

Heroism "at a Pinch:"
The Story of the Structures
of Middle-earth

by

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A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfilment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
English

Waterloo, Ontario, 1988

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Abstract

Discussions of the heroic element in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* generally focus on Frodo and/or Aragorn. But Sam Gamgee is in some ways the best representative of the sort of heroism that Tolkien most admired, the heroism of the ordinary. Tolkien believed that ordinary people, doing their task with devotion and to the best of their abilities, are most deserving of admiration. This idea is rooted in his Christian beliefs, which hold that the servant is more to be honoured than the lord.

Tolkien has attempted, in *The Lord of the Rings*, to give this paradox concrete representation in a fictional world, and, despite the obvious problems and inconsistencies of doing so, has built this idea into the structures which form the book. This thesis makes use of three structural models to see how Tolkien accomplishes his objective. The first, the formal model, examines the overall shape of the story, using the scope of characterisation, historical sweep, and geographical expanse to provide the dimensions of that shape. The second, the oppositional model, is a treatment of Tolkien's use of the basic opposition between Good and Evil, and suggests that, though this opposition is the most obvious and ubiquitous, it is only the background for the primary story, which is the journey of Frodo and Sam. The third model is narratological, observing the effects of the way the tale is communicated on the tale itself. The final chapter is an attempt to draw some conclusions about the role of Sam Gamgee, based on the observations of the previous three chapters.

Acknowledgements

When a project takes as long as the following thesis, one accumulates a sizeable list of people to thank, for patience, if nothing else. The place to start is clear enough: my advisor, Dr. Neil Randall, was immensely helpful and encouraging and available throughout the whole project. The comments and criticisms of Dr. Gordon Slethaug and Dr. Michael Higgins were invaluable as well. And Diana Swart continued to live up to the legend that is growing around her.

Dana's support remained as a presence long after she left my office. Watching her go through all this first helped me to keep my own frustrations in perspective. For her friendship through the long summer I cannot thank her enough.

Thank you, Desh, for the hours of help on the computer.

The decision to attempt this project was made in England with Heidi's help. I thank her for that, and for the gift of the pewter Hobbit, which had its desired effect.

Lyle Dorset of the Wade Collection, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, helped me through a very difficult time, and I thank him. The decision to make use of the Collection itself was one of the best that I made during the process.

My many good friends at Conrad Grebel College helped me to continue to enjoy life, even at the worst times. To Val, who was always a source of strength and encouragement, I offer special thanks.

My sister Carol typed this thesis. For the hours she sacrificed to do so, and for the hours she saved me by doing so, I give her my love. Bruce, my brother, offered his computer and

helped out by solving all my "technical difficulties." Janice would have helped, I am sure, if she didn't live so far away.

My greatest thanks I keep for my parents, George and Sarah Reid, whose support took many forms, and whose love will never cease to amaze me. Without them, the project would have died in its infancy. So its completion is a monument (inadequate) to their love.

For Berg
whose love is always

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INTRODUCTION

If readers of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* were asked what the books were about, they might give any of several answers. But they would be very likely to include mention of Hobbits, rings, bad guys, perhaps a Wizard, and a journey or quest. They would likely agree that it is a heroic tale, but what that meant could be widely varied. Such is the nature of signification. Meaning is always elusive (illusive). The reader might be thinking simply that the story has a hero, and Frodo or perhaps Gandalf would come to mind. Perhaps the classical notion of heroism would set them thinking about the superhuman nature of some of the characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. To others "heroic" may suggest bombastic or overwritten prose.

It is clear at least that the meaning of "hero" is problematic. But it is also certain that Tolkien was of the opinion that the tale was about heroism (though the reasons for writing it were primarily linguistic),¹ not heroism of the classical model, but his own kind. For the heroes of Middle-earth are not superhuman, but almost subhuman. They are Hobbits, about whom he says

They are made *small* (little more than half human stature, but dwindling as the years pass) partly to exhibit the pettiness of man, plain unimaginative parochial man -- though not with either the smallness or the savageness of Swift, and mostly to show up, in creatures of very small physical power, the amazing and unexpected heroism of ordinary men "at a pinch". (158)

For Tolkien, the heroic is found in the ordinary. And, in this respect, Sam is the most consistent and heroic Ordinary Man.

¹Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981) 214, 219. All subsequent quotations in this introduction that are taken from this text are cited within the paper.

Heroism is a familiar concept for Tolkien, because it is fundamental to the early language and literature he studied. But Tolkien's perception of the concept was not informed by this literature only, but also by another mythology that was at least as much a part of him -- the Christian myth. Northrop Frye has made clear the similarities between the various mythologies, but despite those, there is, I think, a difference in emphasis between the Christian myth and many other mythologies. The classical hero is a super-human (more or less) whose people are in some danger (often a form of sterility) from some great force. The hero, therefore, opposes the force, vanquishing the enemy and saving his people.² The difference in the Christian myth (and it is important even though only a difference in emphasis and not in essential content) is that Christian heroism emphasizes not the greatness of the hero (the anagnorisis phase) but the smallness of the hero (the pathos phase). The focus of the Christian myth is the substitutionary death of its hero, not his resurrection. Though each is meaningless without the other, and therefore both are essential, Christians through the centuries have always paid more attention to the death than the resurrection (because that death makes our resurrection possible).

The notion that the smallest of the small are God's representatives on earth is closely related to this "death of the hero" theme. Though the central figure, Christ, achieves greatness through death and resurrection, and therefore becomes a champion of the poor, to his followers he offers no such guarantee. There is no promise that by being humble the follower of Christ will achieve a high position, one of superiority. Instead, the humble position itself is given value. In other words, giving away all that one has one does not guarantee wealth. Giving away all that

²Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) 186-192.

one has results only in poverty, which is itself a different kind of moral wealth.³ And this notion is clearly also emphasized by *The Lord of the Rings*. Ordinarity, as I will use the term, is the virtue of doing good without drawing attention to the fact. The classical hero has an exceptional history, is the subject of prophecies, is stronger than most of his opponents, and is the leader of his people. The ordinariness of the Christian hero is just the opposite. The poor, the weak, and the humble are Christian heroes; their goodness is accomplished so quietly that the good done by the right hand escapes the notice of the left (Matt. 6:3-4). The power of *The Lord of the Rings* is that, though it contains both classical and Christian traditions, it highlights the Christian hero, the average person. Its theme is that ordinariness is, in some way, especially blessed.

Of course, Tolkien runs into difficulties presenting this theme. That the small could be great and the great small is clearly paradoxical, and the problem of making a paradox concrete within a closed system is obvious. While in the case of the Hobbits, the small are in some sense great, and, in the case of Sauron, the great is small, many of the other characters do not either benefit or suffer under this paradox. Grishnakh is an Orc of relatively small standing, but this does not stand him in good stead. Rather, he is killed with all the others of his band by the Men of Rohan. Goldberry waits on Bombadil's table, but such a humble position does not mean any special blessing for her. The pinnacle of her exaltation is a platter of water lilies and some flattering remarks about her appearance and her voice. Gandalf, on the other hand, is of great stature at the beginning of the work, but his stature grows, rather than diminishes, as the book progresses.

³This is a rendering of the Christian myth that will not satisfy all readers. It represents, I think, the orthodox theology of centuries past, and, more important, the theology with which Tolkien would have been familiar. Liberation theology has, I acknowledge, affected the understanding of wealth and poverty.

Despite the problem of having greatness at times remaining great, and smallness at times remaining small, Tolkien does construct a story where the principle of heroic ordinariness is present and significant, if somewhat inconsistently. This thesis will present the view that the best representative of this "heroism of the ordinary" is Sam Gamage. Though it is tempting to see Aragorn as the classical hero, and Frodo as the ordinary hero, I will argue that Frodo rather moves from ordinariness into much the same sort of greatness as Aragorn displays. The character who remains behind in the ordinary world is Sam. Verlyn Flieger writes:

Although Frodo voluntarily assumes the burden of the Ring, he feels as if "some other will" is using him (FR, 354). He has a last supper with his followers before setting out on his journey. He suffers five wounds, one a blow in the side with a spear, one a laceration with thorns. He has a moment in the garden where he tries to relinquish his burden and be released from his destiny. He is betrayed by one of his followers. His way is dolorous, his ascent of the mountain painful; he is burdend [sic] with a heavy cross. His surrender of himself at the end is total.⁴

Though Flieger goes on to add that the identification with Christ is not complete, and that Frodo is given no consolation for his feats, in fact the identification is very nearly complete, and what Frodo is not given is the ability to go back into the ordinary world. He belongs with Elves in the West, not with Hobbits in the Shire.

This thesis will search out the theme of the ordinary hero in the structures upon which the tale can be said to be built. There is an undeniable arbitrariness in these chosen structures. That the story is built upon them is only arguable, not absolute. Thus, I have chosen three models from among, theoretically, an infinite number, because these three are, to my purposes, helpful. The three structural models are the formal, oppositional, and narratological models.

⁴Verlyn Flieger, "Missing Person," *Mythlore* 46 (Summer 1986): 14.

The formal model is named thus because of its concern with the shape of the tale. The concept of "shape" in connection with story requires some explanation. What is being measured in this chapter in order to determine the tale's shape is what might be called scope -- geographical scope, historical scope, the scope of the significance of the actions, and the range of characters involved. The idea for this chapter came from Diana Wynn Jones's "The Shape of the Narrative in *The Lord of the Rings*."⁵ Some additional help came from David Miller's "Narrative Pattern in *The Fellowship of the Ring*."⁶ In essence, this chapter takes their ideas, expands them somewhat, and applies them more extensively throughout the work. Tolkien writes of *The Lord of the Rings*:

This last great Tale . . . is seen mainly through the eyes of Hobbits: it thus becomes in fact anthropocentric. But through Hobbits, not Men so-called, because the last tale is to exemplify most clearly a recurrent theme: the place in "world politics" of the unforeseen and unforeseeable acts of will, and deeds of virtue of the apparently small, ungreat, forgotten in the places of the Wise and Great (good as well as evil). A moral of the whole . . . is the obvious one that without the high and noble the simple and vulgar is utterly mean; and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless. (160)

My first chapter is about that relationship between the simple and ordinary, and the noble and heroic.

The oppositional model forms the basis for the analysis of the second chapter. The idea for the chapter was triggered by a single phrase in Miller's essay.⁷ It came from the realisation that since the main action of the story is a quest, and a quest is a journey with some goal at the end, the story is structured on the possibility of forward movement. This movement has surrounding it

⁵Diana Wynn Jones, "The Shape of the Narrative in *The Lord of the Rings*," Robert Giddings, ed., *This Far Land* (London: Vision, 1983) 87-107.

⁶David Miller, "Narrative Pattern in *The Fellowship of the Ring*," *A Tolkien Compass*, Jared Lobdell, ed. (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1975).

⁷The phrase is ". . . cancel each other so that lesser powers may hold sway." See II, 5 below.

two forces in opposition to each other -- a force that supports its forward progress, and one that opposes it. Tolkien states it this way:

The story is cast in terms of a good side, and a bad side, beauty against ruthless ugliness, tyranny against kingship, moderated freedom with consent against compulsion that has long lost any object save power, and so on; but both sides in some degree, conservative or destructive, want a measure of control. (178-179)

Thus, the main action, movement, occurs in accordance with the state of this struggle between opposites. The primary opposition, expressed most obviously in a battle between two forces, is always the background; the progress of the Hobbits, expressed more subtly in tensions between love and hate, desire and ability, and so on, remains always the foreground.

The third model, the narratological, is an attempt to grapple with the effects the telling of the tale has on its significance. The chapter is based on the assumption that the way in which the narrative is constructed affects the overall impression it makes on the reader. The specific narratological model chosen for this work is Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*.

In her narratological model, Bal divides narrative into three levels-- fabula, story, and text.⁸ The fabula is a series of related events, the story is the way in which these events are told, and the text is the specific, finite reality, consisting of language signs. To apply the whole of Bal's theory to the whole of Tolkien's work would be an undertaking of vast proportions, and the result would be an unapproachable tome of mostly insignificant data. Selectivity is not only expedient, but unavoidable. Thus, I have limited the treatment in my third chapter to those aspects of narrative

⁸Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985), 4-5.

that have a significance for the subject at hand. Since my purpose is primarily thematic, the fabula and the story are the most pertinent aspects of the narrative, and those concerns that Bal labels textual are limited to a few comments on narrative voice.

The fourth chapter extracts the significance of the observations made in the previous three chapters into one coherent statement. For a paper that has attempted to that point to at least approach objectivity, the shift in tone will be noticeable. This chapter is unapologetically subjective, especially as it probes the effects of the story on the reader. The previous three chapters have built a somewhat stable platform to stand on, from which to plunge into this fourth chapter. Chapter four makes use of Tolkien's concepts of Escape, Consolation and Recovery, all of which are very much reader-centered notions. The goal is to show that there are indeed structural bases on which the thematic centrality of Sam Gamgee is constructed.

Tolkien has succeeded in creating a world striking in its consistency and detail, and almost magical in its ability to draw its readers into its secondary reality. The reasons for this are many. But at the centre of most of them is a Hobbit gardener named Sam. What follows is an exploration of how this character, in many ways the least significant, becomes in many other ways the most significant, and the vehicle through which the reader enters and, usually, enjoys her or his stay in Middle-earth.

THE FORMAL MODEL

The first of three models to be applied to *The Lord of the Rings* is one that, because of its primary concern with the overall shape of the tale, can be called the "formal model." It is purely descriptive, concerned only with what is there, and not, as the next chapter is, with how it works. This model approaches *The Lord of the Rings* with only a tape measure.

The scope of the activity of *The Lord of the Rings* is, at its beginning, narrow and parochial. The first chapter is set in its entirety within the borders of the Shire, and provides only hints that anything lies beyond its borders. There is reference to Bilbo's "remarkable disappearance and unexpected return"(FR, 39), and some oblique reference to elves and dragons, and reputed sightings of dwarves at Bag End. Gandalf makes an appearance, and the narrator makes a cryptic remark that though his "fame in the Shire was due mainly to his skill with fires, smokes, and lights," in fact "his real business was far more difficult and dangerous, but the Shire-folk knew nothing about it"(FR, 44). There is something out there beyond the Shire's borders, but the reader is concerned mainly with Hobbits at this point, and Hobbits do not know that area at all well. For them, those Hobbits are odd enough who live in a different part of the Shire, such as "Buckland, where folks are so queer"(FR, 41). And the great conflicts are between neighbours and in-laws and relatives such as the Sackville-Bagginses.

Tolkien has gone to great pains to make the Shire, and Hobbiton in particular, as provincial as possible. It is extraordinarily ordinary; it is everything dear and quaint and familiar and comfortable. From this beginning, the tale expands through the first five books, the world through the Hobbits' eyes getting ever larger in size and significance, until in the middle of the sixth book it

begins to narrow again. It ends where it began, at Bag End, this time with Sam instead of Bilbo. The shape, therefore, can be seen (two-dimensionally) as that of a ring. There is some usefulness to this linear model, for the story begins in the Shire, goes away, and comes back again. But there is a further, three-dimensional aspect to the story; it widens as it moves away and narrows again as it returns.

The first chapter is set in Hobbiton, the Shire, and the characters are, for the most part, Hobbits. The physical dimensions of the world are such that a Hobbit could probably walk across it in a single day. The widening begins in the second chapter where the reader is told of "rumours of strange things happening in the world outside," and "of the Enemy and of the Land of Mordor" (FR, 68). In this chapter the first instance occurs of a device that is used regularly throughout the tale -- the story within a story. Although the space-scope remains narrow, the entire chapter taking place at the Green Dragon and Bag End, the time-scope is widened and the events of the tale are set in history. As is often the case, this task falls to Gandalf. The majority of this second chapter is Gandalf's tale of the history of the Ring. This placing of the outside-narrated present events into a historical perspective has an effect that will be mentioned here and expanded later. It ends the light and at times humorous tone that the first chapter and the Green Dragon segment of the second chapter share with *The Hobbit*. This sense of history is never developed in *The Hobbit*. The entire tale, except for the tensions between Elves and Dwarves, is void of any specifically historical setting; it could have taken place at any point in the history of Middle-earth. But from the second chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*, the local story-line is a small piece, of a particular shape and colour, of the whole mosaic of the history of Middle-earth.

But at this point only the story within the story is broad. And though its existence pushes out on the boundaries of the story that contains it, the story-line itself is still narrow in scope and involves only a small number of Hobbits and a wizard. The third chapter begins to widen the space-scope (that is, the journey to Buckland begins) and, in an understated way, the scope of the significance of the events is widened as well. David Miller says of this first leg of the journey:

The first digression from the road leads the ring south through Woodyend across Stock Brook to Buckland. Its utility is largely expository. We begin with the ordinariness of a Hobbit in the familiar and thoroughly unmagical shire: before the ring arrives in Buckland, we have been gently introduced to both Black Riders and elves. We also learn that forces for good and evil, distant and vastly more powerful than a Hobbit, are concerned with Frodo's stewardship of the ring.⁹

This realisation of the significance of the Frodo-events occurs as a result of a meeting of Frodo and the Elves at the very moment necessary for Frodo to be spared from an encounter with a Black Rider and an abrupt end to the tale. The nature of this encounter with Evil, and the unexpected appearance of Good,¹⁰ carries on for the next few chapters, always widening (though at this point very slowly) the scope of the tale.

The encounter with Bombadil is the next significant event, marking a beginning and an ending. Diana Wynne Jones has effectively summarised both; the beginning of the remarkable vastness of history and geography that serves, no longer now strictly as background, but as active participant, is revealed, and the ending comes of the relatively safe, homely world of the Shire. It is

⁹David Miller, "Narrative Pattern" 101.

¹⁰ Throughout this thesis, "Good" and "Evil" appear frequently in both capitalised and uncapitalised forms. When the terms are being used to denote the two broad forces pitted against each other throughout the book, they will be capitalised. When they denote the morality of an action, they will be lower case. The exception to these rules is the second chapter, where they are used to denote the stature of the actor they describe. How this is done is explained in chapter two.

on the Barrow Downs "where Tolkien does, briefly, confront you with the scale of his narrative. Tom is near eternal. The bones in the Barrows are so old their deeds have been forgotten."¹¹

There also

is really the last time they are rescued [through unexpected intervention]. That comforting pattern, and the movement, ends with their doings at Bree, which is, not insignificantly, a town half of men and half of Hobbits. Men are now going to enter into the picture. The nursery tales, despite the cosy inn scene, are done with.¹²

This comment introduces the next important stop: the Inn at Bree. Here enters Aragorn, and, appropriately, he arrives *in cognito*. The tale is expanding in every way, but only gradually. For this reason, the only way for a character as grand as the King of Gondor to enter is as a vagabond, just as the only way a character of Gandalf's stature can participate is as a conjurer of tricks with fireworks. It is the first entry of Men, but it is more than that as well. It is, Richard Hughes suggests, "when the author discovers who Strider is and what he wants to do with him that *The Lord of the Rings* starts to assume its large but never baggy shape,"¹³ or, as Verlyn Flieger calls it, the "epic side."¹⁴ Only in the cryptic poem that goes with the name of Aragorn is this epic side suggested, but it is there. Not until the third volume will Aragorn's role in the epic become obvious, but already at Bree that role is visible in the prophetic poem and the elevating language in such phrases as "I am Aragorn son of Arathorn; and if by life or death I can save you, I will"(FR,232). The chapter entitled "Strider" is in many ways a microcosm of what happens in the story as a

¹¹Jones 92.

¹²Jones 92-3.

¹³Daniel Hughes, "Pieties and Giant Forms in *The Lord of the Rings*," *New Critical Perspectives*, eds. Neil D. Isaacs & Rose A. Zimbardo (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1981) 82.

¹⁴Verlyn Flieger, "Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of a Hero," *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*, Neil D. Isaacs & Rose A. Zimbardo (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1981) 46.

whole. It contains a movement from ignorance and suspicion toward knowledge and a loss of innocence. Aragorn's revelation is slow and, while eventually the Hobbits know that they have gained a friend, they have lost something as well -- the ability once and for all to see the boundaries of the Shire as the boundaries of the world, and to see their adventure as something difficult but manageable, local but important. Their quest is of universal significance, and, as Strider correctly suggests, impossible for them without his help. The nursery-tale has indeed ended.

The journey from Bree to Rivendell serves to reinforce the new knowledge that Strider has given to the Hobbits. The quest barely survives the assault of the Black Riders with Aragorn's help; without his help it would not have survived. In fact, the intervention of Glorfindel and his horse is required as well to get Frodo to Rivendell. Also reinforced in this section is the growing awareness that Frodo is at the centre of all this struggle, an awareness that will finally be given definite and concrete expression at Rivendell.

The second book starts much as the first one had, with a feast and a serious counsel at which yet more background information is revealed to the reader. But also, this book finally opens wide the scope of the tale, and the various peoples of Middle-earth who have slowly been revealed now become actors in the story-line instead of background, in much the same way that, earlier, Bombadil and the Barrow-wights brought history into the tale as an actor instead of background. Jones suggests that this happens in volume two, but the first step, the prelude to Jones's "choral movement," is here already in Book Two:

Volume II inaugurates what might be called the great choral movement. The scene widens enormously and the numbers of both enemies and friends suddenly multiply by hundreds. The scale of the story, which Tolkien has unobtrusively been preparing us

for, is now shown to be immense.¹⁵

At the Council of Elrond, all the peoples of Good in Middle-earth are represented, and the forming of the Fellowship of the Ring makes them active participants in the tale.

At the Council of Elrond a process begins of elevating Frodo to a super-Hobbit status. This, too, is a relatively slow process, but one of central importance to the topic of this thesis, for as this elevation takes place, the role that Frodo vacates is filled by Sam. This process will be developed further in the next chapter. For now, it is enough to note that the process has begun. The first concrete step in the process occurs when Boromir at the Council reveals Faramir's recurrent dream. In it a prophecy is spoken, and its last line foreshadows the rise to prominence of the Halfling (FR 322). Frodo has become the subject of prophecy, and shares a place, in this sense, with Aragorn and Gandalf. The end of the Council also reveals something about the change in Frodo:

An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice.

"I will take the Ring," he said, "though I do not know the way." (FR 354)

Tolkien's wording in this case is worthy of note. The idea that "some other will" was using Frodo is suggestive. The world inside Frodo has expanded to make room for greater powers, in the same way that the exterior world has expanded for races, armies and epic struggles. And Frodo's own words are different now as well. They are grander than a Hobbit's words, in stark contrast even to Bilbo's own words a few paragraphs before and Sam's a few paragraphs after:

"Very well, very well, Master Elrond!" said Bilbo suddenly. "Say no more! It is plain

¹⁵Jones, 98.

enough what you are pointing at. Bilbo the silly Hobbit started this affair, and Bilbo had better finish it, or himself. I was very comfortable here, and getting on with my book. If you want to know, I am just writing an ending for it. I had thought of putting: *and he lived happily ever afterwards to the end of his days*. It is a good ending, and none the worse for having been used before." (FR 352-3)

Sam's language is similar:

Sam sat down, blushing and muttering. "A nice pickle we have landed ourselves in, Mr. Frodo!" he said, shaking his head (FR 354).

The language in these discourses is reminiscent of the gossip at the Green Dragon -- colloquial, familiar. Frodo's speech, as illustrated by the words he chooses to accept the quest, is more now like Aragorn's than it is like the other Hobbits'. It is serious and weighty, and he is generally to the point where Bilbo and Sam tend to be wordy. Elrond summarises this change effectively when he says, "This is the hour of the Shire-folk, when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the Great" (FR 354). The tale has widened and elevated considerably since the long-expected party.

The narrative shape of the tale does not change considerably in the rest of the second book. There is one exception. To the end of book one, the forces of Good have been introduced in person, but the forces of Evil only in the Black Riders and the rumours and tales of the Council. In the Mines of Moria the Dark Power suddenly becomes a real force wielding real weapons. The impact of this introduction is powerful and terrifying. The Balrog's nature, like Aragorn's previously, is revealed slowly, and it looms as a dreadful presence, not quite defined, behind the scenes in Moria. When escaping from it costs the Fellowship the life of Gandalf, the final shreds of Shire-like innocence are gone forever.

At Amon Hen the Fellowship is broken in two and, with it, the tale is broken in two as well. This split action is important for many reasons; one is that it avoids the difficulty of holding together a grand epic tale and the immediately personal action of the Hobbits. One or the other would have to give way eventually to the other's domination. Neither of the two story lines that are begun at this point are completely epic or completely personal action. The battles that follow are vast and grand, but there are always Hobbits to keep the reader engaged.¹⁶ The action of Sam and Frodo is very local and restricted, yet the background knowledge of the purpose of the journey always reminds the reader of the universal significance of the action. But despite the fact that neither story is pure in that sense, the obviously different scope of the tales allows the two actions to carry on side by side without colliding, either destroying each other or having one swallowed up in the other. The story could not have gone on expanding toward epic proportions for much longer before Frodo would have to have expanded into a purely epic figure along with it. At the same time, as long as the tale centred on a still rather uninformed and unimpressive Hobbit, the epic side could not have developed full-blown. The split is expedient. Flieger calls these the epic/romance tale and the fairy tale, pinpointing Aragorn and Frodo respectively as the heroes of these tales:

If [a story] is romance or epic the hero will be of great stature, a larger-than-life Beowulf, or Galahad, or Arthur, or Sigurd. If it is a fairy tale he may be a common man like ourselves, the unlikely hero who stumbles into heroic adventure and does the best he can. . . .

In *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien has written a medieval story and given it both kinds of hero, the extraordinary man to give the epic sweep of great events, and the common man

¹⁶The battle at Helm's Deep is an exception, and I suspect that it is at least partly for this reason that it is one of the most difficult passages in which to maintain interest. Were it not for the grim game of Orc-heads in which Legolas and Gimli engage, and the fascination of the Ents, the passage would be entirely forgettable.

who has the immediate, poignant appeal of someone with whom the reader can identify.¹⁷

Though Frodo and Aragorn fit rather well into this distinction, the actual story line does not fit as well. In fact, the epic/romance is at times dominated by Gandalf more than by Aragorn, and, especially toward the end, it is Sam as much as Frodo with whom the reader identifies.

Although this split tale is expedient for Tolkien's purposes, it is a dangerous feat to attempt. One of the major triumphs of Tolkien is that he manages to keep both tales interesting (usually) and to maintain their significance, making only a few cross-references between the tales, and yet preserves a sense of a unified whole. Jones has suggested a perspective on this relationship:

Each major event has a firm viewpoint and solid substance. Things are visualized, and because Hobbits are present eating and drinking gets done. The overall effect is to show that huge events are composed of small ones, and . . . that ordinary people can get forced to make history -- forced by history itself.¹⁸

Though it is rarely stated explicitly, there remains always a sense that the epic tale is made up of small, individual, local actions, and that the tale of Frodo and Sam is a focused part of the larger history that is taking place in the background. The discussion Frodo and Sam have on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol about history as tale (TT 402-404) is one place where the idea is discussed openly. Here they see themselves as characters in the story of history, and they banter about their own relative importance in that tale. The contrast between the battles for Helm's Deep or Pelennor Fields and the battle that Sam and Frodo witness in Ithilien illustrates this idea: "He was glad that he could not see the dead face. He wondered what the man's name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart" (TT 335). There is no room for this kind of detail in the epic

¹⁷Flieger, "Frodo and Aragorn" 41.

¹⁸Jones 105-106.

tale. Yet the existence of this kind of detail in the small tale reinforces the idea that the epic is in fact made up of a whole army of small tales, all important, all a part of the whole. Somehow this relationship is enough to hold together the two stories.

The next significant change in the shape of the tales is that moment at which Gollum falls with his precious into the Cracks of Doom. The effect of this ending to the quest is to allow the great epic to collapse in upon itself and begin the process of narrowing again. For the few lines between Frodo's claiming of the Ring to the moment Gollum falls, the small story and the large intersect. The small story is the large one, and the large one is the small:

And far away, as Frodo put on the Ring and claimed it for his own, even in Sammath Naur the very heart of his realm, the power in Barad-dur was shaken, and the Tower trembled from its foundations to its proud and bitter crown. The Dark Lord was suddenly aware of him, and his Eye piercing all shadows looked across the plain to the door that he had made; and the magnitude of his folly was revealed to him in a blinding flash, and all the devices of his enemies were at last laid bare. Then his wrath blazed in consuming flame, but his fear rose like a vast black smoke to choke him. For he knew his deadly peril and the thread upon which his doom now hung.

From all his policies and webs of fear and treachery, from all his stratagems and wars his mind shook free; and throughout his realm a tremor ran, his slaves quailed, and his armies halted, and his captains suddenly steerless, bereft of will, wavered and despaired. For they were forgotten. The whole mind and purpose of the Power that wielded them was now bent with overwhelming force upon the Mountain. (RK, 269)

The moment the Ring is destroyed, the narrowing begins. Its destruction sets off an apocalyptic convulsion of Middle-earth, during which the scope of the tale diminishes as the Enemy and his land collapse. Sauron is the first to go, "a huge shape of shadow" that is blown away by the wind (RK 273). The battle outside the Black Gate comes to a quick end as well, for the forces of Evil "were flying and the power of Mordor was scattering like dust in the wind"(RK 273). A few pages into "The Field of Cormallen" the two stories merge again, for the first time since Amon Hen, as the Eagles and Gandalf snatch Frodo and Sam from the midst of the apocalypse.

The paring away of the epic splendour of the tale does not happen all at once. The process is only slightly faster than was the movement in the other direction. The celebration on the Field of Cormallen is in some senses as grand an event as any in the book, and it is only toned down slightly through being witnessed from Sam's perspective. "Many Partings" strips away the fellowship one or two at a time, each member going his own way until only the four Hobbits and Gandalf remain. While the group is still larger, their encounter with Saruman is indicative of the extent to which the tale has diminished in scale. Saruman, who at one time was one of the great players in the grand epic, is now a beggar scrounging for a pipeful of weed. Gandalf's comment, "I fancy he could do some mischief still in a small mean way" (RK 319) indicates that the epic is ended for good and that Evil is no longer so much a force as it is a cruel action.

The arrival of the five at The Prancing Pony marks the beginning of the last swell in the action. There is trouble in Bree, but it is of such a scaled-down kind that it creates no real tension. The battle between Good and Evil is over, and this struggle and the one to come in the Shire are the last spasms of the already-dead beast. The fight in Bree claims five lives rather than thousands, and instead of kings and heroes falling, the casualties include "poor Mat Heathertoes" and "little Tom Pickthorn" (RK 329). The scouring of the Shire is only slightly more serious, and Tolkien scatters the narrative with ironic passages in order to keep it from becoming too serious. He plays the reader's knowledge of what has gone before against the Shire Hobbits' lack of knowledge, to underscore the small-scale nature of the trouble in the Shire. The gaffer's entrance into the scene is an excellent example of this:

But I've a bone to pick with you, in a manner o' speaking, if I may make so bold. You didn't never ought to have a' sold Bag End, as I always said. That's what started all the mischief. And while you've been trapesing in foreign parts, chasing Black Men up

mountains from what my Sam says, though what for he don't make clear, they've been and dug up Bagshot Row and ruined my taters! (RK, 356-357).

But a battle ensues, this one costing nineteen Hobbits and seventy "ruffians." The description of the battle is brief, covering a single page and seems to have taken somewhat less than a single morning. Merry slays the leader again, but this Orc-man is no King of the Nazgûl. When the battle is over, the four Hobbits head to Farmer Cotton's house for a "late midday meal"(RK 360). In the death of Saruman the supernatural once again impinges on the natural Shire, like it did at Bilbo's birthday surprise at the beginning of the work:

To the dismay of those that stood by, about the body of Saruman a grey mist gathered, and rising slowly to a great height like smoke from a fire, as a pale shrouded figure it loomed over the Hill. For a moment it wavered, looking to the West; but out of the West came a cold wind, and it bent away, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing. (RK, 365)

The Hobbits are as uncomfortable as ever with anything that "isn't natural." With the departure of the Elves in the final chapter, the tale is in some sense reduced in scope again. Though the Elves have not been a part of the tale for some time, their presence in the background has given the world of the Shire a sort of supernatural backdrop. With their departure, little magic left in the world. It is the natural world. The story ends where it started, in Bag End, with only the owner having changed.

In the course of this narrowing shape one thing occurs that is important to note. Though all the characters in the fellowship grew in stature during the journey, those of them that do not disappear from the tale during "Many Partings" have a subsequent diminishing along with the tale. Even Gandalf, though he remains impressive in some sense, is by the time he turns south for his long visit with Bombadil once again the familiar, tired, old man that appeared at the beginning

of the tale. The one exception in all of this is Frodo. He never really approaches the limited stature he had at the beginning of the work. At the Field of Cormallen Frodo leaves behind for good the familiar, cozy Hobbit and steps into legend. Robert Kiely notes the following:

Most of the characters in the saga have long lists of real and assumed names. They also rename one another in repeated attempts to define relationships and to give substance to their changing judgements.¹⁹

In no character is this more obvious than Frodo. While Aragorn's new names reveal what he has been all along, Frodo's new names reveal what he has become. The lay of "Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom" indicates that Frodo's new place is in legend and ballad, and not really the Shire:

The conclusion of the narrative, the "happy" ending, seems thus to superimposed [sic] upon a tragedy The story seems to demand that Frodo plunge, with the ring, into the Crack of Doom. And in fact, not all of Frodo returns from Mordor: that can be seen in "The Scouring of the Shire." Frodo is no longer a whole Hobbit -- he has given up his Hobbitness.²⁰

Frodo knows himself that he cannot go back to life as usual:

There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest? (RK, 325)

He reinforces this later:

I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them. (RK, 376)

¹⁹Robert Kiely, "Middle Earth," *Commentary* 43 (Feb. 1967) 94.

²⁰David Miller, "Narrative Pattern" 100.

Sam is the character that must now fill Frodo's role. He can go back where Frodo cannot go. Even though Frodo on two occasions tries to raise Sam up to his side again, it never really works. On the stairs of Cirith Ungol Sam anticipates the story of Frodo that will become legend, and Frodo counters by suggesting that Sam belongs in the tale, too: "'But you've left out one of the chief characters: Samwise the stout-hearted'"(TT 404). As it turns out, at the Field of Cormallen the part about Samwise the stout-hearted is left out of the singing. Again, when Frodo encounters the gaffer he says, "'Indeed, if you will believe it, he's now one of the most famous people in all the lands, and they are making songs about his deeds from here to the Sea and beyond the Great River.'" The gaffer acknowledges this, but passes over it quickly and gets to what is really important: "It takes a lot o' believing," said the gaffer, "though I can see he's been mixing in strange company. What's come of his weskit? I don't hold with wearing ironmongery, whether it wears well or no" (RK, 357).

The tale ends small as it began. The tale has gone from a narrow, parochial beginning to a middle that is vast in terms of geographic scope and historical significance, and ends by collapsing down again to concerns local and personal. The responsibility of making it small again Tolkien gives to Sam.

THE OPPOSITIONAL MODEL

Having now looked at the overall shape of the tale, we turn to the basic binary structures that undergird it.²¹ This can be called the "oppositional model" because the tale as a whole is constructed upon a network of oppositional tensions, tensions which create elements of plot and characterisation significant to this thesis. If the first chapter stands at a distance and describes shape, this model takes the book apart piece by piece to examine the mechanics of its plot.

The starting point for this chapter is the Good/Evil opposition. The book is structured on a series of oppositions which in many cases have one representative from the Good side and one from the Evil side. The book breaks down very obviously into these two sides, and the tensions between them are the propulsion necessary to move the plot along. As a quest story, it is specifically this movement that is significant. Other elements, such as character and theme, are for the most part, rooted in plot. And, since this thesis studies Sam in particular, only those structures affecting his place will be studied.

Randal Helms identifies the structure of the first volume as one in which the protagonist repeatedly encounters opposition which is countered by a benevolent helper:

The two books are . . . structured according to the conventional pattern to be found in all works of quest romance. Northrop Frye has described the pattern in these terms: "as soon as romance achieves a literary form, it tends to limit itself to a sequence of minor adventures leading up to a major or climacteric adventure, usually announced from the beginning, the completion of which rounds off the story" (*Anatomy*, 196-87). In Book I there are six of these minor, or "preliminary" adventures, as I call them; each involves a

²¹This summary is based on an analysis by Randal Helms, "The Structure and Aesthetic of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*", *Mythcon I Proceedings* (4-7 September 1970), ed. Glen GoodKnight (Los Angeles: Mythopoeic Society) 5-8. To the end of this chapter all references to this work will be cited within the text.

major threat to the Ring and the Ringbearer, and in each, Frodo is saved by the providential appearance or action of an outside force or helper. (Helms, 5)

These six adventures are: the Black Rider in the Shire, Old Man Willow, the Barrow-wights, the encounter at Bree, the attack at Weathertop, and the escape at the Ford of Bruinen (Helms, 6). David Miller adds three more to this list,²² but the three are not direct encounters. The important aspect of this pattern is that whatever the danger the Hobbits encounter, the help that comes to them offsets it, and the story continues. "Each danger," Miller notes, "is total; a single failure would be final."²³ Thus, for the story to remain at all times interesting the balance between Good and Evil must remain at all times very nearly even, and for the story to move forward, the balance, when it does tip, must do so in favour of Good. The Hobbits (Good) encounter an Evil greater (in terms of strength, knowledge, magic, age, etc.) than they. That Evil is cancelled by the appearance of a matching Good, and the lesser Good -- the Hobbits -- may therefore continue on their way. In addition to being freed to move, in each case the Hobbits' knowledge of their world is expanded, and their innocence is reduced. Thus, by the end of the story the Hobbits have journeyed not only out of the Shire into Middle-earth and back again, but they have traveled out of innocence into experience, out of ignorance into wisdom, out of the natural world into the supernatural world.

The first adventure involves a Black Rider in the Shire who is sniffing for the Ring. He is chased away by the appearance of Gildor the Elf. This is a simple opposition between Good and

²²David Miller, "Narrative Pattern" 101-102. The three he adds are: the events surrounding Farmer Maggot, in which the Black Rider questions Maggot before the other Hobbits arrive; the escape to Buckland across the Brandywine, which even Miller admits to be vague; and the crossing of the Last Bridge over the River Hoarwell, where Black Riders had been driven off before the Hobbits and Strider arrived.

²³Miller, "Narrative Pattern" 102.

Evil, but it is important because it introduces the concepts of Good and Evil, not as properties to be distinguished on moral grounds, but as two large and opposing forces. This is what Middle-earth is like outside the Shire. Evil does nothing bad here, except sniff and crawl, and Good does nothing particularly good here, except sing and put the Hobbits up for the night. But the distinction is clearly drawn, and for the first time the Hobbits are introduced into a world where Good and Evil appear in absolute forms.

The other five adventures share in common with this one several aspects. They have representatives from two sides involved in a clash of some kind; the outcome of each opposition is that the Hobbits gain new insight that could be called a loss of innocence or a gaining of maturity; and, most significantly, though the Hobbits are in some sense at the centre of each encounter, they themselves are not much a part of it. The great flurry of activity storms around them, and they more or less crouch in the middle of it and wait for it to blow over.

The exception is Frodo. He has begun to take a part in these oppositions in a significant way in the last two adventures. This is a sign that Frodo is to become qualitatively different than the other Hobbits over the course of the story. Frodo will leave the Shire, the natural world, for the supernatural world, and will not be able to go back. For the other Hobbits, this is another "there and back again" journey. But Frodo's journey must end at the Grey Havens, not back in the Shire.

The second book is like the first in many of its structures, and unlike it in many other ways. There are two adventures similar to the six of the first book (Moria and Amon Hen). Of these the journey in the Mines of Moria is the central story. It is the first example of a pattern that repeats itself three times, once for each of the three main characters. In this pattern a character (first

Gandalf, then Aragorn, and finally -- and climactically -- Frodo) is forced underground and emerges changed into something greater than the character that first went underground. This first example is the story of Gandalf's journey through the underworld. Once again, in the depths of Moria, the structure recurs of powerful Good nullifying powerful Evil, thus allowing the tale to continue:

This digression anticipates, in miniature, the climax of the trilogy. Gandalf, like the ring, must be hurled into the flame; Frodo must give up his powerful aid in order to gain freedom for himself and the peoples of Middle-earth. As in the larger pattern, Gandalf and the Balrog cancel each other so that lesser powers may hold sway.²⁴

This incident fits the model perfectly. Frodo is spared from entering the battle when Gandalf (Ancient White Magic) intercedes and does the fighting against Ancient Black Magic on his behalf. For Frodo's part is journeying, not fighting. If Frodo stops progressing toward the Cracks of Doom, the tale ends. Fighting between Good and Evil will go on throughout the tale, but it is always the background, distinct from Frodo's basic movement to Orodruin. Once Frodo reaches his destination, then he too must struggle to overcome his foe (which, not insignificantly, he fails to do). But until then, fighting, cancelling each other out, is the lot of all the other characters, and Frodo's task is movement. Nowhere is this structure modelled more neatly than on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm.

By the end of Volume One a pattern has been established: the central action of the plot is the movement of the Ringbearer, and the background action is an ongoing struggle between two forces. Now Volume Two as a whole makes use of this pattern. Book Three, with its clash between Rohan and Isengard, Gandalf and Saruman, Ents and Orcs, is the background. Book

²⁴David Miller, "Narrative Pattern" 99.

Four, the movement of Frodo and Sam from Amon Hen to Shelob's Lair, is the central action. There is no great opposition between any great forces in Book Four. Book Three, the great struggle in which once again the Ringbearer plays no part, forms the background for Book Four. The oppositions of Book Four are generally not external battles, but internal oppositions of emotion and desire between characters who are present throughout the whole Book, rather than in the episodic manner of Volume One.

The dynamic of the primary good/evil opposition in Book Four is one of static tension. In it, Frodo and Gollum function as opposites, two complex sides of what is essentially human nature. In this structure good/Evil (Gollum) encounters good (Sam) and Good/evil (Frodo), and good therefore holds the balance of power and the story continues.²⁵ The relationship between Gollum (good/Evil) and Frodo (Good/evil) is an extremely complex one; but most critics agree nonetheless that the two are in some sense opposites, mirror-images of each other.²⁶ Frodo is mainly good, and therefore must try to destroy the Ring. But he is partly evil, and therefore loves the Ring he wants to destroy. Gollum is mainly evil, and therefore wishes to save the Ring. But he is partly good and therefore aids Frodo in his attempts to destroy it. Both seem to have ambivalent love/hate feelings for each other as well.²⁷

The first event of Book Four (the meeting of Frodo and Gollum) and the last (Shelob's Lair) are similar in structure to the pattern of Books I and II described earlier. They are essentially

²⁵For the rest of this chapter, the capitalisation of "good" or "evil" indicates a greater power than lower-case "good" and "evil". This becomes, then, a method for exploring the dynamic of the battle between the two forces.

²⁶Flieger, "Frodo and Aragorn" 58. Here he lists three other critics who concur with this notion (Douglass Parker, Rose Zimbardo, George Thompson).

²⁷Marion Zimmer Bradley, *Men, Halflings and Hero Worship* (Baltimore: T-K Graphics, 1973) 36.

tussles between Good and Evil. The first struggle is between Sam and Gollum, in this case, good and Evil.²⁸ The intervention of Frodo (Good) cancels Gollum and Sam can go free. This confrontation is really the last between them until near the end of the book when the triangle is broken. The threesome become at this point travelling partners, and the movement of the tale is based on the complex relationships among the three of them. But instead of the structures being revealed in external battle and conflict (Good fights evil), they are, until they reach Shelob's lair, revealed internally, relationally (love, hate, respect, promise, distrust, treachery), and they result primarily in geographical movement.

In Books One and Two the primary action of the tale was Frodo's movement. As background to that movement arose occasional glitches in the process -- an Evil force trying to stop his progress appeared, and had to be fought by a corresponding Good force, allowing Frodo to continue. In the Fourth Book, the primary action is still the Ring-bearer's movement, but without the same background episodic battling. Instead, there is a sort of static tension, a near balance of Good and Evil (tipped as always slightly in favour of Good), that must be maintained without the occurrence of any battle. Movement is the key, and it is the key not only for Good, but for Evil as well. Their spatial ordering in their march through the Dead Marshes is significant. The narrator notes that "they went slowly in single file: Gollum, Sam, Frodo"(TT 289). Gollum is the leader, Frodo is the follower, and Sam keeps the two apart, so that no battle occurs and the balance of power is kept.

²⁸It is not until the aftermath of this little struggle that Tolkien begins to develop the good side of Gollum, or the evil side of Frodo.

Sam's role in this movement is vital. Frodo desires greatly to reach Mordor, but is ill-equipped to do so. He does not know the way. If he is assigned an "a" for ability and a "D" for desire, then Gollum is the inverse, an "Ad" to Frodo's "aD." The result once again is a stand-off. In such a situation, there is no movement, and therefore no plot. But Sam is, as his master is, another "aD." Sam once again plays the role of tipping the scale. Those who desire movement dominate the one who is able to move, and they are therefore able to use his ability to fulfill their desire.²⁹ By thus tipping the balance, Sam facilitates the unfolding of the plot.

It is important to note here that without Gollum (Ability) the quest stops. When Gollum is separated from the others in Ithilien, the progress is halted. During that stop, Frodo has the choice whether or not Gollum should be shot. Such is Faramir's advice. Frodo, however, recognises the dependency on Gollum and spares his life. The removal of any of the three stops the tale. Once the three are loose again, the movement continues, and Gollum resumes his role as guide.

The book ends in Shelob's lair, where pure womanhood and corrupted womanhood stand in opposition to each other. The contrast is overwhelming. Shelob is hideous, dark and destructive; Galadriel is present only as a fair light. Perhaps nowhere is the dark/light contrast underscored so heavily as it is at this point. Into the blackness of this horrid cave comes the Phial of Galadriel: "No such terror out of heaven had ever burned in Shelob's face before" (TT 425). Once again light and darkness cancel, guide and guided are scattered, and all that is left is one character, Sam, to carry on the quest.

²⁹Gollum, in one of the rare moments when he thinks he has caught them both asleep, acknowledges this: "'But there's two of them. They'll wake too quick and kill us,' whined Smeagol in a last effort. 'Not now. Not yet'"(TT 299).

Book Five, once again, acts as a background struggle between two forces, this time Gondor and Mordor, for the central action of Book Six. The last book begins with the quest in bad shape. It has fallen into Sam's hands, but has grown beyond his ability to achieve it. The quest now is to save Frodo from the dozens of Orcs who hold him. Here is a case of good being opposed by Evil. Tolkien has earlier prepared the reader for his solution to this problem, when, in the third book he had Pippin and Merry's escape aided by the self-destructive nature of Evil. Having shown the reader that this can happen with Evil, he uses the same trick again. This structure is an opposition between loyalty and self-interest. Sam, in abandoning the real quest (the movement of the Ring) in favour of the new one (the saving of Frodo) has become the champion of loyalty. At the same time as he is making this crucial decision, the Orcs once again show that, where Good will fight for the sake of others, the central interest of Evil is selfish. Gorbag wants the Elf-mail, and so does Shagrat; the result is a self-destructive battle of self-interest. The primary structure, then, looks like this: Evil (self-interest) is a construct of evil (selfishness) vs. evil (selfishness). The two evils cancel each other, and good is freed again. Sam succeeds in his quest, and as a result Frodo is able to move forward once again on his.

At this point the quest once again becomes one of movement rather than defeating foes. The first threat to movement, the Two Watchers, is overcome once again by the Phial of Galadriel. The primary threat soon reveals itself: Frodo's exhaustion. As they trudge on, Frodo becomes more weak and despairing and tired and less able to move. Stopping, however, is the enemy. Thus, as the quest progresses, its burden falls more and more to Sam: "All right, Sam," said Frodo. "Lead me! As long as you've got any hope left. Mine is gone. But I can't dash, Sam. I'll just plod along after you" (RK, 246). The quest has become dominated by the tension

between despair and hope, and it is Sam's hope that carries it.

Not too far into the journey Gollum reappears. Because of his betrayal, and because he no longer has anything to offer (Ability) that Frodo does not have, the threesome cannot be reformed in the old sense. If they meet it will be to fight. Once again Sam resumes his role as the balance of power:

At that moment he caught a glimpse of a black form or shadow flitting among the rocks away near Frodo's hiding place. Biting back a cry, he leapt down from the spring and ran, jumping from stone to stone. It was a wary creature, difficult to see, but Sam had little doubt about it: he longed to get his hands on its neck. But it heard him coming and slipped quickly away. (RK, 247)

The same tension exists, but now it is at a distance. Sam must keep Gollum away, or the quest will end. And Gollum must stay away until Sam can be bypassed.

The battle against exhaustion continues through to the end. It is in part a function of directionlessness, created by the contrast between the still quite unknowledgeable Hobbits and the purposefulness and wisdom of Gandalf and Aragorn at the end of the previous book. Though in many ways impotent in the face of Sauron, Gandalf and Aragorn carry out their task with insight and resolve. Frodo and Sam, on the other hand, though in a position to topple Sauron's kingdom, are victims of lack of knowledge and fading hope. But the quest must go on, and against these foes Sam steps forward as the necessary hero. The battle is waged in his mind, and at one point the narrator writes the words of the battle against exhaustion explicitly:

"Don't be a fool, Sam Gamgee," came an answer in his own voice. "He won't go another day like that, if he moves at all. And you can't go on much longer giving him all the water and most of the food."

"I can go a good way though, and I will."

"Where to?"

"To the Mountain, of course."

"But what then, Sam Gamage, what then? When you get there, what are you going to do? He won't be able to do anything for himself."

To his dismay Sam realised that he had not got an answer to this

"I'll get there, if I leave everything but my bones behind," said Sam. "And I'll carry Mr. Frodo up myself, if it breaks my back and heart. So stop arguing!" (RK, 260).

Sam is still able to tip the scale enough to keep moving forward. Eventually, he must go so far as to carry Frodo on his back.

Overcoming the lack of knowledge about where they are to go is also Sam's task. Half way up the mountain this enemy is still there: "'How far is there to go?' 'I don't know,' said Sam, 'because I don't know where we're going'" (RK 263). But while they rest Sam sees a road, as if "it might have been put there a-purpose," and the enemy of directionlessness is finally overcome.

The final battle is rooted in the oppositions between love and hate, lust for power and the willingness to give up power. These relationships are extremely complex, as complex as the relationship between Frodo and Gollum. Bradley captures much of the complexity of this battle in the following:

Gollum loved the thing which destroyed him -- and destroyed it in revenge. In 'saving' his 'precious' from destruction, he *genuinely* saves Frodo (whom, obviously, he loves as much as he hates) from destruction too; in seeking to save and destroy what he loves and hates, he saves himself, and Frodo; by bringing the accursed Ring and his own long agony to an end; so that Frodo, rather than meeting the total destruction of his own curse, loses only his Ring finger.³⁰

In this battle for the Ring, it is the greater appetite, the one who held the Ring for the longer period, who wins. Frodo is not strong enough to overcome Gollum's lust for his Precious. But the essentially self-destructive nature of evil is underscored again by Gollum's slip.

³⁰Bradley, 40.

The battles that take place from this point on are not particularly interesting. There exists no more Evil in the land, only evil. And all but the smallest good (the meek and submissive Shire Hobbits before the return of the travelers) have grown to Good. This structure remains visible until the Shire has been cleansed, but it is no longer the most important structure.

More important than any struggle now is the depiction of the end of the Third Age and the rising of the Fourth. It is a time for the Elves to diminish and Men to rise. It is a time for immortality to fade and mortality to flourish. Frodo is part of that which must fade, and so plays an increasingly small role after the celebration on the Field of Cormallen. Sam, as part of that which must flourish, plays an increasingly large role in the tale. Frodo has passed out of the small tale into the large one; Sam must take over as the centre of the small tale. Tolkien lets the reader follow the fairy tale to its conclusion. The final chapter is structured on the contrast between the healing and growing Sam and the wounded and fading Frodo.

The simple structural opposition between Good and Evil is fundamental to the story, for it is the impetus behind the plot. But the tale is structured in such a way that the Hobbits do not play a particularly significant role in this opposition. Good and Evil struggle in the background, while the main action, the movement of the Hobbits, carries on in the foreground, structured on such oppositions as love and hate, desire and impotence, hope and despair, determination and desperation. The most obvious opposition in the work, the great struggle between Good and Evil, is, in Tolkien's world, given secondary status.

THE NARRATOLOGICAL MODEL

Deborah C.W. Rogers writes in her "Everyclod and Everyhero" that "Hobbits are Tolkien's 'normal people' par excellence: the race and kind of character from whose point of view we see the doings in which we become involved."³¹ And for the most part she is correct. Very little in the trilogy is not seen from the perspective of a Hobbit. The race across Rohan to Fangorn is not, nor the battle at Helm's Deep, nor the journey through the Paths of the Dead. In these sections Tolkien gives Gimli a sort of Hobbit-stature, but despite this they are probably among the least enjoyable parts of the book to read.

So in general the Hobbits have an important function to the tale. They act in the role that Mieke Bal (and others) calls the subject of the story's grammar. What follows is an analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* based on Bal's work,³² using the grammatical or narratological model to explore the changes that take place in the roles of the Hobbits. As such, this study will not dwell on what in the previous chapter was described as the epic tale.

Bal says that "the initial situation in a fabula will always be a state of deficiency in which one or more actors want to introduce changes" (Bal, 23). The fabula's action, then, will be made up of an actor or actors attempting to introduce change, and either succeeding or failing to do so. The situation at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings* is not particularly deficient. The life of Hobbits in the Shire is moving along as normal; and there is no real sign of change. But shortly

³¹Deborah Champion Webster Rogers, "Everyclod and Everyhero: The Image of Man in Tolkien," *Tolkien Compass*, Jared Lobdell, ed.(LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1975) 69.

³²Bal. All subsequent references to this work in this chapter will be cited within the text.

after Bilbo's birthday party a minor deficiency appears. Gandalf recognises it first: Bilbo is too attached to the Ring. He must surrender it. This deficiency is quickly satisfied (a process of improvement), Gandalf convinces him to give it up, and the improvement is achieved. Frodo inherits the Ring, and the first sub-fabula is ended. The second chapter introduces the next deficiency, and this is the one that is formative for the grammar of the story.

Gandalf's test of fire for the Ring reveals the nature of Bilbo's toy and creates a new deficiency. A great power is trying to find this thing, and its search has now turned toward the Shire, threatening its comfortable rusticity. Their stable way of life cannot continue much longer. Frodo and his Ring must get out:

"Whatever it may do, it will be slow, slow to evil if you keep it with that purpose," said Gandalf.

"I hope so," said Frodo. "But I hope that you may find some other better keeper soon. But in the meanwhile it seems that I am a danger, a danger to all that live near me. I cannot keep the Ring and stay here. I ought to leave Bag End, leave the Shire, leave everything and go away." He sighed.

"I should like to save the Shire, if I could I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again.

"Of course, I have sometimes thought of going away, but I imagined that as a kind of holiday But this would mean exile, a flight from danger into danger, drawing it after me. And I suppose I must go alone, if I am to do that and save the Shire. But I feel very small, and very uprooted, and well -- desperate. The Enemy is so strong and terrible" (FR 92-3).

This desire to save the Shire is of paramount importance and remains the primary motivating force even after the scope of the tale is expanded exponentially. It is there at the very end as well, when on the way to the Grey Havens Frodo says, "I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: someone has to give them

up, lose them, so that others may keep them"(RK 376). It is the desire to compensate for a deficiency that forms, according to Bal, the verb, the function, of the fabular grammar.

The fundamental grammatical construct informing the entire tale from the second chapter to the destruction of the ring has Frodo as the subject and the Shire as the object, and looks like this:

Subject	Function	Object
Frodo	wishes to save	the Shire

All the action of the story is either in support of this central action, or opposed to it. The epic part has its own grammar, but it too is really, in terms of the story, only an attempt to help this central action. Other formulations of roughly parallel purpose are possible, but none, I think, capture the motivation behind the narrative as this one does. Some of the other possibilities include:

Subject	Function	Object
Frodo	wishes to destroy	the Ring
Frodo	wishes to move toward	Mordor
Frodo	wishes to save	Middle-earth
Elrond & co.	wish to avoid	domination by Sauron

The first of these describes a means rather than an end. Frodo wishes to destroy the Ring *in order that* he can save the Shire. The second is still one step further from the end. Movement is the only hope for destroying the Ring, which in turn is the only hope for saving the Shire. The third is better, except that Frodo sets out from the Shire without any clear sense of what Middle-earth is, and, though his action will clearly help Middle-earth, he is not so obviously motivated by a love for it as for the Shire. The help he brings to Middle-earth is, at least at first, incidental. The fourth possibility misses the mark in that it pinpoints the wrong subject. Avoidance of Sauron's domination will not be achieved through the direct confrontation between the powers of Good

and the powers of Evil. It is a Hobbit, not any power, that must achieve this. *The Lord of the Rings* is about the actions of individuals, not powers. It is Frodo's attempt to right the state of deficiency that carries the tale.

Bal notes that "one may distinguish a class of actors--consisting of those who support the subject in the realization of its intention, supply the object, or allow it to be supplied or given--whom we shall call the *power*" (28). This power is generally abstract and in the background. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings* the reader is given hints that perhaps such a power exists, that something one might call Providence is at work making certain that things turn out right. But, never being named and remaining for the most part in the background of the action, it is not at all a personal force. It is simply a power, a thinking Force, with purposes and plans and some way of implementing them. Grim situations are overcome despite the fact that the "good" side has no power to help overcome them--such as Pippin and Merry's escape from the Orcs or Sam's "rescue" of Frodo in the tower. At such times this power is present as a product of a construct described in the previous chapter -- the fundamental difference in the natures of good and evil. Evil is essentially selfish and power-hungry; good is not. The abstract power/receiver structure can be delineated thus:

Power	Function	Receiver
difference in the nature of good and evil	makes it possible	for Frodo to save the Shire

This structure always adequately describes the local, Hobbit story, until the last moment at the Cracks of Doom, described in the previous chapter. Evil is unable to understand the methods of Good, and, in turning the Eye toward Minas Tirith, allows Frodo to walk through the back door

and destroy the kingdom. Another essential difference, already discussed in the previous chapter, also plays an important part. Evil is recklessly destructive; good is prudently constructive. However, in the larger historical, epic sweep, the presence of Providential power in its personal, thinking form is more often felt because of repeated references to some unstated and not fully understood plan that is guiding the story.

To this point the grammar for the whole story looks like this: Frodo (subject) wishes to save (verb) the Shire (object), and the difference in the nature of Good and Evil (power) makes it possible for Frodo (receiver). But this grammar has parts other than subject, verb and object that are worthy of attention.

Three other elements of this grammar play a major role in the smaller sentences. One is the helper, another, the opponent. The third is the anti-subject. The helper, which plays the part of adverbial adjunct (Bal, 30), arguably appears in the main sentence: Frodo, owing to Sam, saves the Shire. Or better: Frodo wishes with Sam's help to save the Shire. Certainly, in the last volume, Sam appears frequently in the grammatic descriptions of the events, and it is quite beyond Frodo to complete the action without Sam's help. But in the events of the fabula leading up to the breaking of the Fellowship, Sam does not really play the part of the helper. The aim is simply movement, and the opponents that appear to stop the movement of the group always stop Sam as well as Frodo, or are too powerful for Sam to do anything about. In Volume One, the helper is always some force outside the group (Book One), such as Glorfindel or Bombadil, or it is a more powerful member of the Fellowship (Book Two), usually Gandalf or Aragorn.

In Volume Two, Book Four, Frodo's helper is Sam, and then Gollum and Sam. The relationship between these two is an interesting one. As long as Sam is the only helper -- that is,

while he and Frodo are struggling along the Emyrn Muil -- they do move and make progress, but it is very slow, and there is very little hope that they will go on making progress for much longer. Upon taming Gollum, Frodo now has two helpers, in a sense so interdependent that they are one, in that without one, the other would cease to be a helper. Without Sam's presence, Gollum would become an anti-subject, and without Gollum, Sam's helpfulness would be very limited, and, in fact, ultimately useless.

The third element of this fabular grammar is what Bal calls an anti-subject, which "pursues his or her own object, and this pursuit is, at a certain moment, at cross purposes with that of the first subject"(32). There stands in opposition to the central action of the story (Frodo attempts to save the Shire) one opponent throughout the tale. Sauron wishes to destroy the Shire. But occasionally there appears another actor who, in pursuing his goal, is a threat to the quest. The two most significant of these are Saruman and Gollum. Neither particularly care to oppose Frodo's attempts to save the Shire,³³ but simply wish to get the Ring themselves, and, should they attain their goal, Frodo's quest will be one of the casualties.

There are two occasions in the first volume where characters in the story are faced with a decision, whether they will become, in the fabula, helpers or anti-subjects. Galadriel's purpose is to preserve her world, to maintain Elven *status quo*. When Frodo offers her the Ring, she must decide whether to take it to fulfill her own purpose, or refuse it and help Frodo. She passes the test. Boromir is faced with a similar dilemma, and fails. His purpose is the protection of Minas

³³At least, neither care to oppose Frodo until after the Ring is destroyed. Once it is gone, Saruman changes from an antisubject to the last remaining (and rather ineffectual) opponent, who, out of spite and a desire for revenge, sets about the task of robbing the Shire of the very qualities that endear it to those who wish to save it.

Tirith, and he believes the Ring could help. He cannot resist the lure of his own aim, and he attempts to take the Ring from Frodo. In this case, Frodo escapes, and the anti-subject fails to achieve his object.

In Volume Two, Faramir faces the same test as Boromir, but he passes and becomes another helper. But the same actor who functions as a primary helper also functions, in Book Four, and the central anti-subject. He is Gollum. Sam, by his suspicion, constantly reminds the reader that he is an odd sort of helper, and that there is more to his helpfulness than what appears. By the end of the volume, the nature of his function as anti-subject has become clear. His purpose is to get back the Ring, and his help is actually part of the struggle to achieve his purpose. This leads the company to Shelob's lair.

In Shelob's lair change takes place in the grammar of the story. Frodo's purpose finally clashes with Gollum's, and Gollum has brought the Hobbits to a place where there is another anti-subject whose purpose is incompatible with Frodo's. The situation can be described thus:

Subject	Function	Object
Frodo	wishes to arrive	in Mordor
Anti-subject	Function	Object
Gollum	wishes to regain	the Ring
Shelob	wishes to have	a meal (Hobbit)

As described in the previous chapter, none of these aims is achieved. Gollum and Shelob keep Frodo from Mordor, and Sam, armed with the Phial, keeps Gollum from the Ring and Shelob from her supper. This creates a new situation where, for the first time in the book, Sam is the

subject of a fairly extensive group of events,³⁴ and has the chance to become the subject of the bigger story. As Flieger notes, after Frodo is stung by Shelob, Sam

takes the Ring and Frodo's sword, Sting, and goes forward. We see Sam in a way we have never looked at him before, as Frodo's second-in-command. He becomes a figure of some authority, capable of making decisions and carrying them through.³⁵

Whatever Sam does, he will be the subject for the next while. But he must choose what action he wishes to take. The choices of Master Samwise can be illustrated thus:

Subject	Function	Object
A) Sam	wishes to complete	the Quest
B) Sam	wishes to aid	Frodo

Should he choose the second of these, he will eventually resume the role of helper. Thus the choice Sam must make is the choice (grammatically speaking) between being a subject or being adverbial adjunct. Whatever choice he makes, until he achieves his aim, he is the subject. If he makes the first choice he will be the subject for the rest of the quest. If he makes the second choice, he will be subject and Frodo the object until Frodo is rescued and the roles can be reversed again. Of course, it is this second path that Sam chooses.

Book VI begins where Book IV ended, with Sam as the subject, attempting to achieve his object, the rescue of Frodo. Through most of the first chapter this is the case. Frodo resumes his role as subject only when Sam gives him back the Ring. Now Frodo's actions can become significant again. Now his quest can continue. Sam once again is a helper, but, as the story

³⁴In "Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit" Sam is the subject of a large cluster of events, but these are not of a functional nature.

³⁵Flieger, "Medieval Epic and Romance Motifs in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*," diss., Catholic U of America, 1977, 138.

progresses, his help becomes a more and more important part of the events. The second chapter is seen (as will be explored below) almost entirely from Sam's perspective, and though Frodo is still on his quest to preserve the Shire, and, as such, is still the subject, his actions are not as important to the narrative at this point as Sam's musings are. The quest has broken into two struggles: an external one, in which the focus is the battle of Frodo against weariness; and an internal one waged within Sam against despair and loss of will. Sam's struggle in a sense carries Frodo's struggle with it, as later, in a physical sense, Sam carries Frodo.

In the third chapter, "Mount Doom," Sam once again takes over the role of subject. Frodo is once again unable to take any actions that will aid in the achievement of his purpose, so Sam's quest, as described earlier, becomes the central action:

Subject	Function	Object
Sam	wishes to aid	Frodo

Sam is still able to achieve this aim. So when Tolkien writes "Sam tried to guess the distances and to decide what way they ought to take"(RK 253), he shows that the functional events are more Sam's than Frodo's now. Eventually, Frodo's quest and Sam's overlap entirely as Sam actually carries Frodo toward the Cracks of Doom. Here the distinction between what Bal calls an objective or subjective relationship between subject and object is lost entirely.³⁶ Frodo's quest has been an objective one, aimed at the preservation of the Shire. Sam's has always been more subjective, with his aim being more internal--an altruistic devotion to Frodo. Here the one becomes the other. When Gollum surprises them on the road to Doom, two things happen. Frodo

³⁶ Bal, 32. Bal distinguishes between an objective goal for the subject, in which the desired goal is something outside the subject, and a subjective goal, in which the goal is some aspect of the subject's own personality.

takes up his own quest again, becoming the subject once more; and Sam becomes a helper again for one last time. He turns Gollum away while Frodo carries on.

Once they arrive at the Cracks of Doom, Sam is no longer a helper; he is a non-functional observer (and, as shall be discussed later, the focalizer). What he sees is three incompatible fabular sentences juxtaposed upon each other in a sort of narrative paradox. One is the fundamental purpose of Frodo; another is the same purpose of Gollum that got in the way in Shelob's lair; and the third is a new one:

Subject	Function	Object
A)Frodo	wishes to preserve	the Shire
B)Gollum	wishes to regain	the Ring
C)Frodo	wishes to claim	the Ring

The first purpose achieved is C, until Gollum arrives. At this point B and C clash, the achievement of C is undone, and the purpose of B is achieved. Finally, though the resolve to accomplish A has been lost, the appearance of Providence, the great personal power, to push Gollum over the brink results ultimately in the achievement of A. The improvement desired, a safe Shire, is all but assured.

In what follows this moment, there are few functional events. Most of these functional events occur in "The Scouring of the Shire" and "The Grey Havens." Frodo's goal of preserving the Shire is not yet achieved. His opponent, Sauron, has been defeated, but he has a new opponent -- Saruman. The bad must be gotten rid of, and the good that has been lost replaced. Frodo is still the subject in some sense, for he is the leader of the group of Hobbits, and his orders (wishes) are followed by the others. But the fighting (the bad gotten rid of) is mainly Merry and Pippin's work, and the planting and beautification (the lost good replaced) is mainly Sam's work. In other

words, Frodo's wishes still motivate the action, but it is the helpers' action that brings about the successful achievement of those wishes. Frodo simply watches, remaining the subject of the overall story, but leaving to the other Hobbits the task of being the subjects of particular events.

Throughout this chapter, the epic tale has been entirely ignored. Bal describes a fabular model that fits *The Lord of the Rings* perfectly:

It is also possible that a fabula has a second subject that does not come into opposition with the program of the first subject, but is entirely independent from it, or s/he may, consciously or not, give incidental aid or opposition to the achievement of the first subject's aim. In that case there are moments in the fabula when the different lines touch or cross. (Using different terminology, we would speak of the difference between between the various episodes of one plot, and various sub-plots. The appearance of a separate subject always indicates the existence of a sub-fabula.) (Bal, 33)

The epic sub-fabula, which has as its subject at various times such actors as Aragorn, Gandalf, Merry/Pippin, and Faramir/Eowyn, has its line touch directly the primary fabula at its beginning (from the Council of Elrond to the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring*) and at the end (from the celebration at Cormallen to the departure from Gondor of the Hobbits and their company). Indirectly, of course, the epic sub-fabula is never out of touch with the primary fabula. This sub-fabula is generally a conscious attempt by Gandalf (and others) to aid the fabula by distracting the chief opponent of the action of the fabula.³⁷ What is important to note here is that its importance is clearly secondary.

To this point what Bal identifies as the fabula level of narrative has been the subject of this chapter. In what follows, the story level will be studied, and in particular the two processes of

³⁷The only important exceptions are Merry and Pippin's run to Fangorn, which was an unconscious aid, and the fabula of Faramir and Eowyn, which, after it has stopped touching the fabula, has an independent life of its own.

"focalization" and "characterization." Focalization is the creation of a perspective from which the events are viewed. Characterization is the process in which actors are given individual characteristics, and thereby transformed into characters. Characterization will here be discussed only briefly. There is no need to do a thorough analysis of all the characters; two will suffice for the purposes of this work -- Frodo and Sam.

Part of the interest in the book derives from the tension created by Tolkien between the characteristic of Frodo revealed through what Bal calls "qualification" and those revealed through "qualification by function" (Bal, 89). The former are characteristics stated explicitly in the text either by a character within the fabula or a narrator outside it. The latter are characteristics that can be inferred from the character's actions. Much of the humour of *The Hobbit* is based on this tension,³⁸ and Tolkien uses it again in *The Lord of the Rings*. That characteristic that is of primary concern for this paper is *ordinariness*. Ordinariness is, in this work, designated by two related features: a dislike of leaving home and its comforts, and a lack of knowledge of the world outside.

Frodo begins the story as a fairly ordinary Hobbit by these standards. He has an unusual curiosity about the world outside, but not so great a curiosity that he does anything about it. Sam reveals at the Green Dragon that he converses with strange folk and gets news of the outside world, but he is still in need of Gandalf's enlightenment about the Ring. In "The Shadow of the Past" Gandalf slowly reveals the nature of the Ring to Frodo in a way that exposes the scope of

³⁸J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Toronto: Methuen, 1977). The first chapter is a particularly good example of this, in which Bilbo and the narrator and even the actions of Bilbo reinforce repeatedly that Bilbo is a homebody, yet the dwarves believe him to be (and ultimately his actions confirm it) a qualified adventurer.

Gandalf's knowledge and the parochial perspective of Frodo. Throughout the work Tolkien repeatedly creates this caste of knowledge through story-telling and dark hints. The knowledgeable are frequently filling in the ordinary ones (the Hobbits, generally) on past history and legends, by making references to histories, or by hinting that they could. Frodo can keep his quest hidden from the ordinary folk, but Bombadil and Strider, the Black Riders and all of Rivendell know all about it already. But Frodo's ordinariness does not go unchanged. His willingness to go to Rivendell is not too remarkable, in that it is apparently a safer place to be than the Shire itself. But when he takes the Ring from Rivendell he knows very well what he is getting into, but does it anyway. His choice at Amon Hen is even more remarkable -- to go the most dangerous part of the journey alone.

His understanding too grows as the story progresses. The first hint of this is early while the Hobbits are still in the Shire, when Frodo greets Gildor in the high-Elven speech (FR 116). This is the first instance that the reader is made aware that Frodo knows things that the reader (and the Hobbits) do not know. At the Council of Elrond Frodo learns much, though still the path he must follow is hidden. Lady Galadriel says to him in Lothlorien, "as Ring-bearer and as one that has borne it on finger and seen that which is hidden, your sight has grown keener. You have perceived my thought more clearly than many that are accounted wise"(FR 475). Frodo's wisdom and understanding continue to grow, and as the journey continues he is portrayed with increasing frequency as sad, pensive and withdrawn. With the taming of Smeagol the reader finds more and more that it is Frodo who understands the whole picture best,³⁹ and Sam who must occasionally

³⁹In "The Window on the West," Faramir is the one who does not have the necessary knowledge to understand the events, Frodo the one who has that knowledge and the wisdom to know when and how much it should be revealed, and Sam the one who knows enough but does not yet understand the peril

be caught up.⁴⁰ Through the first three chapters of Book VI (to Mount Doom), this distinction is less clear. For this leg of the journey, knowledge is no aid, only will-power is. But the picture of the wise, pensive withdrawn Frodo is emphasised after the Ring is destroyed. In these chapters, if anyone asks for explanations, it is Sam, and Frodo now converses in cryptic comments with the Great Ones. Frodo has grown far beyond Hobbit ordinariness, and the narrator emphasises this by mentioning that no one in the Shire gives him very much credit for his feats (RK 371). Apparently, no Hobbits really understand him any more. The final sign of Frodo's change of character belongs among the qualifications by function - he sails from the Grey Havens with the Elves of Middle-earth. So, while the qualifications given at the outset place Frodo among the ordinary, the qualifications by function, his actions, reveal the story of his rise from ordinariness.

Sam's qualification is done mostly by function, though again the tension between direct qualification and qualification by function is quite intense at some key moments. His role in the early part of the book is rooted firmly in character. The first functional event that has Sam as the subject occurs at the very end of volume one,⁴¹ when he figures out where Frodo has gone and decides to follow him. Before that time he is not really an actor/subject. But he is a character. And, again, one of his primary characteristics is ordinariness. The other, of course, is love for Frodo. And the two are related.

enough to keep quiet. This is seen in these characters' attitudes toward both the Ring and Gollum.

⁴⁰Frodo's understanding of the nature of the Ring has grown by this time. He knows Gollum and the passion that drives him, even though they have just met for the first time (TT 279).

⁴¹There is earlier an event that is implied in the text, and it might be considered functional. In taking an active part in the Hobbit conspiracy, Sam creates the first gathering of what is later to become the fellowship.

Tolkien does an even more thorough job of making Sam ordinary than he does on Frodo. Sam is another lover of the comforts of home, but again he has the same curiosity about things outside the Shire as Frodo. He is really introduced in chapter two (he is mentioned in passing in chapter one), and he is sitting amongst the other townsfolk at the Green Dragon, quaffing ale and speaking with a rural accent. He is a gardener, a bit nose-y, he knows almost nothing about anything and therefore shows a great deal of naivete, and he uses familiar language, for instance in calling his father "dad." He has a wide-eyed innocence that makes him excited and overjoyed at his first sight of Elves and a Oliphaunt. His pack is full of ordinary things that he holds very dear, like a bit of rope and some cooking gear. He becomes attached to an old pony, and his vision of the trees near Bywater being cut down is almost enough to send him running back home. All of these qualifications by function (only a small sampling of a large supply) shout that Sam is ordinary.

Sam's love for Frodo is rarely articulated, but it is emphasised at least as much as his ordinariness. The first clear sign of it is visible when Sam does the packing. He has, Frodo suspects, taken more than his share in order to lighten Frodo's load, and is willing to still take more. At the Prancing Pony he is fiercely protective; at Rivendell he slips into the Council uninvited to sit by his master. Of course, this loyalty and attachment is firmly established when, at the Falls of Rauros, he solves the mystery of Frodo's whereabouts, finds him, and then refuses to leave him despite Frodo's imploring. At this point the magnitude of Sam's love becomes apparent, and Sam is established as a character who is ordinary in every way but one -- his capacity to love.

In Shelob's lair tension is created between the qualifications by function and the direct qualifications. The dilemma Sam faces in making his choices at the end of volume two is rooted in

this tension. Sam at this point, describing himself in his thoughts, underscores what had long been established by function - his own ordinariness. The star-glass, he says, is "too good for me"(TT 428). In the final debate over his options, he expresses that *he* is not clever enough to make the right choice (he says this several times). Later, as he stands looking into Mordor, he entertains illusions of grandeur for a while:

Wild fantasies arose in his mind; he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he marched to the overthrow of Barad-dur. And then all the clouds rolled away, and the white sun shone, and at his command the vale of Gorgoroth became a garden of flowers and trees and brought forth fruit. He had only to put on the Ring and claim it for his own, and all this could be. (RK 210)

But "deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain Hobbit-sense;" Sam knows that he is no great hero, and that "one small garden . . . was all his need and due." Sam envisions himself as a plain, ordinary Hobbit.

But his qualification by function at this point shows that in one sense he is no such thing. The narrator says that "in that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most"(RK 210). This one characteristic has already allowed him to injure Shelob more than anyone has ever done. Now it leads him into a tower he believes to be full of Orcs, where even the Orcs perceive him as "a great silent shape"(RK 214). There he kills an Orc, rescues his master, and leads him into Mordor. With Frodo rescued, he can resume his servant's role again, and he does so for the rest of the book.

After Mount Doom, the qualification by function once again emphasises Sam's ordinariness. It is he who on the Field of Cormallen, when he sees who the King is, calls him by his familiar name, Strider(RK 279). His language remains as full of colloquialisms as ever. He goes

home to the Shire, gets married and has a family. In many ways he returns to where he started. He has lost some of his naivete, certainly, but not so much that he recognises immediately what is happening when he and Frodo embark on their last journey together. He is still Sam, Hobbit gardener and normal person.

A study of focalization in *The Lord of the Rings* produces interesting results as well. Bal writes, "the agent that sees must be given a status other than that of the agent that narrates"(Bal, 101), and, later, "The subject of focalization, the *focalizer*, is the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can be with a character (i.e. an element of the fabula), or outside it"(Bal, 104). When it is with a character, Bal calls it "character-bound focalization"(CF), and when it is outside it is called "external focalization"(EF). *The Lord of the Rings* is both internally and externally focalized. Most of the story is fairly limited in its narration by the agent who sees, and the agent who sees is almost always a Hobbit.

The technique used in this case is a common one. The narrator occasionally explains the story from outside the fabula, but what it describes is usually the perception of the world as one of the characters inside the story would perceive it. This limits the narration in two ways. First, what is seen by the narrator is what one of the characters inside the tale would see. For example, the narrator in the first chapter describes Frodo as hearing a knock and expecting it to be Lobelia(FR 63), rather than describing Gandalf knocking on the door and wondering what is taking Frodo so long to answer. Second, the narrator generally only describes the thoughts of one character during any given event.⁴² So while the reader is told that Frodo thinks it is Lobelia at

⁴²This distinction Bal calls the difference between a perceptible (p) object of focalization and a non-perceptible (np) object. He adds: "This distinction too is of importance for an insight into the power-structure between the characters. When in a conflict situation one character is allotted both CF-p and

the door, s/he is given no sense of who Merry thinks it is.

The focalizer, when character-bound, moves from character to character. As mentioned already, when there is a Hobbit around, it is almost always a Hobbit that acts as the subject of focalization.⁴³ Bilbo is the first character to carry the focalization. When he leaves Bag End to Frodo, the task of carrying the focalization is passed on as well. Frodo is the focalizer from this point until the story splits. One of the advantages of this association is that Frodo's greatest decisions are, with one very important exception, all part of the narration. His decision to take the Ring to Rivendell, his decision to take it from Rivendell, his decision at Amon Hen, his decision not to kill Gollum, all are made accessible to the reader. The net effects of this will be pursued in the next chapter. One effect that can be noted briefly now is the increase in the importance of story and song. Bal discusses chronological deviations (Bal, 53), instances where the sequence of the story and the chronology of the fabula do not line up. This occurs often throughout when one character must inform another of what he has missed, either through a story or a song. This, of course, would be unnecessary if the narrator were not limited by this association with Hobbits.

Frodo's decision at Amon Hen marks the end of the events in which he is consistently the focalizer. It is noteworthy who does the focalizing of the major turning points of the story. Major turning points in the fabula are marked frequently by river crossings⁴⁴ or by one or both of Sam and Frodo passing out. In the case of the Ford of Bruinen, these both occur. In order, these

CF-np, and the other exclusively CF-p, then the first character has the advantage as a party in the conflict. It can give the reader insight into its feelings and thoughts, while the other character cannot communicate anything" (Bal, 109-110). This will be explored in the next chapter.

⁴³The only exception of any length is the first few pages where the focalizing is generally done externally.

⁴⁴Jones 98. The exceptions to this rule are the Brandywine and the Silverlode, which are crossed

five major turns are: Frodo passing out on Weathertop, the crossing of the Bruinen and Frodo's subsequent passing out, crossing Anduin, Frodo passing out in Shelob's lair,⁴⁵ and Frodo and Sam both passing out on Mount Doom. It is worth noting who does the focalization of these events. On Weathertop, the narration stops when Frodo passes out, and begins again when he comes to. The crossing of Bruinen is Frodo's story, and again his collapse on the far side ends the narrative. When the narration resumes, Frodo is waking up in Rivendell. Crossing the Anduin is done only by Sam and Frodo, and they make the decision separately and focalize their own decision-making process. The actual crossing is externally focalized. In Shelob's lair, all focalizing is done by Sam, and what Frodo experiences once he and Sam are separated is left to conjecture and some sketchy remarks made by Frodo after the rescue. The entire Mount Doom event is seen from Sam's perspective. He is an observer, and by this time the reader is not allowed inside Frodo's head at all. All CF-np's, non-perceptible character-bound objects of focalization, are Sam's. When they pass out, the narrative leaves them and ties up loose ends elsewhere. When Sam awakes, after more than a week that the narration does not touch at all, the narration resumes, and focalization is once again Sam's. Frodo had been awake already, but the narrative did not resume until Sam was able to be its focalizing agent.

The importance of Sam's focalization toward the end of the work is indicative of the general pattern the book follows. In volume one, almost all focalizing is done by Frodo; in volume two, the focalization is split, with Sam doing more and more of it as the volume progresses, until in Shelob's lair he does all of it. In the third volume, Frodo is very rarely the focalizer, and Sam

without significant event.

⁴⁵Later Sam, too, knocks himself out throwing himself against the door of the tower, but there is no major turning point here.

almost always is. The epic tale, of course, has not here been discussed; but it is generally true that whenever Merry or Pippin is available to do it, focalizing is theirs to do.

Bal describes briefly the characteristics of the "hero" in his discussion of story. According to this description, the hero typically has the following features:

qualification: comprehensive information about appearance, psychology, motivation, past

distribution: hero occurs often, presence felt at key moments in fabula

independence: the hero can occur alone or hold monologues

function: certain actions are those of hero alone: s/he makes agreements, vanquishes opponents, unmaskers traitors, etc.

relations: s/he maintains relations with the largest number of characters (Bal 92)

In most of these descriptions Frodo's character is reflected. But clearly his character is reflected here more toward the end of the tale, especially in terms of function. Then again, toward the end of the tale, he shows less sign of heroic relations than in the middle. Sam fulfills many of these descriptions too, but again is very weak in terms of heroic function (except in Cirith Ungol).

This chapter has been another almost exclusively descriptive one. The description has been far from comprehensive, but there is some sense of what the grammar of the fabula looks like, and how the narrator turns that into a story, and its actors into characters. But it all means something. What the next chapter holds is more interpretive than descriptive. In a radical shift from analytical to speculative, the next chapter will describe what Tolkien accomplished through creating such a tale.

STRUCTURE AND MEANING

To this point my study of *The Lord of the Rings* has been structural and descriptive. In an undeniably Sam-centred way, the thesis to this point has described simply what is there. This chapter is based on the assumption that structural models as described above have significance beyond themselves. That significance is twofold. The structures suggest that Sam is the key to understanding the story (he is at the centre of its crucial theme), and that he is the key to entering or experiencing the story (he is the vehicle through whom Secondary Belief is made possible).

Identifying the basic structures upon which the tale is built makes it possible to identify with greater clarity and certainty what the story, at least in part, "means." The fundamental structures identified earlier suggest that the central theme can be identified as this: the great events of history are made up of individuals doing their part to the best of their ability. The relationship between the great event and the small participant is expressed well by Barbara Russell in the following:

[Boromir's failure], eventually leading to the disruption of the fellowship but not to the abandonment of the quest, is a structural triumph for Tolkien, for his story is built around the struggle of the weak against the strong, of obedience against pride, of the Company against the Enemy. The heroism Tolkien chooses is that of the "obedient subordinate," Frodo, rather than of the natural leader, Boromir.⁴⁶

The structures of the story support what is almost certainly the intuitive response of any reader of the trilogy: somehow in this story of great people and feats, the little Hobbits are at the centre.

⁴⁶Marian Barbara Russell, "'The Northern Literature' and The Ring Trilogy." *Mythlore*, 5, No. 2, Whole No. 18 (Autumn, 1978): 41.

Closely related to this theme is another aspect of Fantasy that has been explored often by other critics -- the presence of what Tolkien, in his essay "on Fairy-stories," named Escape, Recovery, and Consolation. Despite the extremely subjective nature of these features (all three are descriptions of what should take place within the reader as s/he reads a work of fantasy), this paper will conclude with some comments on Tolkien's attempts to achieve them. The reason is a simple one: if any of the three is going to "happen" for the reader, it is going to happen, I believe, because of Sam. There can be no Escape, Recovery, or Consolation, if the reader does not enter into a Secondary World; the eyes and the mind of Sam Gamgee represent most consistently that gate into the Secondary World.

The previous chapter noted that Bal has outlined the characteristics common to most heroes of narrative literature, characteristics Bal calls qualification, distribution, independence, function and relations.⁴⁷ These characteristics have a relation to the ideology of the author, for, as Bal adds, "The suspicion that the choice of a hero and of the features attributed to him or her betrays an ideological position is a reason not to ignore the problem but rather to study it."⁴⁸ Which of Bal's characteristics Tolkien leaves out in his creation of hero-Hobbits reveals some noteworthy ideological positions. The first three fit Frodo and Sam perfectly. The reader is provided with ample "qualification," information about the psychology, genealogy, and motivation of both. Physical appearance is not carefully described, other than the characteristics of the race of Hobbits as a whole. But this is true of most of the main characters. The reader is told that Aragorn is weather-worn, and Gimli sturdy, and Legolas fair, but only Gandalf is described regularly in any

⁴⁷Bal 92.

⁴⁸Bal 93.

detail. Frodo and Sam are the only characters that are present throughout the main fabula. All the other characters are relegated for at least one-third of the book to a sub-fabula. So Sam and Frodo fit the "distribution" test. And both hold monologues, Frodo more frequently in the first half, and Sam more frequently in the second.

But the function characteristic is not particularly descriptive of Frodo or Sam. Frodo makes agreements with Gollum and Faramir along the way, but they are not spectacular or heroic (one is to give the Hobbits direction because they do not know where they are going, the other is to allow them to be left alone). Frodo vanquishes no opponents; in fact, he hides from them as much as possible. Sam, with some help from the Elves, manages to sting Shelob, although the narrator makes the point that Shelob really stings herself. And instead of unmasking a traitor, Sam and Frodo take one under their wing and walk into his trap in Shelob's lair. Eventually the traitor gives Sam a good knock on the head and manages to steal from Frodo both a finger and the Ring. Functionally, these characters are not heroic in the normal sense. David Miller notes the importance of this:

Tolkien is careful to keep a Hobbit present in almost every scene so that the heroic virtues and actions which fill the book are softened by the quiet, unassuming gaze of a self-procalimed [sic] non-hero.⁴⁹

The sort of heroism that Frodo and Sam represent is crystalised by Sam when he says:

I used to think that [adventures] were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stayed in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually -- their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had

⁴⁹David M. Miller, "Hobbits: Common Lens for Heroic Experience," *Orcist*, No. 3 (Spring-Summer, 1969): 14.

lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd of been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on. (TT 402)

So the emphasis of *The Lord of the Rings* contrasts with Bal's typical hero; the emphasis is on the heroism of the ordinary. Deborah Rogers writes:

[Tolkien] does not focus on the cloddish, though he does focus on Hobbits. Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin are all to a greater or lesser extent billed as Everyclod at the beginnings of their stories, but . . . each of them becomes a hero . . . It is not strictly accurate to say . . . that Bilbo *becomes* brave, or Sam heroic, or Frodo holy. The seeds of these qualities were in them to begin with, and the circumstances of their adventures allow the qualities to emerge like a developing photograph. With the Hobbits, what Tolkien shows us is that, and how, Everyclod really is Everyhero.⁵⁰

Though this comment gives accurate representation of the general theme of the work, I would change the emphasis slightly. It is true that Everyclod is Everyhero; but *The Lord of the Rings* does not suggest that every ordinary person possesses the raw materials of epic-scale heroism within her or him, so much as it suggests that heroism results when ordinary people do ordinary things to the best of their abilities. A true Tolkienesque hero is one that just goes on.⁵¹

The fifth characteristic listed by Bal as typical of the hero is relations with a large number of characters; again, it is a shoe that does not fit well. Clearly Frodo's journey with Sam is a journey into aloneness. As the two separate from the rest of the fellowship, leave behind the comfort of Faramir, lose Gollum, and gradually interact less and less with each other, the reader is constantly reminded that Frodo and Sam are undertaking, not a great public feat, but a quiet, individual

⁵⁰Rogers 72.

⁵¹This idea is explored in Patrick Grant, "Tolkien: Archetype and Word," *Cross Currents* 22 (1972): 365-80. He suggests that love is the most heroic quality, and, as such, Sam is the most consistently heroic character: "Gradually, Frodo's physical power is affected and Sam carries him on his back. The story is, at this point, almost allegorical, as Sam's charity sustains his master's hope and faith. And there is no doubt about the contribution of Sam's heroic love to the success of the quest"(377).

struggle, as much against despair and exhaustion as against any visible foe. For Sam this is especially the case, since, as Frodo is the Ring-bearer, he at least is the centre of the celebrations on the Field of Cormallen. Frodo at least had a visible, concrete action to complete. Sam, cast in a supporting role from the beginning, has simply helped out. His quest was to love his master and serve him; only Frodo understands the degree of his success. In *The Lord of the Rings*, heroes are ordinary, and heroism is not public and visible, but individual and internal. Grant supports the idea of internal heroism when he writes:

The Hobbits are more purely heroic, in that there is nothing chivalrous about them, and their heroism of obedience burns brightest because it is often without any hope of yielding renown or good name among men. Aragorn, true, is heroic, but he is chivalrous as well, and his fame is significantly reinforced by the acclaim of men. In total contrast is Sam Gamgee, whose part is least publicly acclaimed of all, but who, in the sense in which we are now using the word, is especially heroic. His unfailing devotion to Frodo is exemplary, and here, again, Sam is a key link in bringing the meaning of the book to the reader, the everyman who admires great deeds but wonders what his own part might be in important events which seem well enough [sic] wrought without him.⁵²

Ultimately, Sam is cut off from even Frodo, and, by the end of the work, his relations are no longer with kings and wizards, but are domestic, with a wife and children.

Just after Tolkien's death in 1973, the following appeared in an obituary in *The Times*:

It is doubtful how far he realized that these comfort-loving, unambitious, and (in aspiration) unheroic creatures embodied what he loved best in the English character, and saw most endangered by the growth of 'subtopia,' bureaucracy, journalism, and industrialization The ironic destiny which links the humble happiness of the Hobbits to the decision of vast issues which they would gladly ignore, and which even makes civilization itself momentarily dependent on their latent and reluctant courage, is its central theme.⁵³

⁵²Grant 376-377.

⁵³ "Professor J.R.R. Tolkien," *J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller*, eds. Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1979) 14.

This quotation pinpoints again the heroism that *The Lord of the Rings* praises. Small actions have large effects. Heroism is not something grand; it is something far more manageable than that. It is internal. The split tale structure of the work is perfect for underscoring this fact. The epic story, with Aragorn and Gandalf as its heroes, is background to the real action, which has as its heroes a worn-out Hobbit and his gardener who carries him piggyback.

The great theme that is generally cited as the sum total of the whole book, the struggle between Good and Evil, is also rooted in the structures that have been explored. The split tale underscores the theme, and again Sam is a key. The epic tale is one of Good opposing Evil, Light piercing Darkness, Life struggling against Death. In the epic tale these oppositions are clearly divided. Saruman is a traitor and Denethor is mad, but even they are quickly known for who they are and what side they support.⁵⁴ But though the two sides are easily distinguished, it is not really their actions that distinguish them. Both are trying to kill the other, and seem to enjoy doing it. Both want their own side to be the dominant side in Middle-earth. At this point, geography and historic loyalties (underscored by a helpful colour scheme) are what make the sides clearly distinguishable.

The least clearly demarcated character, Boromir, reveals the difficulty of separating the two by actions. His sin is not his desire for power to defeat the enemy, nor strength to kill. All want that -- Gandalf, Aragorn, Galadriel, and the rest. His sin is one of ignorance. He does not understand that they cannot defeat the enemy in the way he wants to. He does not understand that the

⁵⁴ Gandalf reveals at the Council of Elrond that Saruman is a traitor (FR, 338-9), and Denethor is difficult and unpleasant from his first appearance (RK, 25-29). Tolkien creates a clear opposition between Denethor and Gandalf in Denethor's first speech: "Dark indeed is the hour . . . and at such times you are want to come, Mithrandir" (RK, 25). This disposition is reinforced repeatedly until his final madness.

power to defeat the enemy must come through weakness.

The tale at this point must split. Good must battle Evil on two fronts. One is a geographical battle, where forces "from" Good (Gondor, Rohan, Rivendell) clash with those "from" Evil (Mordor). The other is a moral battle, one that takes place mostly inside various representatives of Good and Evil. One is strength against strength, and, for Good, this one is a losing battle. The other is weakness against strength, and it is here that the real battle takes place. This is where real "good" actions are distinguishable from real "evil" actions. On this front, two tired and confused and hopeless Hobbits, and their guide who wishes to kill them, face Shelob and a host of Orcs in the back *and* front yard of the Lord of Darkness. And, for the most part, it is up to Sam to make sure that the battle, despite the odds, tips in the Hobbits' favour.

The epic tale must, therefore, fade into the background; against the backdrop of contrasts between right and wrong, black and white, life and death, glory and shame, fair and foul, the local tale moves in a somewhat more real world. In this world, there are real choices to be made, some of which are right and others wrong.⁵⁵ The importance of the split tale and Hobbit focalization to the creation of these themes is obvious. Good and evil are not ideologies, not opposing philosophies that can be divided along geographical boundaries. Good and evil are internal, rooted in the choices, in the perceptions, of the individual. The small tale moves into a world where good and evil battle within the characters rather than in the landscape, and to have Hobbits focalize the events of this world makes that struggle accessible to the reader. Here evil tugs at the best char-

⁵⁵The choices made by characters in the epic half of the tale are not generally moral choices. They choose, not between what is right and wrong, but between what is good strategy and bad strategy. This contrasts clearly with Sam's choices in Shelob's lair. Whether to try to help Frodo or not is not a strategic decision; it is a moral one.

acters, and the possibility of failure is always present.⁵⁶

Thus, the split tale facilitates a dual representation of good and evil. The epic tale displays heroic good and sinister evil. Heroic good is basically rooted in the medieval chivalric code, and, for all its grandness, is not particularly effective or important, at least in part because if the colour scheme were switched, the difference between the two sides would be minimal. The local tale displays a radically different good, a good rooted in the Christian tradition. Charles Moorman suggests that in this tale good actions are

those of idealized Christian behaviour and the best checklist of its component parts is, however improbably, the Sermon on the Mount. For Frodo is blessed in his endurance of persecution for righteousness sake, in his meekness, in his mercy, in his pureness of heart.⁵⁷

This is true, but if it is true of Frodo, it is even more true of Sam. Frodo, by the end, has taken on complexities of character that make him a less appropriate example of Christian virtue. His heart is no longer pure as it once was; he is too much like Gollum. And in claiming the ring he clearly casts off meekness.

Moorman, in this comment, cites examples from the beatitudes,⁵⁸ (the only part of the Sermon on the Mount that is really relevant to a study of the morality of the local story). And a glance at some of the key events of the small tale indicates the appropriateness of this checklist. Though it is difficult to say what it means to be poor in spirit, it certainly is not far-fetched to

⁵⁶By failure I do not mean the sort where one chooses the right thing but is stopped by the other side. This sort of pseudo-failure seems a more real threat in the epic tale than the local one. The failure that faces Frodo and Sam is true failure -- choosing the wrong thing and not being stopped.

⁵⁷Charles W. Moorman, "Heroism in *The Lord of the Rings*," *The Southern Quarterly* 11(1972): 34.

⁵⁸Matt. 5:3-11. All Biblical quotations are taken from the Authorised Version.

suggest that it involves, in part, ordinariness. And Sam's characterisation throughout the tale has been concentrated on the creation of ordinariness, even at the end, even when his feats have been quite out of the ordinary. In Shelob's lair, as Frodo lay apparently dead, and across the plains of Gorgoroth, Sam suffered and mourned. His willingness to be helper rather than subject of the fabular grammar indicates some sense of meekness. His desire for righteousness enables him to overcome the temptations, first to turn back to his beloved Shire, and, later, to despair and give up the quest. When he finally has a chance to kill Gollum, he shows that he has learned mercy as well. His enduring child-likeness provides some sense of purity of heart. Peace-makers are also blessed, and the existence of the small tale is a sign of Sam and Frodo's desire for peace. If the epic tale stood alone, and the only hope for peace were the sword, then the hope for peace would be scant indeed. Peace can only return to Middle-earth if the desire for power is relinquished. That is the central theme of the entire small tale.⁵⁹ Finally, particularly on the two occasions where Frodo turns on Sam, Sam encounters, first hand, persecution for righteousness' sake.

The other Christian ideal that is repeatedly emphasised in the story of Sam and Frodo is found in Matthew 20: 25-27:

Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: But whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.

Of course, the existence of the small tale is in itself an articulation of this theme. The epic tale, which pits power against spectacular power, is a hopeless endeavour. All hope rests in Frodo and

⁵⁹The small tale is the attempt to destroy the One Ring, which for Sauron, Saruman, Boromir and Denethor, means power. Of course, to the other characters it means power as well, but it is power they re-

Sam and their decision at Amon Hen to go to Mordor alone. David Harvey writes that the Ring

is not only an inanimate symbol of evil that inspires lust for its possession and the power . . . that will flow from it It is the symbol of the forked road that we all so often face and at which we must choose a path.⁶⁰

Again, the battle between Good and Evil is one that takes place on a personal level, within the choice-making individual. The quest to destroy the Ring is a choice against power, and the fact that two defenceless Halflings undertake it is entirely appropriate.

The grammar of the "The Choices of Master Samwise" underscores this theme as well. Sam's choice, grammatically, is to become the subject of the events or to become a helper, an adverbial adjunct. With Ring in hand, he entertains notions of what it might mean for him to be powerful: he might become a sort of fertility god, turning all the brown lands green again. But in the face of this forked road, he puts aside these notions, and accepts the role of helper, becoming the only character ever to give up the Ring freely and without resisting the request to do so.⁶¹

It is important to note that the goodness of rejecting power is not, either in *The Lord of the Rings* or in the Christian ideal, a choice for passivity. A choice is made, not between either taking significant action or not taking action at all, but between two kinds of action -- controlling others' lives or deaths, or acting as servant, helping others. There is something heroic about the Hobbits, because the first choice is a real one -- they could choose to be passive, but they choose instead to be active -- and there is something ordinary and unheroic about them because the

ject.

⁶⁰David Harvey, *The Song of Middle-earth: J.R.R. Tolkien's Themes, Symbols and Myths* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) 67-68.

⁶¹Tom Bombadil also gives up the Ring freely, but he is of a qualitatively different nature than any other character in the book. He is in no way affected by the thing he gives up, and therefore is not fighting any temptation when he does so. Sam knows the attractiveness of the Ring, but gives it up anyway.

second choice is also real -- they could attempt to become lords, but instead they choose to be servants. According to the Christian ideal, both choices are correct. They are heroically unheroic. As Jerome Rosenberg says, "Sam continually grows in character, always voicing a desire for the peace of home, but always responding heroically to the conditions that keep him from the comfort and security he so thoroughly desires."⁶² The fork in the road is one that leads to either self-interest or service, and Sam's heroism is the result of his always choosing the latter.

The split tale illustrates this fundamental difference between Good and Evil: the central action of the tale from the perspective of Good is the small tale. To the Evil side the central action is the epic tale. Evil understands only desire for power; Good understands the value of the sacrifice of power. The weakness of Evil is its power; the power of Good is its weakness.⁶³

The rest of this chapter, based on Tolkien's "On Fairie-stories",⁶⁴ is an exploration of the idea that Sam is the key to entering and experiencing the tale. The concepts which Tolkien calls Escape, Recovery and Consolation are reader-centered phenomena. They are offered by fairy-stories to the reader; they take place in her/his mind or perceptions. Escape is a willingness for the reader to employ Secondary Belief, to move into another sphere where things are as they ought to be. Recovery reclaims what has become too familiar by helping the reader to see it

⁶²Jerome Rosenberg, "The Humanity of Sam Gamgee" *Mythlore* 5, No. 1, Whole No. 17 (May, 1978): 11.

⁶³See Noreen Hayes and Robert Renshaw, "Of Hobbits: *The Lord of the Rings*," *Critique* 9, No. 2 (1967): 60-61. They suggest that completely good or evil characters would be incapable of understanding their opposite. Sauron, as a completely evil character does not understand the good. The good characters (Bombadil excepted) are not completely good in the same way; they are more real, and therefore have an advantage over Sauron.

⁶⁴J.R.R.Tolkien, "On Fairie-stories," *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C.S. Lewis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 38-89. All subsequent quotations from this essay will be cited within the text, using the following abbreviation: OFS.

afresh. And Consolation is the bittersweet mingling of Joy and Sorrow (in the reader) in the happy turn or eucatastrophe. Clearly any study of these phenomena is open to charges of subjectivity. But they are a vital part of the story's overall effect, and again, their success is rooted in the structures described in my first three chapters, especially the third).

The most important single step toward the creation of these phenomena is the creation of a bonding of some kind between the reader and some character(s) in the work.⁶⁵ For all its subjectivity, this at least is safe: if the reader dislikes or is unable (unwilling) to identify with any of the characters, s/he will experience no Escape, no Recovery, no Consolation. The task of creating that bond has therefore been painstakingly thorough. The key to its creation is, of course, Hobbits.

Hobbits are in most every respect humans -- rural, English humans. Tolkien himself admits to being one, confessing, "I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food."⁶⁶ The humanness of Hobbits stands as the necessary link between Primary and Secondary Worlds, the accessible characters in an epic grandness.⁶⁷ David Miller writes:

It is the believability of the Hobbits in their solid earthy world that pulls together impossibility compounded and subdues the otherwise incredible to belief. If the Hobbits are real, all else can follow, for they are constantly at the center of action. If somehow the reader can be lead [sic] to identify with one or more of them, or even to become

⁶⁵The reason this part of the chapter must be subjective is the fact that Escape, Recovery, and Consolation are based on a strong empathy between the reader and some character(s) in the book. I will refer to this concept as "bonding with" or "identifying with."

⁶⁶Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 288.

⁶⁷Daniel Hughes, 74. He writes "The old forms themselves, saga, epic, fable, chronicle, romance, cannot shine directly for the modern reader. Tolkien restores these forms by putting the Hobbit in the midst of them."

thoroughly sympathetic, belief is no longer a problem.⁶⁸

Secondary belief is the key to Escape, and Hobbits make it possible. They become the vicars of human experience in Middle-earth.

The single most important means of making the humanness of the Hobbits accessible is through focalization. The focalizing is done mostly by Hobbits (CF) and very occasionally by the narrator (EF). The objects of focalization are usually (p) perceptible (landscapes, characters, facial expressions), but are also very often (np) non-perceptible (feelings, musings). When all of the Fellowship is together in Volume One, Frodo's non-perceptible objects are recorded and rarely anyone else's. Once the tale splits, and Merry and Pippin are together, Pippin usually focalizes the non-perceptible objects. Sam and Frodo both focalize their non-perceptible objects on occasion throughout Book IV. But by Book VI Sam does by far the majority -- and by the end he does all CF-np.⁶⁹ The effect of this is to strengthen ties between reader and Hobbit, and (as the tale progresses), Sam in particular. To see only what Hobbits see would have this effect. But the addition of having described all that the Hobbits experience internally -- emotions, thoughts -- further strengthens the reader/character relationship.

The second means whereby the Hobbits are made accessible to the reader is through the familiarity of their characteristics. Certain activities are distinctively Hobbit activities; certain language is uniquely Hobbitish. And the general Hobbit frame of mind is shared with no other characters. All three of these peculiarities are familiar to the reader; they are the peculiarities of

⁶⁸David Miller, "Common Lens," 13.

⁶⁹"All" is an overstatement. Frodo, for example, acts as subject of focalization for two sentences on the last page. But for all practical intents and purposes, focalization is Sam's task by this point.

Primary World humans -- the reader's own peculiarities.

The Hobbits like to cook food, eat food, have parties, go pubbing. The Shire is England. It is cut out of the material of ordinary life. Tolkien models it after his own world, and there is nothing about it *itself* that is out of the ordinary. When Tolkien writes "I was born in 1892 and lived for my early years in 'the Shire' in a pre-mechanical age,"⁷⁰ he reveals that, other than the idealised form nostalgia gives to ordinary life, there is in the Shire very little to distinguish it from the Primary World. In the Shire, Primary and Secondary Worlds overlap. Jones adds, "By writing of things which were home to him, he contrives to give the reader a sense of home and security too."⁷¹ Even after they leave the Shire, most of the sleeping, eating and drinking is done by the Hobbits. In the first Book, the interlude between their adventures always includes numerous instances of all of the above. While Strider or Legolas stay up and watch through the nights, the Hobbits sleep. Occasionally a Hobbit takes his turn to watch, and, as often as not, he falls asleep. Sam's balm for the wounds of Frodo's journey is a pot of stewed rabbit. The activities of Hobbits include many events that are the most familiar things in the reader's Primary World. Again the split tale serves this necessity well. The epic is no place to talk of stewed rabbit and water supply. The existence of the small story makes room for this sort of ordinary concern. When ordinary concerns do become the subject of the epic tale, as when Merry and Pippin track down some pipeweed in the ruins of Orthanc, they do so briefly, and as a necessary comic relief. But soon the tale is focused on battles and romantic involvements again. In the small tale, ordinary matters are the very stuff of the story.

⁷⁰Carpenter 288.

⁷¹Jones, 90.

The language of this tale has been the subject of many studies, some of which are extraordinarily thorough.⁷² This summary is far from thorough; but it should nonetheless become obvious that language is another key to the creation of identification of the reader for the Hobbits, and particularly Sam.

Tolkien uses changes in the shades of language to draw distinctions between moods, characters, atmosphere. There is in *The Lord of the Rings* a caste system of language that parallels the caste of characters. This latter includes the coarse pervert, the rural bumpkin, the simple man, the noble man, the lord, and the supernatural being. Each of these has his or her own language. Hyde writes, "In Tolkien's fantasy works . . . language not only [sic] becomes an outward manifestation of a character's nature, but also a cultural marker."⁷³ So the coarse pervert (Shagrat) speaks in a harsh-sounding speech, full of slang and contractions and expletives. The rural bumpkin (Sam) speaks with a rural English accent full of contractions and qualifications (such as "in a manner o' speaking" and "begging your pardon") and low proverbs. The simple man (Merry and Pippin, early Frodo), the noble man (Gimli, Men of Rohan and Gondor, later Frodo), the lord (Aragorn, Elrond) and the supernatural being (Galadriel, some minor Elves), all have their own way of speaking,⁷⁴ and usually the narrator describing them or their actions or surroundings picks up the tone of the characters being described.

⁷²See in particular Paul Nolan Hyde, "Linguistic Techniques Used in Character Development in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien," 3 vols., diss., Purdue University, 1982.

⁷³Hyde, vol. 1, 28. See also Ruth S. Noel, *The Mythology of Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) 28.

⁷⁴Gandalf and Bombadil do not really fit into any sort of caste. Gandalf seems to be able to move (in terms of language) up and down the caste structures, even to the point where he speaks the language of Mordor at the Council of Elrond. Bombadil, as in every other sense, is in his own linguistic world.

Overall, the tone of the language in *The Lord of the Rings* is high, archaic, mythic. Judy Winn Bell, in her analysis of Tolkien's language, cites several devices he uses to elevate the tone.⁷⁵ The most important of these is "topicalization," in which a word, usually adverb or adjective, is moved from the end of a sentence to the beginning: "Many things I can command the Mirror to reveal"(FR, 469). Others include coupling (in which subjects, predicates and objects are doubled up and joined with "and"), the use of "to be" as an auxiliary where "have" would normally be used ("A Balrog is come!") and negatives without the auxiliary "do" ("I need them not"). The tale has a wide range of language styles, but these devices are characteristic. The high language gives the tale its sense of grandness, its "sense of pageantry and formality."⁷⁶ It furnishes the tale with a mythic sensibility, so that the characters who use this speech and the lands described in it are not so much characters as archetypes, not so much lands as moral symbols. And, as Jung says, "Archetypes speak the language of high rhetoric, even of bombast."⁷⁷

The Silmarillion is written in its entirety in this archaic language. Virtually any passage of this mythology could have been taken with few changes, out of the Authorised Version of the Bible, as is evident from the following:

Great was the triumph of Morgoth, and his design was accomplished in a manner after his own heart; for Men took the lives of Men, and betrayed the Eldar, and fear and hatred were aroused among those that should have been united against him. From that day the hearts of the Elves were estranged from Men, save only those of the Three Houses of the

⁷⁵Judy Winn Bell, "The Language of J.R.R.Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings*," *Mythcon I Proceedings* (4-7 September 1970), ed. Glen GoodKnight (Los Angeles: Mythopoeic Society, 1970) 35-40.

⁷⁶Bell 37.

⁷⁷Gracia Fay Elwood, "The Good Guys and the Bad Guys," *Tolkien Journal* 3, No. 4, Whole No. 10 (November 1969): 9.

Edain.⁷⁸

In *The Silmarillion* this style is uninterrupted. This passage, chosen randomly from the middle of the work, begins with a topicalization ("Great was the triumph"), and has numerous couplings thereafter. Tolkien also uses phrases, familiar from Biblical narrative, which are no longer in popular use, such as "in a manner after his own heart" (c.f. I Sam. 13:14) and "save only" (c.f. Gen. 14:24). And the entire work is written in this "high mythic style".⁷⁹ As a result, *The Silmarillion* is for devoted Tolkien enthusiasts only.

Again the split tale helps out. To send the Hobbits off on their own means that the epic tale can go on in the background without alienating the reader. But language is even more important. The epic half would still remain inaccessible were it not for the Hobbits, Merry and Pippin, who focalize the majority of it. Whenever the style of the language starts to creep too high, and the book starts to sound like *The Silmarillion*, a Hobbit steps in to bring it back down to earth. In other words the Hobbits keep the gap between Primary and Secondary Worlds small enough that the reader can make the step.

The meeting between Merry and Pippin with the rest of the company at Isengard (after the battle at Helm's Deep) shows an interesting variation of this use of Hobbit language. Here Tolkien has Merry speak a polished speech more like an Elf than a Hobbit:

"Welcome, my lords, to Isengard!" he said. "We are the door-wardens. Merriadoc, son of Saradoc is my name The Lord Saruman is within; but at the moment he is closeted with one Wormtongue, or doubtless he would be here to welcome such honourable guests." (TT, 200-01)

⁷⁸J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977) 195.

⁷⁹Donald G. Keller, "Tolkien's Music: Preliminary Remarks on Style in *The Silmarillion*," *Fantasiae* 5, No. 11-12, Whole No. 56-57 (November-December, 1977): 8.

The distinction between this speech and the speech the Hobbits normally use creates an ironic tension that is then broken by Gimli:

"You rascals, you woolly-footed and wool-pated truants! A fine hunt you have led us! Two hundred leagues, through fen and forest, battle and death, to rescue you! And here we find you feasting and idling -- and smoking!" (TT, 201)

Though Gimli makes this adjustment in language, the presence of the Hobbits makes it possible, for Gimli would talk to no one else in this way, and would not likely address Merry in this way were it not for Merry's pretensions.

In the epic tale the step between Primary and Secondary Worlds is large and readers do not make it easily; in the story of Frodo and Sam it is a small step and easily made. The ending of the Council of Elrond furnishes an example of the Hobbits performing this function. The Hobbits have no part in the majority of the speaking, and the tales are told in a high style. There is an immense change when Bilbo finally breaks in with his comments. And the end of the chapter, with Sam's "nice pickle" speech, is a sign that the tone of what follows is lower again than what preceded. Another example of this contrasting tone is the shift from the end of Book III to the beginning of Book IV. Gandalf's speech is carefully polished and archaic:

"Away now, Shadowfax! Run, greatheart, run as you have never run before! Now we are come to the lands where you were foaled, and every stone you know. Run now! Hope is in speed!" (TT, 257-58)

But Sam's speech to open the next book is of an altogether different tone: "Well, master, we're in a fix and no mistake" (TT 259). This contrast in language underscores the contrast between the epic tale and the small tale. One is a mythical world; the other is a real world.

In the third volume, Frodo becomes noticeably less accessible than he has previously been. When he says "I will take the Ring . . . though I do not know the way"(FR 354), the elevation of his speech begins. And such speeches as, "Yet our grief is great and our loss cannot be mended . . . Gandalf was our guide, and he led us through Moria; and when our escape seemed beyond hope he saved us, and he fell"(FR 461),⁸⁰ have a distinctly un-Hobbitish ring. But through the second volume this alienation increases, and, with the shift in focalization from Frodo to Sam, by the beginning of Volume Three, the reader no longer has any significant common ground to form an identification with Frodo. Sam becomes the common ground, and, after Mount Doom, he keeps the great eucatastrophic events accessible to the reader. His language remains unchanged from beginning to ending, and this helps. On the Field of Cormallen, he says: "Well, if this isn't the crown of all . . . Strider or I'm still asleep"(RK 279). Not only is the language the same, but the use of the familiar name for Aragorn, King of Gondor, emphasizes that Sam at least will never change.

The ending of the Third Age and beginning of the Fourth has significance. The Third Age, the age in which the epic takes place, is a heroic age, and in it, Hobbits and the Shire are out of place. That is fine as long as the borders are closed to Third Age representatives. These closed borders mean that there is one place where the Secondary World is much like the Primary World (or at least like the reader probably wishes it would be). The story begins here appropriately, because this is a place where the reader can easily go. But the story is about those borders being forced open. Four Fourth-Age representatives leave the Shire and enter the Third Age, at the same time as the Third Age hears about the Shire and crowds into it. It is necessary(or at least

⁸⁰Notice the extensive use of couplings and the complete absence of contractions or colloquialisms.

helpful) that some Fourth-Age representative be consistently present, so the reader can identify with him. This task falls to Sam. The small tale is a Fourth-Age tale. But Frodo, as Tolkien points out in one of his letters, becomes over the course of the tale a saint,⁸¹ so even he becomes inaccessible, swallowed up in the Third Age, steeped in its language and lore. Indeed, Frodo becomes a *part* of the lore of the Third Age, as Bradley writes:

Sam is the only one of the characters who truly passes *out* of the Heroic Age and into the world of today; Aragorn becomes a King, but it is aptly Sam who is shown making the actual, personal *choice*, at the end, between that early flame of true, prime, single devotion which burns up the whole soul is a passion for heroic ends, and the quiet, manful, *necessary* compromise to live in a plain world and to do ordinary things.⁸²

Sam is the link between the Third and Fourth Age, and between the Primary and Secondary World. Through him the reader can slip into the Third Age, with the same sense of wonder as Sam has for it. Flieger describes Sam's role this way:

Sam, the gardener, the bringer of life, will stay, and have children, and truly perpetuate life. And he has yet more to do. Sam, the lover of old tales, and the lore of elder days, is to keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, to make sure not just that life continues, but that the sense of the continuity of life is preserved.⁸³

Though himself a Fourth Age character, he keeps the Third Age alive, because he has been there, and has allowed the reader to go along.

So once the bond between the reader and the Hobbits is strong, Escape, Recovery, and Consolation become possible. Escape is very closely related to Secondary Belief. The reader enters another world willingly, and finds his/her surroundings satisfactory. Tolkien's point is that, in

⁸¹Carpenter 234.

⁸²Bradley, *Men, Halflings and Hero Worship*, 43.

⁸³Verlyn Brown Flieger, "Medieval Epic and Romance Techniques in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1977) 147.

Fairie-story, the reason that the surroundings are satisfactory is that the Secondary World is like the Primary World ought to be, and that escaping into it is therefore like leaving the brick walls of a prison cell and escaping into a forest. But only the reader that goes willingly can truly escape, and that willingness is possible only if there is a character with whom the reader identify.

David Miller expresses well the relationship between this identification and the idea of Escape:

The Hobbits, despite their protests to the contrary, are remarkably free of preconceptions as to what can and cannot exist, and their ingenuousness is contagious. By the time the action moves to Moria, the reader is likely to have completed his identification with the Hobbits. Only the neo-goth could imagine himself battling a Balrog on the fire bridge as Gandalf does, but many of us might stab a troll in the foot if Boromir held the door.⁸⁴

When the reader is able to identify with the Hobbits, s/he can believe in Middle-earth and escape into the imagination. Tolkien writes, "The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it"(OFS, 76). Middle-earth is real enough to escape into, if the reader believes in it while s/he is reading. The focalizing Hobbits help the reader along; they are a comfortable fit. There are strange things to see in the world outside the Shire, but because they are seen through Hobbit eyes, they are not *too* strange. Sam believes in them, even Elves and Oliphaunts, despite their strangeness; any reader who believes in Sam will believe in them too. The reader who does escape to Middle-earth will find refreshment there -- where love exists without ulterior motive, where good is distinguishable from evil and has hope (and eventually success) in overcoming evil, where value is still placed on a breath of fresh air or a clean river. According to Tolkien, this is one of the most important functions of fairy-stories, and for it to work in *The*

⁸⁴David Miller, "Common Lens," 14.

Lord of the Rings, Sam must live believably in the mind of the reader. Patrick Grant says:

The final, and most elusive, archetype is that of the Self. Perhaps Tolkien's trilogy as a work of art which is more than the sum of its parts is the most satisfying representation of this archetype, for the whole meaning is activated within the reader, who alone can experience its completeness. But the most effective mediator between the ordinary reader and the "whole" world of Middle-earth, the character who is in the end closest to ourselves and who also must return to ordinary life, is Sam Gamgee. Sam has become, in the process of the story, Samwise, but he is less removed from ourselves than Frodo or the other characters. As he leaves, Frodo says to Sam: "You will have to be one and whole, for many years. You have so much to enjoy and to be, and to do" (RK, 309). The commendation of Sam's wholeness, and the directive to return to the ordinary world, bearing that wholeness with him, is also a directive to the reader: ripeness is all.⁸⁵

The reader must, like Sam, be able to live in both worlds.

Recovery is closely related to Escape. In order to achieve a "regaining of a clear view"(OFS, 74), the reader must see ordinary things with a renewed wonder. Again Sam is the key character to the success or failure of *The Lord of the Rings* on this score. Flieger writes, "It is through Sam that much of the wonder of Middle-earth, which others take for granted or do not see, is conveyed to the reader,"⁸⁶ because Sam, of all the main characters, is the most "ordinary." Frodo speaks with Elves, Merry is a Brandybuck, and "they're queer"(FR,41), and Pippin is a Took, a family that has bred legends of a fairy wife and a history of adventures.⁸⁷

Sam is a gardener. For him, the whole world is a wonder. More than any other character, he assigns heightened significance to ordinary things. Now this is different than changing ordinary things into wonders. It is true that encountering an Ent changes the way one sees a tree. Suddenly a tree is a strong but aged thing, and worthy of wonder. This change is part of

⁸⁵Grant 374.

⁸⁶Flieger, "Medieval Epic" 132.

⁸⁷Tolkien, *Hobbit* 2.

Recovery. But Sam's involvement with Recovery is rooted in his ability to see the significance, the wonder, of ordinary things. To Sam, not just Ents, but trees, are wonderful. Thus, the tree under which Bilbo has his party becomes the Party Tree, and its untimely end is almost more than he can bear. The stewed rabbit becomes a memory worth reminiscing about in harder times. To his cooking gear Sam becomes so attached that he almost cannot get rid of it. To everything ordinary Sam attaches sacred meaning, and this sacredness reaches the reader, with the potential to transform his/her world as well. For the Primary world is more full of trees than Ents. And the ability to see the tree as having meaning beyond either its substance (a large woody plant) or usefulness (200 feet of two-by-fours) meets a fundamental need in many readers.

Consolation is, for Tolkien, at the heart of fairy-story. It is the eucatastrophe, the good turn. Rooted in his belief in the interrelationship of joy and sorrow, the eucatastrophe is the sudden blooming of an unexpected grace in the middle of hopelessness (OFS, 81). Eucatastrophe is the Happy Ending. *The Lord of the Rings* contains several of these, but the greatest is experienced through Sam. The object of the focalization is non-perceptible. It is the thoughts of Sam, the awakening of hope and joy where Sam had expected only death:

But Sam lay back, and stared with open mouth, and for a moment between bewilderment and great joy, he could not answer. At last he gasped: "Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?"

"A great Shadow has departed," said Gandalf, and then he laughed, and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count. It fell upon his ears like the echo of all the joys he had ever known. But he himself burst into tears. Then, as a sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and his laughter welled up, and laughing he sprang from his bed.

"How do I feel . . . ? I feel like spring after winter, and sun on the leaves; and like trumpets and harps and all the songs I have ever heard" (RK, 277).

The story had been building to that moment from the beginning, and the reader had travelled part of the way with Bilbo, and part of the way with Frodo. But when it comes to the moment, the reader is fortunate to be able to see it through Sam, the character the reader (at her/his best) is most like. And s/he is indeed given "a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief"(OFS,81).

CONCLUSION

At the very moment when Sam and Frodo are at their lowest point, two Halflings alone on the Plains of Gorgoroth, weary beyond hope, at the very heart of the Enemy's territory, there they reach their greatest heights of heroism. There is no one about for them to kill, no grand speeches, no great flash of white against the dark sky as they draw their swords. They are alone, too thirsty to speak, and there is no more sword for them to draw, nor purpose for them to draw it. But here, if anywhere, they become heroes. And Sam in particular demonstrates this heroism. It is the heroism of simply putting one foot in front of the other, of doing what must be done, when what must be done is not dependent on noble birth or strong arm or sword of great lineage. Completing the task requires only a great deal of love, and a willingness to surrender power when to keep it would lead to tyranny.

Of course, of the two of them, Sam is in many ways both the least and the greatest. He persists in his ordinariness to the very end. His language remains that of a gardener, and his love for the soil and its gifts remains intact. His is no journey through the underworld to some glorious state beyond. While Frodo makes his descent, Sam is in the wings watching. And when they return again to the overworld, it is Frodo, not Sam, who is immortalised in song. In some senses, at the end of the tale Sam has just made it to where Frodo began -- the master of Bag End. While Frodo sails with Elves and Wizards to the West, Sam stays home and has a family and raises a garden. Sam is essentially ordinary.

But the structures of the tale reveal the other side. Sam's role is not insignificant. No character who performs in a narrative the number of functions, and holds in a story the significance,

that Sam does, can ever be relegated to secondary status. This is the character through whom the reader experiences Middle-earth, Tolkien's vicar. As the tale grows to its immense epic size, Sam remains Sam and makes the whole thing accessible. When the focus could become fixed on the War between the forces of Good and Evil, Sam is the reminder that the real story is one of movement, not war, and that real goodness is spelled with a small "g" and involves helping out a friend.

This is the character that tips the balance of power in favour of the good side, and by so doing, rather than winning a fight, makes it possible for the journey to continue without a fight. This strange power is one that does not overcome by might, but sustains by love. Along the way this power even learns the meaning of mercy towards one's enemy.

This is the character who gradually moves into the centre of the narrative process, becoming the primary focalizer, providing the eyes for the reader to see with and, more important, the mind for the reader to think, to wonder and to love with. The impact of Sam's focalization is to make a world of wonders believable without becoming any less wonderful, and to make the possibility of an ordinary person taking significant action in such a world believable as well. Tolkien writes, "I myself saw the value of Hobbits, in putting earth under the feet of 'romance,' and in providing subjects for 'ennoblement' and heroes more praiseworthy than the professionals."⁸⁸ The possibility of crossing into Middle-earth (Escape), the possibility of seeing the wonder of Middle-earth (Recovery), and the possibility of being moved by the events at the end of the Third Age of Middle-earth (Consolation), are all fundamentally dependent on the reader believing what is described. And the reason that Secondary Belief is so readily possible for most readers is the fact

⁸⁸ Carpenter, *Letters*, 215.

that the focalizing is done by characters that are, like Sam, in most ways ordinary.

The quotation from Tolkien's letter above summarizes well the two most important functions of the character of Sam Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings*. Sam puts earth under the feet of romance; he is the character that allows the reader to enter the story and experience it.⁸⁹ When it could become too lofty and grand for most readers to really experience it, there is always Sam coming along with his Ninnyhammers and his stewed rabbit to bring it back to earth.

The second function has to do with the idea of providing subjects to act as heroes. Sam is not only the character through whom the reader experiences the story, but he is also the character through whom the reader understands the story. If a meaning for such a tale can be singled out, then it is the notion, rooted in Tolkien's Christian beliefs, that the truly great are actually the truly small. It is the same notion that St. Matthew records on several occasions in his gospel, that "whosoever . . . shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:4), and "whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister" (Matt. 20:26). The heroism of Sam Gamgee is one of servanthood and simplicity. And that, as far as Tolkien is concerned, is Christian heroism.

Thus a single meaning has been pin-pointed for *The Lord of the Rings*, not the only one, not necessarily even the most important one, but certainly one of the important ones. Tolkien's tale is in part about the importance of the unimportant, the classical Christian doctrine that service is the the greatest good, better even than the good of nobility and kingship. And at the centre of this

⁸⁹This is really, of course, the task of Hobbits generally, for it is done through Bilbo at first, and then Frodo, and then either Merry or Pippin when Sam and Frodo are not in the narrative. But by the end of the first volume the task has begun to fall into Sam's hands, and that trend continues to grow more frequent whenever Sam is available to do the work. Finally, by the last book, the climax of the entire work, Sam is carrying the readers' involvement almost entirely.

meaning is the servant Sam. Goodness in this work is choosing Life over Death, Servanthood over Tyranny, Loyalty over Self-interest. By all these definitions there is none so good as Sam, the devoted gardener servant, and therefore none so heroic. As the Third Age ends, its last hero is in many ways the first hero of the post-heroic Fourth Age. This age is a familiar one in the Primary World, one where good and evil do not inhabit separate forms and do battle with swords, but live in each person and do battle there. In this age, in this world, the heroic act is to choose the good when you might just as well have chosen the evil. It means living an ordinary life well, and doing what must be done despite yourself. In short, the Fourth Age hero is Sam.

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