TOLKIEN'S USE OF TIME AND HISTORY AS A METHOD OF CHARACTERIZATION IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS

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Abstract

This thesis argues that J. R. R. Tolkien's method of characterization in The Lord of the Rings is based on his use of time and history to define and situate the characters in relation to one another and to the world they inhabit. The fact that the trilogy is presented as history, and as history has special qualities, suggests the possibility that an examination of the presentation of the characters as historical figures might shed light on who they are and how this knowledge is communicated to the reader. The significance of time in the story is further attested to by the facts that the dominant symbol, the Ring, has the ability to arrest time and alter history, and that one of the dominant themes concerns the changing of history from one Age to the next.

Not only is the story presented as history, but the characters are placed in different levels of time that serve to explain their respective natures and the structure of Middle-earth as a whole. Mythic, chronological, and fairy-tale time are the three time levels that together represent three historical positions into which the characters in The Lord of the Rings can

be divided. Each time level embodies an attitude and perception of time that serves to communicate to the reader an understanding of the characters and the nature and significance of the roles they play in the story. Tolkien's representation of history and the actions of time, as meaningful and directed by a transcendent, creative force, elevates the operations of time and the participation of individuals in it, to the level of a moral as well as a natural law. Evil is, therefore, opposition to the intended course of time and history, while good aids in its ultimate fulfillment.

Tolkien also uses a fourth level of time, narrative time, to emphasize the relative importance of the various narrative threads. The characters in The Lord of the Rings are not the flat stereotypes that some critics have made them, nor are they worth studying only as symbolical or allegorical representations of man. Tolkien has created out of his belief in the importance of fantasy, his knowledge of old myth and legend, and his love of storytelling, a complete world peopled with strange beings who are convincingly and consistently portrayed. It is his use of time and history that is the foundation of his method of characterization.

Table of Contents

Chapter I

Time, History, and Characterization in The Lord of the Rings

J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (LOTR) is a sustained narrative of some 600,000 words, which purports to tell the story of a conflict, set in the distant past of our planet, fought among human, non-human, and supernatural beings, and centered on the attempts to possess or destroy a magical Ring. Apart from an acceptance of these basic facts, critical opinion seems to be fragmented into numerous schools as to what the meaning and value of the story might be. LOTR has been extravagantly praised by some critics while others, frequently on the same grounds, have treated it with contempt or ridicule. The trilogy has been examined from almost every possible critical point of view and the conclusions drawn have varied widely. It has been called an allegory,[1] a contemporary myth,[2] a creation myth,[3] a fairy story,[4] a parable of reality,[5] a study of modern heroism,[6] a history,[7] a retelling of the Beowulf story,[8] escape literature,[9] an exercise in philology,[10] and juvenile trash.[11] Indeed, these are

just some of the representative labels that critics have attached to Tolkien's fiction in general, and LOTR in particular. A number of these classifications are complementary, but their number and diversity reflects the fact that there is far from a unity of opinion upon the part of the critics.

The critical problem that LOTR presents seems to arise from the fact that it does not really fit into any one literary category. The trilogy, because of its scope and the diversity of characters, lends itself to a great many different readings. Charles Moorman, in his essay "The Shire, Mordor, and Minas Tirith," comments that "In a sense it defines its own genre, just as Moby Dick does, and like Moby Dick, it is as bewildering in its variety as it is convincing in its unity."[12] Moorman's point is well made, but the critic is forced to assume some kind of an approach from which to evaluate his subject matter both as a focus for his own argument and to allow other readers to place his comments in perspective. A number of critics have discussed the historical pretense of the narrative, notably Robley Evans, Douglass Parker, Andrzej Zgorzelski, Clyde Kilby, and Paul Kocher. Professor Tolkien, in the Prologue to the story and in a number of interviews, has referred to the historical nature of the trilogy and even a casual reading of LOTR

reveals that there are innumerable references to time, history, calendars, prophecies, and legends. This study will use as its approach the assumption that the trilogy is intended to be read as a kind of analogy to history and that this is one feature, if not the essential one, that serves to define its nature. The focus of this study will be on characterization and the way in which Tolkien uses time and history to define and identify the characters and relate them in terms of each other, their world, and the reader.

The focus of much of the critical controversy surrounding The Lord of the Rings concerns the characters and the way in which they are presented. Edmund Wilson fired the opening salvo when he reviewed the trilogy shortly after it first appeared. Much of his attack was directed at Tolkien's characters.

> For the most part such characterizations as Dr. Tolkien is able to contrive are perfectly stereotyped: Frodo the good little Englishman, Samwise his dog-like servant, who talks lower class and respectful and never deserts his master. These characters who are no characters . . .[13]

Douglass Parker, writing for The Hudson Review, quickly responded in defence of LOTR. In this review he admitted that the characterization was "flat," but defended Tolkien's characters on the basis that conflicts within the characters were externalized and

that the "weight of the trilogy" made necessary " . . . sacrifice of character development."[14] Parker's defence of the characters is typical of much of the subsequent criticism. C. S. Lewis makes a similar point when he calls the characters "visible souls."[15] The attitude taken by many of the critics is that while the characters would appear flat and stereotyped in a work of realistic fiction, in the trilogy they are symbolic, allegorical, or archetypal. R. J. Reilly in his essay "Tolkien and the Fairy Story" briefly discusses a cross-section of earlier criticism and concludes by writing that

> The implicit agreement among all the critics noted is that the book can be taken seriously only if it is in some way allegorical or symbolic. The hostile critics deny allegory of any sort, or find the allegory childish and over simple. The friendly critics find the allegory serious, complex, and moral.[16]

The Reilly generalization, like most generalizations, is true only to a limited degree. Most critics favourably disposed towards LOTR do seek to relate the characters to our own world, or view their roles as being part of a larger view of the universe. W. H. Auden discusses the characters as quest heroes.[17] Patricia Meyer Spacks, Charles Moorman, and David Miller all discuss the trilogy as myth.[18] Marion Bradley and Deborah Rogers view many of the different

species as representing man at different stages in his development.[19] However, because the characters can be related to persons and things outside the story, it does not mean that they lack individual identity or realism within the world in which they appear. Reilly's assumption that the trilogy, and thus the characters, are to be taken seriously only if they are understood to represent things other than themselves, has the effect of reducing LOTR to the status of a means to an end. Such a view denies or overlooks the originality of Tolkien's creation and the vitality and consistency of portrayal of the characters. In this study it will be maintained that the characters are presented as "real" within the dictates of the form and perspective of Tolkien's narrative. Tolkien is a man writing for men and this means inevitably that correspondence of actual life patterns between our world and his fictional world are necessary. Without such correspondences Tolkien's invented world would be incomprehensible to anyone but himself and would fail to achieve the secondary belief that he maintains is so necessary in a successful fairy story. Tolkien also clearly states in the Foreword to the trilogy that, "It is neither allegorical nor topical."[20] An author is not an infallible guide to the meaning and significance of his own work, but his intentions should be

taken into consideration. This is especially true when the author is as prominent a scholar and critic as Tolkien was. It should also be noted that a number of other critics discuss Tolkien's characters and his world primarily on the basis of their own worth and the way in which they function within the story, without calling them symbolic or allegorical.[21] C. S. Lewis wrote, concerning allegorical reading of his own work, that

> Some published fantasies of my own have had foisted on them (often by the kindliest critics) so many admirable allegorical meanings that I never dreamed of as to throw me into doubt whether it is possible for the wit of man to devise anything in which the wit of some other man cannot find and plausibly find, an allegory.[22]

The fact that an allegorical interpretation of a particular work can be plausibly argued does not make that work necessarily an allegory. Indeed, most works can be read as allegories if the reader is determined and inventive. The allegorical elements must be an intrinsic part of a work for it to be termed an allegory. It will be argued in this study that while there may be an allegorical dimension related to some of the characters, they are successful as characters in themselves. The beings that populate Middle-earth are unusual and even fantastic, and their presentation makes special demands on the author, but Tolkien

manages to bring them to life.

The presentation and nature of the characters that appear in LOTR differ from those that appear in realistic fiction in three important ways. First, there is the fact that most of Tolkien's characters are non-human. If an author wishes his non-human creatures to be considered "real" and not merely allegorical, then the characters must be described in such a way as to identify them as being essentially different from men and at the same time establish a link between the reader, who is, after all, a man, and the non-humans that people the story. A second problem inherent in the characterization in LOTR arises out of the fact that there are so many different species and individuals. Tolkien's story contains hobbits, wizards, elves, dwarves, ents, eagles, orcs, trolls, barrow-wights, wargs, goblins, and men of many races, as well as unique individuals such as Tom Bombadil and Sauron. Each of these creatures has special physical features, abilities, and interests particular to its own kind. The reader finds himself faced with a veritable circus of beings who must somehow be organized as to who and what they are if the action of the narrative is to be understood. In a work of the complexity and length of LOTR some consistent and coherent method for identifying and comparing the various characters is crucial if the

reader is not to be lost in a maze of confusing figures. Finally, the world that these characters inhabit is not the world of every-day life, nor is it the world of realistic or naturalistic fiction. It is the world of fantasy, or as Tolkien calls it, Faërie. The world of Faërie contains most of the things found in the real world, though frequently altered or magnified, as well as things and beings not to be found in our world. In his essay "On Fairy Stories" Tolkien describes Faërie as containing

> . . . many things besides elves and fairys, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.[23]

The problem of "sub-creating" such a "Secondary World" as Tolkien calls it, is that, as with non-human characters, the reader must be convinced of its reality as a consistent whole, and must be able to understand and appreciate the actions and creatures that appear in such a world. The writer of fantasy gains the reader's belief in the world of Faërie by giving it "the inner consistency of reality."[24] The realism of this sub-created world is built up through the presentation and adherence to a set of laws that define the invented world. Tolkien maintains that the fantasy

writer" . . . makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world."[25] The characters within such a world must be seen to reflect and personify these laws. Tolkien's characters and the world they inhabit require that the characterization fulfill the three needs already mentioned. The characters need to be presented in such a way as to respect their non-human nature, enable the reader to distinguish one character or species from another, and be seen to define and reflect a set of laws that govern the sub-created world in such a way as to give it the "internal consistency of reality."

Tolkien's solution to these problems of characterization lies in his use of time, legend, and myth which he mixes together in LOTR to form what he calls the history of Middle-earth. In the Foreword to the trilogy, after denying that it is an allegory, Tolkien goes on to state that, "I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers" (B.I, p. 7). Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien's official biographer, quotes Tolkien as having said concerning LOTR that "I wanted people simply to get inside this story and take it (in a sense) as actual history."[26] The story is presented as being a history of the end of the Third

Age as seen by its two authors, Frodo and Bilbo Baggins. Throughout the narrative the characters are constantly referring to the fact that what they are involved in is history. The dominant theme of the story, as Douglass Parker notes, is historical in nature. " . . . this is not primarily the story of the endless struggle between Good and Evil," nor is it at all an allegory of this: it is the story of the end of an age; an age which the author has gone to a fantastic amount of effort to make specific; to make real.[27] Andrej Zgorzelski in his essay "Time setting in J. R. R. Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings'" maintains that "The novel is about the passing of times." and "The Lord of the Rings is a book about history."[28] Throughout the course of the narrative the characters and their actions are described in terms of their historical significance. There are digressions, as with the Tom Bombadil episode, but the narrative quickly moves back to its central focus, the history of the Ring at the end of the Third Age, and incidental characters such as Bombadil soon recede into the background. It is this presentation of the story as history that provides the framework from which the characters and their actions are to be understood; Tolkien's use of history provides the set of laws that give the story its inner consistency. Therefore, it

is history and a time-historical perspective that define and distinguish the characters in their essential natures.

Numerous critics, besides Parker and Zgorzelski have commented on the fact that LOTR purports to be history. Clyde Kilby notes that " . . . it [the story] provides a dependable realization of time . . .. Ancestry and antiquity are everywhere manifest and a viable history buttresses every point of decisions."[29] Paul Kocher refers to Tolkien's "historical pretext" and comments that "By many such references Tolkien achieves for Middle-earth long perspectives backward and forward in geological time."[30] Barton Friedman calls the trilogy "fabricated history" and Roger Sale and Gunnar Urang both use the term "feigned" history in their discussions of the narrative. However, these critics see the historical element mainly as a means of adding versimilitude to the story. By making LOTR a history, and attaching appendices to it, there is an additional sense of realism beyond that of less ambitious fantasy literature. The fact that this history is presented as part of our own distant past also provides a bridge between the reader and the narrative; but the historical pretext also functions in a crucial manner within the narrative. LOTR, in that it is history, has special qualities,

preconceptions and prejudices that set it apart from other histories, real or invented. It is these special qualities that underly the inherent morality of the story, define the natural laws of Middle-earth, and situate the various characters and species in relation to each other, to the reader, and to life itself.

Tolkien depicts history as cyclical and moving steadily downward as Middle-earth recedes from the time of its creation. Its association with the creative beings, the Valar, is growing steadily weaker. The Elder peoples are dying out or leaving Middle-earth, and the fairie quality of the world is fading into something which approximates the feudal world of our own history. The world is degenerating in much the same way as Hesiod depicted it in The Theogony, a point that William Reynolds makes in his essay "Poetry as Metaphor in The Lord of the Rings." "To say that the course of History leads down is to join a tradition which can be traced at least as far back as Hesiod's account of man's decline from a race of gold through successive races of silver and bronze to its final (present) state as a race of iron."[31] Reynolds continues by noting that in LOTR, "Each historical age ends with a victory over evil that leaves the victors weaker . . . And each new age witnesses the reappearance

of the vanquished evil in new and more debased forms."[32]

Sauron is the personification of evil in the Third Age, but he is not the source of all evil; Morgoth came before him; and other evils will arise after his destruction, as Gandalf declares.

> "Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to muster all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set." (B.III, p. 155)

The significance of this progressive degeneration in terms of the characters is crucial to our study. In Middle-earth at the time of the Quest, many of the chief characters were born in past ages; Sauron, Elrond, Bombadil, and Galadriel are the more obvious ones. The powers these characters have are naturally greater than those of later and thus lesser beings. Robley Evans also links the historical-mythic age of a character with his nature and abilities. "Created beings of the Third Age, in which the War of the Rings is fought, are less powerful because farther from the origins of their race and power than their mythic ancestors who were the first to engage in the conflicts between Good and Evil which are the stepping stones of history."[33]

History, in Tolkien's scheme of things, is not simply a factual record of events, nor is it the mechanistic operation of pre-ordained laws. In LOTR, history is purposeful, vital, and above all moral in nature. This inherent morality arises out of two related sources. First, it is clear that the course of history is not mere accident. There are a number of references in key passages in which a transcendent, guiding power is attributed with influencing the course of history. Gandalf tells Frodo that Bilbo's finding of the Ring was not simply the result of chance. "'I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker'" (B.I, p. 65). Elrond tells those assembled for the council that it was not chance that brought them together at the crucial time. "'You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must find counsel for the peril of the world'" (B.I, p. 255). When Frodo agrees to undertake the Quest, Elrond replies by stating that "'I think this task is appointed for you, Frodo; . . .'" (B.I, p. 385). There is no overt theology, little is said about the Valar and there is only one reference to a supreme deity but there is a constant, underlying sense that the

Free Peoples are being aided indirectly from behind the scenes.

The sense of providence does not, however, deny individual self-determination nor does it assure victory over the forces of evil. It is repeatedly made clear that the individual is free to choose to act for good or evil, or not to act at all. Bilbo passes the Ring on to Frodo by choice though Gandalf aids him. Frodo assumes the burden of the Quest freely, though reluctantly. "'I will take the Ring . . . though I do not know the way'" (B.I, p. 284). Aragorn, Gandalf, Galadriel, and Faramir each have an opportunity to possess the Ring but do not, out of awareness that it would be both wrong and dangerous. Paul Kocher notes that " . . . for Tolkien every intelligent being is born with a will capable of free choice, and the exercise of it is the distinguishing mark of his individuality."[34] It is these individual choices that together compose History, a point that William Reynolds makes. "History is not an engine dragging individuals to destruction but the sum of individual reactions to situations involving choice; if the choices are rightly made, each individual is sure of his end--returning properly to the Eternity that lies behind History."[35] This eternity is both figurative and literal in Tolkien's world. Those

characters that act in accordance with their duties and transcendent laws attain honour that assures them of immortality through fame. A number of characters such as Frodo, Bilbo, and Gandalf are also granted the right to travel to the Undying Lands once their role in Middle-earth is done. Beyond this is the suggestion that there will come a time when the world will end and those that have passed out of Middle-earth will meet, if they have deserved it, to live again outside of time and the circle of the known world. It is the element of choice, which if rightly made, guarantees immortality, that Robley Evans refers to when he describes Tolkien's sense of history as " . . . essentially moral in that it is not only a movement through time."[36] History is not only composed of choices which are essentially moral, but the "good" character is awarded a special place of honour in its annals, and may even be granted the opportunity to transcend the passage of time and achieve a deathless state of happiness beyond the limits of Middle-earth.

Tolkien's conception of history operates on four inter-related time levels. On the highest level, time is presented on an epic mythic-scale which relates the characters and their actions to a cosmic view of existence dating back to the time of creation. However, this mythic presentation of history is made concrete

and immediate through the use of chronological time. Chronological time is specific and particular and places reality in an ordered, linear perspective. It is concerned with the movements of the sun, the waxing and waning of the moon and cycles of the season and is the basis for the use of calendars and the assigning of dates. Thirdly, there is the use of fairy-tale time which arises out of the setting of the story in a fantasy world of the distant, unspecified past.[37] Each of these levels serves to define the characters through a combination of traditional and invented time-related symbolism that permeates the narrative. The fourth level, narrative time, affects the reader's appreciation of the story in a way extrinsic to the time structure within the narrative. It is simply the pace and rhythm of the prose and the way in which, depending on the character and the situation being described, the narrative either moves along briskly summarizing and compressing the action, or else dwells on detail, giving the effect that the reader is actually experiencing the duration of the action in the same way that the character does.

Epic-mythic time is presented within the story in two forms and affects the reader in two additional ways. Within the story a number of characters are portrayed as having been born in the distant mythic

past, before or at the time of the creation of Middle-earth. Sauron, Galadriel, Elrond, and Bombadil are all presented as living myths in that their origins pre-date the time of the Ring Quest by thousands of years. Mythic time is also associated with other characters whose actions are presented as re-enactments of events that took place millenniums earlier. Several times an analogy is drawn between Frodo and Beren, an ancient hero. The defeat of Sauron parallels the defeat of Morgoth who was the original form of evil on Middle-earth. The marriage of Arwen and Aragorn markedly resembles the marriage between Beren and Luthien. For the reader, the sense of cosmic time has two additional features that arise out of the story. LOTR is itself an explanation of the origins of our world; the events that compose the end of the Third Age result in the beginning of the Fourth Age, the Age of Man, the Age of the reader. David Miller comments that "The Lord of the Rings is a creation myth: it explains how the world got to be the way it is."[38] The use of mythic time, and the characters associated with such a time, also serve to link Tolkien's characters with other figures from religion, literature, and psychology that display similar mythical qualities. Sauron is readily associated with Satan, and Gandalf and Frodo with Christ, because

of the symbolic significance of their acts and natures. These beings have in common an involvement with existence at its essential level, and their actions contain an inherent symbolism which gives them the significance of such positive mythic acts as those of creation, regeneration, purification, and salvation through sacrifice. This has the effect of expanding the significance of the story beyond the boundaries of Middle-earth, but it does not make Tolkien's characters primarily allegorical or symbolic. Mythic time and the characters and actions that figure in such a time exist in response to the same realities that appear in our world and in the world of literature and psychology. Life and death, good and evil, and the passage of time are shared realities that exist in all imperfect worlds. The similarities between Tolkien's mythic characters and those that appear elsewhere rest in the essential similarities that exist in the worlds they inhabit.

In fact, the use of the term "mythic time" is in itself misleading when applied to Tolkien's world. It is commonly used to describe an imagined or invented understanding of the distant past that is considered more powerful (significant) in proportion to its proximity to the time of creation. A mythic view of life tends to translate history into myth in order to

escape the limits and transcience of what Mircea Eliade calls "profane time."[39] In Tolkien's world the past is indeed more powerful than the present; but myth is not glorified history, it is actual history and as such is concretely linked with chronological time.

Chronological time is used to place the characters and the action in a specific, objective perspective. Ruth Noel writes concerning LOTR that, "The chronology of the Lord of the Rings is painstakingly consistent. The sun and the stars rise at times appropriate to the season; the moon waxes and wanes and rises with complete regularity."[40] Noel finds this preoccupation with chronological time both unusual and significant. "Chronology, time and calendars are given a curious emphasis in Tolkien's works. A great deal of mythology is associated with calendric systems and the measurement of time in general. Tolkien used chronology as one of his most unusual devices for overlaying the Lord of the Rings with realistic detail."[41] As Noel points out, mythology, and thus mythic time, is repeated in and related to, chronological time. The effect is to give the mythic characters from the past a realism that is lacking in most fantasy and mythic literature. Indeed, mythic time is contained within chronological time, and, as noted earlier, many of the characters from Middle-earth's mythic period continue to live and act

in the present dealt with in the story.

The third time layer in LOTR is fairy-tale time. It is this nebulous sense of time that contributes to the fantastic nature of Middle-earth. While the actual history of Middle-earth is made concrete, its relation to our world and our view of history is never made clear. The reader is aware that the events described took place some time in the distant past, but he is never informed as to just how distant. In this respect the story is reminiscent of the classic fairy story opening of "Once upon a time." The vagueness of this fairy story time permits the author to present an alien world, peopled by fantastic creatures, which does not directly conflict with what the reader knows about the past of our own world.

The actual presentation of the story provides Tolkien with a fourth way of using time to structure the reader's understanding. This is done through his use of narrative time. Ruth Noel maintains that

> . . . the sense of the passage of time is dealt with in such a way that the reader has the impression of experiencing the same duration of time that the travelers do. This is particularly noticeable when a single paragraph summarizes the activities of several days but gives the illusion that the experiences of those days have been set forth in detail.[42]

David Miller comments that, "like the journey itself, time spurts and lags with discernable rhythm. Rivendell and Lothorien are timeouts in both movement and calendar."[43] Narrative time not only reflects the character's experience of time, it also reflects the significance of the actions. After the narrative splits between Frodo and Sam on one hand, and the other members of the fellowship on the other, there is a marked difference in narrative pace. The progress of Frodo and Sam towards Mount Doom crawls along, and it seems as if their every thought and action is described. It is with them that the fate of Middle-earth lies, and their painful progress, reflected in the rhythm of the narrative, is in sharp contrast to the description of the other characters. The second narrative thread moves swiftly as armies gallop across the landscape and clash. There is a superabundance of action, and yet the reader is aware that all this hurry and bustle is little more than a diversionary tactic intended to distract Sauron.

The first three time elements are combined and inter-related in such a way as to show history operating on every level. The result is a complex, composite framework which serves to define and identify the characters and their actions. It is this historical framework which provides the set of laws

that enable the reader to place the characters in moral, social, and historical perspective. These laws arise out of Tolkien's conception of history as it operates in Middle-earth. They all relate time and its passage to the individual in Middle-earth and his relationship to the world he inhabits.

The primary law in Middle-earth is that change is inevitable, necessary, and good, and that there is a transcendent force acting to insure that this change occurs. Change, which is a function of time, is a fundamental part of natural law and is given a moral dimension by Tolkien, in his sub-created world. It is made clear that the process of change is supported and directed by a supreme force of good, in an intended direction. The record of change, as it is experienced by rational creatures, is called history. A character's interest and involvement in the process of change positions that character in relation to the other characters and the process as a whole. Each species, and member of species, in the natural order of things, has a place in the continuum of change, and any attempt by a species or member of a species to halt or disrupt change is acting against natural law and thus to the detriment of its intended nature. Finally, each species and member of a species is assigned not only a position in the process of change, but a perception

of this process that is in keeping with its individual nature.

LOTR constitutes an application of this law of change focused on a crucial moment in the process. The Ruling Ring represents the antithesis of change, Sauron's attempt to halt the process. The actions of the "good" characters are directed towards destroying the Ring and thus permitting natural law to proceed. Natural law dictates that the Third Age end, and the people of that Age pass or die out of Middle-earth. Men are depicted as being the only species capable of change and involved in its process, and it is they who will survive to dominate the Fourth Age. Each species and member of a species either participates in this undertaking in accordance with its proper place in time or else is punished. In addition, certain characters who are exempt (or are rendered exempt) from the natural process participate in the Quest in a transcendent manner as instruments of natural law. Gandalf and Frodo are two such characters.

A number of critics have noted the significance of time specifically in relation to characterization. Rose Zimbardo comments that the various species inhabiting Middle-earth are arranged in a hierarchy and that the harmony of Tolkien's world depends on change. "The permanence of All consists in change.

The harmony of being demands decay before regeneration begins."[44] Robley Evans emphasizes the importance of the function of time as history in the characterization in LOTR. "The various races and individuals who appear are defined by their relationship to history and to the power over it which the imagination provides."[45]

Tolkien's use of time and history utilizes traditional symbolism related to time and expands on it. The equating of age with wisdom, the mystical significance of the changing of the seasons, and the movements of the sun--all figure prominently in Tolkien's method of characterization. But Tolkien's sense of time goes beyond the limits of traditional and realistic fiction. In his world the past is not simply tenuously linked with the present. It exerts a direct influence on the present in two very immediate ways. First, there is the continued presence of characters that are remnants from another Age. Tolkien also involves the past in the present through his use of prophecy and precedent which serve as accurate indicators of what is to come. Randel Helms lists this importance of inherited knowledge as the fifth law governing Middle-earth. "All experience is the realization of proverbial truth."[46] The past not only exerts an influence on the present and the future, it also provides predictions and models that help guide

those wise enough to heed them.

The importance of time and history in Tolkien's method of characterization can only be validated by a systematic examination of the characters themselves and the way in which their essential natures are communicated to the reader. Towards this purpose the characters in LOTR will be examined both individually and in the way in which they relate to one another. The emphasis will be placed on the way in which the characters are presented within the narrative, and the Appendices will be referred to only as they serve to elaborate qualities already displayed by characters within the story. This study will limit its focus to the characters as they are portrayed in LOTR and any references to Tolkien's other fiction will be made only to support something already noted in the trilogy. This is not only due to the dictates of time and space but because LOTR differs essentially from his other works.[47]

Notes

[1] Robert J. Reilly, "Tolkien and the Fairy Story," in Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Issacs and Rose A. Zimbardo. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 136. All subsequent references to this book will refer to it as TCr. Also Burton Raffel, "The Lord of the Rings as Literature," in TCr., p. 244.

[2] Randel Helms, Tolkien's World (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), p. 58. Also Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Power and Meaning in The Lord of the Rings," in TCr., p. 82.

[3] David M. Miller, "The Narrative Pattern in The Fellowship of the Ring," in A Tolkien Compass, ed. Jared Lobdell (LaSalle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1975), p. 97.

[4] Reilly, in TCr., p. 129.

[5] Robert Plank, "The Scouring of the Shire: Tolkien's View of Fascism," in A Tolkien Compass, p. 109.

[6] Roger Sale, "Tolkien and Frodo Baggins," in TCr., pp. 247-88.

[7] Douglass Parker, "Hwaet We Holbytla . . .," Hudson Review, 9 (Winter, 1956-57), 607.

[8] Parker, p. 608.

[9] Charles Elliot, "Can America Kick the Hobbit? The Tolkien Caper," Life, 62 (February 24, 1967), p. 10. Refers to LOTR as " . . . just a good yarn on the level of Tom Swift and his Electric Runabout." The term "escape literature" has also been used more positively in reference to LOTR. Indeed Tolkien uses it to refer to one of the primary qualities of a good fairy story in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," in The Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), see especially pp. 60-68.

[10] Edmund Wilson, "Oo, Those Awful Orcs!" Nation, 182 (April 14, 1956), 312.

[11] Wilson, p. 314.

[12] Charles Moorman, "The Shire, Mordor, and Minas Tirith," in TCr., p. 201.

[13] Wilson, p. 313.

[14] Parker, p. 609.

[15] C. S. Lewis, "The Dethronement of Power," in TCr., p. 15.

[16] Reilly, p. 136.

[17] W. H. Auden, "The Quest Hero," in TCr., pp. 40-61.

[18] Spacks, in TCr., pp. 100-108; Moorman, in TCr., pp. 201-17; and Miller, in A Tolkien Compass, pp. 95-106.

[19] Marion Zimmer Bradley, "Men, Halflings, and Hero-Worship," in TCr., pp. 109-27, and Deborah Rogers, "Everyclod and Everyhero: The Image of Man in Tolkien," in A Tolkien Compass, pp. 69-76.

[20] J. R. R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 6. All subsequent references to the three books that compose The Lord of the Rings will be identified within the text. The Fellowship of the Ring is hereafter referred to as B.I, with the page number, while the second and third volumes, The Two Towers and The Return of the King are indicated as B.II and B.III respectively.

[21] A number of critics discuss the story in a larger context, either literary or realistic, without questioning its validity as a work of merit in its own right. Many of the critics who examine the trilogy in an allegorical context preface their remarks, as Edmund Fuller does, by referring to its "allegorical possibilities" rather than stating that the story is an allegory. (Edmund Fuller, "The Lord of the Hobbits," in TCr., p. 31.)

[22] Quoted in Roger Sherman Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 10.

[23] Tolkien, in The Tolkien Reader, p. 9.

[24] Tolkien, in The Tolkien Reader, p. 47.

[25] Tolkien, in The Tolkien Reader, p. 37.

[26] Quoted by Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p. 195.

[27] Parker, p. 603.

[28] Andrzej Zgorzelski, "Time Setting in J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings," Zagadnienia Rodzajow Literackich, 13 (1971), 94.

[29] Clyde S. Kilby, "Meaning in The Lord of The Rings," in Shadows of Imagination, ed. Mark R. Hillegas (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press, 1969), p. 70.

[30] Paul H. Kocher, Master of Middle-earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 4.

[31] William Reynolds, "Poetry as Metaphor in The Lord of The Rings," in Mythlore, 4, No. 4 (June 1977), 15.

[32] Reynolds, p. 15.

[33] Robley Evans, J. R. R. Tolkien (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1974), p. 96.

[34] Kocher, p. 61.

[35] Reynolds, p. 15.

[36] Evans, p. 96.

[37] Andrzej Zgorzelski maintains that LOTR is set in three layers of time; "These layers are epic time, the chronicle time, and the fairy tale time." (Zgorzelski, p. 95.)

[38] Miller, p. 97.

[39] Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), see especially pp. 34-47.

[40] Ruth S. Noel, The Mythology of Middle-earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p. 36.

[41] Noel, p. 16.

[42] Noel, p. 36.

[43] Miller, p. 104.

[44] Zimbardo, in TCr., p. 106.

[45] Evans, p. 76.

[46] Helms, p. 79.

[47] A number of critics have made the distinction between LOTR and The Hobbit. Randel Helms in Tolkien's World states that The Hobbit is limited in terms of theme, moral complexity, and tone. (See especially pp. 24-40.) Edmund Fuller offers similar comments in "The Lord of the Hobbits," in TCr., p. 20. The Hobbit is basically a children's story while The Lord of the Rings is for adults. The characters in LOTR reflect this fact in that they are presented as being more complex, serious, and significant. The Silmarillion, Tolkien's other major fictional work, differs from LOTR in that it is not presented as a consistent narrative but rather serves to supply a mythology and background information for certain of the characters and species that are alluded to in LOTR as a part of the distant, mythic past, but never really discussed.

Chapter II

Hobbits: Creatures of the Present

The characters most frequently discussed by the critics are the hobbits, and rightly so. It is through the eyes of the hobbits, and from their point of view, that the reader experiences the Quest. It is the hobbits who appeal to the heart as well as the head. It is in the hands of a hobbit, Frodo, that the fate of the Quest lies. There are no less than five hobbits, Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin who figure prominently in the story; additionally, there is Smeagol who is descended from hobbit ancestors. Finally, it is Frodo alone, among all the other characters, who develops and changes dramatically as an individual, in the course of the narrative.

The story opens with a Prologue in which the reader is introduced to hobbits in general, Shire hobbits more particularly, and Bilbo Baggins especially. The initial description of these curious creatures is carried out through a combination of physical description, casual references to past hobbit history, and mention of a variety of their idiosyncracies. A

summary of this introductory hobbit lore would include the information that they stand two to four feet tall, have curly hair (on heads and feet), and red cheeks. They eat five to six meals a day when they can get them, usually live in holes in the ground, and are fond of mushrooms and smoking, which they claim to have invented. Their history, what little there is of it, is reckoned from the year 1601 of the Third Age, though they are much older than that as a species. They are little interested in learning and knowledge, " . . . they like to have books filled with things that they already knew set out fair and square with no contradictions" (B.I, p. 17). They are largely indifferent to the affairs of the outside world and much prefer family genealogies to history. Today they have grown shy of the big people, as they call us, and avoid contact as much as possible.

With these sparse details as an introduction, the reader enters the story at the time just before Bilbo's birthday party and the passing on of his magical ring to Frodo. As the preparations for the birthday party unfold and the hobbits are observed at first hand, the reader might well exclaim as does a rider of Rohan later in the story. "Halflings! But they are only a little people in the old songs and children's tales out of the North. Do we walk in legends or on the

green earth in the daylight?" (B.I, p. 37). Aragorn replies "A man may do both, . . . For not we but those who come after will make the legends of our time, The green earth, say you? That is a mighty matter of legend, though you tread it under the light of day!" (B.II, p. 37). The question the Rider asks is, in a larger sense, a questioning of the validity of the whole story, from the reader's point of view. The hobbits do not fit in with the Rider's conception of his world, just as the strange creatures in the trilogy are not a part of the reader's "real" world. The question is especially applicable to the hobbits because, not only are they alien to our world, but they also seem out of place in the heroic world in which the action of the story is set. Their simple agrarian lifestyle is in sharp contrast to the terrors and struggles of the world around them. Aragorn's reply answers both the Rider's question and the reader's concerning the realism of legendary creatures. Legends are what people make out of past stories and events. This is precisely what the author of LOTR has done, though the basis of his story is fictional. The reader is reminded, through the Rider of Rohan's question, that much that he takes for granted is also an object of wonder, "a matter of Legend" as is the earth itself.

Tolkien's presentation of the hobbits is carefully designed to draw the reader gradually into the story and to an acceptance of the fantastic characters and world they inhabit. The reader's belief in this world is centered on the hobbits because they are the first non-human characters portrayed in the story, and because it is through their eyes that the reader views Middle-earth at the end of the Third Age. The initial depiction of the hobbits does two things. First, it catches and holds the reader's attention because the hobbits are interesting and amusing characters. The description of the birthday party is entertaining but does little in terms of the plot, other than to provide a dramatic exit for Bilbo. The second thing that Tolkien does is to begin to lay the foundation for his "time-history" portrayal of the characters and the events. The reader has already been told in the Prologue that what he is reading is history. He now becomes aware that the essential information being provided for him about hobbits in general, and Bilbo and Frodo in particular, has an historical orientation, and seems to be based on a relationship with, and perspective towards, time. It is this use of time that provides the "inner consistency" that Tolkien speaks of, in his essay "On Fairy Stories," as necessary in a successful fantasy. It is also this use of time that

takes the place of more conventional methods of characterization that would be inadequate in the trilogy, because of its special qualities.

Hobbits are clearly identified from the beginning of LOTR as being interested and involved only in the present and only as it relates directly to them. Their indifference to history is described by the author in the Prologue when he notes that "Of their original home the Hobbits in Bilbo's time preserved no knowledge. A love of learning (other than genealogical lore) was far from general among them . . ." (B.I, pp. 11-12). Gandalf, a wizard of great power and wisdom who is famed among men, elves, and dwarves for his exploits in many lands and through long ages, is known in the Shire for " . . . his skill with fires, smokes, and lights" (B.II, p. 33). These displays, put on for entertainment, were known in Bilbo's time, as part of the "legendary past" (B.I, p. 33). Bilbo Baggins, who has travelled in the world outside the Shire and even encountered a dragon, is known as "mad Baggins" and "the old fool." As Sauron's power increases and the outside world begins to intrude on the Shire in the form of outsiders fleeing from his power, the hobbits continue to ignore any but their own small affairs. "Giants and other portents on the borders of the Shire were forgotten for more important matters: Mr. Frodo

was selling Bag End, indeed he had already sold it--to the Sackville Bagginses!" (B.I, p. 75). While hobbits are long lived by our standards--the Old Took reached 130--they do not live as long as some men, or dwarves, or the immortal elves. The hobbits in summary, then, are estranged from the memory of their creation; they are little interested in history past or future, and in the present only in a very limited, immediate sense. Finally, their life span is relatively short compared to that of their fellow inhabitants of Middle-earth. These are the dominant features that determine their role in the battle with Sauron. The hobbits, as a species, do nothing to overthrow the forces of evil. They play no role in the major conflicts and even when elements of the evil that is assailing Middle-earth enter the Shire, they prove themselves incapable of dealing with it. When the hobbit members of the fellowship return home, they discover that Sharkey and his gang have taken over the Shire and have corrupted the very things that gave it its idyllic nature.

All that has been said thus far refers only to the hobbits in general. However, there are individual hobbits that play major roles in the Quest. Rather than contradicting what has been said thus far, Bilbo, Frodo, Merry, Pippin, and Sam offer the real proof. These five characters are affected by their experiences

during the Quest to such an extent that they behave in a most unhobbitlike manner. The changes they undergo are reflected and manifested in their gaining a different view of time and history from that of the average hobbit.

Bilbo is the first hobbit singled out by the author for our attention. He behaves in normal hobbit fashion in most ways. He enjoys parties, food, presents, and company, all qualities he displays before and during the birthday party. However, the reader is quickly made aware that he is different. He meets with beings from outside the Shire, that is, with dwarves, elves, and Gandalf. He is interested in the past and has written a history, not only of his own adventures, but concerning elves and dwarves, and dragons. He is also interested in news of what is taking place in the world outside and what it means for the future. He has travelled and seen such marvels as dragons--which rustics, such as Sandyman the Miller, scoff at as mere stories. Then, too, his attitudes and interests in the history of Middle-earth set him apart from the other hobbits. Another unusual thing about him is that he seems to defy time by not growing old. "Time wore on, but it seemed to have little effect on Mr. Baggins. At ninety he was much the same as at fifty. At ninety-nine they began to call him well preserved; but

unchanged would have been nearer the mark" (B.I, p. 29). His agelessness is not initially very striking, but as the story progresses both Bilbo and his age take on added significance. Gandalf reveals to Frodo that it is the Ring that has preserved Bilbo from time; and his unmarked age, which is a result of the magical Ring, takes on a magical quality. He is not merely an elderly hobbit; in fact, his leaving the Shire is a recognition of this fact. Eventually he goes and stays with Elrond, the Half-Elven, in a place where time seems arrested and the memories of the past are alive and co-exist with the present. Here he remains, writing his history and songs about the past, with a knowledge about the present and the future that transcends that of his kindred. It is Bilbo who composes a prophetic poem about Aragorn, which he recites in the council at Elrond's home, that accurately predicts what is to take place.

> All that is gold does not glitter,
> Not all those who wander are lost;
> The old that is strong does not wither,
> Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
> From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
> A light from the shadows shall spring;
> Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
> The crownless again shall be king.
> (B.I, p. 182)

Robley Evans aptly describes this transformation from hobbit to lore master when he writes,

> For Bilbo to have moved from an ordinary hobbit to a mystic seer living among the elves in Rivendell suggests something about the nature of time: for Bilbo has lived beyond his normal years . . . But for the moment of the War he remains in Middle-earth to turn history into legend, and to read myth in history, both means of transforming time into eternity.[1]

Bilbo's role and importance in the story of Sauron's power is greater than that of the average hobbit in direct proportion to his greater perspective of history, and in relation to his longevity. It is striking that by the end of the story, Bilbo has become almost elvish. He shares the elves' interest in the past, their habit of keeping it alive in memory and song in the present, and their home in Rivendell. The role that he plays in the actual Quest is very similar to that of the Elf lords Elrond, Celeborn, and Galadriel, as advisor and gift giver, but not as actor. Finally, he shares the elvish fate of leaving Middle-earth for the Undying lands when the Quest is fulfilled. These correspondences to elves, and their shared fate, can only be seen to have taken their source from a shared experience and perception of time.

Frodo Baggins inherits more than just Bilbo's physical possessions. He had lived with Bilbo for some time before Bilbo left the Shire for good. From him he received not only the magic Ring but also an interest in outsiders and a friendship with Gandalf.

Bilbo had taught him some of the history of Middle-earth, especially of the elves, and even some of their language. Despite this, for quite some time after Bilbo's departure, he showed few signs of being different from his fellow hobbits. He had a number of hobbit friends, two of whom, Merry and Pippin, join him on his journey. He wandered around the Shire at night under starlight, and gathered news by talking to strangers, but he stayed within its borders and seemed content. "For some years he was quite happy and did not worry much about the future" (B.I, p. 52). Gradually, however, Frodo's differences from his neighbours become more marked.

> Frodo began to feel restless and the old paths seemed too well trodden. He looked at maps, and wondered what lay beyond their edges: maps made in the Shire showed mostly white spaces beyond its borders. He took to wandering farther afield and more often by himself; and Merry and his other friends watched him anxiously. Often he was seen walking and talking with the strange wayfarers that began at this time to appear in the Shire. (B.I, p. 52.)

More concretely, the Ring is affecting him as it did Bilbo. "As time went on, people began to notice that Frodo also showed signs of good 'preservation': outwardly he retained the appearance of a robust and energetic hobbit just out of his tweens" (B.I, p. 52). Gandalf then returns with the news about the true

nature of Bilbo's Ring, that Frodo now possesses, and the danger that it represents both in itself and because the enemy is now seeking it. Frodo is forced to act because of this new knowledge of the past and the threat it poses for the future but he does so reluctantly. "'I wish it need not have happened in my time, . . .'" (B.I, p. 60). He decides to keep the Ring secret and leave the Shire, but his view of the future is still limited to the immediate situation. "'As far as I understand what you have said, I suppose I must keep the Ring and guard it, at least for the present, whatever it may do to me'" (B.I, p. 71). The first stage of Frodo's journey takes him from the Shire to Buckland and from there to Rivendell. During this journey Frodo continues to act in a typically hobbit-like manner, with one significant exception. After taking leave of Tom Bombadil and Goldberry, the hobbits find themselves trapped by a barrow wight. David M. Miller interprets this episode as being a kind of pre-enactment of the Quest.

> Frodo's struggle in the barrow is, in fact, a miniature version of the ring quest acted out in the second age of Middle-earth. When Frodo passes the standing stone, he moves through a doorway in time and becomes a part of the defeat which created the wights from free men . . . When Frodo strikes off the ghostly hand, he anticipates the thrust which Merry gives the Lord of Minas Morgul and recalls the cutting off of Sauron's finger by Isildur.[2]

It is questionable to what degree the three episodes, the barrow wight, Merry's stabbing the Ringwraith, and Isildur's cutting off Sauron's finger, parallel each other. Miller's comment on the barrow as being a receptacle of past time, however, is clearly supported by the text and bears on our present inquiry. It is Frodo alone, among the hobbits, who is able to resist the wight's spell; a spell that holds the others in a past age as the wight is himself a creature of another time. It is Frodo that awakens and sees the danger, cuts off the hand, and summons Tom Bombadil's aid. It is he, the Ring bearer and Bilbo's heir, that seems if not immune then resistant to the spell cast by the wight that traps the other members in a dream of another time.

The council at Elrond's home marks the turning point in Frodo's development. It is during this council that he learns of the history of the Ring and its significance, past, present, and future, in the fate of Middle-earth. He freely chooses to assume the burden of the Ring and the perilous journey that its destruction necessitates. In doing so he is sacrificing his own hobbit desires to enjoy the present and let others take responsibility for the future and the outside world.

> 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." (B.I, p. 284)

It is at this point that Frodo enters the history of Middle-earth as an active agent; he chooses out of a knowledge of the past and the needs of the present, to act for the future. He surrenders his own desires and hopes for comfort in order to fulfill the historical needs of his world. He accepts Elrond's statement that the Quest is his fate, "' . . . this task is appointed for you Frodo;'" (B.I, p. 284), and accepts the burden that represents Middle-earth's hopes for the future. In doing so he is exercising his freedom of choice as an individual as well as accepting the guidance of the transcendent power that is working indirectly in opposition to Sauron. This essentially moral choice of Frodo's, made in opposition to the normal hobbit attitude towards the future, is one of the crucial turning points on which the fate of Middle-earth rests.

The journey continues and for a time Frodo is still guided by the advice of others, notably Gandalf and Aragorn, but after the confrontation with Boromir, he assumes full responsibility for the Quest and starts out for Mordor with only Sam as a companion. Frodo's

alienation from normal time is increasingly evident in the visions of past, present, and future that he experiences. Paul Kocher notes that, "Frodo's visions in sleep set him apart as unusual even before he leaves the Shire, and begin to affect his conduct and personality: . . ."[3] In Lothlorien, for example, he is immediately aware of the timeless quality of the land, and glimpses his own future when looking into Galadriel's Mirror. He manifests a sense of the passing of time that transcends the ordinary and is an accurate reflection of what needs to be done and when. He is able to sense when the time to leave Lothlorien arrives: "On Frodo suddenly the shadow of parting had fallen: he knew somehow that the time was very near when he must leave Lothlorien" (B.I, p. 375). This sudden knowledge that he must hurry occurs again when he is trying to get down from the cliff into Morgul Vale, and again in climbing Orthanac to the crack of Doom. As the burden of the Ring increases, his consciousness shrinks until his sole preoccupation is the destruction of the Ring. He becomes progressively less an individual than a force directed against the Ring and all it stands for. The destruction of the Ring is the very act that will free history and allow the normal processes of change to resume. Near the end of the Quest Frodo loses all personal identity. In

his confrontation with Smeagol part way up Mount Doom, he is "a voice speaking out of a ring of fire" (B.III, p. 221). He becomes the embodiment of history itself, which demands the destruction of the Ring so that time and change may resume its normal course.

The destruction of the Ring returns Frodo to himself, but he is no longer a member of the hobbit community. He is unable and unwilling to take part in the scourging of the Shire because he has been transformed by his experiences and by the Ring into a member of the past that dies with the Ring. Symbolically this estrangement from the present is manifested by his taking up Bilbo's task of writing the history of the Ring that Bilbo is no longer able to complete. Rose Zimbardo comments that, "In losing their hobbit nature they [Frodo and Bilbo] change their position in being as well as in time; they become part of the elvish aura that must fade from the earth."[4] Once the history is completed, Bilbo and Frodo join the other beings that no longer belong in Middle-earth's present, and take ship for the Undying lands.

The transformation that Frodo undergoes during the Quest, and the significance of his actions, transcends the immediate reality of chronological time. The destruction of the Ring not only permits the process of change to resume in terms of the natural

world, but also in a larger, mythic sense. Mircea Eliade, in his book Cosmos and History, discusses a ceremony common to archaic societies which he calls the "mythic celebration of the New Year." This celebration is a symbolic enactment of the transition from one year to the next. Eliade maintains that in this ceremonial celebration

> . . . we witness not only the effectual cessation of a certain temporal interval and the beginning of another, but also the abolition of the past year and of past time. And this is the meaning of ritual purifications: a combustion, an annulling of the sins and faults of the individual and of those of the community as a whole-- . . .[5]

Frodo undergoes a series of adventures and trials that serve to purify and mature him. The result of his actions is the literal "cessation of a certain temporal interval," not the past year, but the past Age. The significance of his destruction of the Ring lies in the fact that it is not just the symbol of Sauron's evil, but the repository for much of his power to do evil, to halt the process of change. The Ring is cast into the Crack of Doom where it is "combusted," and the sins and faults of Middle-earth's past that have intruded on the present through Sauron and the Ring, are banished. The natural cycles, the seasons of the year, and the movements of the sun, are then restored to their normal course. History fulfills

prophecy as a new Age, the Age of Men begins, and the creatures of the past Ages accept their fate and pass out of Middle-earth or continue to sink into obscurity and eventual oblivion. Mythically, what Eliade calls "the great time" is finally past as change catches up to time. The system regains equilibrium once the unnatural effect of the Ring dissipates.

Merry, Pippin, and Sam are the other three hobbits that embark on the Quest. It is they who interject a sense of normality into the proceedings. They are typically hobbit-like in character and motivation and continue to live in the present amid the conflicting panorama of figures acting for the future or out of the past. Their motivation for joining the Quest is love and loyalty for Frodo. Their actions are typified by a continued interest in bed and bottle and a lack of understanding of anything but the immediate reality. They describe themselves as "rag tags" and "pawns" and such they are, leaving all major decisions during the Quest to others. Hugh T. Keenan, in "The Appeal of The Lord of the Rings: A Struggle for Life" notes that "Gandalf interests himself in the fate of the future living creatures. The hobbits Merry and Pippin act for the present."[6] Despite the limited understanding that the three hobbits display, they each have a crucial role within the story, and

in effecting the reader's appreciation of it.

Several times Merry and Pippin accidently affect the course of history. They inadvertently cause Aragorn to be near Rohan just as Saruman launches his crucial attack, and Aragorn plays a pivotal role in the ensuing battle. Gandalf likens the arrival of Merry and Pippin in Fangorn's forest to "' . . . the falling of small stones that starts an avalanche in the mountains'" (B.II, p. 99). They are the immediate cause of the ents' attacking Isengard, and thus preventing Sauron's ally, Saruman, from acquiring the Ring for himself, or aiding in the final battle against the Free peoples. It is Merry's stabbing of the Morgul Lord at Gondor that brings about this dread enemy's death, a death which is one of the turning points in the battle. In brief, to say that Merry and Pippin retain their hobbit nature is not to suggest that they return to the Shire unchanged. They have grown as a result of their experiences, as proven by their leadership of the Shire hobbits in overthrowing Sharkey and his gang. Significantly they, like Frodo and Bilbo, acquire an interest in history and the outside world and retain this knowledge by writing it down in order to preserve it for posterity.

Sam is the most rustic of the hobbits who become entangled in the great events of the end of the Third

Age and also the most typical. He is at the bottom of the scale intellectually and socially in the fellowship, and yet he too has his part to play. It is he who is Frodo's constant companion throughout the Quest, facing the day-to-day problems of acquiring food and drink, sustaining Frodo in his times of trial, and even bearing Frodo on his back when the burden of the Ring and the trials of the journey become more than Frodo can bear. Sam is seen to act only once independently and in opposition to what he sees as the immediate needs of the present, and this is when he thinks Shelob has killed Frodo and the Quest is on the brink of failure. He wishes to stay with Frodo's corpse and defend it as best he can, but instead attempts to assume the role of Ring-bearer. He transcends his commitment to the present and tries to act in accordance with the historical demands of the Quest. This recognition of the demands of the future earns him the right to join Frodo and Bilbo in the Undying land when his time on Middle-earth is done. When he discovers that Frodo is still alive he reverts to his commitment to the present in rescuing and protecting Frodo, but he too has grown. When he returns to the Shire, he eventually becomes mayor and guardian of the history that Frodo and Bilbo have written. When they have left Middle-earth there are

some blank pages left at the back of this book in which Sam is to write.

Generally, then, the three younger hobbits, Merry, Pippin, and Sam are a constant source of contrast to the other characters. They remain firmly rooted in the present while surrounded by creatures and powers from the legendary past. They provide the means through which the reader can appreciate the changes in Frodo and the efforts and perspectives of the other characters. It is their common sense, curiosity, and confusion amidst the marvels of this mythic world that provides the bridge between the reader and the story, and between the past and the future. Douglass Parker writes that " . . . they [hobbits] are the efficient causes of the transition itself,"[7] that is, the transition from the Third to the Fourth Age. Just as the present is the bridge between past and future, so it is a hobbit that causes the end of the Third Age which is a composite of the past of Middle-earth, and enables the Fourth Age, the age of man, to begin.

Merry, Sam, and Pippin, in a sense, represent the reader in the story. Firmly rooted in the present, it is they who provide the common-sense attitude that makes the fantastic creatures and events in the story believable. With the exception of two minor episodes,

there is always one of these three characters present, to interject a sense of normality into the action and as they learn about the mysteries of Middle-earth, so does the reader. Their constant awareness of their own ignorance and limitations together with their silly, hobbit behaviour, even in moments of great peril, prevents the narrative from becoming too serious. The reader is constantly returned to the everyday world by the antics of these three characters just when the action is becoming too remotely heroic for the reader to be able to relate to it personally. As Robley Evans states, "The hobbits provide Tolkien with an important point of view by which other characters and events can be evaluated."[8] Their surprise and confusion amidst the wonders of Middle-earth unites them with the reader who finds Tolkien's world equally strange. Because the hobbits are there to see for us, and because their reaction to what they see would be our reaction, we accept what they see as "real." The differences between their abilities and knowledge and those of the mightier characters enable us to appreciate the differences between our world and the world of Middle-earth without rejecting it as unreal.

The fact that it is a hobbit who is the chosen Ring-bearer makes sense symbolically though it seems

strange from a practical point of view. Frodo asks Gandalf "'Why was I chosen?'" Gandalf replies that "'Such questions cannot be answered, . . . You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate'" (B.I, p. 70). The answer does not lie with Frodo's particular excellences, nor his hobbit abilities but the nature of the Quest and the laws governing it do provide room for speculation. The Quest, in its largest sense, is an attempt to free history from the state of stasis which the Ring has caused. There is a transcendent force operating in Middle-earth which is attempting to guide history back into its normal course, without intervening directly. The hobbits stand as a symbol of the present in that they lack any real ties with the past or interest in the future. Robley Evans states that "Hobbits are unknown to that living record of history, the ent Treebeard, who cannot place them on the list of Living Creatures . . ."[9] They exist apart from history and so are not entangled in its web. The power that seeks to aid history can use Frodo and the hobbits as a means of directing history, without altering the fabric of history itself. Symbolically the eternal present, which is what the hobbits represent, is the means through which the process of change occurs, creating history. Because

Frodo's nature is tampered with in order that he aid in the process of change, he is transformed from a hobbit, who lives only in the present, into something which is a part of the process and must therefore pass out of Middle-earth when the process advances beyond his sphere of action.

Smeagol also deserves discussion in terms of the hobbits and their role in the story because he comes from a race related to them, and because he is linked with them both thematically and in the components of his character. Just as Frodo and Bilbo are hobbits who have transcended their normal natures, Smeagol has degenerated from his. All three undergo this change as a result of the Ring. Like Frodo and Bilbo, Smeagol has lived for many years unaffected by the passage of time and has far outlived his normal span of years. Unlike them the effect of the Ring caused him to withdraw from the world until his perception of reality is little more than instinctive. In J. R. R. Tolkien, Robley Evans writes that

> In ironic counterpoint to the others, Smeagol has no sense of the plan of the universe working itself out in history and willed endeavor; he sees himself and his pain within the narrow sphere, "animal" not only in form but in the range of his imagination.[10]

While Frodo chooses to act in accord with the necessities of history and consciously seeks to destroy the

Ring, Smeagol becomes the unconscious tool through which the Quest is fulfilled. At the Crack of Doom Smeagol and Frodo become one, both mastered by desire for the Ring, but while Frodo survives to become a hero in the history of Middle-earth, Smeagol dies, a tool more than a victim, of what is to be. Smeagol acts as a foil for Frodo and Sam. Unconscious of history, he unconsciously becomes its instrument by inadvertently causing the Ring to fall into the fire which was used to forge it.

The significance of the roles that the hobbits, particularly Frodo, play in the history of Middle-earth is symbolized by the fact that each major stage in the Quest occurs at an appropriate time in the year and in its natural cycles. Ruth Noel notes that,

> The autumnal equinox corresponds to both Bilbo and Frodo's birthday, which was the date that they rode out with the Guardians of the Elven Rings to the Grey Havens, and the date that Samwise left the Shire for the Havens some sixty years later. December twenty-fifth, our Yule but not the hobbits', was the date that the Company of the Ring left Rivendell to begin their quest. March twenty-fifth, which approximates the vernal equinox, . . . was the date of the destruction of the Ring, the beginning of the new age, and, later, of the birth of Samwise's first child, Elanor. The use of these two Christian holidays (previously pagan celebrations) for the commencement and culmination of the quest underlines the ethical direction of the journey. Mid-year's Day . . . was the date that Aragorn was trothplighted to Arwen and the date of their wedding nearly forty years later.[11]

The symbolism of the dates of the commencement and culmination of the Quest does more than emphasize the ethical direction of the journey as Noel comments, though her point is important. It also emphasizes the link between the world of history and that of nature. The significant dates in this cycle of the history of Middle-earth are also the dates that approximate the changing of the seasons. The mythic significance of chronological time as it appears in nature, is echoed by the mythic significance of chronological time in history. The unity of Tolkien's world is the unity of time and the significance of its operations permeates Middle-earth on every level.

Notes

[1] Evans, p. 111.

[2] Miller, in A Tolkien Compass, p. 105.

[3] Kocher, p. 119.

[4] Zimbardo, in TCr., p. 106.

[5] Eliade, p. 54.

[6] Hugh T. Keenan, "The Appeal of The Lord of The Rings," in TCr., p. 67.

[7] Parker, p. 607.

[8] Evans, p. 112.

[9] Evans, p. 107.

[10] Evans, p. 101.

[11] Noel, pp. 38-39.

Chapter III

The Other Free Peoples

Elves

The elves that appear in LOTR are not the diminutive sprites of more conventional fairy-tales. Tolkien's elves are tall, slender, and inhumanly fair of face. In appearance and temperament they are in sharp contrast to hobbits. The average hobbit, of whom Merry, Sam, and Pippin are representative, know little more of elves than does the reader at the beginning of the story. Bilbo alone seems to know much of their history but by the time of the Quest he has joined them at Rivendell and has become rather elvish himself. The first elves to enter the story are Gildor and his company, who are encountered by the four hobbit travellers outside the Buckland woods. In a sense the hobbits and the reader meet and learn of elves simultaneously, as it is through the hobbits' eyes that the reader perceives and understands the marvels contained in Middle-earth. It is the simple, common-sense hobbit Sam, in particular, who provides the bridge between the reader and the mysterious, legendary elves.

The elves enter, appropriately, singing a song of what has been. They sing of Elberth, the Queen of the Valar, a figure out of the distant past whom they remember in a song of sadness. This song contrasts sharply with the song the hobbits have just been singing, a song which is appropriate to their present situation. It is a "walking song" adapted from a hobbit "supper-song." The contrast between their songs epitomizes the difference between the two species. The hobbits are simple creatures, living in the present. In contrast, the elves quickly emerge as mysterious, paradoxical beings, concerned primarily with their memories of the past.

The physical description of the elves is non-specific throughout the course of the narrative. The contrast between their youthful appearance and their great age and devotion to the past is the essential descriptive detail that is emphasized; it is repeated significantly in describing the most important elves, Elrond, and Galadriel. It is Sam who communicates this initial reaction to the reader when Frodo asks him what he thinks of elves now that he has met them. "It don't seem to matter what I think about them. They are quite different from what I expected--so old and young, and so gay and sad, as it were'" (B.I, p. 96). The immortal elves remain a mystery for Sam

and the reader alike. The effect of their appearance, "young and old," "gay and sad," is to make them appear a paradox. Indeed, their existence on Middle-earth is a paradox arising out of their place in history and their perception of time.

The description of Elrond, a leader among the elves, serves to emphasize the significance of time for the elves which is manifested both in their bodies and in their personalities.

> The face of Elrond was ageless, neither old nor young, though in it was written the memory of many things both glad and sorrowful . . . Venerable he seemed as a king crowned with many winters, and yet hale as a tried warrior in the fulness of his strength. (B.I, p. 239)

His great age, belied by his appearance, is revealed when he says at the council that "' . . . my memory reaches back even to the Elder Days . . . I have seen three ages in the West of the world, and many defeats, and many fruitless victories'" (B.I, p. 256). His daughter, Arwen, is described in a similar fashion.

> Young she was and yet not so. The braids of her dark hair were touched by no frost, her white arms and clear face were flawless and smooth, and the light of stars were in her bright eyes, grey as a cloudless night; yet queenly she looked, and thought and knowledge were in her glance, as one who has known many things that the years bring. (B.I, p. 239)

The other two elf leaders are Celeborn and Galadriel, and they too display this quality of youthful antiquity. Galadriel tells of their great age when she says of Celeborn "'He has dwelt in the West since the days of dawn, and I have dwelt with him for years uncounted; for ere the fall of Nargothrond or Gondolin I passed over the mountains, and together through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat'" (B.I, p. 372). Despite the fact that they are thousands of years old " . . . no sign of age was upon them, unless it were in the depths of their eyes; for these were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory" (B.I, p. 369).

The lands inhabited by the elf lords share and reflect their relationship to time. Bilbo tells Frodo that "'I can't count days in Rivendell'" (B.I, p. 286), and "'Time dosen't seem to pass here: it just is'" (B.I, p. 243). The presence of the past is experienced even more strongly in Lothlorien. When Frodo enters this strange land:

> . . . it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell there was memory of ancient things; in Lorien the ancient things still lived in the waking world. (B.I, p. 364)

Even the cycle of nature is altered, as Legolas tells his companions. "'For the autumn their [Malorns] leaves fall not, but turn to gold. Not till the spring comes and the new green opens do they fall, and then the boughs are laden with yellow flowers; . . .'" (B.I, p. 349).

The elves can be killed but do not die of old age. This immunity from time, however, is counteracted by their knowledge and acceptance that their time on Middle-earth is limited. After a time they must return to the Undying Lands from whence they came in the First Age. That time has almost arrived at the time of the Quest. Galadriel tells Sam that "' . . . our spring and summer are gone by, and they will never be seen on earth again save in memory'" (B.I, p. 392). At the council in Rivendell, Saruman is quoted by Gandalf as saying "'The Elder Days are gone. The Middle Days are passing. The Younger Days are beginning. The time of the Elves is over, . . .'" (B.I, p. 272). One must remember that, despite the fact that Saruman is evil, he is also a loremaster, and what he says is true up to a point.

The preservation of Rivendell and Lorien is dependent on the elvish rings. They in turn are dependent on the great Ring. When it is destroyed, the elf rings lose their power to preserve the past.

With the passing of Sauron's Ring, Lorien is doomed. Galadriel predicts this fate when she says "' . . . the tides of time will sweep it away'" (B.I, p. 390). Change is inevitable, even for the elves. Legolas describes what this means for his people when he responds to Sam's questions about Lorien.

> "For the elves the world moves both very swift and very slow. Swift, because they themselves change little and all else fleets by: it is a grief to them. Slow, because they do not count the running years, not for themselves. The passing seasons are but ripples ever repeated in the long long stream. Yet beneath the sun all things must wear to an end at last." (B.I, pp. 404-405)

With the passing of the Ring the time of the elves is irrevocably past. In recognition of this, the high elves leave Middle-earth, once the rule of men is established. "Then Elrond and Galadriel rode on; for the Third Age was over, and the Days of the Rings were passed, and an end was come of the story and song of these times" (B.III, p. 309). The elves that stayed behind on Middle-earth were only lingering there for a while.

The elves as a species have several special qualities that relate to our examination of the nature and role of each of the characters and their species. They are incredibly long lived, both as a species and as individuals. Their links to their past are

correspondingly strong, and indeed they seem to live largely in their past. They have great power; but in the story it is manifested primarily in defending their own lands, in striving with the projected will of Sauron, and in giving counsel and gifts to the members of the fellowship.

The role that the elves play in the Quest seems at first to be rather minor. Gildor and his party accompany the four hobbits only far enough to put them temporarily out of the reach of the Nazgûl. Elrond offers counsel and encouragement but does not go on the Quest himself, nor does he send an elf-lord to accompany them. Instead he sends Legolas to represent the elves. Legolas displays skill and courage as a warrior but no great qualities as a leader, loremaster, or holder of transcendent power. Galadriel refuses to offer counsel, though she gives gifts and permits Frodo and Sam to gaze into her "mirror." She tells Frodo "'I do not counsel you one way or the other. I am not a counsellor'" (B.I, p. 378). The information she provides them with is like the things seen in her mirror, "' . . . it shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be'" (B.I, p. 377). Galadriel, like her mirror, comments on the possibilities for the future but does not order or suggest a course of action. The elves' lack of concrete

involvement in the actual Quest seems curious and yet makes sense when placed in an historical context.

The time of the domination of Middle-earth by the elves is presented by the author as antecedent to the action. In his book on Tolkien, Robley Evans states that

> In the Lord of the Rings, the elves and dwarfs stand in the background, symbolic figures who address our imaginations from the fairy-story past and are not involved in the great moral choices Frodo must make. Their time for shaping the world is past.[1]

Elrond plays a more active role in the Quest than does Galadriel, but then he is half-elven: half-man and half-elf. While he does not enter the wars personally, he does permit his sons to join Aragorn as the final battle approaches, and his daughter Arwen chooses to remain with Aragorn and eventually die in Middle-earth. They do these things because of their human half and in spite of the elvish side of their nature. The elves aid in the Quest out of their knowledge of the past which is, because of their longevity, co-eternal with the present. Their aid generally takes the form of knowledge, not of counsel or action, with the minor exceptions noted. Since they are of the past their outlook on life is relatively static, it is not for them to interfere directly in the future. They bow to natural law, which dictates that change must

inevitably occur. Galadriel accepts the dictates of this natural law when she refuses Frodo's offer of the Ring and says "'I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel'" (B.I, p. 381). Her decision is the decision of the elves, which is to accept their historical fate and leave Middle-earth where they no longer belong.

The elves' continued presence on Middle-earth up until the end of the Third Age is not an attempt on their part to deny change. They do not seek to halt the passage of time except within their own limited countries. The continued existence of Sauron has retarded the natural process that would have caused the elves to leave Middle-earth earlier. They continue there because as long as Sauron and the influence of his Ruling Ring persist, the past to which the elves belong is still alive in Middle-earth. They provide a partial balance to Sauron's powers, powers derived from their common, distant past.

The elves, like Sauron, lead a static existence. Because of their longevity and attitude towards time, they see the world around them change while they remain constant. They do not seek change and go so far as to halt the process within their own lands, but they accept the fact that it is an eventual necessity. When Sauron's increasing powers make it

clear that all potential for change will soon be blotted out under his rule, they offer counsel and aid to those that seek to restore the process. Their help is less active than passive because the process has moved beyond the point where they have an active role to play. It is the active, vital characters, particularly men, who must effect the change because the future belongs to them. The elves are unable to change and can only leave Middle-earth for an unchanging world where they belong.

Dwarves

The dwarves, like the elves, are members of one of the Elder peoples. They are not immortal but they are long lived; at the time of the story Dain is 250 years old. Like the elves, by the time of the Quest most of their thoughts are devoted to memories of past glories. Robley Evans states that, "For the dwarves history has been the accumulation of treasure which in turn awakes enemies who wish to possess it--and them."[2] They do not have the elves' option of leaving Middle-earth for the Undying Lands, but it is clear that their time of greatness is past. Gloin tells Frodo that "'We have done well . . . But in metal work we cannot rival our Fathers, . . .'" (B.I, p. 241). Their skills have degenerated and their efforts are now directed towards attempts at regaining

what was once theirs. The friendship between Legolas the elf and Gimli the dwarf symbolizes the projected common fate of the two species they represent on the Quest. The dwarf population has been reduced because of constant warfare with the orcs. In addition, only one third of the dwarves that are born are female, and many of them choose not to mate. Their fate is clearly sealed. Like the elves, their dominance in Middle-earth is ended and their time grows short. Like the elves they send no armies to aid in the great battle. They fight their own battles on other fronts but it is Gimli alone that represents them in the great wars where, in ages past, they sent great hosts.

Gandalf

Gandalf is a wizard and one of the most important characters in LOTR, though his significance is not at first apparent. He first appears in the trilogy at the time of Bilbo's birthday party, and the way in which he is described is reminiscent of the role he played in The Hobbit. In this prelude to LOTR Gandalf was portrayed as a kindly, crusty old wizard who bossed, tricked, and cajoled Bilbo into having an adventure. His role in The Hobbit was very much in the fairy-tale tradition, and his actions and abilities were those of the standard magician who is

essentially a man with unusual powers.

The initial description of Gandalf in LOTR does little to suggest that he is a figure of power and mystery. He is described as an old man driving a cartload of fire crackers. "He wore a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, and a silver scarf. He had a long white beard and bushy eyebrows that stuck out beyond the brim of his hat" (B.I, p. 33). The figure Gandalf cuts in the Shire seems far more likely to draw laughter than wonder from the reader. Gandalf's odd but unimpressive entrance into the story is presented from the average hobbit's point of view. They know nothing about his crucial role in the affairs of the world and esteem him only for his abilities with fire crackers. There are hints given to the reader through authorial comments, and through Gandalf's conversations with Bilbo and Frodo that he is more than he appears to be, but it is only later at Rivendell that some idea of who and what he really is emerges.

The significance of Gandalf's unimpressive entrance into the story relates directly to Tolkien's method of characterization in two important ways. First it is one of the clearest examples of how Tolkien uses the hobbits' point of view to establish a character as a concrete individual that is familiar

enough to the reader both from real life and from fiction and fairy stories to make him acceptable and even believable. It is only later, in "The Shadow of the Past" chapter and particularly in the council at Elrond's home that the hobbits and the reader begin to appreciate the true extent of Gandalf's powers. Secondly, the contrast between the initial description of Gandalf that emphasizes his appearance and relatively normal behaviour, and his true greatness, alerts the reader to the fact that a character's true identity is often belied by physical looks. The key to understanding Gandalf and the part he is to play in the story is directly linked with time and the process of change. Hugh T. Keenan emphasizes the fact that "Gandalf interests himself in the fate of future living creatures."[3] He displays a panoramic view of history and a deep knowledge of the past, not just of its history but also its lore and wisdom while his own origins seem clouded in mystery. He seems to have no place of his own in the process that has evolved history to the point that it has reached at the time of the story. It is not physical description nor psychological insights into his mind that define the role Gandalf plays in the story, it is his relationship to time and the process of change. Physical description provides a number of the clues

to the question of who Gandalf is, but they really only indicate the source of his true nature.

Gandalf leaves the Shire shortly after the party, and seventeen years pass before he returns to Frodo with news of Bilbo's magical Ring which Frodo has inherited. It has been more then eighty years since the time that Gandalf first convinced Bilbo to journey with the dwarves to Smaug's lair, and yet Gandalf is little changed. "His hair was perhaps whiter than it had been then, and his beard and eyebrows were perhaps longer, and his face more lined with care and wisdom; but his eyes were as bright as ever, and he smoked and blew smoke rings with the same vigour and delight" (B.I, p. 55). He reveals that he had spent the intervening seventeen years searching for information about the Ring. His appearance and the fact that he has spent such a long period of time investigating the origins and nature of the Ring reveal that he has a certain immunity to time that permits him to pursue knowledge without fear of impending old age. He is not locked into time, but instead uses it. He is interested and involved in the affairs of others, instead of keeping to himself as do the elves and the dwarves. Significantly, it is Frodo and Bilbo's imperviousness to time that arouses Gandalf's curiosity and alarm about the Ring.

The council at Elrond's home serves to reveal to the hobbits and to the reader Gandalf's true nature. In the company of elf lords and kingly men he stands revealed as a figure of power and wisdom.

> Gandalf was shorter in stature than the other two [Elrond and Aragorn] but his long white hair, his sweeping silver beard, and his broad shoulders, made him look like some wise king of ancient legend. In his aged face under great snowy brows his dark eyes were set like coals that could leap suddenly into fire. (B.I, p. 239)

The effect of this description is to emphasize Gandalf's age; "like some wise king of ancient legend." The advice he offers, and the information he reveals, show a knowledge of the distant past and an awareness of the present, but most of all, a concern for the future. "'And it is not our part here to take thought only for a season, or for a few lives of Men, or for a passing age of the world. We should seek a final end of this menace, even if we do not hope to make one'" (B.I, p. 280). Gandalf's own age, and his origins remain a mystery, as do the nature and extent of his powers. It is clear, however, that both are considerable.

Gandalf is chosen at the council to be the leader of the fellowship. During the early stages of their journey, he proves himself as leader, loremaster, and holder of great power, both physical and supernatural.

Then, in the confrontation with the Balrog, he falls a victim of this mysterious ancient creature, feared by both elves and the dwarves, though he slays it in the end. It is clear that in this fall he dies both symbolically and literally, and yet he returns, or more precisely he is sent back. After he has destroyed the Balrog, he tells Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas that, "'Then darkness took me, and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered far on roads that I will not tell'" (B.II, p. 106). He continues by saying "'Naked I was sent back--for a brief time, until my task is done'" (B.II, p. 106). This speech is crucial to our understanding of who Gandalf is, and what his role in the Quest was and will be. It is clear that he is acting not for himself but for others and that his actions are directed by an outside, transcendent force. He was "sent back" and has a "task" that he must fulfill. The task is clearly the destruction of the Ring; with the completion of the Quest, his purpose is fulfilled and he leaves Middle-earth with the elves. "'The Third Age was my age. I was the Enemy of Sauron; and my work is finished. I shall go soon. The burden must lie now upon you [Aragorn] and your kindred'" (B.III, p. 249). The destruction of the Ring signals the resumption of the process of change, a process that Gandalf exists

apart from. Once the Ring is destroyed Gandalf no longer belongs in Middle-earth and he returns to a world where time and change do not occur.

Gandalf's return from death is marked by a change and increase in his powers. Before his fall, he seemed to be a combination of human and elvish qualities. He grew old like men, but was so long lived that the passage of years affected him little. He was conscious and knowledgeable about the past as a living entity, but he was able and willing to participate directly in the Quest and war that it entailed. With the passing of the Ring, he assumes a passive role and then passes out of Middle-earth; but while Sauron lives, he is his active enemy. In Elrond's hall Gandalf was described as " . . . like some wise king of ancient legend" (B.I, p. 239). Upon his return he is described as " . . . shining now as if with some light kindled within, bent, laden with years, but holding a power beyond the strength of kings" (B.II, p. 104). Aragorn celebrates this change when he says "'The Dark Lord has Nine: But we have One, mightier than they: the White Rider. He has passed through the fire and the abyss, and they shall fear him'" (B.II, p. 104). Gandalf returns from death transformed, greater than he was. "'Yes, that was the name. I was Gandalf'" (B.II, p. 98). By

passing out of time through death, he returns more powerful, more mysterious, and better able to fulfill his task. His master is never named, but it is clear that his efforts are directed at ending the threat of Sauron and thus letting history resume its normal course. Gandalf becomes an instrument through which history can be fulfilled. Existing outside it, having a place neither in the past nor the future, he acts only for others and only according to the dictates of natural law that require change and a passing of the Third Age. His transcendence of time enables him to aid in its fulfillment.

Tom Bombadil

Tom Bombadil is quite possibly the most unusual creature that inhabits Middle-earth. Gracia Fay Ellwood discusses Tom at some length in her book Good News From Tolkien's Middle Earth. She proposes that Tom is a kind of "unfallen Adam" but with elements of Christ and Man in his character.[4] Her difficulty in making Tom into any one allegorical figure is a reflection of the fact that he is basically unlike anything in the reader's or the hobbits' experience.[5]

Tom Bombadil enters the story hopping and bounding and singing a strange and seemingly ridiculous song, a few lines of which go:

> Hey dol! Merry dol! ring a dong dillo!
> Ring a dong! hop along! fal lal the willow!
> Tom Bom, jolly Tom, Tom Bombadilla!
> (B.I, p. 130)

His song and appearance contrast strongly with the gravity of the situation. Old Man Willow has trapped Merry and Pippin, and Frodo and Sam are seeking help when Tom happens along. In appearance he is somewhere between a man and a hobbit " . . . too large and heavy for a hobbit, if not tall enough for one of the Big People . . ." (B.I, p. 131). He is dressed in bright colours of blue and yellow, has a brown beard, blue eyes, and a red face. He is described as " . . . charging through the grass and rushes like a cow going down to drink" (B.I, p. 131). Despite his strange appearance, he is able to free Merry and Pippin; and in his subsequent talks with the hobbits, it quickly becomes clear that he is more than he appears to be.

The day after their first meeting Frodo asks Tom who he is. Tom's reply is virtually the only information that the reader gains about him, as he soon drops out of the story. Significantly, his self-identification is in terms of time.

> "Don't you know my name yet? That's the only answer. Tell me, who are you, alone, yourself and nameless? But you are young and I am old. Eldest, that's what I am. Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the

> river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before . . .." (B.I., p. 142)

Stripped of all incidentals, Tom says that what he is, essentially, is the oldest living creature. Like the earth itself he has endured through the whole of history on Middle-earth. His memories of Middle-earth pre-date those of any other living creature. His co-existence with the earth at its time of creation gives him a mythic aspect, which his behaviour and what he tells of life reinforces.

Tom is impervious to time and indifferent to history. He lives within his own country with boundaries set by himself. He is interested and involved in nature, particularly with the seasonal cycles of the year. Rose Zimbardo says of Bombadil that, "He has neither history nor memory because change for him is only seasonal change. He is the permanence at the heart of change, . . ."[6] He collects water-lilies in the fall and preserves them in his home over winter. In the spring he returns them to the river. His removal of the water lilies, which are the last things to die in autumn, signal the coming of winter. When he returns them to the river, spring begins. He seems symbolically, if not literally, to control and maintain the changing of seasons. This, together with his marriage to the River Man's daughter, makes him an

obvious vegetation figure. He is a living embodiment of the natural cycles of the seasons.

Tom's perception and involvement in time is strictly limited. He remembers the past but is little interested in history, past, present, or future. His attention is taken up with nature and its endlessly repeated cycles. Tom is involved in time only as it pertains to nature, and like nature he is constantly renewed by the cycles of the season. He stays at home in winter, a kind of dormant period for nature and emerges in the spring. The Ring, a symbol of past history that seeks to deny change, has no effect on Tom. He can still see Frodo when he puts it on, and when Tom places it on his own hand he remains visible. The Ring has no real reference to his participation in time. Admittedly, Sauron can disrupt even the natural cycles; indeed, he has done so in Mordor, where the country seems to be in a constant state of winter. But Tom has placed limits on himself. He stays within his own country, and out of the affairs of the world. Gandalf likens Tom to "a moss-gatherer" (B.III, p. 275), and such he is. He has a sense of his proper place in the scheme of things and just as the Ring and the Quest do not belong in his sphere of control, he is not subject to the Ring's power.

Ents

Fangorn, or Treebeard as he is called by the hobbits, is in many ways similar to Bombadil. He is old, so old that Gandalf describes him as "' . . . the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun upon this Middle-earth . . .'" (B.II, p. 102). Later, Gandalf describes Fangorn for Theoden and again what is emphasized is his incredible age. "'For Treebeard is Fangorn, and the eldest and chief of the Ents, and when you speak with him you will hear the speech of the oldest of all living things'" (B.II, p. 104). This claim seems to overlook Bombadil, or perhaps the reader is indirectly being told that Tom is not, in fact, a "living creature" but some kind of nature spirit. At any rate, it is clear that both are of immense antiquity. Significantly, neither becomes involved in the great wars; both stay within the confines of their own lands and mind their own affairs. Treebeard tells Merry and Pippin that "' . . . I have not troubled about the Great Wars, . . . they mostly concern Elves and Men. That is the business of Wizards; Wizards are always troubled about the future'" (B.II, p. 75). The ents, under Treebeard's leadership, only act against Saruman when he poses a direct threat to them by cutting down their trees.

Treebeard is described as seen through the eyes of the Hobbits, Merry and Pippin. The physical description, as with the other fantastic beings, is rather vague. He is

> . . . a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen feet high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. Whether it was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered with a brown smooth skin. The large feet had seven toes each. The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the roots, thin and mossy at the ends. But at the moment the hobbits noted little but the eyes. (B.II, p. 66)

Ents clearly resemble the trees from which they evolved. It is Treebeard's eyes that the author singles out for a detailed description that transcends the physical. "One felt as if there was an enormous well behind them, filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking; but their surface was sparkling with the present: . . ." (B.II, p. 67). Like Bombadil and the elves, Treebeard's memory stretches into the distant past. However, unlike the elves, he lives in the present as suggested by the sparkling of his eyes. He also differs from Bombadil who celebrates and perhaps even controls the natural cycle of time, while Treebeard lives in the present but is aware that his time, and the time of his species, is nearly past.

The entwives have been lost, no new ents are being born. Some ents have been killed by Saruman and his forces, while others are turning back into trees. Treebeard confides to Merry and Pippin that he realizes his people are fated to diminish into legend. "'Now at least the last march of the Ents may be worth a song. Aye, we may help the other peoples before we pass away'" (B.II, p. 90). The ents act in accordance with their position in time and with the powers appropriate to their age as a species and as individuals. Paul Kocher notes that "For them life is history in which the past grows into the present, all in due order, and they remember every part of it sequentially and calmly."[7] However, their longevity and slow appreciation of life has caused them to become static. The process of change, marked by the changing of the Ages, is destined to leave them behind.

Men

Men are the fifth species that, together with elves, dwarves, hobbits, and ents, compose the Free Peoples. The age to come is to be their age, and by extension the age of the reader, and waits only upon the destruction of the Ring. At the time of the Quest there are numerous different races of men living in Middle-earth but they fall into three basic categories.[8] Faramir, Denethor's youngest son, happens upon Frodo

and Sam just outside the borders of Mordor. In his conversation with Frodo he tells him of the fortunes of the Men of Gondor and of men in general.

> "For so we reckon Men in our lore, calling them the High, or Men of the West, which are the Numenoreans; and the Middle Peoples, Men of the Twilight, such as are the Rohirrim and their kin that still dwell far in the North; and the Wild, the Men of Darkness." (B.III, p. 287)

This division of men into different kinds is in marked contrast to the treatment of the other species. Elves, for example, while belonging to different families and living in different places, share a common perspective of time and place in history. In the great wars at the end of the Third Age, they are united as a species in terms of their place in history. This is equally true of hobbits, dwarves, and ents but not of men. Deborah Rogers comments on the variety of men in LOTR in her essay "Everyclod and Everyhero: The Image of Man in Tolkien." She states that,

> Tolkien's human race, in the specimens we encounter, has much more variety than any of the other races. From petty villains like Bill Ferny, through the loathsome Grima, to that portrait of damnation, poor Denethor; from the slow-thinking Butterbur, through the martial Eomer to the king, Aragorn. Not to mention the gentle warrior Faramir, the hero-villan Boromir, the resurrected epic Theoden and the warrior-maid Eowyn (a fascinating character). The first thing to be said of the human race, in Tolkien's portrait, is that it is capable of any act: . . .[9]

The three kinds of men each differ, significantly, from one another. The way in which they differ is intimately linked with time and history, and also offers an explanation as to why it is men who are to survive the transition from the Third to the Fourth Age and emerge as the dominant species. An examination of representative members of each of the three kinds of men serves to explain and confirm this observation.

The Numenoreans are the first kind of men that Faramir mentions, and the most powerful. Historically, they were descended from the Edain, the fathers of men, and at one time lived within sight of the Blessed-Realm. They were long lived, living three times longer than normal men; but eventually, like all men, they died. As their power increased, the Numenoreans began to fear death and eventually sought to wrest immortality from the Valar by launching a great expedition against the Blessed Realm. Most of them were destroyed, along with their island home, as punishment for this act of presumption. Some Numenoreans had remained faithful to the dictates of the Valar, and these few under Elendil sailed to Middle-earth and founded a kingdom. Gondor was a part of that ancient realm. Their history through the following years is lengthy and complex, but suffice it to say that at the time of the Quest the Numenoreans,

though wiser and more powerful than other men, had degenerated to the point where it seemed clear that they would soon be indistinguishable from the lesser, Middle men. Elrond identifies this decay as beginning at the time that Sauron was first overthrown by Elendil and Gil-galad. "'And ever since that day the race of Numenor has decayed, and the span of their years lessened'" (B.I, p. 257). It is significant that the decay of the race is marked by a reduction of their longevity. Indeed, the original sin of the Numenoreans that caused them to be sundered from the Valar was a seeking after immortality. This sin of pride is still present in Gondor, according to Faramir, and has caused Gondor's decay which in turn permitted Sauron to return and gain strength.

> "Death was ever present, because the Numenoreans still, as they had in their old kingdom, so lost it, hungered after endless life unchanging. Kings made tombs more splendid than houses of the living, and counted old names in the rolls of their descendants dearer than the names of sons . . .." (B. II, p. 286)

The Numenoreans decayed because they sought to deny change and the death that must come to men because of it.

In Tolkien's scheme, death is not an inevitable evil but a "gift." J. S. Ryan remarks on this aspect of man's existence in Tolkien: Cult or Culture.

> The gift of the One to Men had been death, a sense of the fitness of things and a reminder of limited mortal powers, and it seems there had always been present prohibition against the courses of evil or any attempt at arresting age-change.[10]

The significance of calling death a "gift" goes beyond Ryan's comments. It is man's limited life-span that enables man to change more readily than longer lived species. It is the reason why they are to inherit dominion over the Fourth Age. The ability to change insures racial survival in a world of change. Man has this ability because of the gift of death and a relatively short life span. He has managed to retain his vitality through the Ages because for each new generation of men the world is fresh and new. Man has always played a role on Middle-earth from the time of his creation but never become locked into any one historical period.

The story of the Quest involves four descendants of the Numenoreans who play prominent roles. They are Aragorn, Denethor, and his two sons, Faramir and Boromir. Aragorn and Faramir achieve success and honour as a result of their efforts while Denethor and Boromir undergo dishonour and death. The rewards or punishments meted out to these characters can be clearly traced to their acceptance or rejection of their proper place in relation to natural law. Those

men who seek to exceed their normal position in time-history are punished; those who understand and accept the demands and limitations of their involvement in the creation of history emerge victorious. As with the other characters, the hobbits act as intermediaries between the reader and men of Middle-earth.

Aragorn is the first Numenorean to enter the story; he is also the most important man living in Middle-earth at that time. He is the descendant of Kings and is destined to be the first ruler of the Fourth Age. The hobbits first encounter him in the inn at Bree. The initial description is vague. Frodo notices " . . . a strange weather-beaten man, sitting in the shadows near the wall . . ." (B.I, p. 168). He has long legs, encased in leather boots, and is dressed in a travel-stained, dark green cloak. The hobbits later return to their room to find Aragorn, or Strider as he is known in Bree, waiting for them. He continues to be a figure of mystery. He offers his services to the hobbits as guide; and, as proof of his abilities in this capacity, he says "'I am older than I look. I might prove useful'" (B.I, p. 177). This equating of ability with age is continued in two lines of the poem of prophecy that is contained in Gandalf's letter concerning Aragorn. "The old that is strong does not wither, / Deep roots are not reached

by the frost" (B.I, p. 182). Aragorn is strong in every sense of the word, and it is soon revealed that he comes of an ancient family and is himself not young; a point again made during the council at Elrond's home, "' . . . I have had a hard life and a long; . . .'" (B.I, p. 261). A number of times Aragorn refers to his own age as evidence that he has the right and the ability to share in the counsel and undertakings of Gandalf. When Gandalf returns from the dead, Aragorn tells him, "'I am no longer young even in the reckoning of Men of the Ancient Houses, . . . Will you not open your mind more clearly to me?'" (B.II, p. 100). When Gandalf gives the Palantir of Orthanc to Aragorn, he counsels caution. Aragorn responds, "'When have I been hasty or unwary, who have waited and prepared for many long years?'" (B.II, p. 200). Aragorn has acquired wisdom and power with age. He has a sense of his own destiny. He tells Gandalf "'Now my hour draws near'" (B.II, p. 199). The subject of prophecy and the heir of ancient objects of power, he is the wielder of Narsil, Elandil's sword that helped defeat Sauron in the Second Age and was used to cut off Sauron's Ring, thus depriving him of much of his power.[11] He is the proper owner of the Palantir, the scrying stones that permit him to see things distant both in time and

space. He is the holder of the oaths of the dead who haunt the Paths of the Dead and is able to command them into battle against the Corsairs of Umbar. He revives the hopes of men, the Glory of Gondor, and the rule of kings. He proves himself as loremaster, leader, warrior, and finally as ruler. He acts in accordance with his destiny, foretold in prophecy, rooted in his past and the past of his ancestors and in accordance with the dictates of time. He waits for the right time to act, in each case acts at exactly the right time, and is rewarded by a place of honour in history. He is directly descended from the Numenoreans of old and can expect a long life.

> " . . . I shall have life far longer than other men, yet that is but a little while; and when those who are now in the wombs of women are born and have grown old, I too shall grow old." (B.III, p. 249)

However, he does not seek to deny the passage of time, and when his alloted time is done, he accepts death. Aragorn lived to be 191; when he felt approaching old age, he passed the crown to his son, entered the tombs of his ancestors, and bid farewell to his family. In response to Arwen's pleas that he stay his passing, he replies in part,

> "Take counsel with yourself, beloved, and ask whether you would indeed have me wait until I wither and fall from my high seat unmanned and witless. Nay, lady, I am the last of the Numenoreans and the latest King of the Elder Days; and to me has been given not only a span thrice that of Men of Middle-earth, but also the grace to go at will and give back the gift. Now, therefore I will sleep." (B.III, p. 343)

Aragorn accepts death voluntarily and does not seek to avoid it. A final reward is given to him then, for in death he regains his appearance of youth and does not decay. "And long there he lay, an image of the splendour of the Kings of Men in glory undimmed before the breaking of the world" (B.III, p. 344).

Aragorn, as the King of Men and one of the leaders in the Fellowship is the individual most responsible for the ordering of the transition from the Third to the Fourth Age. Frodo is the effective cause of the end of the Third Age but once the Ring is destroyed, Frodo, Gandalf, and the elf lords assume a passive role and it is Aragorn who directs the course of change in its intended direction. His actions are in keeping with the dictates of natural law, the demands of justice, and the prophecies of the past. As a reward for reinstating the process of change, Aragorn is granted immunity from it in several forms. He attains fame and the assurance that his name will be honoured in history as well as carried on by his

descendants. His body does not suffer dissolution after death but rather regains the beauty of his youth. Finally, it is hinted at by Aragorn that death is not final. He comforts Arwen when she mourns his impending death by telling her that, "'Behold! We are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory, Farewell'" (B.III, p. 344). An afterlife is clearly implied, though nothing more is specified.

In contrast to Aragorn is Denethor. Gandalf warned Pippin concerning Denethor as they approached Gondor "'Theoden is a kindly old man. Denethor is of another sort, proud and subtle, a man of far greater lineage and power, though he is not called a King'" (B.III, p. 25). Gandalf's warning serves as an accurate indication of what is to come. Denethor is described as being old and yet powerful, again the two qualities are paired.

> Denethor looked indeed much more like a great wizard than Gandalf did, more kingly, beautiful, and powerful; and older. Yet by a sense other than sight Pippin perceived that Gandalf had the greater power and the deeper wisdom, and a majesty that was veiled. And he was older, far older. (B.III, p. 29)

Despite Denethor's impressive appearance, he is flawed. This flaw is pride, as Gandalf earlier indicated to Pippin. Denethor's pride has caused him to dare to

use one of the Palantir, the seeing stones, to look into the future. Beregond comments that this has caused him to age prematurely. "'And so it is that he is old, worn out before his time'" (B.III, p. 37). Eventually this peering into the future causes Denethor to give up all hope of defeating the Enemy. He deserts his duties and commits suicide, and so brings dishonour to his own name. He sought after knowledge of the future, knowledge that was not properly within his scope of understanding. This act of pride is the direct cause of his ignominious end.

The conception that the individual is forbidden to look beyond the limits of his own time as dictated by his nature reflects on the operations of time in Middle-earth in several ways. In much the same way as the characters from the mythic past are limited to the roles they may properly play in the present, the creatures of the present are limited to their own time. The individual's role in history is limited to his own time and the future is in the hands of those who are to come, under the direction of the "One." Like Faustus, Denethor sought for knowledge beyond his proper sphere and suffered the consequences. The future of Middle-earth is not pre-destined and any attempt at looking beyond the present and its implications is based on a false view of the process. In

order for the future to be seen in advance it must be fixed. Denethor's belief that he knows what will occur, based on what he has seen in the Palantir, is both incorrect and founded on pride. The uncertainty of the Quest is a reflection of the freedom of the individual and the integrity of the process of change. It is also the source of its vitality. Denethor is not only misled by what Sauron showed him through the Palantir, but was also led to accept his view of history as something that can be made static.

Boromir, Denethor's son, suffers a similar fate and for much the same reasons. He was a valiant warrior and enemy of Sauron and all his servants, but because of his pride, he failed in his duty, suffering dishonour for this failure. Boromir attempted to take the Ring from Frodo by force at Tol Brandir. The Ring, a symbol of anti-history, would have been too powerful for Boromir to control. Had he gained possession of it, he would have become a Dark Lord himself. Use of the Ring as a weapon would have resulted in denying the need for change that was manifest in Middle-earth at that time. Boromir's seeking to possess it was an attempt on his part to deny the natural course of history that demanded that the Ring, and all it stood for, disappear from Middle-earth. Boromir regained some honour by dying, defending Merry

and Pippin, and repentant for his attack on Frodo; but the splitting of the fellowship and his own death were largely a product of his pride.

The fourth Numenorean, and Denethor's second son, was Faramir. Faramir, like Aragorn, remains true to his oaths and accepts his own limitations. When he discovers what Frodo's burden is, he says,

> "Even if I were such a man as to desire this thing, and even though I knew not clearly what this thing was when I spoke, still I should take those words as a vow, and be held by them. But I am not such a man. Or I am wise enough to know that there are some perils from which a man must flee." (B.II, pp. 289-90)

Faramir recognizes the peril of the Ring and remains true to his oath. He admits that the power of the Ring is beyond his power to claim or wield. He remains true to his own nature and is rewarded by gaining honour in battle and eventually succeeding to the Stewardship of Gondor and then the Princedom of Ithilien.

The Numenoreans as a race, though degenerate at the time of the Quest, were stronger and wiser than other men. Those of them that sought power and knowledge beyond their proper scope, power derived from the Third Age, were punished. Such was the fate of Denethor and Boromir. Aragorn and Faramir, in contrast, acted in accordance with their proper nature and aided

in ending the Third Age and were rewarded by emerging as the rulers of the Fourth Age.

The second group of men inhabiting Middle-earth at the time of the Quest are called by Faramir the Middle men. Their most representative members are the Rohan. These Middle men were of lesser lineage. They were not loremasters or leaders of men but, rather warriors. Aragorn describes them:

> "They are proud and wilful, but they are true-hearted, generous in thought and deed; bold but not cruel; wise but unlearned, writing no books but singing many songs; after the manner of the children of Men before the Dark Years." (B.II, p. 33)

They are less long lived than the Numenoreans and committed to the present rather than the future or the past. They act in the great wars because of the immediate threat that Saruman and Sauron represents and because of their sworn fealty to Gondor. Their power is in strength of arms and their virtue is in honest loyalty. They are guided by the counsel of greater powers, notably Gandalf, though they are led by their own leaders, first Theoden, and then Eomer.

Theoden first appears in the story as an old man bent and withered by age. "Upon it [his throne] sat a man so bent with age that he seemed almost a dwarf; ... ." (B.II, p. 116). Theoden is indeed old but his weakness is the result of the sapping

influence that Grima has had on him. Gandalf reveals the true state of affairs to Theoden and in doing so permits him to regain his proper strength. Theoden is still old but is now revealed as being still hale and an able warrior. Eventually he is over mastered by the inhuman power of the Nazgûl leader, but he first proves himself as a warrior and gains honour by his action. He acts as a man of action, fulfills his role to the best of his ability, and then dies as he wished to die, in glory on the battlefield. He does not seek to prolong his life unduly and goes to war knowing that he is likely to die. He accepts death when it comes, first naming Eomer as his heir, in accordance with the laws of nature and the customs of his land. In doing so he wins a place of honour in the history of his people and of the Age. Theoden's death is a recognition that the old must die to make way for the young. His death in noble old age permits the succession of the young Eomer and in a larger sense helps end the old Third Age so that the new, Fourth Age can begin.

The final category of men Faramir called the Wild or Men of Darkness. These men are completely degenerate, to the point where they have virtually lost their human nature as with the Woses or else have become tools used by Sauron and Saruman as are the Easterlings

and Harads. They do not emerge as individuals in the story with the exception of the Wild man, Ghan-buri-Ghan who makes only a brief appearance. The Wild men have little more than animal cunning and disappear from the story, back into their woods, where they supposedly die out eventually. The fallen men have surrendered their identity to Sauron and are driven to battle where they are largely destroyed when Sauron falls. Some of these Fallen men are more properly Middle men (Harads) and when Sauron falls, they are defeated and then permitted to return home.

Notes

[1] Evans, pp. 114-15.

[2] Evans, p. 171.

[3] Keenan, p. 67.

[4] Gracia Fay Ellwood, Good News From Tolkien's Middle Earth (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 104-105.

[6] Zimbardo, in TCr., p. 107.

[7] Kocher, p. 112.

[8] Ruth Noel and Douglass Parker both discuss this tri-part division of men. Parker calls then "decadent, vigorous, and primitive," (Parker, p. 604). Noel refers to them as "High, Middle and Low" (Noel, p. 66).

[9] Rogers, in A Tolkien Compass, p. 73.

[10] Ryan, p. 156.

[11] Ryan comments concerning Aragorn's sword that, "The power of a sword is in proportion to its age and the rank of its original owner, . . ." (Ryan, p. 158). The significance of age in determining power is extended even to inanimate objects such as swords, the Rings, and the Palantir.

Chapter IV

Creatures and Objects of Evil

The problem of rendering moral judgments on individuals, or races, is that there are usually two sides to every story. The criminal is also a victim of the society that produced him, the expansionist race is often driven by the need to find food or land for its swelling population. History is frequently the winners' version of a conflict, while the loser is cast in the role of aggressor and author of its own misfortunes. Such is not the case in Middle-earth. Sauron and the Ring he forged in the Second Age were utterly evil. Those creatures that seek to possess the Ring for their own use or aid Sauron in his attempts to gain dominance over Middle-earth are evil. In addition there are creatures such as Shelob and the balrog, devoted to their own evil ends, whose nature is exploited by Sauron without their being under his direct control.

Because the story is told from the point of view of the hobbits, as Frodo's subtitle to the history states, "(as seen by the Little People; being the

memoirs of Bilbo and Frodo of the Shire, supplemented by the accounts of their friends and the learning of the Wise)" (B.III, p. 307), relatively little information and description is provided about the enemies of the Free Peoples. The hobbits had little direct contact with Sauron and his minions, except in battle, and knew little about them apart from what they were told by other characters. The description of the evil characters is correspondingly less detailed than that of the "good" characters. In addition, a number of the anti-heroes are less individuals than principles of evil and lack a physical body in the normal sense; this is true of the ringwraiths and Sauron. Despite the brevity of description devoted to these characters, their individual roles in the story can be defined by viewing them from a time-history perspective. The negative characters are roughly arranged in a hierarchy with Sauron at the top and the orcs at the bottom. A number of characters, notably Shelob, the balrog, and Saruman, do not fit exactly into this structure, but their powers and motivations are in keeping with the overall framework.

Sauron and the Great Ring

Sauron is the personification of evil, and the most powerful being on Middle-earth. He is able to draw all evil creatures to him, as Gandalf tells Frodo.

"'Alas! Mordor draws all wicked things, and the Dark Power was bending all its will to gather them there'" (B.I, p. 68). Through the use of bribery, trickery, and coercion he manages to gain mastery over those creatures inclined towards evil, and musters them into his army. The only thing needed to assure his domination over the whole of Middle-earth is the Ring, into which he had placed much of his power during the Second Age.

The evil that Sauron represents is not theological in nature. He does not seek to contest the might of the One or the Valar. His actions are centered on Middle-earth and in opposition to the laws that govern that world. As has already been stated, the supreme forces of good do not engage in the conflict in Middle-earth directly. When Glorfindel suggests sending the Ring over the sea where it would come under the protection of the Valar, Elrond replies, "' . . . they who dwell beyond the Sea would not receive it: for good or ill it belongs to Middle-earth; it is for us who still dwell here to deal with it'" (B.I, p. 279). The evil that Sauron and the Ring together constitute is active only on Middle-earth, and must be dealt with by those beings that dwell there. The evil that exists in Middle-earth at the end of the Third Age is within the scope of that world. It may take

its source from the corrupting influence of Power as Edmund Fuller argues,[1] or from an excess of pride and power as Patricia Spacks suggests,[2] but it is manifested in an attempt to halt the process of change which is the fundamental law governing Middle-earth. This process may have been initiated by the creator and his attendant forces, the Valar, and they may even aid in its continuance and direction; but they will not interfere directly. Because of Sauron's evil influence, the freedom of the individual is denied, and the passage of time, both in the natural and the mythic sense, is halted. Sauron's life is artificially prolonged because of the Ring; the seasons of the year and the movements of the sun are disrupted, and the transition from the Third to the Fourth Age is delayed. In a more individual sense, the evil characters lose their ability to change and thus lose contact with the process itself. Like the ringwraiths and the Mouth of Sauron, they feel no joy in life and are devoted to its destruction. They are isolated from the harmony that constitutes the unity of the whole and so are trapped in a hell of chaos and discord.

Sauron is never described in concrete terms, partly because he stays within his fortress and directs his forces from there, and partly because he has long ago lost his physical body. He has been

involved in three defeats, at least two of which should have destroyed him. He served Morgoth in the First Age and yet managed to avoid destruction when Morgoth and his forces were overthrown through the intervention of the Valar. He sailed with the Numenoreans, who assailed the Undying lands, and his body was destroyed when the Valar destroyed the Fleet; yet he was able to return to Middle-earth and take form again. "Sauron was indeed caught in the wreck of Numenor, so that the bodily form in which he long had walked perished, but he fled back to Middle-earth, a spirit of hatred borne upon a dark wind" (B.III, p. 317). He was defeated a third time by Gil-galad and Elendil, and again his bodily form was destroyed. Despite these three defeats, each time Sauron was able to return to the world of physical being, though altered in form. Originally Sauron was not evil or horrible in appearance, according to Elrond. "'For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so'" (B.I, p. 281). However, by the end of the Second Age, he had become wholly evil and his appearance had altered accordingly. He is described as a "dark, shadowy form" or as a "great eye." While resting in Lothlorien, Frodo catches a glimpse of him in Galadriel's Mirror.

> In the black abyss there appeared a single Eye that slowly grew, until it filled nearly all the Mirror. So terrible was it that Frodo stood rooted, unable to cry out or to withdraw his gaze. The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing. (B.I, p. 379)

Sauron is seldom named but is frequently referred to as the Dark Lord, or as a Shadow. Imagery of darkness is continually associated with Sauron and the forces of evil on Middle-earth. His servants are most powerful at night and many of the orcs and trolls cannot bear the light of day. When Sauron's troops go to war he surrounds them with an artificial darkness that hides their movements while striking terror into the hearts of his opponents.

The degeneration in appearance, the associations with darkness and fire, and the role as leader of a dark army of monstrous beings, all link Sauron to Satan, particularly Milton's depiction of him. There is even a similarity in names. However, the parallels between these two figures of evil are countered by an essential difference. In Paradise Lost the world is initially static, it is Satan's fall and his subsequent corruption of Adam and Eve that initiates the process of change. In Middle-earth the process has existed previous to Sauron's rise to power, and death, rather than being God's punishment for man's

disobedience, is called a gift. While Satan tries to cause change, Sauron seeks to halt it.

Sauron's presence throughout the story is felt as an omnipresent threat, dark and mysterious. His continued existence is in contradiction to the laws of nature; he transcends the physical world by refusing to die and so continues on Middle-earth up to the time of the Quest, as the essence of all that is negative. J. E. A. Tyler calls Sauron

> . . . the focus for all the greed, lust, and terrible energy which was to be found on Middle-earth during the two Ages of his Supremacy. All evil gravitated to him; just as he was its ultimate source; . . .[3]

Sauron is a creature of a past age. His origins are unclear but it is almost certain that he is older than Middle-earth itself and his powers are commensurate with his great age. He cannot be defeated by physical force, as Aragorn states in the debate before the final battle. "'This war then is without final hope, as Denethor perceived. Victory cannot be achieved by arms, . . .'" (R.III, p. 154). The only hope that the Free Peoples have of defeating Sauron lies in the destruction of his Ring, which Frodo now possesses. Sauron's continued existence after his defeat, which marked the end of the Second Age, was possible because the Ring was not destroyed at that time. Sauron had

forged the Ring in order to gain domination over the other rings made by the elves. Into it he had placed much of his own power and had made it a kind of extension of his own being. Isildur refused to destroy the Ring when Sauron was overthrown and so, as Elrond reveals at the council, Sauron was able to rise once again.

> "Sauron was diminished, but not destroyed. His Ring was lost but not unmade. The Dark Tower was broken but its foundations were not removed; for they were made with the power of the Ring, and while it remains they will endure." (B.I, p. 257)

The Ring and Sauron are in a sense one being. Gandalf tells Boromir that, "'It [the Ring] belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil'" (B.I, p. 281). Like Sauron, it belongs to a past age and, indeed, is the source of the power that enables the Second Age to encroach on the Third. Not only is Sauron's presence dependent on it, but also the other rings that permit the continued existence of the ringwraiths, Rivendell and Lothlorien, all of which would have passed into history if not for the Ruling Ring's influence. Robley Evans sees the Ring as a symbol of the Quest, and the " . . . recurrent character of history."[4] He also argues that its continued existence during the Third Age is in opposition to the natural laws of Middle-earth:

" . . . Tolkien's view of life is one of constant process and perception, and is therefore opposed to the purpose of the One Ring which is to 'bind' life, enclose it within its circle forever."[5] Rose Zimbardo, in discussing the Ring, comments that the property that makes it almost "irresistible" is its ability to arrest time. She concludes by stating that,

> The Ring, then, not only takes its wearer out of the community, of positive being, but out of the cycle of time to which that being is subject. The permanence of All consists in change. The harmony of being demands decay before regeneration begins.[6]

The effect that the Ring has on natural law is a manifestation of Sauron's desires; that is, he seeks to impose his rule over the whole of Middle-earth. His powers, and his very nature are derived from a past, more powerful age. Sauron's efforts are directed towards preventing history (change) from occurring. He desires an eternity of domination by himself over a world peopled with nothing but his own slaves. He strives to create a kind of hell on earth in which even the cycles of the year and the movements of the sun are arrested. Towards this end, he makes winter unending in his kingdom where all natural life is blasted or twisted, and creates an unnatural darkness to blot out the sun. His refusal to die, and his efforts to deny the passing of his time of power, is

the ultimate assertion of an ego which places itself in opposition to the laws of the world in which it exists.

The static nature of evil, which Sauron is the supreme example of, differs from the inability to change that is displayed by elves, ents, and dwarves primarily because of the effect that it has on the individual, and the individual's reaction to the knowledge that the process is gradually leaving him behind. The elves, ents, and dwarves are survivals from the past and the result is a loss of vitality that dooms them to eventual extinction on Middle-earth. This loss of vitality is natural; as the world changes, those beings that do not change with it no longer have a place in the new order. The reaction of the Free Peoples is to accept this fact. They do not seek to halt the process of change as a whole, nor do they seek to impose their past time of dominance on the present. They retain their identities and freely choose to aid in the war against Sauron though they know that regardless of the outcome their fate is sealed.

Sauron and his followers differ from the Free peoples because they refuse to accept their fate; they seek to deny change not only for themselves but the process as a whole. The result is that they lose

their own identities; Sauron's appearance degenerates until he is little more than a dark malignancy. His followers undergo a similar change. Patricia Spacks notes that, "By using their freedom to choose evil, the wicked destroy freedom: emphasis is consistently upon the essential slavery of the servants of Sauron, . . ."[7] Douglass Parker comments that "These extensions [Sauron's creatures], with the single exception of Shelob, have no personality of their own. They are not so much evil as Evilness."[8] The evil characters refuse to accept change, but in order to continue in a changed world they suffer an alteration of being, a distortion of what they once were. They become warped in appearance and character while those beings that accepted the inevitability of change retained their appearance and nature unmarred.

The Ringwraiths

The ringwraiths are figures of pure evil, second only to Sauron himself. They appear to the hobbits as tall, dark figures, dressed in black robes. Originally they were men who ruled various kingdoms in Middle-earth. They were given rings of power by Sauron during the Second Age, which gave them supernatural powers and immortality as long as the One Ring existed. In actual fact, the rings that Sauron had given the Nazgûl enslaved them and they became shadows of evil

under his control. Though immortal, they became, as Tyler describes them, ". . . . deathless spirits with no physical substance and no will to oppose he who wore the One Ring."[9]

The Nazgûl are lesser imitations of Sauron himself, made by him (through the influence of the rings), to carry out his orders and to command the lesser creatures under his control. At the time of the Quest the ringwraiths are some four thousand years old and have lived many times beyond their natural human age. Their actions and their very existence is a contradiction of the natural laws of change. When Sauron's Ring is destroyed, their rings fail and they die. They are creatures without free will or joy in life, and the sound of their cries is that of a soul in despair. Time has claimed their physical bodies and they have become like the pre-historic winged monsters they ride, creatures alien to the world in which they continue to exist. They have surpassed the limits of normal chronological time for their species and become, indeed, mythic horrors whose very presence drives men insane. They have refused the gift of the One, death, and as a result have lost their human natures and paid the terrible price of enslaved, joyless eons under Sauron's command.

Orcs and Trolls

Sauron's armies are composed of men, orcs, and trolls. The men fall into the categories already discussed, and have either been corrupted by Sauron, or won over to his side by lies and promises. Orcs and trolls are artificial creatures bred and controlled by Sauron to oppose the armies of the Free peoples. Treebeard is the only character in the story who actually discusses their origins. He tells Merry and Pippin that "' . . . Trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as Orcs were of Elves'" (B.II, p. 89). Physically, orcs were usually short, bow-legged, and evil-featured. Tyler says of them that

> . . . the creatures he [Morgoth] made were evil, filled with his dark will, cannibalistic and cruel, and they abhorred the light of the sun from their Beginnings, emerging from their caves to do battle for their Black Master only at nightfall--or when the Great Darkness blotted out the lights of Heaven. They were bred in Darkness, lived in Darkness, died in the dark; yet although they were cowardly and unreliable, so long as the will of their Master animated them they were formidable soldiery, and enmity between them and the Elves was bitter.[10]

The orcs were relatively weak as individuals. Their strength lay in numbers and in the driving will of their master, first Morgoth, and after his defeat in the First Age, Sauron. They lack any real sense of

identity as a race, except when faced with an outside threat, and quarrel and kill among themselves when left alone. They display no interest in the past or future and, unless driven, act only in accordance with their immediate needs and hates.

The trolls, like the orcs, were artificial beings, created by Morgoth. They were larger than orcs and fierce fighters, but less prolific as breeders. They were used by Sauron and his Captain, the Chief Nazgûl, to spearhead attacks. Little is said about them in LOTR and none of them emerge as individuals. According to Tyler,

> Trolls were strong, fierce and exceedingly dull-witted, with hides of overlapping scales resistant to all but the most well-forged weaponry; and though brutish and ignorant, they were readily adapted by Morgoth the Enemy to serve the course of Evil.[11]

Sauron found them to be equally suitable for his purposes.

The trolls and orcs seem to have no real place of their own in history. They were made and controlled by the forces of evil, rather than having been created or having evolved as part of the natural world. Their dominant traits are an excessive aggressiveness, coupled with a limited intelligence. They lack any sense of purposeful existence apart from being tools of

evil, and once Sauron's will no longer holds them and pushes them into battle, they are quickly defeated despite their superior numbers. Their conception of life and thus history is, like Smeagol's, animal rather than intelligent. Once Sauron is defeated, their future fate seems sealed. They are not adaptable themselves, but have been adapted by and for the forces of evil. Their eventual destruction becomes inevitable as Middle-earth changes, a change marked by the beginning of the Fourth Age.

Shelob and the Balrog

The figures of evil already discussed may all be seen to be derived from one source, Sauron and his Ring. The Nazgûl, orcs, and trolls are little more than artificial extensions of Sauron's will and have no purpose or power apart from what is derived from him. This is not true of two other figures, Shelob and the balrog, who are devoted to evil but have powers of their own. They aid Sauron by choice, rather than by necessity, and because their purposes seem complementary. Shelob and the balrog have both lived in Middle-earth for Ages and their great age is accompanied with great power.

The balrog is a figure of ancient evil, known to the dwarves as Durin's Bane, and called by Gandalf, Flame of Udûn, implying that it is a spirit of hell

itself. Tyler speculates concerning balrogs that " . . . they are likely to have been dark spirits from Udûn (Hell), summoned by Morgoth to aid him in the wars of the First Age."[12] The balrog that figures in LOTR is left unexplained as to its origins and motivations. It is described as a great, winged, shadowy form, surrounded by fire and armed with a whip and a red sword. Its presence causes terror to Legolas and Gimli, elf and dwarf, as well as to the orcs in Moira, though it is fighting on their side. The balrog's power was sufficient to drive the dwarves from Moira in the past, and strike terror into the hearts of elves at the mention of its name. It proves a match for Gandalf, dragging him into the pit when it falls, and though Gandalf slays it, he dies in the deed.

Shelob, like the balrog, does not derive her power from Sauron and seems to be a natural form of evil. The narrator described her as " . . . an evil thing in spider-form, . . ." (B.II, p. 332). She is ancient and completely evil, serving no one, but left in peace by Sauron in exchange for the protection she provided as guardian of one of the entrances to his Kingdom.

> But still she was there who was there before Sauron, and before the first stone of Barad-dûr; and she served none but herself, drinking the blood of Elves and Men, bloated

> and grown fat with endless brooding on her feasts, weaving webs of shadow; for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness. (B.II, p. 332).

Ryan calls her " . . . a powerful if motiveless archetypal evil . . . like Bombadil, she is unaffected by the supernatural power come into the world after her own origin."[13]

Shelob and the balrog have only a limited involvement in the history of Middle-earth as a whole. They markedly resemble Tom Bombadil in this respect. They stay within the boundaries of their own little worlds, Shelob in the caves above the plains of Mordor, and the balrog in Moira. Just as Bombadil took no part in the Quest itself, Shelob and the balrog are not interested in the Quest so much as in the exercise of their own evil natures. They do not go to war for Sauron, nor do they pursue Frodo or the Ring once they have passed out of their respective caves. Shelob and the balrog do not strive to halt history nor do they belong to a past Age; they exist apart from it. Significantly the destruction of the balrog and the wounding of Shelob does not alter the state of the Quest except in permitting it to proceed. Sauron did not bring evil into Middle-earth nor does his death end it. Evil as well as good has a place in the natural order of things, just as Shelob, the balrog,

and Bombadil each have their place. It is only when a force, like Sauron, denies the natural process, that transcendent forces such as are felt to be working behind the scenes in the Quest, take a part in the world to insure that history's progress is restored.

Saruman

Saruman is a wizard but, unlike Gandalf, he has fallen prey to the wiles of the Enemy. Originally he was one of Sauron's chief enemies. He was the chief wizard, Gandalf's superior, and head of the White Council. He was known as "Saruman the White," and "Saruman the Wise" in recognition of his abilities and because white, an obvious symbol of good and purity, was his colour just as grey was Gandalf's. Each of the wizards specialized in a different branch of knowledge: Gandalf studied hobbits; Radagast, animals; and Saruman, "the arts of the Enemy" (B.I, p. 370). Unfortunately, Saruman found one of the Palantir in Orthanc and sought to use it. Gandalf tells Pippin that at first he must have used it to "' . . . see small images of things far off and days remote'" (B.II, p. 203). But Saruman was not content with this limited vision. "'Further and further abroad he gazed, until he cast his gaze upon Barad-dûr. Then he was caught!'" (B.II, p. 203). Sauron had also gained possession of one of the Palantir, and through it he

was able to dominate Saruman and subvert him to evil.

Once Sauron had Saruman under his power, Saruman degenerated from good to evil. Saruman, like Gandalf, had been sent to Middle-earth to oppose Sauron. Appendix B states, concerning wizards, that

> It was afterwards said that they [Wizards] came out of the Far West and were messengers sent to contest the power of Sauron, and to unite all those who had the will to resist him; but they were forbidden to match his power with power, or to seek to dominate Elves or Men by Force and Fear. (B.III, p. 365)

Saruman abandons his duty as a wizard and seeks to become the ruler of Middle-earth. He alters his colour from white to rainbow coloured and raises an army of orcs, trolls, and men in rivalry of Sauron. He calls himself Sauruman Ring-maker in a kind of parody of Sauron. He attempts to acquire the Ring for himself; if it proves beyond reach, he intends to ally himself with Sauron and hopes to share the Dark Lord's power. He tries to gain Gandalf's aid by telling him that "'The time of the Elves is over, but our time is at hand: the world of Men, which we must rule'" (B.I, p. 272). In refusing to act in accordance with his proper role, Saruman is denying his nature as a wizard. He disobeys the edict placed upon the wizards not to match force with force and not to seek domination through force and fear. After Saruman's army had been defeated

and he found himself trapped in Orthanc, Gandalf offered him a chance to repent. Saruman refuses and Gandalf breaks his staff, casting Saruman out of the Order of Wizards. Interestingly, after Gandalf's battle with the balrog, he returns, not as Gandalf the Grey, but as Gandalf the White. Though Gandalf had earlier declared Saruman his superior, after his return, Gandalf is the stronger of the two. Gandalf becomes what Saruman had ceased to be. Gandalf has been cleansed by death while Saruman has become defiled through the life he has chosen to lead. He assumes Saruman's role as leader of the Free people. He tells Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas concerning his transformation that "'Yes, I am white now, . . . Indeed I am Saruman, one might almost say, Saruman as he should have been'" (B.II, p. 98).

Saruman undergoes a series of changes that show him to be in a process of degeneration. He falls from Saruman the White, head of the White Council, to Saruman of the Rainbow Colours. Gandalf strips him of his wizard's staff, and casts him out of the order, and he becomes a man and an outcast. He then goes to the Shire and rules over that small country with a band of thieves. His men are defeated by the returning hobbits, and Frodo proves himself Saruman's superior by refusing to have him killed. Saruman is then

killed by his own victim, Grima Wormtongue, a creature more beast than man.

Saruman's degeneration can be seen to develop out of the loss of his own proper historical role and perspective. As a wizard he was sent to Middle-earth to aid in the fulfillment of history, which demanded that the Third Age end and Sauron be destroyed once and for all. Instead, Saruman ceased acting for the future of Middle-earth and instead sought to further his own ends. He attempted to gain mastery over Middle-earth for himself, in opposition to the dictates of history and the laws governing his proper role as a wizard. He falls from being the leader of the Wise and Mighty who are devoted to good, until at the end he is killed by a creature held in contempt by all, whom he contemptuously called "worm."

We have stated that the process of change is natural, good, and inevitable in Tolkien's sub-created world. It is purposeful, directed, and vital and seeks to establish a harmony in a world of flux, a harmony that allows the individual scope for freedom and a proper place in the scheme of things. Evil is the antithesis of the process. It is static and oppressive. It strives to deny the individual freedom and identity and results in chaos and discord. It breeds violence and decay, though its presence can

and does allow the individual the opportunity to transcend himself by opposing it as an instrument of the guiding force that lies behind the process. The acceptance of evil results in a loss of vitality, a degeneration of body and spirit. Even at the time of the Quest, elves and men seldom use Sauron's name, but rather simply call him the Dark Lord.

The degenerate nature of the evil characters arises out of the fact they no longer have (or never had), a natural place in the process of change. Sauron and the Nazgûl belong in the past and their continued existence is a result of the perverting effect that the Ring has on time and history. Orcs and trolls, created by the forces of evil, have no part to play in natural evolution or directed history. The balrog and Shelob are outcasts from the community of positive being. They do not participate in the operations of time in the vegetative or in the social world and therefore do not partake of the "goodness" that arises out of its actions.

The evil characters' lack of a place in the operations of time and their opposition to its intended direction result in their being ostracized from the unity of the natural world and the creatures living in it. They take no joy from their own existence and have no hope of immortality beyond the bounds of

Middle-earth. Their very names are dropped from history. Sauron is seldom named but is given vague titles such as the Dark Lord, the Enemy, or the Shadow. The Nazgûl are not referred to by individual names and are distinguished from one another only in that their leader is known as the Chief Nazgûl. The orcs and trolls have no heroes who are remembered in song or word but are all lumped together as figures of evil to be killed and then forgotten. The evil characters are remembered only as warnings for the future or as the opposition to the good beings who are enshrined in history. They have no hope of personal immortality.

Notes

[1] Fuller, in TCr., p. 26.

[2] Spacks, in TCr., pp. 92-94.

[3] J. E. A. Tyler, The Tolkien Companion (New York: Avon Books, 1977).

[4] Evans, p. 49.

[5] Evans, p. 92.

[6] Zimbardo, in TCr., p. 106.

[7] Spacks, in TCr., p. 92.

[8] Parker, p. 603.

[9] Tyler, p. 403.

[10] Tyler, p. 357.

[11] Tyler, p. 487.

[12] Tyler, p. 38.

[13] Ryan, p. 157.

Chapter V

Tolkien's Use of Time Placed in Perspective

Over the whole of Middle-earth time rules supreme. The Ring's circularity is an apt symbol for LOTR and the life within its boundaries. The story proceeds in a series of cycles, itself being one part of a cycle, and the lives of individuals and species are portrayed as circular. Life is bounded on one side by nature and the movement from birth to death, and on the other by history in which there is an inevitable rising and falling. Middle-earth is cycling downwards to eventual destruction and within it occur smaller cycles which both reflect and participate in the overall movement.

The importance of Tolkien's use of time and history to define and position the characters in The Lord of the Rings is clearly confirmed by the discussion in the preceding chapters. Emphasis is repeatedly placed on a character's age and that of his species, his expected life-span, his historical period of origin, his perception of history, and his place in its annals. These repeated references to time, and their significance

when placed together provide the reader with the key to understanding who a character is, how he relates to the world he inhabits, and the significance of his role in the story. The consistency and comprehensiveness of these time-related details is in marked contrast to the vagueness and scarcity of the physical description and psychological insights that usually figure prominently in the characterization to be found in more conventional works. It is the lack of traditional characterization that has led so many critics to dismiss the characters as flat or stereotyped, symbolic or allegorical. Those critics that dismiss the characters as being unworthy of study in their own right overlook the effect that Tolkien's use of time has on their presentation.

The significance of time and its passage permeates Tolkien's world at every level. It provides the set of laws that explain the nature of Middle-earth, both in the natural and the moral sense. Life is a continuous process of birth, growth, and death; these vital states insure that the process of life will continue. In an impermanent world, which both our world and Middle-earth are, stasis leads to sterility and death. The process of change is given a further moral dimension because it is made clear that history, which is the record of change as it is experienced by

rational beings, is operating under the guidance of the supreme creative force in an intended direction. History is depicted as a continuous battle, dating from the time of creation, between the forces of good and evil, between the process of natural change, and forces that seek to halt or disrupt it. Robley Evans states, "The struggle for power is cast in terms of an original battle at the beginning of history between super-beings who establish history as a moral progression, and who set a pattern which repeats itself over and over."[1] The process of change considered as a whole forms a unity. The mythic past is repeated in the present, as well as being represented by creatures such as Sauron, Elrond, and Galadriel who have survived from past Ages. Chronological time, recorded as history, places the process in a linear perspective which at the same time is seen to be composed of a series of cycles that move steadily downward as Middle-earth recedes from the time of its creation, and approaches the time of its ultimate destruction. The fairy-tale time of the story identifies it as remote from ourselves; but because change is a repeating pattern that bridges mythic and chronological time, the trilogy is made directly relevant to the reader, both because we are part of the same process, and because an analogous situation has occurred and will occur

again in the pattern.

Moreover, the laws that govern Middle-earth, the conception of the supreme importance of the actions and effects of time, are made incarnate in the characters. Tolkien's use of time and history provides the reader with a knowledge of the essential difference between the various characters and species. Each character and species has a particular perception of time and place in its processes, that identifies it as a hobbit or dwarve, man or elf, wizard or ent far more clearly than a reliance on physical description would reveal. An unusually fair-featured man is not an elf, nor is a jolly, beardless drawve a hobbit though they may look alike. Each species differs essentially from every other species by virtue of its position and perception of life, of change, and time. Not only are the differences between species denoted by a difference in relation to time and history, but within each species individuals are distinguished by how they perceive time and the way this perception affects them. Aragorn differs from Theoden not simply because of an accident of birth or temperament but because of his greater historical role, his lineage which links him directly with the mighty Numenoreans of the Second Age, his longevity, and his superior awareness of history as a meaningful process.

Time and history not only serve to identify and define characters as individuals, it is the time-historical framework which also provides the organizing principle for the characters both within the narrative and for the reader. Rose Zimbardo discusses the ordering of all life in Middle-earth into a "chain of being" that together constitutes a unity.[2] J. S. Ryan emphasizes the systematic organization of the characters into a hierarchy which operates both within each species and group, and also as a unifying principle for the whole of Middle-earth. Ryan maintains that the presence of a hierarchy naturally arises out of the significance and operation of time that places the older species at the top because they are nearer the mythic time of creation. "As with history, so in hierarchy the most ancient and powerful levels are obscure . . ."[3] The actions of time result in a continuous state of flux both in the natural world and in history. The characters in Middle-earth reflect this process; and as the world changes, the ordering of the characters into a hierarchy also changes. The good characters, those who accept the dictates of natural law and the intended direction of history, together form a harmony that must be capable of change to match the alterations in the world that result from the passage of time. At the time of the Ring Quest, elves, dwarves, and

ents are good beings who have survived from past Ages and have become a part of mythic time. They have become static and are unable to change along with their world. They experience a waning of their powers, a lack of vitality, which will eventually cause them to disappear from Middle-earth. These beings, who were once the dominant figures in the history of Middle-earth, have lost much of their potency; and as they sink towards obscurity, it is men who rise to take their place. Men, because of their ability to change, which arises out of their position and perception of time, are able to change as the world changes. Men stand rooted in chronological time; and as it progresses, so do they.

The hobbits stand near the bottom of the hierarchy of the good creatures. In the past they have had little to do with the making of history or the world outside their own borders. They are linked with nature and the present, rather than with the future or the past. Their lack of any strong link with a particular historical period means that they have been little affected by the progress of history up to the time of the Quest. With the rise of Sauron, however, history intrudes on their world and they are forced into becoming involved in the fortunes of the outside world. Merry, Sam, and Pippin become historical

figures that play significant roles in the history of the last phase of the Third Age. The hobbits are not linked to a mythic past, but neither are they capable of evolving as an historical force as men are. The passing of the Third Age affects them less dramatically than it does the other Elder peoples, but they too decline as a people until today they are seldom seen. As long as they remained apart from history they were relatively immune to the effects of its passage; but once involved in it, they were left behind when it progressed while they did not.

Tom Bombadil represents a fourth level of involvement in time that places him apart from the hierarchy of the species though he is in harmony with it. Tom lives apart from history and so its passage has no effect on him. He is involved in the natural cycles, the changing of the seasons, and the movements of the sun; and time in this respect is infinitely repeated, until the breaking of the world. His vitality is the vitality of nature, and while nature persists so will he.

The evil characters are also arrayed in a hierarchy, but unlike that of the good characters it is static and lacks vitality. As its top is Sauron and his Ring, and together they represent a denial of the process. Sauron's nature is imposed on all the levels beneath

him to such an extent that they are mere extensions of himself, slaves. The Nazgûl, orcs, trolls, corrupt men, and Saruman have all lost (or never had), the ability to change and grow. In terms of history they are unnatural products of Sauron's desire to halt the process and gain domination over Middle-earth. By refusing to die, Sauron has sought to evade the operations of time that cause decay and death. Sauron and the Nazgûl have had their physical bodies destroyed by the effects of time, but they continue to live on in dark shadows of lifeless flesh. Saruman and the men Sauron corrupted lose their proper place in history and fail of their intended natures. Saruman breaks the edict placed on wizards and is cast out of the order. Those men who are corrupted surrender their birthright, the rule of the Fourth Age. The orcs and trolls are created beings who have no place in nature or history except that which is derived from Sauron. The evil characters together form a disunity, held together by fear and Sauron's will. They take no joy in life or in each other and delight only in torture and death. Among them are characters from the mythic past and the chronological present, but all distinctions break down under Sauron's rule. They have no perception of time or history and no position in the process of change. They are dead to

life and seek to drag it down to their level. Shelob is the natural form of evil, corresponding in many respects to Bombadil; but while Tom is in harmony with nature and is renewed by the process of the cycles of change, Shelob lives apart from nature, malignant and killing and feeding off of all who enter her domain.

The conflict between the forces of good and evil began with the creation of Middle-earth and will continue until the end of the world. However, at the time of the Ring Quest, the forces of good are aided by an outside force. As has already been discussed there are a number of characters in LOTR who significantly affect the course of history without seeming to have a place in it. Gandalf, Frodo, and Bilbo each have an important role to play in overthrowing Sauron's power, without seeming to have a place in the process as a whole. The explanation for the roles they play resides in the fact that the course of history is not random but rather directed by a transcendent force. We are told in the Appendices that the wizards were sent to Middle-earth to contest Sauron's power but were forbidden to match force with force. It is also made clear that the actions of Frodo and Bilbo are not typical of hobbits in general, and that their possession of the Ring was not by chance. It is clear that Gandalf, Frodo, and Bilbo are used by an outside

force to help restore the process of change and history. They become the means through which the actions of time are permitted to resume their normal course without altering the fabric of the process. Gandalf enters Middle-earth during the Third Age and acts as a counselor and guide, but does not seek to raise any armies or order the actions of others. He offers knowledge derived from the past and insights into the workings of evil, but while in Middle-earth he is subject to its laws. Frodo and Bilbo change and grow as a result of a series of encounters centered on the Ring, but they are free to choose for good or evil and have no guarantee of success. In LOTR the power of the creator is restrained from interfering in the natural processes by choice. The Ring cannot be sent across the sea because it belongs to Middle-earth and must be dealt with by those that live there. However, the threat that Sauron represents is unnatural and clearly endangers the process of life itself. In response to this danger Gandalf, Frodo, and Bilbo emerge providing an opportunity to save the process. They are taken from outside the process, having no place in it, and given powers beyond that of normal creatures in the hope that they can enable the Free peoples to triumph. They become a part of the process only until Sauron is vanquished and history

and time are returned to their normal operations. Once this is accomplished their involvement with the process at only one point, the end of the Third Age, causes them to leave Middle-earth once that time is past. The process remains intact, its fabric unaltered by their temporary presence, and the influence of the transcendent force is withdrawn when it becomes unnecessary.

The significance of time and the positiveness of its operation is attested to at every level of life in Middle-earth. Bombadil is a living celebration of the cycles of the seasons in the natural world. The leaders of species and the rulers of races such as the Rohan invariably display a maturity of years, a knowledge and respect for the past, and an acceptance of their proper historical roles that identify them as being good. Those characters that accept and further the natural course of change are rewarded by a place of honour in history, and in exceptional cases the opportunity to transcend the limitations of the mutable world. Theoden's noble death in battle is rewarded by a place of honour beside his ancestors. His memory is enshrined in a heroic lay celebrating his life and the deeds that culminated in his death. Before he dies, he passes on his crown to Eomer, ensuring leadership for his people, and so as the new

Age begins the Rohan are led by a young, vital ruler. Aragorn is permitted to choose the time of his death and he does so while he is still hale and strong and at a time when he has a son who is ready and able to assume his place. In return he gains a place of note in history, his body regains the appearance of youth in death and is not subject to decay, and he has hope of a rebirth beyond the reaches of time. Bilbo, Frodo, and Gandalf win the gratitude of the Free people, are paid tribute to in word and song (which is a form of history), and are permitted to journey to the Undying Lands. The elves, dwarves, and ents continue to wane as a force in Middle-earth, but they do so with the knowledge that they will be remembered with honour and that they have realized their potential and preserved the world for those who are to come.

The evil creatures achieve no fame and suffer death without honour or dignity. Sauron is reduced to a dark shadow that is blown away by the wind, the Nazgûl go out like candles. Saruman is slain by the miserable Wormtongue, and the orcs and trolls kill themselves or are destroyed as they run and cower from Aragorn and his forces.

This study of Tolkien's method of characterization in LOTR began by outlining three general attitudes towards the characters that broadly represent the various

critical approaches. The three positions mentioned were, 1) that the characters are overly simplistic, suitable only for holding the attention and belief of a child, 2) that they are allegorical or symbolic representations of man and his world and as such not intended to be taken seriously in themselves but only in terms of what they represent, and 3) that they are deliberately portrayed in such a way as to emphasize the fact that they are "real" within the dictates of the form and world in which they are placed and are worthy of serious attention as beings in their own right.

The first position, that the characters are nothing but stereotypes, has been systematically refuted by a great many critics beginning with Douglass Parker and continued by such notables as C. S. Lewis, W. H. Auden, Patricia Meyer Spacks, and Rose Zimbardo, to name just a few. The fact that LOTR continues to be read seriously a quarter of a century after it first appeared is also a strong argument for accepting the trilogy, and the characters in it, as worthy of serious study. The complexity and comprehensiveness of their portrayal through references to time, the originality of the act of sub-creation that brought them into being, and their ability to interest and move the reader in repeated readings, all argues that there is

more than " . . . a simple confrontation--in more or less traditional terms of British melodrama--of the Forces of Evil with the Forces of Good, the remote and alien Villain with the plucky little home-grown hero."[4]

The second critical position, that the characters are symbolic or allegorical representations, is less easily dismissed. Certainly the characters are not depicted or developed as would be expected in a realistic or naturalistic work. Many of them are presented as being more essence than substance; Bombadil is the embodiment of nature and its cycles, and Sauron is a figure of pure evil with no redeeming features. However, Tolkien's pervasive use of time-history subsumes the place of conventional characterization. It provides a set of laws that define Middle-earth and make it both understandable and convincing to the reader. It identifies the characters as individuals and as members of a species and relates them to each other and their world. It also provides the reader with an awareness of the essential difference between himself and the fantastic characters that people Tolkien's world and at the same time links our world and Middle-earth, and all the creatures contained within it, as being part of a common process, that of change. Yet the question remains as to why Tolkien chose to people his world with fantastic

beings such as hobbits and elves, dwarves and ents, orcs and wizards. If The Lord of the Rings is a work of serious literary worth, if the characters are neither stereotypes nor allegorical, some explanation for their genus and significance must exist. There is no one answer to this question concerning Tolkien's use of non-human characters but there are a number of explanations that can be deduced from what is known about Tolkien as a man, as a scholar and critic, and as an author.

In the Foreword to LOTR Tolkien states that the story was " . . . primarily linguistic in inspiration and was begun in order to provide the necessary background of 'history' for Elvish tongues" (B.I, p. 5). As a philologist Tolkien not only studied languages but delighted in inventing his own. By writing about fantastic creatures he provides himself with the opportunity for giving them languages of his own invention which are in keeping with their characters. This, however, does not make LOTR any less a work of literature because the languages do not intrude on the characters or action but rather complement them.

Also in the Foreword, Tolkien states that

> The prime motive [for writing the story] was the desire of a story-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite or deeply move them. (B.I, p. 6)

That Tolkien, as a scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature, especially noted for his essay on Beowulf entitled "Beowulf:the Monsters and the Critics," should choose as the subject matter for his own writings a distant, past, heroic time, in which dragons and monsters such as Grendel and his dam exist alongside of men is perfectly natural. The parallels between Beowulf and LOTR have been noted by a number of critics, Douglass Parker going so far as to say that Tolkien has " . . . rewritten, or rather recreated, Beowulf . . ."[5] By placing LOTR in the fairy-tale past, and by peopling this past with all manner of living creatures, he is free to draw upon his knowledge of old literature and the characters and creatures that appear in it. His characters partake of the traditional associations that have evolved from this literature, noted in mythology and legend, and at the same time are given new or expanded significance and attributes limited only by Tolkien's own imagination. Tolkien's defense of the presence of the monsters in Beowulf also reflects on LOTR. He comments that " . . . the monsters are not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, . . ."[6] It is the presence of the monsters that raises Beowulf out of the confines of just another story about a tribal hero. It is the inhuman power of his adversaries that defines Beowulf's

heroism as being beyond that of most mortals. Beowulf becomes "Something more significant than a standard hero, a man faced with a foe more evil than any human enemy of house or realm, is before us, and yet incarnate in time, walking in heroic history, . . ."[7] In LOTR the presence of the monsters (fantastic beings), both good and evil, lifts the story into the world of myth where evil in all its gradations is opposed by the whole of life. Man is not alone in Tolkien's world, but is rather accompanied in his battle with evil by forms of life both more and less powerful than himself. Tolkien has gone beyond the Beowulf poet by including not just evil monsters, but a whole pantheon of creatures, good and evil, whose presence emphasizes that man is not of ultimate importance, but is only a part of the process of life. While Tolkien has not copied Beowulf, in theme, tone, setting, or characterization, the echoes are strong. The effect that LOTR has on the reader is very similar to the effect that Tolkien feels Beowulf had on its listeners.

> The whole [the Beowulf poem] must have succeeded admirably in creating in the minds of the poet's contemporaries the illusion of surveying a past, pagan but noble and fraught with a deep significance--a past that itself had depth and reached backward into a dark antiquity of sorrow.[8]

The fantastic nature of the characters and the way in which they are presented is also a reflection of the theories that Tolkien presented in his essay, originally a lecture, entitled "On Fairy-Stories." In this essay Tolkien discusses the nature and effect of a successful fairy story or fantasy. He maintains that it offers for the reader three things not found in realistic works: recovery, escape, and consolation. Recovery for Tolkien is " . . . a regaining--regaining of a clear view."[9] By Tolkien's placing familiar things in a Fantastic setting, by his making the hero a hobbit, for example, the reader rediscovers the meaning and significance of things that he has taken so much for granted that he has ceased to appreciate them. R. J. Reilly discusses this element of fantasy and writes,

> We see morality as morality by prescinding from this or that human act and watching the "inherent morality" to which all the beings of the Third Age--the evil as well as the good--bear witness. And, perhaps, the devouring nature of time itself is borne in on us, . . .[10]

Fairy stories also offer the opportunity for escape, and indeed Tolkien considers such a result to be " . . . one of the main functions of Fairy stories."[11] Tolkien uses the term to refer to the flight of the prisoner, not that of the deserter, and sees it as

good and even, perhaps, heroic. Tolkien's conception of escape is linked with his dislike of progress and industrialization and all its accompanying horrors. He does not seek to deny reality but questions the need to accept and even glorify "robot" factories and " . . . hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death."[12] Escape from these "realities" to a simpler, earlier world, or even to a world of fantasy is laudable according to Tolkien. In view of this attitude, Middle-earth and its inhabitants are hardly surprising as they undeniably drew the reader away from the complexity and ugliness of the modern world. Tolkien sees escape as positive, a kind of rebellion that refuses to raise the ugliness of the modern world into the world of art, to let it intrude to the point where it is tacitly acceptable.

Related to Tolkien's conception of escape is consolation, the "Consolation of the Happy Ending,"[13] as he calls it. He states that " . . . Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of a Fairy-story. Since we do not possess a word that expresses this opposite--I will call it Eucatastrophe."[14] The successful fairy story, by means of eucatastrophe, gives " . . . a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of

the story, and lets a gleam come through."[15] As Reilly states, the relevance of the fairy story to reality lies in this gleam, which is a "sudden glimpse of the underlying reality of truth."[16]

Tolkien, as a devout Christian, firmly believed in the beneficence of life and this is reflected in the operations of Middle-earth. He does not seek to impose his Christianity on the story or its readers; LOTR is not an allegory, but it is an expression of belief in life itself. The gleam that transcends the story is the acknowledgement of the power of good that holds equally true in our world. In LOTR the aptness of calling death "a gift" to men, and the passage of Frodo, Bilbo, and Gandalf along with the elves to the Undying lands is the essence of eucatastrophe.

The significance and pervasiveness of time in Middle-earth, its effect on the characters and their role in its actions, finds its ultimate expression in the sudden joyful ending that is accorded those characters that have aided in its fulfillment. Time is the just master of Middle-earth; because of its positive operations it proves the means to happiness beyond the limitations of mortal flesh--life continues in its vitality, its champions are enshrined in history in places of honour, and in exceptional circumstances its heroes are transported to a place outside its limits.

The fantastic nature of Tolkien's characters provides the recovery, escape, and consolation of which Tolkien speaks. Tolkien's choice of time and history as the defining principle of life for his world provides the reader with a familiar link to his own world while at the same time enabling him to appreciate the differences between Middle-earth and our earth. We escape to a distant place of wonder and in doing so recover an awareness of the truths and beauties of our own world. The eucatastrophe that occurs in LOTR moves us because it is relevant to our own world. It is not the grace of Christian salvation and is no more limited to our world than it is to Middle-earth. It is the assertion of truth about life which is ruled, but not tyrannized by time. It is as true for the past as for the present, for elves as for men.

In "On Fairy-Stories" Tolkien also discusses two "primal desires" of man. These are " . . . to survey the depths of space and time," and " . . . to hold communion with other living things."[17] LOTR seeks to satisfy these two desires by combining them. Tolkien presents a wide variety of intelligent living creatures who speak to the reader out of the distant past. The history of the Ring Quest opens the door to a mythic past where man is not alone and where the effects of time are not only the explanation for why

these other beings are what they are, but also why they are no longer present with us today. The sense of isolation that the individual experiences in our modern world together with the culture shock that rapid technology arouses is left behind in Middle-earth. The loss of ties to the past that is so often mourned today is reasserted in LOTR and is of central concern to Tolkien. The importance of the individual in himself and as an historical force, the sense of a community of beings separated by more than just colour or language and yet united against evil, appeals strongly to the modern reader who has grown weary of being alone in the face of infinite complexity. The world of myth, Tolkien's world, is both rich and simple. Simple, but not simplistic for it is filled with life and with death, joy, and sorrow. It contains the realities to be found in our world but in a purer form. The world of myth wears no disguises based on sheer complexity. The characters are not black and white except on the more powerful levels of being, but the process of life is good and meaningful; and the individual who strives in its cause partakes of this goodness, though it may come mixed with tears. Evil is not banished with a wand or once defeated destroyed for good, but it can be faced squarely and in worthy company.

What appealed to the author of LOTR appeals to many readers. Tolkien's interest in philology, his love and knowledge of Beowulf, particularly the monsters in it, his dislike of machines and industrialization, his conception of the importance of fantasy and the fairy tale, and his feelings concerning the essential goodness of life which is a part of his Christianity, are all reasons why he chose to write a story about non-humans living in a fairy-tale world of long ago. In fact, while these reasons are all undoubtedly valid, the explanation for the origins of LOTR is probably simpler. Tolkien declares himself to have felt the desire of a story teller to reach his audience. In choosing fantasy he frees himself of the constraints placed on writers of realistic fiction while enabling him to draw on his knowledge and interests as a man, and as a scholar of early literature. As Burton Raffel states, "Narrative art is, . . ., Tolkien's primary concern; it is also and quite obviously his forte."[18]

The story's presentation as history is a partial defense for any lack of character development. History is concerned with action, cause, and effect, rather than with individuals. Individuals and races are inevitably reduced to categories and types, leaders and armies. The fact that LOTR's historians are hobbits

further explains the simplification of the story and lack of insight into characters such as Treebeard or the Nazgûl. The historical pose is none the less not an apology on Tolkien's part for any weakness of characterization. It is a pose common to most early literature and no less effective in Tolkien's hands. His characters display a wealth of invention and a variety of mind and body that is virtually unparallelled. Through repeated references to time and history they are identified and situated, made concrete and convincing. They live and breathe as individuals who are beyond our ability to completely understand, but they speak to the heart and display the ability to move the reader deeply.

R. S. Ryan comments in Tolkien: Cult or Culture that, "One of the consequences of this process of fading and diminishing lifespans is that the history of Middle-earth begins to look less like myth and more like history."[19] This comment is an apt expression for both the movement of the process within the story and the reader's understanding of it. While time in LOTR runs down and the world changes from myth into history and eventually into the present of the reader's own experience, Middle-earth still partakes of the qualities of myth. Translating a myth into a simple allegory seldom does justice to the original,

and it is this temptation that has led many critics to insist that it "mean" one thing, or to reject it outright.

In Fables of Identity Northrop Frye states that " . . . myths are stories, what they 'mean' is inside them, in the implications of their incidents. No rendering of any myth into conceptual language can serve as a full equivalent of its meaning."[20] Tolkien's characters arise out of a mythic past, partly invented by him, partly borrowed from elsewhere. They are defined by the actions of time at every level, fairy tale, mythic, chronological, and narrative, and by the historical roles they play in LOTR. They come to us dressed in the rich robes of myth and as such are not reducible to any one theory; they mean nothing except as they participate in a complete world as individuals. Tolkien invites the reader to apply the history that comprises The Lord of the Rings to his own thought and experience (B.I, p. 7). The characters are complete in themselves; this is their "meaning," if meaning they must have. The lessons they have to teach are the lessons to be derived from observing "real" individuals who act in a world drawn larger than ours, more heroic because closer to the world of myth, but no less real.

Notes

[1] Evans, p. 97.

[2] Zimbardo, in TCr., p. 101.

[3] Ryan, p. 156.

[4] Wilson, p. 313.

[5] Parker, p. 608.

[6] J. R. R. Tolkien, Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics (Norwood Editions, 1976), p. 17. Originally read November 25, 1936 for the Sir Israel Gallancz Memorial Lecture.

[7] Tolkien, Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics, p. 15.

[8] Tolkien, Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics, p. 26.

[9] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," p. 57.

[10] Reilly, in TCr., p. 145.

[11] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," p. 60.

[12] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," p. 65.

[13] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," p. 68.

[14] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," p. 68.

[15] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," p. 71.

[16] Reilly, in TCr., p. 149.

[17] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," p. 13.

[18] Raffel, in TCr., p. 240.

[19] Ryan, p. 155.

[20] Northrop Frye, Fables of Identity (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1963), p. 32.

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