.H. White’s “The Once and Future King”, and the intrusive narrator of “The Water Babies” has cousins in “The Hobbit” and some early children’s fantasy.

Finally, there is the wildly popular Arthurian genre. Arthurian romance has a pedigree that goes back at least until the twelfth century with Chretien de Troyes through the Breton lais and Marie de France, to Chaucer, the anonymous author of “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”, and Malory. Partly because it has this long pedigree, Arthurian literature is usually considered simply serious literature or romance, which is an older genre, with roots far back in the Middle Ages, rather than fantasy.

Arthurian literature has also had an uneasy relationship with magic, with some traditions treating magic merely as a plot device and others more interested in magic itself. It is impossible to generalize with complete accuracy, but much of the time in Arthurian literature the magical elements are subordinated to male-female relationships, to the ethical aspects of the stories, or to the description of adventure. It is worth noting that, at times, Arthurian literature has been both mainstream and serious: Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “Idylls of the King” is a romantic retelling, in poetic form, of the Arthurian stories. The social class, educational background, and interests of the audience for Arthurian literature, the obviously adult themes of romance, and particularly, the *continuous* tradition of Arthurian literature all work to move it out of the fantasy genre and into mainstream literature<sup>1</sup>.

Both Arthurian and children’s literature add to fantasy the absolutely essential element of nostalgia – which comes from a Latin phrase meaning “our house” – the idea that there is an unrecoverable but beautiful past for which we mourn. Nostalgia connects fantasy to childhood or to periods of time – such as the Middle Ages before the wars of religion, or the “belle epoche” before World War I – when people believed life was simpler and better.

The flowering of fantasy, children’s literature, and Arthurian literature in the Victorian age also founded a more modern tradition to which subsequent fantasy

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<sup>1</sup> Drouot Michael D.C. Rings, Swords, and Monsters: Exploring Fantasy Literature. Course Guide. Recorded Books, LLC, 2006, p.57

literature can be directly connected. These works set the stage for the development of fantasy after World War I in the person of J.R.R. Tolkien, born at the end of the Victorian Age and who, after growing up in the belle epoche and seeing that idyllic time shattered by World War I, went on to be the greatest fantasy writer of the twentieth century.

## **2. The difference between Fantasy and Science Fiction**

The difference between Fantasy and Horror fiction or Romantic seems obvious, but it is slightly different with Science Fiction. The domains of Science Fiction and Fantasy literature are recognizable to many people, and throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the messages and social commentary behind these icons captivated readers, and more recently critics. Science Fiction and Fantasy appear from the outside to be two distinct forms of literature, and yet the two genres share some similar characteristics and roots. This paradox has inspired much debate over the twentieth century, while the movement itself has grown into a booming publishing industry that shows no signs of slowing.

Both science fiction and fantasy present things that do not exist. All fiction does this, of course. That's what makes it fiction. But science fiction and fantasy include not only imaginary characters and events but settings, creatures, concepts, or devices that are qualitatively beyond our normal, everyday experience. Although they share some characteristics, there is, I think, a clear and unambiguous distinction between them.

Fantasy may be as old as speech. From the time we, that is, I mean, our ancestors could communicate more than simple facts, people probably made up stories to explain the inexplicable, like where rain, thunder and babies come from. The people I mean are those who first discovered that they could chip flint to make sharp points to put on the end of long sticks, which they then used to hunt for food and intimidate their neighbors who had wild cave-painting parties late into the night or played their music too loud. I can easily imagine them huddled around a fire once they got around to discovering that, telling tales filled with imaginary creatures and mystical forces, which remain the defining characteristics of fantasy to this day. Fantasy is as old as mankind.

Science fiction, on the other hand, is a form of fiction that has its roots in the Age of Enlightenment. Science was an element in fiction as early as the 17<sup>th</sup>

century, included in works by Francis Bacon (“New Atlantis” 1617), Johannes Kepler (“Somnium” 1634), and Francis Godwin (“The Man in the Moone” 1638). The term ‘science-fiction’ wasn’t coined until 1851 by the English author, William Wilson. The first known reference to ‘science-fiction’ appears in Chapter Ten of his book “A Little Earnest Book on a Great Old Subject”, but it did not come into common use, apparently, until the 1930’s.<sup>1</sup>

It may be hard for us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to imagine, but people did not always regard the scientific method – that is, empirical evidence obtained through observation and experimentation – as the best way to understand things about the world. In many societies prior to the Enlightenment, reality was what your tradition, king, or priest said it was, and you did not question them.

According to Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, science fiction is “fiction dealing principally with the impact of actual or imagined science on society or individuals or having a scientific factor as an essential orienting component.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, science fiction relies on a scientific foundation for the speculative elements of the story. The tone of such stories was originally a positive one, supportive of a scientific outlook and optimistic about the possibilities science creates. Wilson’s usage of the term in 1851 is in reference to the laudable goal of using science fiction to popularize real science<sup>3</sup>.

Jules Verne and H.G. Wells are two of the earliest true modern science fiction writers. Both stretched the bounds of what was known at the time to suggest things that did not exist. Unlike earlier, and even much of the other speculative fiction of the time, though, they based their plot devices on extrapolations from current science and technology. Previous visits to improbable lands, encounters with strange creatures, and even fictional travels through time were often the result

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<sup>1</sup> Senior, W.A. Variations on the Fantasy Tradition: Stephen R. Donaldson’s Chronicles of Thomas Covenant. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1995, p.37

<sup>2</sup> Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. Merriam-Webster Incorporation, 1983, p.980

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, William. A Little Earnest Book on a Great Old Subject. Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2007, p.146

of a dream or mystical insight. Both Wells and Verne presented their readers with fantastic machines, but these were based on scientifically explained principles. They included strange creatures, but they were natural rather than supernatural, with abilities explainable, at least in theory, solely in terms of biology and evolution.

Fantasy is less constrained. It can include just about anything – magic wands, vampires, dragons, demons, werewolves, genies, and even talking rabbits in waistcoats with pocket watches. These things just ‘are’ and don’t need to be explained from a scientific, naturalistic, post-Enlightenment perspective. The magical elements must be internally consistent, but they don’t need to be based on known science. If the story includes supernatural or mythological characters or forces that cannot be supported in scientific terms, then it is fantasy. Well known examples would include “Harry Potter”, “The Lord of the Rings” and Terry Pratchett’s “Discworld” books<sup>1</sup>.

There are, of course, books that fall into a category where these two genres merge. A term that has been applied to these is ‘science fantasy.’ An example would be Star Wars, which is mainly a fantasy adventure with some science fiction trappings. The fantasy element is the Force, which is described as a mystical ‘energy’ field. The science fiction elements, obviously, are extraterrestrial aliens and space ships. Another example would be Star Trek, which is mainly science fiction but with some fantasy thrown in. One of the science fiction elements is super-luminal space travel, which the various series explain is achieved through a matter/antimatter reaction creating a warp in space-time. The fantasy aspects of Star Trek include such things as the scientifically unexplained psychic abilities exhibited by Vulcans and Betazoids.

Although there are many exceptions, science fiction stories also tend to take place in an imagined future or futuristic setting while fantasy tends to be set in an

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<sup>1</sup>Saricks, Joyce G. *The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. ALA Readers’ Advisory Guide Series. American Library Association, Chicago, 2009, p. 289

imaginary past, often a medieval type setting. This is not always the case, of course. There seems to be a growing popularity for fantasy that is set in current times with stories such as “Harry Potter” and a great deal of vampire and zombie novels. The possible combinations of settings and mixtures of fantasy and science fiction elements are extensive, and many subcategories of both genres have been identified.

When asked to explain the difference between science fiction and fantasy, Isaac Asimov, the prolific writer of mystery, science, and history but known mostly for his science fiction, replied, “science fiction, given its grounding in science, is possible; fantasy, which has no grounding in reality, is not.”<sup>1</sup>

Another distinction was provided by the Canadian science fiction writer Robert J. Sawyer: “Succinctly: there’s discontinuity between our reality and fantasy; there’s continuity between our reality and science fiction.”<sup>2</sup> He is saying that fantasy proposes the existence of things we can’t begin to explain rationally. Science fiction, on the other hand, must present at least some backstory for how such things *could* exist and at least imply a plausible theoretical explanation rooted in what we currently know. Where did they come from? How might they work? What allowed them to evolve the way they did? Works of science fiction don’t need to answer such questions in any detail. They don’t require elaborate explanations in the stories, but the reader must feel that scientific explanations for them are possible.

Fantasy does not require such things to have a basis in known science. Science fiction does. Science fiction, in the original sense of the term, is supportive of a scientific outlook and optimistic about humanity’s ability to use science to explain the universe and create a brighter future. In this respect, it is almost the

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<sup>1</sup> Milne, Ira Mark. *Literary Movements for Students*. Gale, Cengage Learning, 2009, p.144

<sup>2</sup> Sawyer, Robert J. *Triggers*. Ace Hardcover, 2009, p.162

antithesis of Fantasy, which has a mystical basis, suggesting the existence of things science cannot explain or, quite possibly, deal with.

To appreciate the distinction between the two genres requires some knowledge of science, of course. Without it, the reader has no foundation for distinguishing between ideas that are plausible, unlikely, or almost certainly impossible from a scientific point of view. As Carl Sagan once said, “Science is a way of thinking much more than it is a body of knowledge”<sup>1</sup>.

To conclude, stories from both genres can be insightful, thought-provoking, mind-stretching and evoke a sense of wonder. Both can take us to strange and fascinating worlds. There is a difference between the two, but you don’t need to recognize it to enjoy the tales.

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<sup>1</sup> Sagan, Carl. *Broca’s Brain: Reflections on the Romance of Science*. Ballantine Books, 1986, p.349

### **3. The development of fantasy genre and the new trend in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The Modern Fantasy genre, that is the fantasy as we know it now, can be conditionally divided into three main parts:

1. The pre-Tolkien period
2. Tolkien period
3. The post-Tolkien period

Stories continued to be told using fantastic elements, although less believed in, already in the early Victorian era. Charles Dickens wrote “A Christmas Carol”, using novelistic characterization to make his ghost story plausible; for instance, Scrooge at first doubts the reality of the ghosts, suspecting them his own imagination.

Hans Christian Andersen initiated a new style of fairy tales, original tales told in seriousness. From this origin, John Ruskin wrote “The King of the Golden River”, a fairy tale that uses new levels of characterization, creating in the South-West Wind an irascible but kindly character similar to the later Gandalf.

It was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, that modern fantasy genre first truly began to take shape. The history of modern fantasy literature begins with George MacDonald, the Scottish author of such novels as “The Princess and the Goblin” and “Phantastes” the latter of which is widely considered to be the first fantasy novel ever written for adults. MacDonald also wrote one of the first critical essays about the fantasy genre, "The Fantastic Imagination", in his book “A Dish of Orts”. MacDonald was a major influence on both J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>.

Despite MacDonald's future influence, it was not until around the start of the 20th century that fantasy fiction began to reach a large audience, with authors such as Lord Dunsany who wrote fantasy novels, but in the short story form. He was particularly noted for his vivid and evocative style. His style greatly influenced

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<sup>1</sup> Carpenter, Humphrey. Tolkien: A Biography. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2001, p.117

many writers, not always happily; Ursula K. Le Guin, in her essay on style in fantasy "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie", wryly referred to Lord Dunsany as the "First Terrible Fate that Awaiteth Unwary Beginners in Fantasy", alluding to young writers attempting to write in Lord Dunsany's style<sup>1</sup>.

Several classic children's fantasies such as Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland", J. M. Barrie's "Peter Pan", L. Frank Baum's "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" were also published around this time. Indeed, C. S. Lewis noted that in the earlier part of the 20th century, fantasy was more accepted in juvenile literature, and therefore a writer interested in fantasy often wrote in it to find an audience, despite concepts that could form an adult work.

The immense popularity of fantasy literature in the latter half of the twentieth century is, however, directly attributable to the influence of two friends who lived, taught, and wrote in Oxford: J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Each wrote highly successful fantasy stories and each contributed in a significant way to the theoretical understanding of the genre. Their lives, intertwined through the positions they held during the same decades at the University of Oxford, led them to the fantasy genre and shaped their understandings of the relation of fantasy and culture.

Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" is often called the greatest children's story of all<sup>2</sup>. One of Carroll's great tricks – subsequently adopted by other writers of fantasy – was his ability to roll one adventure along after another without the pauses and elaborate justifications found in much other fantastic literature.

Tolkien and Lewis held similar ideas about fantasy, but used different approaches in arriving at them. Lewis's reflections on fantasy focus on readers and on the effects that stories have on them. In "An Experiment in Criticism" Lewis defined literary fantasy as "any narrative that deals with impossibles and

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<sup>1</sup> Drout, Michael D.C. Rings, Swords, and Monsters: Exploring Fantasy Literature. Course Guide. Recorded Books, LLC, 2006, p.47

<sup>2</sup> The same source, p.48

preternaturals . . . [with] the fantastic”<sup>1</sup>. Fantasy enables readers to leave the narrow confines of their own lives and enter a totally different world, not because they want to escape from reality or indulge in fantasizings, but because they seek an enlargement of their being: “We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as our own”. Lovers of fantasy respond to “an imaginative impulse as old as the human race,” that is, “to visit strange regions in search of such beauty, awe, or terror as the actual world does not supply.” Such stories are “actual additions to life,” giving us “sensations we never had before” and enlarging “our conception of the range of possible experience”.

Tolkien’s discussions of fantasy focused more on the writer than on the reader, and more on the essence of the form than on its literary effect. His clearest and fullest exploration of the form – one of the most important contributions to the theory of fantasy anywhere – appears in his essay “On fairy-stories,” published in 1947 in a book of essays edited by Lewis. In it, Tolkien affirms the status of a writer of fairy stories – that is, stories about the world of Faerie, of magic, enchantment, and elves (not “fairies” as thought of today). Those who write about Faerie are “sub-creators”: their creating of new worlds in a sense parallels God’s creating of the world<sup>2</sup>.

Neither Tolkien nor Lewis subscribed to the conventional twentieth-century view that realistic fiction is the acme of narrative art. Because the fantasy writer is creating something new – a world with the potential to achieve Primary Belief – Tolkien regarded fantasy as “a higher form of Art,” perhaps the highest form, the “most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent.” To write fantasy is among the most difficult tasks a human can undertake, one that demands special skill, “a kind of elvish craft.” But when the task is “attempted and in any degree

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<sup>1</sup> Drout, Michael D.C. Rings, Swords, and Monsters: Exploring Fantasy Literature. Course Guide. Recorded Books, LLC, 2006, p.48

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien [edited by Humphrey Carpenter], Houghton Mifflin, 2000, p. 138

accomplished, then we have a rare achievement of Art”<sup>1</sup>. It was in the achievement of such art, not in theorizing about it, that Tolkien and Lewis made their greatest contributions to fantasy.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, authors tried either to imitate Tolkien or to escape from his shadow. Certainly not the best, but perhaps one of the most representative, is Terry Brooks, whose 1977 “The Sword of Shannara” is almost an exact copy of Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings”, both in major plot devices and minor detail (it lacks only a volcano). Brooks is seen as having opened the floodgates for imitations of Tolkien, although this seems to have been true only with regard to publishers—writers, by their own admission, had been writing fantasy, Tolkienian and otherwise, on their own. But the success of “Shannara”, especially given the fact that its writing was pedestrian and generic, began the fantasy mass market. As a result the genre saw an incredible boom in the number of titles published in the following years. Notable fantasy novels of the late 1970s and 1980s included Stephen R. Donaldson's “Lord Foul's Bane” the first in “The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever” series, John Crowley's “Little, Big”, Robert Holdstock's “Mythago Wood” and Glen Cook's Black Company series. These books are notable for their attempts to break out of the Tolkienian notion of fantasy<sup>2</sup>.

Ursula K. Le Guin and Robert Holdstock managed to create fantasy that has much of the power of Tolkien, and their works live up to the aesthetic standards he set, but without the exceptionally close imitation performed by Brooks and Donaldson. Le Guin and Holdstock also both deal with Tolkienian issues—language for Le Guin and the traditions of the British Isles for Holdstock—with originality and deftness.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* [edited by Humphrey Carpenter], Houghton Mifflin, 2000, p.257

<sup>2</sup> Saricks, Joyce G. *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. ALA Readers' Advisory Guide Series. American Library Association, Chicago, 2009, p. 139

The “golden age” of fantasy did not continue through the 1980s, and some critics believed that video games, Dungeons and Dragons, and other media had shifted creative energy from books into other pursuits.

Fantasy was thought to have migrated into visual media. But in the late 1990s, children’s fantasy suddenly took a quantum leap in popularity with the unprecedented success of J.K. Rowling’s “Harry Potter” books.

Other notable books of the 1990s include Robert Jordan's popular series “Wheel of Time”, Tad Williams' “Memory, Sorrow and Thorn” series and George R. R. Martin's “A Game of Thrones” (part of the series “A Song of Ice and Fire”). “A Game Of Thrones” is considered a path-breaking work which paved the work for a new kind of fantasy, which was less idealistic and more violent in nature.

Rowling succeeded artistically with her series as a whole, and she managed a solid ending. “Harry Potter” took its place at least in the second rank of children’s fantasy, not perhaps up to the level of Le Guin or Cooper, but in the company of Lloyd Alexander and C.S. Lewis.

Rowling’s genius is her ability to use humor while at the same time maintaining the moral seriousness of her vision. Puns, bad Latin, and Dickensian names all generate laughs, but the inner lives of her characters and the highstakes material creates a set of books that are both gripping and fun.

Since the 1990s, the genre has been marked by the rise of female-centric urban fantasy, very different from Tolkien's works, as shown by the popularity of Laurell K. Hamilton's Anita Blake novels and Charlaine Harris' The Southern Vampire Mysteries books.

Today fantasy continues as an expansive, multi-layered medium encompassing many sub-genres of literature; from traditional high fantasy and sword and sorcery, to magical realism, fairytale fantasy, horror-tinged dark fantasy and more.

To recapitulate everything mentioned, it is safe to say that one can notice that fantasy genre, modern fantasy genre, has had a fairly short, but particularly

fast development in the last two centuries. It has considerably transformed itself out of “older” fantasy and partly assimilated into modern media world, and among the giants in such genre who helped to catalyze this phenomenon were notably J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and J.K. Rowling.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LIFE AND WORKS OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE MODERN FANTASY GENRE**

#### **1. Tolkien's life and his first insight into the genre**

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in South Africa in 1892. Tolkien is actually a Dutch name, but the Tolkiens had long been Anglicized. Tolkien's father, like many other young Englishmen of promise, had migrated to the British colony in hopes of make his fortune. But Tolkien's mother was unhappy living so far away from home and in such harsh circumstances. She had returned to England for the birth of her second son, Hilary, when Ronald was only three. Their father contracted yellow fever and, before Mabel Tolkien could return to Africa to care for him, he died. Thus was she left a young widow faced with the task of raising two young sons on her own.

Mabel Suffield Tolkien was a remarkable woman. She was skilled in penmanship and languages, having command of Latin, Greek, and French. She taught both disciplines to her sons, so that young Ronald could read and write proficiently before he was four. Yet her own lot in life proved exceedingly hard. She did not get much help from her family in raising these sons. Though once distinguished, the Suffields had come down in the world.

Tolkien remained a convinced rather than a standard-issue cradle Catholic mostly because he regarded his mother as a martyr. Mabel Tolkien worked so hard to see that her boys were nurtured in the Catholic faith that, weakened by her long labors, she died from diabetes in 1904, when Ronald was 12. Her death made Tolkien a pessimist and doom-monger. "Doom" is indeed a word that resounds like a fearful drumbeat throughout the "Lord of the Rings". It evokes a chilling sense of both fate and judgment. The death of Tolkien's mother "filled him with a deep sense of impending loss," Carpenter declares. "It taught him that nothing is ever

safe, that nothing will last, that no battle will be won forever."<sup>1</sup> Tolkien was sometimes given to bouts of depression, unable to attend confession and to receive the sacrament. Yet he believed that the Crucifix stands rightly at the center of Catholic worship, both as the sign of God's own sacrifice of his Son as well as the doom that hangs over all creaturely life. That this doom bore down so soon on his own mother led Tolkien to make this comment about her when he was 21: "My own dear mother was a martyr indeed, and it is not to everybody that God grants so easy a way to his great gifts as he did to Hilary and myself, giving us a mother who killed herself with labour and trouble to ensure us keeping the faith"<sup>2</sup>.

Though Tolkien's imagination was supremely visual, he would realize his images primarily in words rather than pictures. He was drawn to the sound of words no less than their meaning. He would later observe that *cellar door* is a gorgeous phrase, far more attractive than the word *sky*, and even more beautiful than the word *beauty* itself. Tolkien was also mesmerized by the strange phonic order that words often have. Having begun one of his childhood stories with the phrase "the green great dragon," he was told by his mother that this wouldn't do, that it should be "the great green dragon" instead. Tolkien would spend his life seeking to fathom this syntactic mystery. He was also moved by the wonder of Welsh words which he saw printed on the sides of coal trucks, finding an almost mystical enchantment in an unpronounceable name like *Penrhiwceiber*. He was also drawn to the beauty of Celtic and Germanic languages, finding in both their sound and sense a whole new way of apprehending the world<sup>3</sup>.

It is not surprising that young Tolkien did not enjoy the traditional children's books: "Alice in Wonderland", "Treasure Island", "The Pied Piper", and the stories of Hans Christian Andersen. Like C. S. Lewis, he was moved by the Curdie books

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<sup>1</sup> Carpenter, Humphrey. Tolkien: A Biography. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2001, p. 233

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien [edited by Humphrey Carpenter], Houghton Mifflin, 2000, p. 394

<sup>3</sup> Shippey, Tom. J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001, p.188

of George Macdonald. They were set in remote kingdoms where misshapen and malevolent goblins lurked beneath mountains. Though he was drawn to the Arthurian legends, Tolkien the boy found his chief delight in the “Red Fairy Book” of Andrew Lang. It contained the best story he had ever read, the tale of Sigurd, the warrior who slew the dragon Fafnir. It was also a story set in the far-off and nameless North--a region at once the richest and most beautiful he had ever encountered, but also the most perilous. Again with Lewis, the fierce and dark beauty of Northernness, the stark and violent world of Scandinavian myth and saga, would always be more attractive to Tolkien than the sunnier mythologies of the Mediterranean world. It fit their own early, bitter experience<sup>1</sup>.

Tolkien prospered at Oxford. There he learned the glories of good talk, strong ale, male company, and a freshly-fueled pipe. He was by no means bookish. Like other Oxonians, he adopted their curious slang and indulged what would become a lifelong love of rather boorish practical jokes. Having already mastered Greek and Latin in public school, he became bored with them at Oxford, much preferring his independent labors in the Germanic languages. He came to have an almost mystical regard for words. He regarded articulate breath as our greatest gift, the one thing animals lack: speech. In Tolkien's view, no word is ever arbitrary or merely accidental. As he will show in the “Fellowship of the Ring”, even a seemingly nonsensical nursery rhyme like "Hey, diddle diddle" may have originally served as a drinking song. Words come into being because they reveal, in irreplaceable and non-duplicable ways, the nature of things<sup>2</sup>.

This is an ontological view of language: it arises out of the very nature of things and is thus intrinsic rather than extrinsic to the cosmos. Here Tolkien stands in direct opposition to the standard post-modernist view that words are signs that reveal nothing but their differences from other signs, and thus their origin in the

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<sup>1</sup> Drouot, Michael D.C. Rings, Swords, and Monsters: Exploring Fantasy Literature. Course Guide. Recorded Books, LLC, 2006, p. 48

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p. 39

human desire to impose order on chaos. Hence Ferdinand Saussure's widely-accepted claim: "Language is a system of arbitrary signs.... There is no reason for preferring *Soeur* to sister, *Ochs* to *boeuf*, etc.... Because the sign is arbitrary, it follows no other law than that of tradition, and because it is based on tradition, it is arbitrary."<sup>1</sup> For Tolkien, by contrast, language is our fundamental way into the real. Mythologies are supreme examples of this ontological character of speech. They disclose--through characters and events and images--the fundamental order of things, an order which we are meant not to invent so much as to find out. Tolkien thus believed that he had not *devised* his magnificent mythology so much as he had *discovered* it.

Tolkien's high regard for ancient languages also gave him a high regard for ancient poetry. Like both Chesterton and Lewis, he remained almost completely opaque to the free-verse experimentalism of modern poetry, even that of his fellow T. S. Eliot. He much preferred Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poems like "Beowulf", "The Pearl", "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", the last of which he translated into a much-admired modern English version. Among later bards, he was drawn to the 19th century poet Francis Thompson, and he especially admired (as did C. S. Lewis) the work of William Morris. Like Tolkien himself, Morris sought to retell the ancient English and Icelandic sagas. Tolkien's own poetry thus indulges in poetic inversions and archaisms, in drumbeat rhythms and regular rhymes that sound all too much like jingling to us.

It was not the power of words alone that sustained Tolkien during his years at Oxford. He was also buoyed by three friendships he had made at King Edward's School and that continued as the group split into their Cambridge and Oxford studies. Tolkien and his friends had discovered the wonder of shared books and ideas, of loves and dreams, as they met for daily talk at a local Birmingham tea club called the Barrows. Thus did they give themselves a comically Latinate name-

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Israel Gollancz Conference. Tolkien J.R.R. *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, 1936, p. 4

-the Tea Club Barrovian Society--which they shortened to TCBS. These four young men were united not only in their thorough knowledge of Greek and Latin literature, but also in their common conviction that they were destined to kindle a new spiritual light for England. They shared C. S. Lewis' thesis that *philia* is the only love that is not diminished when it is divided. As one of them confessed, they felt "four times their intellectual size" whenever they met. More perhaps even than his Oxford tutors, these three friends helped shape Tolkien's sense of himself as having a unique talent and vocation<sup>1</sup>.

It was a blow almost beyond bearing when two of these three friends were killed in the "animal horror" (as Tolkien called it) of World War I. After finishing at Oxford in 1915, Tolkien himself left for the French front, almost immediately to be involved in the Battle of the Somme. He was spared almost certain death only because he contracted trench fever and sent back to England. Like Karl Barth, Virginia Woolf, and many others, Tolkien sensed that a radical rearrangement of human life had occurred in this prematurely named Great War. Here humanity had taken a decisive step toward the Abyss. It was the beginning of what Pope John Paul II has called "the century and culture of death." As George Will has observed, more people have been killed in this century than in all previous centuries combined. For the first time in Western warfare, civilian populations were not spared, as everything was laid waste in the new practice of total war. Unlike Lewis, Tolkien was permanently affected by his war experience. If his mother's death had taught Tolkien that something is terribly awry with the world in general, this war brought home to him the special wretchedness of modern life, with its all-powerful means for utterly destructive ends. The "Lord of the Rings" has war and the weapon of total coercion as its central subject, unlike anything comparable in Lewis's books.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien [edited by Humphrey Carpenter], Houghton Mifflin, 2000, p. 147

Yet even amidst the bloated corpses with their dreadfully staring eyes, Tolkien found strange hope. Though he despised commanding officers who assumed a superior air of authority, he deeply admired the privates who played their part without fuss or fury. Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee are indeed hobbitic versions of these common soldiers who slogged ahead without hope of glory or even victory. Tolkien also felt a special vocation to realize the slain dreams and hopes of his two TCBS comrades who had been killed. One of them, G. B. Smith, had written shortly before his death this remarkable confession to Tolkien:

*“My chief consolation is that if I am scuppered tonight ... there will still be left a member of the great TCBS to voice what I dreamed and what we all agreed upon. For the death of one of its members cannot put an end to the immortal four! ... May God bless you, my dear John Ronald, and may you say the things I have tried to say long after I am not there to say them, if such be my lot.”<sup>1</sup>*

Several months before Tolkien crossed the channel to war, he had revived his old love for Edith Bratt. He feared that she might have married in the meantime, but she had no other love than John Ronald, and they thus resumed their old relation where it had left off. In an age when the only approved way of consummating romantic love lay in marriage, they were wed shortly before Tolkien shipped out. On their honeymoon, he began to work on a new mythology that had been rolling in the back of his mind. It had to do with *silmarils*, the three great jewels of the elves that were stolen from the blessed realm of Valinor by the evil creature Morgoth, and with the subsequent wars in which the elves try to regain them. It would require an entire mythological system to explain it all; hence his lifelong project called “The Silmarillion”. Edith had not gone up to Oxford or Cambridge after finishing public school. Instead, she worked as a secretary, unable to earn a living as the gifted pianist she was. But she proved to be an excellent

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* [edited by Humphrey Carpenter], Houghton Mifflin, 2000, p. 364

nurse who brought her war-sick husband back to health. He would never forget their early happiness, especially their long walks in a hemlock wood as he recovered from trench fever. "Her hair was raven," he wrote, "her skin clear, her eyes bright, and she could sing--and *dance*". Tolkien later insisted that the name *Luthien* be inscribed on Edith's tombstone. She was the elven-maiden who had sacrificed her immortality to marry the mortal Beren, much as Edith Bratt had given up her own ambitions to marry Tolkien. At his death in 1973, his children engraved the name *Beren* on his own marker.

After the war ended and Tolkien settled into marriage, he soon began to ascend the academic ladder--first as a researcher for the Oxford English Dictionary (the century-long compilation of the history of every English word), then as a tutor in English at Leeds University, and finally as Professor of English Language and Literature at Merton College in Oxford. This last appointment came when Tolkien was only 32, and he held it for 35 years. C. S. Lewis, in contrast, was never given a professorship at Oxford, remaining a tutor until, near the end of his life, Cambridge finally made him a professor. Tolkien was a good but not a great teacher. He was given to an indistinct articulation that made his lectures hard to understand. Nor was he adept at explaining himself in clear terms, finding it difficult to scale down his massive learning into proportions his students could comprehend. But he was passionate about Anglo-Saxon and gifted at bringing his subject alive. His recitations of "Beowulf" were so celebrated that W. H. Auden described them as being spoken in the voice of Gandalf. Another listener declared that Tolkien "could turn a lecture room into a mead hall in which he was the bard and we were the feasting, listening guests"<sup>1</sup>. Tolkien remained constitutionally immune to critical theory, believing that literary interpretation could never be turned into a science and thus made part of the curriculum. He held that literature interprets itself. Like Charles Williams, Tolkien regarded the great literary texts as *events* to be

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<sup>1</sup> Hart, Trevor. *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature, and Theology*. Baylor University Press, 2007, p.123

experienced largely through reading them aloud. Linguistic and historical study provide the only true aid for understanding literary texts, Tolkien believed, revealing their original setting as well as showing how the author used words, even as language also made its own constructive use of the author.

Another of Tolkien's prominent contribution to the genre of fantasy was an article which was initially a lecture "Beowulf: The monsters and the Critics"<sup>1</sup> (November 25, 1936) which revolutionized the attitude of the critics towards the Anglo-Saxon epic Beowulf. This shows that as well as being a powerful writer, Tolkien was also a leading author of academic literary criticism. This article or rather essay is considered to be the most important piece of work ever written about Beowulf. Michael D.C. Drout says, "'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics'" has perhaps become (in the tongue-in-cheek words of R.D. Fulk) "the object of mindless veneration," and it certainly is not often enough read in its proper scholarly context." It can easily be said that "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" lays a foundation of modern scholarship on Beowulf. After "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," scholars refocused their attention on Beowulf itself rather than examining what was missing from the poem or was only generally discussed<sup>2</sup>. In Tolkien's opinion the monsters, which he sets at the center of Beowulf criticism, play an important role in studying the poem. He maintains that Beowulf is primarily a poem full of allegory and where these monsters are key elements which point out the high excellence of poetry. He rejects the idea that monsters in epics are merely "childish flaws".

The main critical opponents for Tolkien who mentioned this term "childish flaws" in their works are the critics W.P. Ker and R.W. Chambers Tolkien spends a great deal of time dissecting their many errors. However, the original impetus for Tolkien's lecture almost certainly was dissatisfaction with the way W.P. Ker treats

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<sup>1</sup> Carpenter, Humphrey. Tolkien: A Biography. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2001, p.217

<sup>2</sup> Drout, Michael D.C., ed. Beowulf and the Critics by J.R.R. Tolkien. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2002, p. 349

Beowulf in his *The Dark Ages*: notes found by Christopher Tolkien in J.R.R. Tolkien's copy of *The Dark Ages* are directly connected with the A-text of *Beowulf and the Critics*.

He concludes his essay by saying: "Yet it is in fact written in a language that after many centuries has still essential kinship with our own, it was made in this land, and moves in our northern world beneath our northern sky, and for those who are native to that tongue and land, it must ever call with a profound appeal—until the dragon comes."<sup>1</sup> In 1936, the identity of the dragon looming over England (and all of Europe) was perhaps all too clear.

This conclusion is followed by appendices on "Grendel's Titles," the words "'Lof,' and 'Dom,' 'hell,' and 'heofon,'" In these appendices, we see Tolkien's more technical (as opposed to integrative and interpretive) approach to Old English: the appendices are detailed and philological rather than literary-critical.

Tolkien took early retirement from Oxford and moved to an obscure resort on the coast near Bournemouth, where only his friends and associates could locate him. After Mabel Tolkien's death in 1971, he was often a lonely though still an active man. He was awarded an honorary doctorate at Oxford in 1972--for his work in philology, not in fantasy. He continued in desultory fashion to revise "The Silmarillion" until finally he saw that his son Christopher--who had become an expert in his father's fiction--would have to complete it for publication. Christopher Tolkien would in fact spend the next 25 years living away from the public eye in France while editing and publishing his father's other works in nine fat volumes, until his own death in the late 1990s. Tolkien himself died on September 2, 1973, at the age of 81. He was buried beside his wife in a plain grave located in the Catholic section of an Oxford public cemetery called Wolvercote, among Polish emigrés.

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<sup>1</sup> Drout, Michael D.C., ed. *Beowulf and the Critics* by J.R.R. Tolkien. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2002, p.422

## 2. The major characters and themes in the “Lord of the Rings”

In 1928, while grading exams, Tolkien absentmindedly wrote on a blank sheet of paper, “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.” With this sentence, Tolkien began to imagine what “hobbits” might be like and what they might do. From these imaginings grew “The Hobbit”, a children’s story and Tolkien’s first published work. In 1936, a version of “The Hobbit” reached a representative of the publishing firm Allen and Unwin, which published the novel a year later. The novel met with great success, and there was demand for a sequel.

During this period, Tolkien developed a friendship with another well-known Oxford professor and writer, C.S. Lewis. Tolkien convinced Lewis to devote his life to Christianity, although Tolkien, a devout Catholic, was disappointed that Lewis became a Protestant. The two critiqued each other’s work as part of an informal group of writers and scholars known as “the Inklings.”

Heartened by the profits of “The Hobbit”, Tolkien’s publisher encouraged him to start work on what later became “The Lord of the Rings”. Tolkien spent twelve years writing the novel. His initial goal was only to write a very long tale, but as the novel took shape, he related his story of Hobbits to the vast history and mythology of Middle-earth that he had developed in the Silmarillion stories. “The Lord of the Rings”, completed in 1949, was conceived of as a single novel, but published in three volumes—“The Fellowship of the Ring” (1954), “The Two Towers” (1954), and “The Return of the King” (1955)—for logistical reasons.

Frodo Baggins. As the Ring-bearer and then principal protagonist of “The Lord of the Rings”, Frodo is endowed with a temperament well suited to resist evil. He is brave, selfless, thoughtful, wise, observant, and even unfailingly polite. Unlike the common run of provincial, self-satisfied Hobbits, Frodo is curious about the outside world and knowledgeable about the traditions of the Elves. As everyone from Bilbo to Gandalf to Aragorn notices, there is something special in Frodo, something that sets him apart from the rest of his race—a fineness, perhaps,

or an inner strength. Frodo's goodness, wisdom, and generally impeccable character might make him seem one-dimensional if he were not so frequently wracked with doubt and faced with obstacles he feels unable to surmount. Frodo is not Elrond, nor even Aragorn; he has no otherworldly powers or even physical prowess. Frodo is initially so weak he can barely even get out of the Shire without the help of Farmer Maggot and then Tom Bombadil<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps what distinguishes Frodo more than any other quality is the sense of remote sadness and reluctance that surrounds him. He has a great task, but it is to him simply a burden—one that grows heavier as the quest progresses. Frodo does not long for the thrill of exploration or battle or timeless deeds of heroism. As such, his willingness to go ahead with the quest speaks much about the sort of strength of character Tolkien values. Like the other Hobbits in the novel, Frodo is not so much a born hero as one who has had heroism thrust upon him. Despite his lack of heroic stature—or perhaps because of it—Frodo is well liked by those who know him intimately.

Sam Gamgee. The loyal Sam consistently serves as a foil to all of the grandeur and earthshaking events that take place in "The Lord of the Rings". Some readers may find Sam's folksy wisdom and extreme devotion to Frodo somewhat cloying, but these traits do allow Tolkien to keep a little bit of the flavor of the Shire with the Fellowship as it moves toward the dark land of Mordor. Sam is much more the typical Hobbit than Frodo, though Sam, too, displays a great curiosity about the world beyond the Shire, especially Elves. Sam is shy and somewhat awkward socially, but he is ferocious in a fight and clever and quick on his feet. His speech consistently has a modest, awestruck tone. When Frodo becomes increasingly preoccupied with the great burden of the Ring, he comes to rely more and more on Sam for help. Indeed, throughout even the lowest and most hopeless points of the journey, Sam remains relentlessly pragmatic and optimistic. If it is Frodo's duty to "carry" the Ring, it is often Sam's duty to carry Frodo. In

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.268

the early parts of “The Lord of the Rings”, Sam comes across as a rather flat character, a sidekick to the more interesting and dynamic Frodo, whom he serves. But from a psychological point of view, Sam is among the most interesting and complex characters in the novel. Over the course of “The Two Towers”, Sam changes more than any other character. Sam possesses such a strong tacit love for Frodo that he becomes united with the object of his service. As Sam climbs Mount Doom, carrying Frodo, the comrades appear to be only one hobbit climbing, not two. The ascent of Mount Doom is emblematic of Sam’s friendship with Frodo. Sam’s sacrifice produces true friendship, for he loses all thoughts of himself in his devoted care for his companion and master.

Gandalf is a Wizard of surpassing power and wisdom, but when we first meet him he merely appears to be a wizened old man driving a wagon full of fireworks. This mix of the awe-inspiring and the touchingly human defines Gandalf. He is as comfortable at a Hobbit birthday party as at the Council of Elrond, and he counts both the celestial Galadriel and the lowly Barliman Butterbur among his friends. This quality makes Gandalf a more sympathetic character than the sometimes aloof Elves. It also gives him insights that even the wise Elrond misses, as when Gandalf supports Pippin and Merry’s wish to be included in the Fellowship on the grounds that their loyalty to Frodo makes up for their lack of experience and strength. Paradoxically, we see Gandalf grow in power throughout “The Fellowship of the Ring” even as he comes up against obstacles that show him at the limits of his power. He is tested again and again, whether by Saruman or at the Door to Moria or, finally, on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm<sup>1</sup>. In “The Two Towers”, Gandalf returns, having survived his battle with the fearsome Balrog and been made even more powerful by his trial. Nevertheless, even at the height of his powers, Gandalf retains his common touch. Gandalf is the supreme force of good in the novel, a worthy opponent of the evil Saruman and Sauron.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.349

Furthermore, the wizard's timely arrival with military backup during the siege of Hornburg makes him seem almost a miracle worker<sup>1</sup>. He maintains firm personal connections with all the characters, regardless of race or rank; he addresses even the lowliest members of the Fellowship by their full names and with great respect.

Aragorn, much like Gandalf, hides an impressive amount of power, greatness, and knowledge under a humble exterior. We first meet Aragorn as Strider, the laconic, worn Ranger at the Prancing Pony inn in Bree<sup>2</sup>. As the action moves forward, we see Aragorn slowly transform into the king he is destined to become. Aragorn also displays Gandalf's bravery, kindness, and wisdom—indeed, neither of them appear to have any major faults to speak of. The title of the third volume, “The Return of the King”, refers to Aragorn, or Strider, and his return to claim the throne of Gondor. When the hobbits first encounter Strider in “The Fellowship of the Ring”, he is a cloaked and mysterious Ranger of the North, a mercenary who patrols the borders of Middle-earth against bandits and evildoers. As the novel progresses, we learn that Strider is Aragorn, the heir of Isildur, the last and greatest king of Men who led the forces of Middle-earth against the armies of Mordor. To the hobbits, Strider appears rugged yet strangely stately, an ideal combination for the ruler of the great realm of Gondor. In Books V and VI, Aragorn ceases to be a character who reveals himself through conversations, personality quirks, or limited knowledge of events. Aragorn's character reveals itself in the roles he plays, and particularly in the symbolic actions he performs.

Gollum. While a wide variety of creepy nonhuman creatures populate the world of “The Lord of the Rings” – ranging from the dark Nazgûl to the revolting Shelob – Gollum stands out from the rest as psychologically intriguing. Capable of speech, he is quite forthcoming in sharing his inner thoughts with anyone who cares to hear them, even talking out loud when no one is there to hear. As such,

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Two Towers*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.227

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.331

Gollum is something more than a mere monster. By the same token, he is not quite a villain either, as he lacks the grand stature of Sauron or Saruman, or even of Wormtongue. We cannot imagine any of these other wicked figures splashing around in the water in search of fish or whining about how bread burns his throat. Moreover, though Gollum acts like a servant, it is hard for us to believe that he kowtows to Frodo only in order to win the hobbit's trust. Rather, this wretched subservience seems to be Gollum's natural state – at least, his natural state after years of the deleterious effects of possessing the Ring. On the whole, Gollum's morality is almost completely impossible to guess for most of the novel. While other characters are clearly evil or clearly good, Gollum acts as if he is on the side of good, but he may perhaps be treacherous. Until the end of "The Two Towers", we are never quite sure. Gollum's fondness for Frodo is one of the mysteries of the creature's personality. Of course, Gollum willingly leads Frodo to a probable death at the end, and he is no true friend to the hobbit. But still there is a striking and surprising display of real affection for the one whom Gollum calls master, even beneath the false flattery he issues to Frodo in order to gain trust. When Sam catches Gollum fondly caressing the sleeping Frodo<sup>1</sup>, there is no other explanation for what the creature is doing than showing that he loves his master.

The Corrupting Influence of Power. Sauron bound up much of his power in the One Ring when he forged it ages ago, and whoever wields the Ring has access to some of that power. The full extent and nature of the Ring's power never becomes entirely clear to us, but we get the sense that the Ring symbolizes a power almost without limits, and which is utterly corrupting. It is immensely difficult for many of the characters to resist the temptation to take the Ring for themselves and use it for their own ends. Regardless of the wearer's initial intentions, good or evil, the Ring's power always turns the wearer to evil. Indeed, even keeping the Ring is dangerous. "The Fellowship of the Ring" is strewn with examples of those who are

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Return of the King*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.357

corrupted by the Ring<sup>1</sup>. The power of the Ring transformed the Black Riders, once human kings, into fearsome, undead Ringwraiths. Gollum, once a young boy named Sméagol, killed his friend Déagol for the Ring and then gradually became a wretched, crouching, froglike creature who thinks only of his desire to retrieve the Ring for himself. During the travels of the Fellowship, Boromir grows increasingly corrupted by the proximity of the Ring, wanting to use its power to destroy Sauron rather than destroy the Ring itself, as Elrond and Gandalf have advised; ultimately, the Ring leads Boromir to desire it for himself. For many, the great power offered by the Ring overrides all rational thought. The power of the Ring is by no means the only temptation in Middle-earth – the Dwarves of Moria, for example, coveted *mithril* too much, and they dug so deep that they awakened the Balrog beneath them – but the Ring is the greatest temptation and therefore the greatest threat.

The Inevitability of Decline. The Middle-earth of “The Lord of the Rings” is a world on the brink of a transformation. After the events the novel describes, the age of the Elves will pass and the age of Men will dawn. A large portion of the story eulogizes this passing age of the Elves. The Elves and their realms have a beauty and grace unmatched by anything else in Middle-earth. Though the Elves themselves are immortal, as Galadriel tells us, the destruction of Sauron’s One Ring will weaken the Three Elven Rings, forcing the Elves to leave Middle-earth and fade away<sup>2</sup>. Throughout the novel, Tolkien gives us the sense that the adventures of the Ring represent the last burst of a sort of magic that will not be found in the world that comes afterward. This later world will be a world without Sauron, but also a world without Lothlórien. Even in chapters about the Hobbits and the lowly Shire, we sense that we are witnessing something good and pure that is, for whatever reason, no longer present in this world. The Hobbits, the narrator

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.347

<sup>2</sup> The same source, p.348

tells us, have become somewhat estranged from Men in the times since “The Lord of the Rings” took place, and now avoid us “with dismay.”

**The Power of Myth.** The sense of transience and lost grandeur that pervades “The Lord of the Rings” goes, in part, with the territory in which Tolkien is wading. He writes the novel in a mythic mode, and one of the conventions of myth is that it describes a past that is more glorious than the present. This sense of loss certainly is present in the Greek myths, for example, or in Homer’s epic poems that draw on these myths – both of which describe a world in which men and gods mix freely, a world that is no more. Tolkien’s own work is something between mythology and fiction, locating itself in a middle ground between a past that is remembered only in song and the everyday present of the reader. This sense of ancientness is constantly present, brought to life in chants, poems, and graven inscriptions. As Tolkien shows again and again – whether with the Elves or with the Númenóreans or the Dwarves – the stories that the characters tell define them. In some cases, as with Aragorn for example, this mythology explains not only where a character comes from, but also where he or she is going. The characters carry their past and their lore around with them, and they are virtually unable to speak without referring to this lore. The twist Tolkien adds is that these “myths,” while retaining all of the usual metaphorical resonance and symbolic simplicity, also happen to be true—at least in his world. This sense of reality within the novel, in turn, lends power to even the most everyday occurrences in Middle-earth.

**The Decay of Civilization.** The world that the members of the Fellowship glimpse on their wanderings through Rohan, Isengard, Entwash, and Mordor is not a happy one. Everywhere the Fellowship goes, it finds evidence of how the civilized world has fallen from a peaceful and noble earlier state into a present degradation threatened by warlords and general bleakness. Isengard and Gondor are both described as formerly beautiful realms, once full of orchards and blossoming gardens that have deteriorated into desolate and barren places that

smell terrible and are littered with poison pits<sup>1</sup>. It is not merely the landscape, however, that has disintegrated. Moral and noble ideals have fallen away as well. Earlier norms of hospitality toward strangers have been abandoned because of the new dangers of the modern age, as Éomer notes when he refers to the “dark times” as an explanation for why he cannot treat the hobbits with customary courtesy<sup>2</sup>. Stopping the onslaught of Sauron is, therefore, much more than merely thwarting an enemy: it is also saving an entire civilization from a slow slide into chaos.

**The Value of Fellowship.** Fellowship is mentioned often in “The Lord of the Rings”, not merely because the group of freedom fighters struggling to destroy the Ring calls itself the Fellowship of the Ring. The Fellowship, in a sense, is the collective protagonist of Tolkien’s novel, a group representing all the free races and realms of Middle-earth in the struggle against the evil of Mordor. Fellowship is an important ideal for these characters, standing for a sense of camaraderie that depends on mutual support, cooperation, and solidarity in which no single member is considered more essential than any other. Even Gandalf, though the unofficial leader of the Fellowship, does not order around or act superior to the others. He is clearly far more powerful than any of the others, but still he needs them, and therefore treats them all with respect – referring even to low-rankers like Merry and Pippin by their full honorific names. There is also a mutual kindness that unites the members of the Fellowship, as we see when Pippin gives Gimli his precious pipe simply out of a desire to make the dwarf happy. It is this sensitivity toward others that the villains of the novel – all of them egomaniacs – noticeably lack.

**The Ambiguity of Evil.** Tolkien offers a conflicted picture of evil in “The Lord of the Rings”. As the literary scholar T.A. Shippey argues<sup>3</sup>, the images of evil

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Return of the King*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.254

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Two Towers*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.137

<sup>3</sup> Shippey, Tom. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001, p. 233

-Tolkien portrays in the novel depict two traditional explanations for the existence of evil. The first, Manichaeism, was a view deemed heretical by the early Christian church. In Manichaeism, good and evil are two opposing forces or powers at war in the world. The second view, embraced by early Christian theologians, is that evil does not exist as a positive force. Evil is, instead, a human creation – that which is produced by humankind’s lack of goodness. The Shadow, the chief metaphor for the evil of Mordor, exemplifies this ambivalent depiction of evil. On one hand, shadow is nothing but the absence of light; it has no substance, and its qualities are ambiguous even to those who perceive it. At the same time, shadows are real objects, with clearly visible shapes and edges. With the Shadow that blankets Mordor and extends outward later in “The Lord of the Rings”, Sauron’s evil spreads as various groups of Men and Orcs obey his will. In this sense, Sauron’s evil is not a force or a thing, but a form of human behavior. Even so, Sauron’s Darkness affects the physical world itself. The land of Mordor lies destitute and barren because of Sauron’s residence there, and the flying Nazgûl represent the physical embodiment of a mystical evil force. While Tolkien does not clarify this ambiguous picture of evil, he suggests that the evil of human behavior precedes the physical force or power of evil in the world. Sauron creates the Ring out of malice and pride; the Ring does not cause Sauron’s evil. Similarly, the evil Saruman never actually loses his mystical powers when ousted from Isengard. Saruman’s hatred and bitterness cause his psychological deterioration, and his physical loss of power follows suit.

The Priority of Friendship. The common concept of friendship might appear too simple or trite to have such great importance in an epic novel, but Tolkien’s picture of true friendship is at times grave and demanding. Tolkien suggests that even the all-important quest itself should be suspended for the sake of devotion to one’s friends. Sam’s deeds in Mordor display the ultimate courage, for he must constantly decide between fidelity to his friend Frodo or the forward movement of

the Ring<sup>1</sup>. In the dead silence of Mordor, Sam risks discovery by singing aloud in order to find his way to Frodo's hidden cell. For Sam, true friendship means absolute devotion to another person. This absolute devotion involves a denial of the self and the willingness to sacrifice one's own life for one's friend. At the same time, Tolkien's exploration of friendship remains refreshing in its lightheartedness. The companions of the Fellowship make few vows of deep or serious friendship to each other. Rather, friendship in the novel frequently means being content with the company of another person. As Frodo leisurely tells Sam while Mordor collapses around them, "I am glad you are here with me . . . at the end of all things." Gandalf closes the novel by quietly bidding Sam, Merry, and Pippin to return home, "for it will be better to ride back three together than one alone."

To conclude, one can certainly agree that Tolkien's role in the development of the modern fantasy genre is unquestionable. As for his masterpiece "Lord of the Rings", it is surely one of the most influential books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main reason for that is Tolkien's unmistakable ability to portray truly deep and diverse characters that make the novel both entertaining and didactic about human nature, while the themes discussed in it are and will be true in the centuries to come.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Return of the King*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.119

# CHAPTER III

## THE FIGHT BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL FOR VIRTUE IN “THE LORD OF THE RINGS”

### 1. Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee as the representatives of virtue

One of the most common criticisms of J.R.R. Tolkien’s writing is that he merely produced idealistic, allegorical stories for children. Because the purpose and meaning of his work are often misinterpreted, the bulk of Tolkien criticism, whenever his work is given any consideration, is "shallow and silly commentary, both hostile and laudatory." <sup>1</sup>

Yet, despite the literary community’s dismissal of Tolkien’s works, British readers chose *The Lord of the Rings* as “the greatest book of the century” in a 1997 poll by Channel 4 and Waterstone’s, a prominent British bookseller. Upon learning of the people’s wide support for “The Lord of the Rings”, the literary community issued forth even harsher criticisms of both Tolkien and his readers. The *Times Literary Supplement* maintained that the poll’s results were “horrifying.”<sup>2</sup> The *Sunday Times* proclaimed it a “black day for British culture” and called for all the libraries to be closed because “it just shows... the folly of teaching people to read.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the greatest criticism of the poll’s results came from Germaine Greer. In Waterstone’s own magazine, she writes that it had been her “nightmare” that readers would consider Tolkien as the “most influential writer of the twentieth century,” and now, “the bad dream has materialized.”<sup>4</sup> She further sneers, “Novels don't come more fictional than that... The books that come from Tolkien's train are

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<sup>1</sup> Rosebury, Brian. *Tolkien: A Critical Assessment*. London: St. Martins, 1992, p.227

<sup>2</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 January 1997

<sup>3</sup> *Sunday Times*, 26 January, 1997

<sup>4</sup> Greer, Germaine. *The book of the Century*. Waterstone’s Magazine, 1997

more or less what you would expect; flight from reality is their dominating characteristic.”

In response to this onslaught by the literary community, many writers rose to Tolkien’s defense. Specifically responding to Greer’s reaction, Patrick Curry, author of “Defending Middle Earth”, argues that critics have long misunderstood Tolkien and his reasons for writing:

*Tolkien addressed the fears of late-20th-century readers... he gave them hope. Far from being escapist or reactionary, The Lord of the Rings addresses the greatest struggle of this century and beyond. And Greer, unlike the common reader, has completely missed it: certainly in the book, and perhaps in the world.*

*Who, then, is living in a world of fantasy? Tolkien’s critics, not his readers, are out of touch with reality.<sup>1</sup>*

Never has the intellectual establishment so richly deserved defiance. Curry, like many other writers, completely dismisses the value of these criticisms; however, the literary establishment continues to call into question the judgment and taste of Tolkien’s readers.

To be able to consider objectively both the sides one has to dive deeper into the work in order to make out the true meaning and message of the book. The final chapter of the thesis deals with the two main characteristics that serve as a proof that Tolkien or his readers are *not* out of touch with reality and his themes can directly talk to the reading public of any age or era. Those two characteristics are firstly the absolute good which is embodied in the friendship of the two main characters of the novel: Frodo and Sam, in contrast to the absolute evil in the face of Sauron and Saruman, and secondly the heroic exploits of people who are defending their own nation, Middle Earth. To understand why these two features are instrumental in the novel one has to consider the difference between friendship and alliance, the difference between good and absolute good, the difference

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<sup>1</sup>New Statement, 31 January, 1997

between fighting to conquer and fighting to defend your own nation and motherland.

There are numerous interesting factors to be explored in J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece, "The Lord of the Rings". The one interesting factor we will be focusing on is the theme of friendship, which is an important underlying theme throughout the books. In order to explore the theme, it is vital to examine what characteristics different friendships have in common in Tolkien's books. Tolkien himself seems to have valued friendship very highly, and there are certain elements which he seems to have emphasised as important factors in such relationships throughout his life. Thus by comparing Tolkien's own views regarding friendship to the relationships in the books these factors are revealed.

All of Tolkien's friendships in "The Lord of the Rings" are grounded in honesty, loyalty and mutual respect, but are also quite diverse and complicated. Therefore it is important to consider how these friendships relate to male-bonding, master-servant relationships and the shared quest. Firstly, Tolkien's past seems to have influenced the friendships in his books, as there are definitely some similarities between relationships and incidents in Tolkien's life, and certain scenarios in the books. Secondly, some master-servant relationships in the books are extraordinary and involve friendship based on loyalty and mutual respect.

All the main friendships in the books, no matter how diverse and complicated they are, share the fact that they are based on love, loyalty and mutual respect. Therefore the theme of friendship in Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" is quite interesting to explore in relation to these elements.

The first and the most important relationship between friends – which is also the topic of this chapter – is the friendship between the two hobbits, Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee of the Shire. Originally this friendship is of master-servant relationship as Sam is Frodo's gardener and he frequently addresses to Frodo as his master. Nevertheless, this point loses its basis at the very beginning of the first

book of the trilogy, where Sam makes a choice of embarking on a dangerous journey with Frodo to Rivendell, the house of Elves to take the One Ring:

*‘Sam fell on his knees, trembling. “Get up, Sam!” said Gandalf. “I have thought of something better than that. Something to shut your mouth, and punish you properly for listening. You shall go away with Mr. Frodo!’*

*“Me, sir!” cried Sam, springing up like a dog invited for a walk. “Me go and see Elves and all! Hooray!” he shouted, and then burst into tears.’<sup>1</sup>*

Although, it is true that except for the loyalty to his master, Sam is also driven by the desire to meet Elves and fear before Gandalf for eavesdropping on their conversation about this same ring. However, Sam chooses on his own will to go with Frodo both at the beginning and when he joins the Fellowship of the Ring, a council of nine people who swear to protect the ring and take it to the Mount Doom:

*“But you won’t send him off alone surely, Master?” cried Sam, unable to contain himself any longer, and jumping up from the corner where he had been quietly sitting on the floor.*

*“No indeed!” said Elrond, turning towards him with a smile. “You at least shall go with him. It is hardly possible to separate you from him, even when he is summoned to a secret council and you are not.”<sup>2</sup>*

Throughout the novel Sam proves to be the most honest and loyal friend to Frodo. After pointing out why this friendship is different from those of other characters in the book, we will witness why exactly this relationship is the incarnation of absolute good and why I have chosen it as the focus of the work.

Except for Frodo and Sam’s, there is friendship between three more pairs of vital characters of the novel: between Merry and Pippin, the hobbits; the dwarf, Gimli and the elf, Legolas; the man, Aragon and the wizard, Gandalf. These are the

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.229

<sup>2</sup> The same source, p.231

representatives of good in the “Lord of the Rings”, the members of the Fellowship of the Ring. These relationships embody in themselves the true concept of friendship that Tolkien puts forward: they are based on loyalty, honesty, mutual respect and the pursuit of absolute goodness. There is no betrayal, no search for power, or no untruthfulness between them.

Essentially, the friendship between Gimli and Legolas is very important to observe. It is first born with hatred between the races of elves and dwarves, the long-lasting enmity, which is fully described in “The Hobbit”<sup>1</sup>. At the beginning of the novel both heroes disrespect each other, and Gimli reminded Legolas how they treated him:

*“You were less tender to me,” said Gimli with a flash of his eyes as old memories were stirred of his imprisonment in the deep places of the Elven-King’s halls.*<sup>2</sup>

However soon after fighting along each other, Legolas and Gimli become very close friends, as they come to understand that they have the same purpose – to overcome evil; and as the novel progresses, they are already prepared to give their lives for each other and the hostile attitude at the beginning completely vanishes and is replaced with valour and deep veneration towards each other:

*“At last all such things must end,” he said, “but I would have you wait a little while longer, for the end of the deeds that you have shared in has not yet come. A day draws near that I have looked for in all the years of my manhood, and when it comes I would have my friends beside me.” But of that day he would say no more.*<sup>3</sup>

Merry and Pippin have known each other all their lives and their friendship has never been broken. They grew up together, they did things together and they

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Hobbit. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1973, p.331

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.249

<sup>3</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Hobbit. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1973, p.188

will fight together. However, this friendship is very different from that of Frodo and Sam, at least in the fact that they do not really understand the whole seriousness of the journey they are embarking on:

*“I don’t wonder,” said Merry, “and I wish you could. But we are envying Sam, not you. If you have to go, then it will be a punishment for any of us to be left behind, even in Rivendell. We have come a long way with you and been through some stiff times. We want to go on.”*

*“That’s what I meant,” said Pippin, “We hobbits ought to stick together, and we will. I shall go, unless they chain me up. There must be someone with intelligence in the party.”<sup>1</sup>*

Although they are true to each other, they seem to take this quest lightly, just as their friendship. They seem to be friends for the sake of friendship. For Tolkien, it is an ideal type of friendship; it is what he values; it is what he tries to preserve during those horrible years of war both in Middle Earth and modern Europe. However, this friendship does not represent the theme of this work, where true friendship is tested against the power of Sauron, the Dark Lord<sup>2</sup>.

In comparison with Merry and Pippin, Gandalf and Aragon have a completely different attitude toward each other. Their friendship resembles to that of Gimli and Legolas, the one which is fraught with honesty, loyalty and deep respect to each other. They are ready to support and entrust with their lives, but they are very different from each other in many aspects. And Aragon is very moved when he sees Gandalf after his return:

*“Gandalf!” he said, “Beyond all hope you return to us in our need! What veil was over my sight? Gandalf!”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.231

<sup>2</sup> Carpenter, Humphrey. Tolkien: A Biography. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2001, p.149

<sup>3</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Two Towers. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.194

However despite the differences between them, this relationship resembles more to Frodo and Sam's friendship in various ways, the main aspect being the ability to withstand evil, which is why its importance follows Frodo and Sam's.

In contrast with these relationships, there are three more friendships that prove why the qualities described above are essential in the victory of good over evil. These friendships fail to exist mainly due to the corruption and the desire for evil. The first one of these is friendship formed between Frodo and Gollum, the creature which once was a hobbit-like creature and had owned the One Ring for over five hundred years. Frodo trusts the good soul of Gollum, he believes he can change him, but Gollum's desire for the ring – the embodiment of evil in the novel – betrays Frodo in the end, almost leading Frodo to his death. He leads Frodo to the lair of Shelob the Great, an ancient arachnid of the mountain:

*'But she must eat, and however busily they delved new winding passages from the pass and from their tower, ever she found some way to snare them. But she lusted for sweeter meat. And Gollum had brought it to her.*

*"We'll see, we'll see," he said often to himself, when the evil mood was on him, as he walked the dangerous road from Eryn Muil to Morgul Vale, "we'll see. It may well be, O yes, it may well be that when She throws away the bones and the empty garments, we shall find it, we shall get it, the Precious, a reward for poor Sméagol who brings nice food. And we'll save the Precious, as we promised. O yes. And when we've got it safe, then She'll know it, O yes, then we'll pay Her back, my precious. Then we'll pay everyone back!"<sup>1</sup>*

Whether Gollum does this willingly or unwillingly, his heart and soul have already been corrupted by the evil of the ring. There is no redemption for him, notwithstanding Frodo's ceaseless efforts.

Similar to this is Saruman and Gandalf's friendship, friendship initially full of veneration and mutual service. Nonetheless, Saruman, like Gollum, becomes

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Return of the King. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.227

absorbed by the ring and the power it can give. An ambassador of good for so many years turns into a slave of evil, again for his soul is corrupted by it. This eventually urges him to attempt to kill Gandalf, his long-lasting friend:

*'He was cold now and perilous. 'Yes,' he said. 'I did not expect you to show wisdom, even in your own behalf; but I gave you the chance of aiding me willingly and so saving yourself much trouble and pain. The third choice is to stay here, until the end.' 'Until what end?' 'Until you reveal to me where the One may be found. I may find means to persuade you. Or until it is found in your despite, and the Ruler has time to turn to lighter matters; to devise, say, a fitting reward for the hindrance and insolence of Gandalf the Grey.'*<sup>1</sup>

The third alliance, rather than friendship, however differs considerably from the former two. This relationship between Sauron and Saruman, where both are completely devoured by evil and end up betraying each other, shows us the real difference between the true idealistic friendship described by Tolkien and a mere alliance for the purpose of power over the world.

Having observed these complex and various types of friendships, it is important now to observe how Frodo and Sam's relationship varies from these. Although the friendships between Gimli and Legolas, Merry and Pippin, Aragon and Gandalf represent the values such as honesty, loyalty and mutual respect and they are the defendants of good, they do not fully have what it takes to create the absolute good which can be powerful enough to conquer the evil engendered by Sauron and Saruman. And though seemingly the main fight between the legendary powers of evil and good happens in Minas Tirith, where the armies of Men and Mordor face each other, the decisive fight and victory takes place in the Mount Doom, in Mordor itself, where Frodo and Sam are about to throw the ring into the volcano.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.189

What is then so special about Frodo and Sam's friendship and why does it have enough power to cause such a cataclysmic event? It all comes to the point when it is essential to tell the difference between good and absolute good, between friendship and alliance.

Men, Elves, Dwarves, Wizards and Hobbits are the representatives of good and virtue. These peoples are inherently honorable and righteous. They never war against one another and always support one another in battles. And in this novel they are united to fight against the evil of Sauron, not only to overcome him, but most importantly fight for Middle Earth, for their land. However they may be the allies of good, they are not absolute good, that is they have the courage and honor it takes to win the battle, but they do not possess what it takes to win Sauron himself, as it is not Sauron's army that causes threat, but his ability to corrupt the souls of men. He accomplishes it through such a small, but a very symbolic thing as a ring, the symbol of greed for power and wealth. None of the characters have the strength to resist the power of the ring, except for Frodo and Sam.

If we go back for a moment to the very beginning of the novel, to the forging of the great ring, Tolkien tells us that except this One Ring, nineteen more rings were created: nine for the race of Men, seven for the race of Dwarves and three for the race of Elves. All these peoples were deceived into believing that they were in control of their fate, however soon they lost their souls to the evil of the One Ring and Sauron.

At the time of the novel, all the characters prove to be unworthy to possess the ring: Gandalf is afraid to take the ring and he urges Frodo not to tempt him<sup>1</sup>, because he knows it will corrupt him, Galadriel, one of the Elven queens, has the same fear<sup>2</sup>. They both fear that the Ring will do great evils through them. Aragon, the heir of Isildur, is unsure of his ability to govern Gondor, although it is his

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.336

<sup>2</sup> The same source, p.339

rightful throne, and his possession of the Ring is out of the question. Boromir, Gollum and Saruman have already been corrupted by the ring and paid their lives for it. Even Bilbo Baggins, Frodo's uncle, the one who found the Ring in the first place, in the end becomes dependent upon the ring and he even snaps back at Gandalf when he offers help:

*'Bilbo flushed, and there was an angry light in his eyes. His kindly face grew hard. "Why not?" he cried, "And what business is it of yours, anyway, to know what I do with my own things? It is my own. I found it. It came to me." "Yes, yes," said Gandalf, "But there is no need to get angry." "If I am it is your fault," said Bilbo, "It is mine, I tell you. My own. My precious. Yes, my precious.'*<sup>1</sup>.

Only Frodo and Sam are uncorrupted by it throughout the book and it is their friendship and the absolute good in their souls that saves them from it. Thus, one can come to the conclusion that the good differs from the absolute good by the pureness and uncorruptedness of the soul.

Frodo and Sam's friendship, originated first from the master-servant relationship grew to the level when they become one whole in the end. When they are in the dominion of evil, when they are climbing the mountain which will lead to Mount Doom, it seems as though there are not two, but one person. This immeasurable trust and love towards each other created an unbreakable union which engendered the absolute good, strong enough to defeat Sauron and his evil. It is not understandable why Tolkien chose Hobbits for this great role, but precisely this people was the one he entrusted this task.

Another main reason why the good wins over evil in the novel is connected with honor that is persistent in the friendship in its bigger notion, among peoples as in whole. When closely analysed there is a substantial difference between friendship, depicted in the relationship of people, and the alliance among the forces of evil. It clearly shows how important and crucial are the qualities such as honor

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.123

and respect, which the forces of evil are devoid of. Tolkien shows how real friends support each other no matter what situation arises, and how allies are ready to betray one another whenever it suits them. This plays a crucial role in the outcome of the war between the men of Minas Tirith and those of Mordor. The riders of Rohan leave their kingdom in danger to join the forces of Gondor, to defend Gondor<sup>1</sup>. Elves, who usually keep to themselves, come as well to the aid of Men both to the Helm's Deep and to Minas Tirith<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, the forces of evil are always ready to gnaw each other, to take what they think is theirs and flee when they feel danger.

This valour reveals itself in many ways and in various scenes in the book. The first time it is seen in the formation of the Fellowship of the Ring in the house of Elrond<sup>3</sup>. Nine members from five different races embark on a journey to protect the ring from the minions of Sauron, the Nazgul, and to destroy it in the fires of the Mount Doom, where it was forged, the only place it can be destroyed. One Wizard, one Elf, one Dwarf, two Men and four Hobbits set off on this quest, notwithstanding their differences and solely on their own will. At any point they have an opportunity to abandon the quest, however they are ready to fight to death to protect the ring-bearer Frodo. But the power of the ring is strong and the first one to be seduced by it is Boromir, the future steward of Gondor. He tries to take it away from Frodo, but he fails. At this point we see how his honor prevails and he gives his life to protect Frodo and Sam, proving that the good in him is still stronger than the evil. As an antithesis to this is the scene where a group of orcs fight one another over food and this lack of respect to one another soon brings them to their death<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Return of the King. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.199

<sup>2</sup> The same source, p.201

<sup>3</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Two Towers. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.257

<sup>4</sup> The same source, p.261

Another example can be a scene where Gandalf sacrifices his life to save those of the other members of the fellowship. He fights with Molrog in the mines of Moria and dies defending them<sup>1</sup>. And again on the opposite is Saruman, who simply locks himself into his tower and leaves his army to die when the Ents, ancient trees attack upon them<sup>2</sup>.

There are many examples of valour on the side of good and treacherous behavior on the side of evil, which proves the point that alliance is not always composed of honor and respect, but sometimes of fear; and that evil does not always honor its alliance, while for good it is of utmost importance in unity.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.221

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Two Towers. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.348

## **2. The legendary exploits of Men in the final fight by Minas Tirith**

There are four main battles described in the “Lord of the Rings”. The purpose of this part of the thesis work will be to focus mainly on the third and most important battle between good and evil by Minas Tirith, Gondor. However, for the sake of implementing the point a few words will be said about the first battle as well. Two main questions that are the core of the point are whether there is a tangible difference between fighting to conquer and fighting to defend and how the exploits of good will matter in the outcome of the war.

As it was said it is important to browse through the first battle that led and eventually helped the good win over the evil forever. The battle takes place in Helm’s Deep between the orcs of Saruman, the Wizard and the people of Rohan. In this scene, the orcs attack the White Tower, the heart of Rohan’s kingdom and the last refuge for the Rohirrim. This fight serves perfectly to delineate the first question of the point about whether there is any difference between fighting to defend your native land and fighting to conquer and broaden your kingdom. In this battle, Saruman’s sole purpose is not simply to accumulate his territory, but to wipe out the race of humans from the face of the earth. The amount of evil he inspires into his soldiers is so overwhelming that it turns them into merciless assassins. The only thing they desire is to kill, no matter who it is, a child, a woman or a man. They have only two motives: to please their master – mostly out of fear – and to destroy everything on their way, so they are governed by fear and violence<sup>1</sup>.

On the other side, there are the people of Rohan the noble fighters and defenders of their fatherland. Their only purpose is to protect their land and their families. Although their hope is strongly shaken by the sheer number of the enemy, they are prepared to fight till the end. The valour in them is so exemplary that even

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Two Towers. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.367

Elves come to their aid and plead their allegiance to them. It is of utmost significance to observe the attitude of the good in this scene, the way they behave and fight, the choices they make and the feelings they go through. One can witness that the protection of your land does not only mean to withstand the enemy, but also to withstand the evil. Even right before the end of the battle, when all hope is lost and when the king Theoden is almost prepared to give up, he regains his courage and wants to ride out with his remaining soldiers to face the evil in the open battle and his speech at this point is spectacular:

*“The end will not be long,” said the king. “But I will not end here, taken like an old badger in a trap. Snowmane and Hasufel and the horses of my guard are in the inner court. When dawn comes, I will bid men sound Helm’s horn, and I will ride forth. Will you ride with me then, son of Arathorn? Maybe we shall cleave a road, or make such an end as will be worth a song, if any be left to sing of us hereafter.”<sup>1</sup>*

At this point Tolkien introduces, for a fleeting moment, a new theme, the theme of light. As light is commonly taken to be the signature of good, Tolkien consciously or unconsciously brings it out as a martial maneuver. When Gandalf, the wizard, comes to the aid of Rohan at the end of the battle, he and his army come down a mountain. As it is a dawn, the sun rises behind them and the illusion is as if they were coming right out of light, and this light strikes the orcs before the swords of their enemies<sup>2</sup>. Panic overwhelms the enemy and they start to flee as fast as they can.

If digression of this sort can be pardoned, a few words about the importance of traditional elements of good and evil should be mentioned. The classic good is almost always depicted with a white colour, that is the colour of light, while the classic evil is with black, the colour of darkness. Many truly good things are given

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Two Towers. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.219

<sup>2</sup> The same source, p.221

the colour of white in “The Lord of the Rings”: Gandalf’s clothes – which interestingly change into white with the progress of the novel, making him one of the true representatives of good – and the colour of Gondor, the White Tower. On the opposite side, the garments of Nazgul, the servants of Sauron all wear black and Mordor, although it is a scenery, is always in darkness. However, most interestingly are depicted the robe of Saruman: it changes colour meaning his treacherous nature and he himself starts calling himself Saruman of Many Colours<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, when comparing these two armies in Helm’s Deep and considering their attitude to war and their purpose of fighting, one clearly sees the features which define good and evil, which separate one from the other. These same features help us distinguish those who to fight to vanquish from those who fight to protect what is theirs.

Now the main battle we are going to observe represents so many important values that make up the concept of good, or rather absolute good. This battle’s setting is the city of Men, Gondor or as it was already mentioned – the White Tower. This is the only place that still haunts Sauron, the only place he fears, and he thus accordingly sends his whole power to attack the city<sup>2</sup>. It was Men who stopped Sauron in the earlier age and sent him to crouch in the darkness for centuries and he had a personal vendetta to them. It was Isildur, the king of Gondor, who depraved Sauron of his Ring and power, and now he was to face Isildur’s heir, Aragon. The battle in terms of its volume takes up half of the third book of the trilogy and it is one of the most decisive moments in the novel. Here three armies of the good face the total strength of Sauron: the army of Men from Gondor under Gandalf, the army of Rohan under Theoden and the army of the dead, who once gave an oath to Isildur himself but escaped and have since been on

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.264

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Return of the King. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.149

this earth, under Aragon. The army of Sauron consists of all the evil possible starting from orcs to trolls, giants and warrior elephants. Despite the sizes of the armies and the volume it takes in the novel, the battle itself lasts less than two days.

However, it is not the length of the war but its values and messages that matter to us. Firstly, we come again to the discrepancies of good and evil in fighting, how evil in our case fights to conquer and wipe out all other races from the face of the earth and how good fights to protect their land from these evils. The same situation can be observed here: the evil is motivated only by fear and hatred towards everything that is not its like. The armies of Sauron march to Gondor blindly with no purpose but for these two motives. On the other hand, the armies of good fight with a purpose, the purpose of freeing the Middle Earth from all the evil that is there, to protect this realm from Sauron. Their aims are noble and it is the main virtue of good.

One important point should be taken into consideration while discussing this matter. The last battle between good and evil takes place not in the domain of good, but in Mordor itself. This might seem that good is also attacking to conquer, however the cause is absolutely different. After the battle in Gondor and the escape and loss of the army of Sauron, the leaders of all races hold a council in the White Tower to discuss their further action<sup>1</sup>. Despite being victorious in this battle, they know that until the Ruling Ring is destroyed they are under mortal threat by Sauron. By that time they guess that Frodo and Sam are near the Mount Doom and there is an enormous league of orcs between them and the volcano. At this point the council decides to go on to the last battle against Sauron, not to conquer or destroy him, but to distract him and lure out his army from the Mount Doom. They know for sure that their armies are too weak and they are facing death with this exploit, however they are ready to sacrifice their own lives to enable a passage for

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Return of the King*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.421

Frodo to destroy the Ring. This utterly refutes the supposition that the good in this scene is fighting to conquer or that its act has any resemblance to that of the evil.

The second point of the work is the bravery and exploits of the Free People of the Middle Earth in this battle. From the start of the battle when the steward of Gondor, gone mad by the death of his sons, orders them to abandon their posts and flee for their lives, the soldiers hold to their posts and are willing to fight till their death. Simultaneously, the armies of Sauron are ready to flee when they see chunks of stones being thrown at them from the White Tower, however stopped by their captain. This element of contrast between evil and good is ever present in the novel, as there is no doubt that Tolkien wants to delineate clearly these features.

A little later when hope is lost and orcs are already in the city and there is no sign on Rohan, men of Gondor, under the leadership of Gandalf, stand fast to the defense of the inner city. This bravery is the only thing that stops evil from completely destroying the tower and stalls them until Rohirrim come. As soon as Theoden comes, the orcs and trolls seeing the number and outcry of theirs, flee hastily only saved by giant warrior elephants and the Nazgul<sup>1</sup>.

Notwithstanding all these exploits of men in this battle, one act is considerably more decisive to this battle than any other. This act, however, is not done by a man or elf, it is done by a woman and a hobbit. When the lord of Nazguls, the Witch King of Angmar, strikes Theoden and on the verge of killing him, Theoden's niece Eowyn protects him and with the help of Merry kills the Nazgul. It is in its nature a singular exploit as Angmar according to the legend cannot be killed by any man and he is the deadliest servant of Sauron. This is a strong blow to Sauron and he is weakened considerably by his servant's death. However, at the same time Angmar is not simply a servant, but also the true representative of evil in this particular battle, as his death fills the other soldiers

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Return of the King*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.134

with horror and they are about to flee. Thus, Eowyn's exploit changes the course of the battle to the advantage of good<sup>1</sup>. Here Eowyn brings forth another World War I archetype: the warrior-woman, modeled on Joan of Arc<sup>2</sup>.

The last, but also a very important exploit belongs to the dead men summoned by Aragon. At the time of the first war against Sauron over two thousand years ago, these men swore to fight for Isildur, however fled out of fear and hid in the mountains. At that point Isildur accursed them to live in this state until they fulfilled their oath to Gondor and since then these men have been at the state of unrest, their souls unable to leave earth. Now Isildur's heir, Aragon summons them to fight for Gondor once more and finally fulfill their promise. These warriors dishonorable in life eventually become honorable in death and their exploits are legendary for the course of the battle, as without them the battle might have ended with the victory of evil.

All these exploits, bravery, honour are the most important elements of the work and they are decisive in the victory of good over evil. Without these qualities the good would not be able to defeat Sauron's army and thus the evil would rule over the land. At the same time, due to being devoid of these features, the evil does not have the strength to change anything in the battle.

Yet despite these all deliberations about the qualities and strength of the good, a strange atmosphere still persists in the novel – namely, that there is a strain of dualism at work in Tolkien, that he gives evil a power virtually equal to that of the good, and thus that his epic fantasy is so gloomy in its final tone. It is certainly true that there is no real eucatastrophe in Tolkien's great work – no catastrophic ending in which, though much is destroyed, good totally triumphs. Sauron the Sorcerer, the malign fashioner of the one Ruling Ring, is indeed defeated, and Middle-earth is wondrously spared his continuing depredations. Yet we are told

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Return of the King*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.124

<sup>2</sup> Drout, Michael D.C. *Rings, Swords, and Monsters: Exploring Fantasy Literature*. Course Guide. Recorded Books, LLC, 2006, p.34

that Sauron will assume some new and more sinister form in the future. The appendices reveal, in fact, that the Fourth Age, the age of men, proved to be hardly a better time than the Third Age of wizards and elves<sup>1</sup>. The novel's penultimate episode is also quite muted in its cheer, as Gandalf and Frodo depart for the Grey Havens in sheer exhaustion from their struggle, far too wounded to enjoy the fruits of their victory. It is a scene that only the hard-hearted can read without tears, and the sadness is hardly offset by Sam's welcome back to Hobbiton<sup>2</sup>. No wonder that C. S. Lewis spoke of the enormous darkness of Tolkien's work. John Garth's recent study of Tolkien's devastating losses from the First War also underscores the fundamental tone of sadness pervading the whole of Tolkien's work<sup>3</sup>.

To summarize, although Tolkien was deeply influenced and disturbed by the events in his own life and there is an apparent doom ringing in his great masterpiece "The Lord of the Rings", the work itself through thorough analysis reveals a great number of elements that are still truly optimistic. These elements eventually make the novel the true archetype of modern fantasy, that is, the fantasy that gives people hope and belief in a better future. These elements are bravery, honesty and unity against the evils of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Return of the King*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p.328

<sup>2</sup> The same source, p.331

<sup>3</sup> Garth, John. *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005, p. 224.

## CONCLUSION

Fantasy genre has seen a truly tremendous amount of alterations and modifications throughout its development. It was first generated as a legendary, mythical form of literature in the hands of such literary giants as Homer and Ovid. Then it passed through the pens of the authors of the fantastic Beowulf, Arthurian Legends and came to an apparent halt at the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However at those particular periods it was ubiquitously accepted as a real type of fiction, fiction that depicted existing monsters and other creatures of this sort roaming the earth. At about the 18-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the picture would change as it took a new shape, turning into modern fantasy genre where harsh realistic and romantic views made it look a slightly less serious genre. The audience of critics and readers started treating fantasy genre as fairy tales and as of the worlds as far as possible from reality. This state of things had continued up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when such great authors as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien showed a completely another side of Modern Fantasy. C.S. Lewis with his books for children thoroughly altered the conventional view about literature for children and his success was almost unsurpassed in this matter, until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the appearance of J.K. Rowling on the literary stage. However, the greatest influence on the fantasy genre was unquestionably brought by J.R.R. Tolkien, who did not just change children's literature, but also made it acceptable by adult readers.

The debut of Tolkien was his novel "The Hobbit" which although had many conventional monsters and creatures, also introduced a new world that Tolkien would continue in his "Lord of the Rings". Tolkien's desire was not simply to write a successful novel, but to create an epic for English literature, which, one might say, was more than successful. He managed to create a whole new world with its detailed history and geography. He was the first person to turn Modern Fantasy genre into a successful epic.

While doing research, two main aspects of Modern Fantasy needed clarification: firstly, how modern fantasy is different from the older, more ancient form of it, and secondly what are the characteristics of this genre in contrast with other genres which bear some similar features of fantastic in their core. As previously mentioned, the main discrepancy between the two forms of fantasy is in their perception by society, that is, how these fantastic elements are true to reality according to the readers. While they both share the same unearthly creatures, people see these particular creatures as unreal nowadays and in the past they were accepted as quite commonplace, mainly due to the religious manifestation and lack of scientific analysis of the phenomena. Concerning the differences between the fantasy and other genres with fantastic elements in them, the dissertation gives a detailed explanation as how to differentiate them.

Alongside with these, the history and development of the fantasy genre are given in some details with the examples from different authors starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present. Among the most prominent figures of the genre Lloyd Alexander, Ursula K. Le Guin, J.R.R. Tolkien, Patricia Wrede, David Anthony Durham, C.S. Lewis and J.K. Rowling are worth mentioning. The works of these authors transformed fantasy genre into a somewhat familiar trend for us.

Despite the objections of many critics of the new criticism, and in fact Tolkien himself, about the relationship of an author's life and his work, we can observe many repercussions of Tolkien's life experience on his masterpiece "The Lord of the Rings". The eminent mood of doom is ever present throughout the novel, as heroes fight against the evils of Dark Lord Sauron. Tolkien's experience of war and bitter childhood, his enmity towards evil are clearly manifested and notwithstanding his attempt to disguise this, we can with some effort to associate them with some situations in the book.

However, at this point it is important to mention that Tolkien did try to create an escapist world, which was one of the most important factors that distinguished him among all other writers. He created a world where adults could

relax at least for some time from their everyday lives. This eternal theme of good wins evil was very important at the time throughout the world, as people had just been through the two world wars and a cold war, and they needed to escape from this for some time.

Concerning the novel itself, two main aspects of it were discussed in the dissertation work: the importance of true friendship between the two main characters, Frodo and Sam, in defeating the evil Sauron and the outstanding exploits of people during the legendary battles between good and evil for virtue. Relating to the first aspect, Frodo and Sam's friendship is compared with others and it is shown that they stand out among the others by their absolute goodness and exceptional loyalty. The uncorruptedness of their souls decides the outcome of the novel and the battles, as it is trusted upon them to destroy the One Ring which is the source of all evil in the book. Tolkien managed to depict some truly exceptional features of human beings both of positive and negative kind. On one hand there is courage, patriotism, loyalty and pureness of a soul, and on the other is greed for power, betrayal and callousness, all features present even now in our world. This makes his characters diverse and very didactic to learn from.

The theme of war and the exploits done by people to protect their motherland and fight against evil is given a special place in the novel. Tolkien repeatedly displays these heroic deeds to point out how different it is to fight for your country, for your freedom and for equality, and to fight for greed of land and power. All of Tolkien's protagonists share the same qualities such as courage, loyalty and kindness, while his antagonists love violence, blood and are ruled by greed. The last plan of the dissertation mostly focuses on the decisive fight between good and evil in Minas Tirith, where good finally overthrows evil in a very impressive way.

In conclusion, Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" is an outstanding archetype of Modern Fantasy genre, as it has all the significant elements that are to be present in

a novel of this sort. All the efforts and battles of good versus evil pay off in the end, and evil is destroyed completely.

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