

**The Christianization of Middle Earth: Heroic Service in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord
of the Rings***

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the spiritual and moral heroic dynamics in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* through the Christian virtue of humble service. Examining the emerging Christian values in an arguably pagan world creates a dichotomy of heroic values which compose a spiritual commentary for our modern world. Sam Gamgee, who I argue acts as the text's moral crux, relies on the strengths of his Hobbit nature while keeping a reverence for "nobler" things. I will use Tolkien's depiction of human character to explore the moral balance of inherent human qualities with conscious cultivation through righteous action. By highlighting this spiritual balance within Sam Gamgee, modern issues of class status begin to emerge through a focused Christian lens. Viewing heroic morality in this manner affords readers to celebrate the various strengths existent in all human beings and defends the concept of class difference as a natural aspect of the human condition.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction:

Tolkien's Perspective on Myth

Selling roughly one hundred and fifty million copies, J.R.R. Tolkien's high fantasy epic, *The Lord of the Rings*, elevates the fantasy genre to canonical proportions. As Tolkien himself articulates in his oft-cited essay "On Fairy Stories," fantasy grants a psychological release from the physical limitations of our "primary world". This ability to stray past the barriers of physical reality affords humans the opportunity to explore the theoretical and moral implications of human nature. Tolkien, a master of creating and suspending this "secondary belief", illustrates Middle-earth's emerging morality through detailed and intricate environments in addition to a deep and colorful mythology. Moving beyond the limits of the "primary world", Tolkien's sophisticated syntax and diction affords readers an opportunity, a laboratory as it were, to question and explore the moral roots of social dynamics and the essence of humanity.

Tolkien masterfully records the events of Middle-earth, from the music of creation to the end of the Third Age, by centering his tale on the independent and collective moral explorations of the incarnate inhabitants. This examination of morality, through the basis of being descendants of an omniscient creator, introduces the spiritual conflict of psychomachia, otherwise known as the conflict between the physical self and the, possibly eternal, soul. Tolkien defines true "fairy stories" as those stories that engage in the exploration and "satisfaction of certain primordial human desires... one of these desires is to survey the depths of space and time. Another is (as will be seen) to hold communion with other living things" ("On Fairy Stories"; *Monsters* 116). I would argue that here, Tolkien elevates "fairy stories" to a special status of artistic vision, where

readers can move beyond the limits of physical reality and infinitely explore the human mind. Despite the limits of physical reality, the human mind has no limits, so the exploration through fantasy grants humans with the opportunity to survey different philosophical and moral perspectives not possible in the “primary world”.

In Tolkien’s terms, fantasy’s capacity to explore “secondary belief” stems from humankind’s instinct for language and reason; the development of language expands creative minds to make inquiries of the world. For Tolkien, a lifelong committed Christian and Roman Catholic, humanity’s faculty of language descends directly from God’s creative vision. In the Biblical accounts, Genesis 2:19-20 marks the birth of language as Adam names “each living creature”, and The New Testament elaborates on the implications of naming by unifying “the Word” with God (1 John:1). The “Word”, in Tolkien’s perspective, is a divine gift to humanity, and it separates the incarnate beings from God’s other creations.

Language, as a divine gift, releases humanity from the physical confines of reality to explore alternative worlds. As humans begin to distinguish one thing from another using language, Tolkien’s depiction of sub-creation emerges:

The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval. The human mind, endowed with the powers of generalisation and abstraction, sees not only *green-grass*, discriminating it from other things (and finding it fair to look upon), but sees that it is *green* as well as being *grass*. (“On Fairy Stories”; *Monsters* 122)

The act of categorizing and describing the appearance of the world, in Tolkien’s example “*green-grass*”, is the beginning of humanity’s divine ability to sub-create. Tolkien attributes the full emergence of sub-creation through the development of the adjective: “the mind that thought of *light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift*, also conceived of magic

that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into a swift water” (122). The ability to imagine alternative appearances or scenarios begins the divine process, but the skill needed to bring that alteration to a state of belief marks true sub-creation. Having the language and logic to illustrate and describe various aspects of the physical world affords Humanity the power to sub-create.

Although language catalyzes sub-creation, Humanity, as sub-creator, depicts personal morals, values, and desires within the development of language and tales.

Tolkien elaborates on the often overlooked, explorative properties of fantasy when he writes,

An essential power of Faerie is thus the power of making immediately effective by the will the visions of “fantasy”. Not all are beautiful or even wholesome, not at any rate the fantasies of fallen Man. And he has stained the elves who have the power (in verity or fable) with his own stain. This aspect of mythology—sub-creation, rather than either representation or symbolic interpretation of the beauties and terrors of the world—is, I think, too little considered. (“On Fairy Stories”; *Monsters* 122)

In short, many scholars, notably Verlyn Flieger, argue that Tolkien’s conception of language, originating from God, marks any form of sub-creation as a manifestation of the divine. Although the “stain” of “fallen Man” can never be erased, Tolkien’s emphasizes that it is Humanity’s *ability* to sub-create, not the product, that elevates the fantasy genre. Because fantasy, “fairy stories”, and myth originate from divine sub-creation, readers, observers, and creators should treat each with similar contemplation and analysis through a theological lens.

Because many “fairy stories” and mythologies result from an exploration of the human condition rather than direct Christian allegory, some critics, including Tolkien’s good friend C.S. Lewis, view these tales as false and misleading because of the lack of

Christian enlightenment. Despite his studies and general interest regarding mythology, Lewis claims that myths are “lies and therefore worthless, even though ‘breathed through silver’” (*Tree 97*), for his faith prevents him from dissecting the divinity behind inherently Pagan tales. Tolkien responds to Lewis’ assertions with his poem “Mythopoeia” (*Tree 97-101*):

The heart of man is not compound of lies,
but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,
and still recalls him. Though now long estranged,
man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed. (lines 53-56)

Despite Pagan society being “long estranged” from the “only Wise”, early humanity retains some of the divine wisdom from the distant creation of Humankind. Within the so called “lies” there remains “some wisdom” that may be distorted, but can never be completely absent, forgotten, or ignored. Tolkien continues:

Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned,
and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned,
his world-dominion by creative act:
not his to worship the great Artefact,
Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind. (lines 57-64)

Although Fallen, Pagan society retains “rags of lordship” through the “creative act”. God, the single Creator of humanity, grants echoes of “lordship” through “world-dominion by creative act”. Despite being “refracted” and “splintered”, the initial Truth of creation remains ingrained within human nature and “moves from mind to mind” within the larger society. Tolkien elaborates,

Though all the crannies of the world we filled
with elves and goblins, though we dared to build
gods and their houses out of dark and light,
and sow the seed of dragons, 'twas our right

(used or misused). The right has not decayed.
We make still by the law in which we're made. (lines 65-70)

Because of Humanity's intimate connection to the Creator through the art of sub-creation, Humankind's ability to create remains a "right (used or misused)"; therefore, sub-creation begins with divine inspiration and manifests through human experience. Tolkien points out, "the right has not decayed", meaning that the ancient civilizations creating mythologies carry the same theological weight as modern writers.

Understanding Tolkien's religious connection to language and the "word" paves the road for considering his act of sub-creation, the Middle-earth mythos, in a similar theological light. By utilizing Tolkien's various Letters, I will utilize his own theological and philosophical perspectives to better dissect a small slice of his mythos. The philosophical and moral weight of the Christian religion ripple through Tolkien's epic, and in this thesis, following the analytical approach popularized by Flieger, I will explore Tolkien's major work, *The Lord of the Rings*, using these Christian theological implications.

Tolkien's Vision

Before leaping into the bulk of Tolkien's sub-creation, it is pivotal to note Tolkien's inspiration and initial intention regarding his epic. Tolkien's "Mythopoeia" defends the validity of pagan mythologies through the power of creativity and language, and Tolkien's obvious affinity for myth and legend inspires him to explore his own interpretation of sub-creation. Examining Tolkien's inspiration for Middle-earth affords readers and critics to perceive *The Lord of the Rings* with the same weight and cultural implications as world myths.

The pre-Christian and medieval turmoil of England results in a lack of a unified and cohesive mythology, and this absence entices Tolkien to create the Middle-earth mythos. In his 1951 letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien reveals his inspiration to fill the developmental gap of England's cultural history:

I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country; it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. (*Letters* 144)

Tolkien's emphasis on stories being "bound up with its tongue and soil" highlights the connection between the story and culture. Because of the many migrations and conquests regarding the land that is now England, English legends lack the development and unification of virtues and values explored within the mythologies of other cultures.

Although medieval England experiments with the Arthurian legends, the Arthur legends are "associated with the soil of Britain but not with English" (*Letters* 144). The chivalric romance genre is closely intertwined with French values; in addition, the legends explore the virtues of primarily the aristocratic class, which exists as the minority of the population. Tolkien asserts that the stories lack the necessary cultural substance and exploration regarding the English cultural morals. Tolkien also points out that the Arthurian myths, and their dependency on the Christian religion, directly contrast with his personal definition of fantasy and mythology:

[Arthurian] 'faerie' is too lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. For another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion... Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error) but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world. (I am speaking, of course, of our present situation, not of ancient pagan, pre-Christian days) (*Letters* 144)

Here, Tolkien argues that the post-Christian world gives birth to the Arthurian tales, but these legends lack the individualistic unification of cultural, regional, and spiritual values present within pagan myths. The consistent emphasis of the Christian God regarding decision-making and morality simplifies the culture of the English medieval mythos. Tolkien, rather, takes interest in societies of “ancestral heroes, mightier than men and yet already men” (“On Fairy Stories”; *Monsters* 123), which inspire the cultural sharing and creation of societal mythologies; therefore, within cultures, “legends and myths are largely made of ‘truth’” (*Letters* 147).

Tolkien’s sub-creation examines medieval “ancestral heroes” despite writing within the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Tolkien’s perspectives on sub-creation pair with his affinity for ancient myths to elevate his project to divine proportions. Tolkien highlights the divine nature of his project by reflecting on his creative process: “I always had the sense of recording what was already ‘there’, somewhere: not of ‘inventing’” (*The Letters* 145). This “recording” of events, rather than “inventing,” highlights his efforts to capture the lost cultural ethos of England. Thus, Tolkien’s project is of necessity; it is a curious blending of old and new, of both scripture and of myth. This unification not only sets the stage for examining his text through Christian theology but also encourages a similar examination of the pagan world.

Scandinavian Paganism and Implicit Allegory: The Oldest form of Heroic Morality

As stated earlier, Tolkien’s fascination with mythology stems from the communal creation of stories. Not to say that every member of society directly contributes to a specific story, but rather, the sharing and morphing of these tales results in a fairly unified set of virtues, and thus values, that reflect the community. The heroes of these

tales engage with and illustrate the cultural values by interacting with their world.

Heroism, therefore, becomes a key tactic in illustrating the virtues of a community. Pre-Christian, pagan heroism stems from humankind's efforts to explain the happenings of the natural world by viewing "nature as a theophany" (Jones 2). Within the primary world, Pagan mythologies regard their heroes in such ways that imply human transcendence.

Tolkien is not the first to turn to old pre-Christian philosophy, religion, and myth for answers to some very modern and very Christian moral problems. Thomas Carlyle, in his 1840's lecture series "On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History", views "the hero as Divinity, [as] the oldest primary form of heroism". Pagan civilizations observe the mysterious, and therefore implicit, "divineness of nature" (Carlyle) and personify nature by illustrating their heroes with similar characteristics. Like Tolkien, Carlyle examines the moral implications of Pagan mythology, but Carlyle explicitly excludes the Greco-Roman myths from his focus. Carlyle's favor of the Scandinavian myths highlights the Norse mythology as holding "a broad simplicity, rusticity, so very different from the light gracefulness of the old Greek Paganism". He continues,

It is Thought; the genuine Thought of deep, rude, earnest minds, fairly opened to the things about them; a face-to-face and heart-to-heart inspection of the things,—the first characteristic of all good Thought in all times. Not graceful lightness, half-sport, as in the Greek Paganism; a certain homely truthfulness and rustic strength, a great rude sincerity, discloses itself here... I feel that these old Northmen wore looking into Nature with open eye and soul: most earnest, honest; childlike, and yet manlike; with a great-hearted simplicity and depth and freshness, in a true, loving, admiring, unfeared way.

Norse mythology's rustic naturalism strengthens the connection between humans and the natural world. The uniting of the human psyche with the natural world emphasizes heroic

action as a naturalistic illustration of the world; meaning, the behaviors of pagan heroes carry the moral weight of nature itself. The intimate connection with the natural world affords humankind to explore their innate desires: “to survey the depths of space and time” and to hold “communion with other living things” (“On Fairy Stories”; *Monsters* 116).

Carlyle’s logic for minimizing emphasis on the Greco-Roman myths seems to translate to Tolkien’s own writing. Tolkien’s mythos embodies specific echoes of Finnish and Germanic cultural influences due to their more rustic and natural connotations. When highlighting the cultural relevance of mythic heroes, Tolkien explores the pagan personification of nature through his exploration of the Norse god Thor. Tolkien emphasizes the difference between the nature allegory from the character: “personality can only be derived from a person. The gods may derive their colour and beauty from the high splendours of nature, but it was Man who obtained these for them” (“On Fairy Stories”; *Monsters* 123). The illustration behind these nature inspired heroes can only come from the mind of a human. The Story of the heroes plays off of the Truth behind the human mind. Tolkien continues to explore the dynamic of Story and Truth:

which came first, nature allegories about personalized thunder in the mountains, splitting rocks and trees; or stories about an irascible, not very clever, red-beard farmer, of a strength beyond common measure, a person (in all but mere stature) very much like the Northern farmers, the boendr by whom Thorr was chiefly beloved? (*Monsters* 124)

The play of nature and humanity highlights heroic action as a reflection of the society. Regardless of “which came first”, the pagan deities became heroes within a larger mythos through the introduction of the nature allegories as explanations for the events of the

natural world. With this introduction, humans become able to explore the characteristics of innate morality and the eternal mystery of the human condition.

To emphasize the moral and religious Truth behind stories many authors, like C.S. Lewis, turn to conscious allegory. Allegorical writing illustrates a clear cut, typically religious, morality, but Tolkien famously “dislik[ed] Allegory” (*Letters* 145). Despite this, Tolkien narrows this assertion by clarifying that he dislikes “the conscious and intentional allegory” and admits “any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language” (*Letters* 145). He may not intend any conscious allegory in his mythos, but allegorical implications appear within his texts, as within any carefully constructed sub-creation.

Tolkien illustrates the inevitable connection between allegory and story in his 1947 Letter to Stanley Unwin regarding Rayner Unwin’s comments: “allegory and Story converge, meeting somewhere in Truth” (*Letters* 121). The intersection of allegory and story resulting in truth highlights that any examination of the moral behavior of Humankind can inevitably be read as a form of allegory and thus reveal a higher, more divine, truth. Tolkien continues, “the better and more consistent an allegory is the more easily can it be read as ‘just a story’; and the better and more closely woven a story is the more easily can those so minded find allegory in it” (*Letters* 121). Tolkien’s criteria of “better” stories as having consistency and being “closely woven” pair with his perspective of true “secondary belief” as illustrated in his green sun example (“On Fairy Stories”; *Monsters* 140). In order to create a world in which a “green sun” is plausible enough to suspend “secondary belief”, the sub-creator must have a mastery of both verbal and written language.

According to Tolkien, any story, any sub-creation, inevitably carries some form of allegorical truth, for “the Allegory is the product of [the] certainty, not the producer” (Carlyle). The sub-creative “truth” behind the pagan tales set the stage for examining mythologies through a Christian theological lens. Thomas Carlyle’s exploration of heroic morality sets the foundation to explore the theological virtues ingrained in the heroics of *The Lord of the Rings*. Both Carlyle and Tolkien emphasize the naturalism within the pagan myths to illustrate humanity’s innate, and therefore Christianized, connection to the natural world.

Paganism: a “Splintering” of Christian Virtues

Tolkien’s fascination and reverence for the natural world seemingly highlights pagan worship of the elements. In addition, his apparent glorification of war and feudalistic social structures suggests a reverence for early medieval and pagan values, and indeed, Tolkien admits that “the ‘Third Age’ was not a Christian world” (*Letters* 220). Patricia Meyer Spacks examines the inherent ethos within Tolkien’s epic in “Power and Meaning in *The Lord of the Rings*”, and she differentiates the implications and tendencies of Christian fables from Pagan mythologies:

The archetypical Christian fable, [Tolkien] observes, centers on the battle between the soul and its adversaries... in this struggle, the Christian is finally triumphant, in the afterlife if not on earth. But northern mythology takes a darker view. Its characteristic struggle between man and monster must end ultimately, within Time, in man’s defeat. (54)

Spacks’s analysis highlights the Pagan explorations of the fate/freewill dynamic and of “goodness” being “equated with understanding of nature, closeness of the natural world” (54). Despite the emphasis on Pagan themes and values, Tolkien’s Catholic “element is

absorbed” (*Letters* 172) deep within his theology. Tolkien’s perspective that divine “truth” roots all sub-creation complicates the discussion of the ethos of his work.

As stated earlier, Tolkien attributes the divineness of sub-creation to God’s gift of language to Humanity. Verlyn Flieger’s *Splintered Light* illustrates Tolkien’s meticulous attention to language and highlights Tolkien’s unification of language with light and goodness; the gift of language to humanity “’twas our right / (used or misused)” (*Tree* 99). This misuse embodies a (intentional and unintentional) “refraction” of universal truth, and Tolkien’s emphasis on light imagery mirrors a similar “splintering” (*Splintered Light*). Pagan society’s attempt to explore the world through myth and language may be a misinterpretation of God’s singular truth, but the core sub-creative properties of language remain pure.

Through his epic, Tolkien illustrates a transitional morality where Germanic pagan heroism confronts a Christian emphasis on individual responsibility and action. Jane Chance examines this moral crossroad between Pagan and Christian values in *A Mythology for England*: “Tolkien’s *The Lord of The Rings* delineates a clash of values during the passage from the Third Age of Middle earth, dominated by the Elves, to the Fourth Age, dominated by Men. Such values mask very medieval notions of Germanic heroism and Christianity” (142). Overall criticism settles on this interpretation of the moral values stemming from both Pagan and Christian themes. *The Lord of the Rings* blurs the lines of Paganism and Christianity to illustrate the moral transitional period existent in most world mythologies in an attempt to fill this gap of moral exploration within England’s history.

The blurring of Pagan and Christian themes illustrates the shards of the Christian ethos within the Paganism, and Carlyle defines this gradation of morality during his lecture series. The curiosity and eventual reverence for the natural world plants the seed of Christian morality:

Such recognition of Nature one finds to be the chief element of Paganism; recognition of Man, and his Moral Duty, though this too is not wanting, comes to be the chief element only in purer forms of religion. Here, indeed, is a great distinction and epoch in Human Beliefs; a great landmark in the religious development of Mankind. Man first puts himself in relation with Nature and her Powers, wonders and worships over those; not till a later epoch does he discern that all Power is Moral, that the grand point is the distinction for him of Good and Evil, of *Thou shalt* and *Thou shalt not*.

Pagan mythology unifies of the human self with nature, illustrated by Tolkien's Thor example, and this embodiment explores "Man, and his Moral Duty" within the natural world. The Christian ethos emerges as cultures view the natural world as an interconnected chain of being rather than two sides of the same coin. Tolkien examines the binary of "Good and Evil" within *The Lord of the Rings* by highlighting righteous action, as defined through the Great Chain of Being, and complicates the moral dynamic by emphasizing the themes of the Christian Fall and of Redemption.

The inherent morality of Paganism questions Humanity's role within the natural world, and Tolkien expands this question with the introduction of Christian values. In short, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is a fascinating and multidimensional text, one that explores modern issues of environmentalism and social dynamics through an emphasis on Christian service, as illustrated in the following section.

Christian Virtue of Service

Tolkien's effort to meld the pre-Christian and the Christian, the old "vigor" and the new moral and spiritual truth, completes the timeline of morality for the English people. Through a general acceptance of the Great Chain of Being theology, Tolkien's illustration of the Christian virtue of service ennoble those previously ignored within ancient mythologies. Contrasting the adventures of the traditional heroes, illustrated by Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, with the small but more significant journey of Sam and Frodo, highlights the service of the "small and weak" as the ethos of the text. This thesis will look specifically at one elemental Christian virtue, the virtue of service, as an avenue to understanding the ennoblement of the traditional servant class.

Because Pagan society saw their heroes as acting through the will of heavenly and natural powers, they developed a monarchical society where their leaders were descendants of these divine bloodlines. These divine implications lead to theologies such as the "Cult of Kingship" (Chaney), which, with the introduction of Christianity, lead to the Divine Right of Kings and the Great Chain of Being perspectives. This implicit hierarchy "naturally" separates the social classes and inhibits social progress. Tolkien roots his mythos in these belief systems but introduces a new view where "the great policies of world history, 'the wheels of the world', are often turned not by the Lords and Governors, even gods, but by the seemingly unknown and weak" (*Letters* 149). Tolkien plays with these concepts by incorporating graced heroes, who often stem from elven lineage (as the *First Children*), and contrast them with the rustic, and very small, hobbits.

Tolkien's affinity toward the humble Hobbits seemingly contradicts his pre-modern view of the world, which emphasizes the existence of a natural and righteous

hierarchy of the human world. Reinhard Feldmeier, professor of the New Testament within Georg-August-University of Göttingen, highlights the importance of an implicit natural order by pointing out that “the New Testament presupposes that the human being always exists in relationships... this dependence is often called service” (35). The modern understanding of service entails a direct act, or set of acts, to cater to another person’s wants and needs, but Christian service implies an ingrained personality, a daily way of life when interacting with all of God’s creations. Feldmeier reveals the implications of the Great Chain of Being within Christian theology:

True greatness lies in service, in existing for others and making their needs one’s own, free from the compulsion to assert oneself and from the urge to dominate... Jesus does not preach the ideal of a fellowship in which there is no rule. Rather, he recognizes the necessity of superior and lower positions, of command and obedience. But he offers an inverse justification of hierarchy. Among those who follow him, those at the top are not the ones who compel the others to obey them but those who act in the interest of the others and thus realize something of God’s caring rule (42)

Tolkien accepts the Great Chain of Being theology, where God creates and ordains a natural social hierarchy, within *The Lord of the Rings*, yet, like Feldmeier suggests, “he offers an inverse justification of hierarchy”. The Biblical, notably New Testament, emphasis on love and care highlight a reverence for service and submission, as it translates to divine social order. The Christian emphasis on humble service marks the core of Tolkien’s theology; his incorporation of the prophesized great leaders contrasts with the ennobled hobbits that carry the moral weight of the story.

Jane Chance also comments on the importance of human relationships in *Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power*, and she examines how communities need to function in a universal harmony: “it is the communication between two individuals, two leaders,

and even two parts of the same body (communication, nation, etc.) and their harmonious concord that provides the opportunity for the idea of community itself to exist” (96).

Communication, highlighted by the divine gift of language, affords humanity to exist as a functioning whole. To successfully interact as a community, individuals must interact as “two parts of the same body” to sustain a society. Chance summarizes the weight of humility and service by saying, “intellectual heroism in Tolkien’s world is achieved through social involvement, service to others, and the disappearance of self-indulgence” (*Mythology of Power* 23).

It is pivotal to mention that “the disappearance of self-indulgence” does not equate to a disappearance of individualism. Despite Tolkien’s stressing of a need for a universal harmony, critics and readers must not forget the individualistic nature of humans. The beginning of *The Silmarillion* opens with the music of Creation:

But for a long while they sang only each alone, or but few together, while the rest hearkened; for each comprehended only that part of the mind of Ilúvatar from which he came, and in the understanding of their brethren they grew but slowly. Yet ever as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in unison and harmony (3)

The voices “came to a deeper understanding” through a harmony of multiple voices, but Tolkien also mentions how “each comprehended only that part of the mind of Ilúvatar from which he came”. Individualism exists because no single voice can comprehend the omniscience of the Creator; humanity’s limited mental capacity, compared to Ilúvatar, forces individualism to surface through specific strengths and capabilities. This emphasis on individual strength becomes intertwined with themes of unison and harmony through human interaction. Human service thus emerges as a chief element of *The Lord of the Rings* saga.

Tolkien plays with themes of service and obedience throughout his mythos: Melkor's disobedience to comply with the music of creation, Sauron being "less evil than [Melkor] in that for long he served another and not himself" (*Silmarillion* 24), Sam's refusal to abandon his master, and even Gollum as he guides the hobbits into Mordor. Chance addresses Tolkien's exploration of power dynamics by highlighting the contrast "of good characters, linked by the symbolic value of fellowship into an invisible band or chain of love, with the hierarchy of evil characters linked by the literal rings of enslavement—a chain of sin" (*Mythology of Power* 151). The power dynamics of service hold Middle-earth together to create the new qualifications for modern heroism. This examination will utilize, and complicate, Chance's analytical foundation of power dynamics by narrowing the lens of service to specifically Christian implications. J.R.R. Tolkien's illustration of the "seemingly unknown and weak" emphasize the Christian theme of service to encapsulate the development of the Christian hero, realized in Sam Gamgee.

Chapter 2 - Tolkien's Fall of Elves and Humanity

For Tolkien, as for many Christians, one foundation of all moral understanding is the historical reality or critical concept of the Fall from Grace. Understanding that concept, I argue, is essential in developing an understanding of service as a specifically Christian and post-lapsarian virtue. The concept of the Fall emphasizes the moral weight of the text through righteous action. In this chapter, I examine Tolkien's illustration of the Fall through both, the First and Second, Children of Ilúvatar to solidify the foundation of Christian moral service in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The root of Tolkien's mythology remains unfinished, parsed out, and collected by his son, Christopher Tolkien, within *The Silmarillion*. The collection illustrates the pagan inspired events of the First and Second Age of Middle-Earth where "ancestral heroes" develop civilizations, find romance, engage with spiritual beings, and defend against the darkness. Tolkien's *Silmarillion*, arguably his true attempt at a mythos, explores the development of humanity from creation to the Third Age, and the spiritual Fall of Elves and Humankind leave the themes of repentance and redemption to the hobbit-centered events in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Although Tolkien's Middle-earth neglects to explicitly illustrate a formal or institutionalized religion, the hierarchy of the Valar, presence of the Great Chain of Being ideology, and emphasis on a singular creator, exhibited by Ilúvatar, or "The One", illustrate a monotheistic Truth. Tolkien addresses the implications of his Middle-earth theology when he says, "a pure monotheistic world, in which all things and beings and powers that might seem worshipful were not to be worshipped, not even the gods (the Valar), being only creatures of the One" (*Letters* 204). The presence of a singular Truth

creates a spiritual binary for the beings of creation. The First and Second Children of Ilúvatar, Elves and Humans respectively, each illustrate a religious Fall from this unified Truth; in fact, Tolkien claims, “there cannot be any ‘story’ without a fall - all stories are ultimately about the fall” (*Letters* 147).

The Elves, as the First Children, are seemingly blessed with eternal health and immortality, but this eternal life excludes them from the “wheels of the world”. The elven race inevitably places their concerns in “the griefs and burdens of deathlessness in time and change” (*Letters* 146). Despite their “immortal” nature, the elves still face death through unnatural causes, but this death is simply an “injury or destruction of their incarnate form, they do not escape from time, but remain in the world, either discarnate, or being re-born” (*Letters* 236) within the Halls of Mandos. The elves never truly die, but instead “they were rehabilitated and reborn and eventually recovered memory of all their past: they remained ‘identical’” (*Letters* 286). This unyielding life cycle and spiritual weariness becomes the catalyst for the ‘Fall’ of the elves.

The only recorded ‘natural’ death in elven society, the death of Míriel, illustrates the weariness and general despair of immortality. Wife of Finwë, the first High-King of the Noldor, Míriel wearies after the birth of her son, Fëanor; she lays down to rest, and “though she seemed to sleep, her spirit indeed departed from her body, and passed in silence to the halls of Mandos... she did not return” (*Silmarillion* 65). Tolkien notes that her wish “to abandon being, and refus[al of] rebirth” causes “disastrous results” (*Letters* 286). Míriel’s despair and utter disregard for Ilúvatar’s creative vision triggers the Fall of the elves, eventually explicitly expressed through her son, Fëanor.

Fëanor personifies the elves' embodiment as "the artistic, aesthetic, and purely scientific aspects of the Humane" (*Letters* 236). By creating the Silmarils, Fëanor acts as *The Silmarillion's* primary sub-creator. His possessive and reclusive nature fuel his susceptibility to the lies of Melkor:

snared though he was in the webs of Melkor's malice against the Valar he held no converse with him and took no counsel from him. For Fëanor was driven by the fire of his own heart only, working ever swiftly and alone; and he asked the aid and sought the counsel of none that dwelt in Aman. (*Silmarillion* 68)

Fëanor's social isolation and lack of counsel distance him from his community and thus the Truth of Ilúvatar. He utilizes his natural strengths to sub-create, but his possessiveness and disregard for the greater good fuels the Fall of the elves. "He echoe[s] the lies of Melkor" (*Silmarillion* 89) and persuades the Noldor to leave the Blessed Realm in favor of spiritual independence in Middle-Earth. The elves lose their faith through the lies of Fëanor, and their lack of universal Truth distances them from the Christian values and eventually begins the Fall through the Kinslaying.

The end of *The Silmarillion* and the happenings of *The Lord of the Rings* illustrate the transition of the Age of Elves to the Age of Humankind: the elves must "'fade' as the Followers [Humans] grow and absorb the life from which both proceed" (*Letters* 147). Where the elves carry the weight of immortality, intimacy with the natural world, and connection with the Ainur, the Third Age explores the growth and development of the mortal society of Humans. Death, "the Great Escape" ("On Fairy Stories"; *Monsters* 153), remains the primary difference between Elves and Humanity: "Elves and Men are just different aspects of the Humane... the Elvish weakness is [in their nature] to regret the past, and to become unwilling to face change: as if a man were to hate a very long

book still going on, and wished to settle down in a favorite chapter” (*Letters* 236). The Elves’ complacent nature from the Fall and their reluctance toward change result in a spiritual sloth, and the Age of Humankind introduces a new morality and system of virtues to Middle-Earth.

The mortality of Humans incentivizes change and societal development, which complicate the choices within their short lives. Humans, being further removed from the Ainur, are forced to create and maintain their own morality, which minimizes the scope of divinity to focus on mortal actions: “as the stories become less mythical, and more like stories and romances, Men are interwoven” (*Letters* 149). Personal values become the catalyst of the Third Age and the happenings of *The Lord of the Rings*. Humans, in Tolkien’s mythology, are not welcomed in the Halls of Mandos like the Elves, so their actions in their short lives become the driving force of the text’s morality. Although Humanity begrudgingly accepts their fate, they introduce a new emphasis on righteous and heroic action in order to gain honor and remembrance; their bodies are mortal, but their name lives on through myth and story.

Tolkien intentionally neglects to physically record The First Fall of Humanity within his mythos (*Letters* 387), yet implications of the Fall and Humankind’s natural susceptibility to sin remain throughout the text. Tolkien likens the nature of Humans to that of a seed’s “innate vitality and heredity”, where “a great part of the ‘changes’ in a man are no doubt unfoldings of the patterns hidden in the seed” (*Letters* 240). Because of the First Fall, Humankind embodies the struggle to flawlessly and completely follow Truth; Humankind’s nature is to sin, in one form or another. Tolkien’s nature of Humanity emerges directly out of Christian theology: “the ‘prehistory’ at the beginning

of the Bible makes it clear that the urge to push oneself up too high is so elemental to the human being that the tempter can successfully take hold of him by means of it, and bring about his downfall” (Feldmeier 1). Tolkien illustrates this natural susceptibility through the Second Fall.

Where the Elves exemplify a naturalistic connection to the Valar, and thus Ilúvatar, Humanity’s physical and spiritual distance from the Blessed Realm exhibits an inherent moral weakness. Tolkien depicts the Second Fall within the later pages of *The Silmarillion*:

the Downfall is partly the result of an inner weakness in Men — consequent, if you will, upon the first Fall (unrecorded in these tales), repented but not fully healed... [The Second] Fall is achieved by the cunning of Sauron in exploiting this weakness. It’s central theme is (inevitably, I think, in a story of Man) a Ban, or Prohibition. (*Letters* 154)

The Second Fall partially relies on the First Fall, Humanity’s initial Fall from Grace leaves a stain on their once pure nature, and future susceptibility becomes a driving force for the text’s morality. Humanity’s ban from traveling west, toward the Blessed Realm and thus from chasing immortality, limit their spirituality and overall faith in the Ilúvatar’s natural order. Tolkien segments the complexity of the Second Fall into “three [distinct] phases” (*Letters* 155).

The initial phase presents Pagan themes, illustrating the theological separation of Humanity to “the One”. Tolkien’s imagery as he illustrates the first stage of this Fall mimics his perspective regarding the, although misinterpreted, divine nature of Pagan mythology. Tolkien states,

in the first stage, being men of peace, their courage is devoted to sea-voyages...and being barred from the West, they sail to the uttermost north, and south, and east... In those days they would come amongst Wild Men as almost divine benefactors, bringing gifts of arts and knowledge, and

passing away again -- leaving many legends behind of kings and gods out of the sunset. (155)

As the Humans from the West travel throughout Middle-earth, they spread “gifts of arts and knowledge”. The influence of the Western ideology mixes with that of the “Wild Men” to create a unique set of morality through “legends of kings and gods”. Tolkien carefully describes these tales as being “out of the sunset”, which highlights the pure light stemming from the West. Despite the Truth and light of the Blessed Realm, the “sunset” image warps and distorts the “legends” for the “Wild Men”; any backlit image highlights the silhouette of the figure, thereby creating a caricature. Being ignorant of the true nature of the light and of the legends cause a societal misinterpretation expressed through Pagan theology.

The second phase builds on the misconceptions of the first stage by highlighting Humankind’s grudge regarding their mortality. The skewed interpretation of “legends of kings and gods” encourage Humanity’s “desire for deathlessness” (*Letters* 262) through a reliance on power, wealth, and other themes of Pagan heroism:

In the second stage, the days of Pride and Glory and grudging of the Ban, they begin to seek wealth rather than bliss. The desire to escape death produced a cult of the dead, and they lavished wealth and the art on tombs and memorials. They now made settlements on the west-shores, but these became rather strongholds and ‘factories’ of lords seeking wealth... The Númenóreans began the forging of arms and engines. (*Letters* 155)

Although Tolkien’s use of the term “factory” may carry different connotations in modern English, the now-archaic meaning emphasizes places of business or trade; by rooting the term in a more generic place of business, modern interpretations of the term can still stand. The emphasis on “Pride and Glory” as their pivotal values emphasize competition over cooperation; personal success becomes a direct representation of righteous action.

Seemingly, those who dominate act in positions of power because of the natural will of the universe. The creation of “arms and engines” demonstrates a lack of faith in the greater powers through a reliance on tools of destruction. Dominion and power become the roots of reverence regardless of moral intentions; therefore, Humankind begins to prioritize wealth and weaponry to illustrate dominance and personal prowess.

“Pride and Glory” set the foundation for the third phase and solidify the Second Fall. “Tar-Calion the Golden, the most powerful and proud of all kings” ascends to the throne, and his pride becomes the paved avenue of Sauron’s manipulation:

When [Tar-Calion] learned that Sauron had taken the title of King of Kings and Lord of the World, he resolved to put down the ‘pretender’...[Sauron] is carried off to Númenor as hostage and prisoner. But there he swiftly rises by his cunning and knowledge from servant to chief counsellor of the king, and seduces the king and most of the lords and people with his lies. He denies the existence of God, saying that the One is a mere invention of the jealous Valar of the West, the oracle of their own wishes. The chief of the gods is he that dwells in the Void, who will conquer in the end... A new religion, and worship of the Dark, with its temple under Sauron arises. (155-156)

Mankind’s disregard for the Truth and general submission to Sauron’s manipulation directly mimics the Fall of the Elves through Fëanor’s trust in Melkor’s lies. The final action in Humankind’s Second Fall rests in Tar-Calion’s breaking of the Ban by sailing West, with the influence of Sauron, in search of immortality. Tolkien highlights that “to attempt by device or ‘magic’ to recover longevity is thus a supreme folly and wickedness of ‘mortals’” (*Letters* 286), for this attempt directly contradicts the natural order of the world, and thus the will of Ilúvatar. The Valar observe the defiance of Humanity and remove physical access to the Blessed Realm while plunging Númenor into the Great Sea.

The implication that Humanity does, and can have, multiple Falls suggests that ‘Falling’ exists as a natural cycle of the world. Flieger comments that “a Christian acceptance of the Fall of Man leads inevitably to the idea that imperfection is the state of things in this world, and that human actions -- however hopeful-- cannot rise above imperfection” (*Splintered Light* 4). Tolkien highlights Mankind’s reliance on personal prowess to illustrate their defiance and inevitable Fall, but themes of the late Third Age and the events within *The Lord of the Rings* imply that “the Redemption of Man in the far future” (*Letters* 387). As stated earlier, Tolkien likens human nature to that of a predisposed seed, but he takes care to highlight Humanity’s redemptive qualities as well:

A man is not only a seed, developing in a defined pattern, well or ill according to its situation or its defects as an example of its species; a man is both a seed and in some degree also a gardener, for good or ill. I am impressed by the degree in which the development of ‘character’ can be a product on conscious intention, the will to modify innate tendencies in desired directions; in some cases the change can be great and permanent. (*Letters* 240)

Humankind’s susceptibility to sin is inherent but so is their free will. Shaping one’s character takes conscious pruning and planning; innate desires will always exist, but acting on those desires are what create character and identity. Tolkien’s emphasis on the image of the “gardener” and of “conscious intention” not only demonstrates his Catholic faith, but it also highlights repentance and redemption.

The cyclical nature of falling and repenting illustrate the crux of the text by narrowing his mythological exploration to conscious action via Christian virtues. The pagan themes act as the foundation for the Fall to open the text to Christian heroism. A new emphasis on community and service emerges through the events and social interactions during the Third Age; this foundation affords readers and critics to examine

The Lord of the Rings epic as a “hobbito-centric” narrative with emphasis on spiritual exploration.

Chapter 3 - “Concerning Hobbits” and the Integration of Catholic Heroic Virtues

In this chapter, I argue that a great deal of the “Christianization” that Tolkien achieves over traditional pagan mythology is specifically rooted in his invention and focus on the characters and qualities of his hobbits: the “little people” who carry forward Christian humility and, as I will show, service as a primary virtue. Hobbits, with their close relationship with the natural world, utilize their inner strength to exhibit Christian heroic virtues.

Tolkien’s emphasis on the pride and prowess of “kings and gods” births the juxtaposition of heroic morality rooted within the “unknown and weak” (*Letters* 149); Hobbits are so unknown that “their origin is unknown (even to themselves) for they escaped the notice of the great” (*Letters* 158). Despite their unknown origins, Hobbits are “a branch of the specifically *human* race” (158). The emphasis on human nature welcomes the comparison of ancient civilizations and the emergence of Hobbit culture; Tolkien describes Hobbit virtues as “shrewd sense, generosity, patience and fortitude, and also a strong ‘spark’ yet unkindled” (*Letters* 365). In contrast to Humanity, Hobbits do not rely on their strength, wealth, or reputations; they do not concern themselves with idealism and immortality, for they “are represented as being more in touch with ‘nature’ (the soil and other living things, plants and animals), and abnormally, for humans, free from ambition or greed of wealth” (*Letters* 158). Although Hobbits lack these negative values, they are in no way completely pure and free of criticism.

Through his juxtaposition of Humans and Hobbits, Tolkien elaborates on the constructive qualities that accompany Humankind’s nature by highlighting the Hobbits’ lack of those virtues. Despite the Hobbits being void of “ambition or greed of wealth”,

the catalyst for the Downfall of Humanity, Hobbits' lack of ambition translates to a general societal vulgarity and sloth, for "all Hobbits were slow to change" (*Letters* 290). Tolkien reveals this lack of creativity or want of innovation through Hobbit culture: "they liked to have books filled with things that they already knew, set out fair and square with no contradictions" (*Fellowship* 27). Hobbit society's lack of ambition accompanies a lack of curiosity and aspiration for knowledge. Tolkien continues this tread of thought in a 1964 BBC interview, "The Hobbits are just rustic English people, made in small size because it reflects (in general) the small reach of their imagination". Tolkien's reverence for moral exploration through sub-creation directly contrasts "the small reach of [Hobbit] imagination", so although Hobbits generally embody a tone of virtue, they do lack a sense of curiosity and refinement. With the increasing engagement with humans outside of Hobbit society, the contrasting virtues come into contact with one another and suggest a new focus of heroism.

Where Humankind's faith lies in their own knowledge and abilities, the inclusion of Hobbits removes those traditional, Pagan virtues and I argue, suggests a budding Christianized view of Middle-Earth. Tolkien's task in creating a "hobbit-centric" narrative highlights "the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble" (*Letters* 237). Tolkien's ennoblement of the Hobbits places the moral weight of the story on their backs as the "unknown and weak". Despite Hobbits being "creatures of very small physical power", they exhibit "the amazing and unexpected heroism of ordinary men 'at a pinch'" (*Letters* 158). Tolkien's "ennoblement of the ignoble" (*Letters* 220) introduces the virtues of a new type of hero, a Catholic hero. As examined earlier, Tolkien separates The Second Fall of Humanity into "three phases": the distance and misinterpretation of the

Truth, the susceptibility to “Pride and Glory”, and finally Humankind’s blatant refusal to accept the natural cycles of the world. My overview of Hobbit nature follows a similar structure to emphasize the juxtaposition of Humans and Hobbits.

The first phase of Humanity’s Second Fall focuses on the misinterpretation of the Creator and thus a singular Truth. Like the “Wild Men”, the Hobbits learned “their letters and began to write after the manner of the Dúnedain”: “the kings of Men that came over the Sea out of Westernessee” (*Fellowship* 22). Yet, instead of idolizing these “kings and gods”, “they forgot or ignored what little they had ever known of the Guardians, and of the labours of those that made possible the long peace of the Shire”, for “they came to think that peace and plenty were the rue in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk” (*Fellowship* 23). Hobbit society disregards the “labours” of these kings by turning inward into their own community. Their physical isolation translates to a cultural isolation, which preserves their relationship with the natural world, so they look to the natural world, rather than ancient people for their faith. Regardless of intent, Hobbits remain in an extremely “sheltered” community, and this distance from the larger world community worsens their lack of ambition and general ignorance.

Hobbit disregard for the greater workings of the world suggests a willful ignorance through sloth, but Tolkien complicates this assumption by highlighting the spiritual perseverance present in the nature of the Hobbits. Despite their inclination toward ignorance of the greater world and affinity for the base luxuries that accompany peacetime, Hobbits retain a hidden spiritual strength:

Nonetheless, ease and peace had left this people still curiously tough. They were, if it came to it, so unwearyingly fond of good things not least because they could, when out to it, do without them, and could survive rough handling by grief, foe, or weather in a way that astonished those

who did not know them well and looked no further than their bellies and their well-fed faces. (*Fellowship* 23-4)

Although Tolkien's vision for the small size of Hobbits takes root in the "small reach of their imagination", this does not equate to a "small reach of their courage or latent power" (1964 BBC Interview). Tolkien mentions the Hobbits' strength to survive "grief, foe, or weather" to highlight their capacity for endurance, and I argue that all three "handling[s]" are specific endeavors of Humankind's spirit. Hobbits have a natural endurance to overcome trials of the self, fellow men, and the natural world, and this perseverance stems from a strength of will, not of physical prowess. Hobbits are generally sheltered, but this simplicity and innocence form a foundational respect for the natural world and life's base pleasures.

The next phase, of the Second Fall of Humanity, emphasizes the growing "pride and glory" in the hearts of Humanity. The western shores become "factories" of lords, pumping out cheap imitations of the "kings and gods" of legend. This desperate effort to assert oneself above another for the sake of wealth and power is "the most improper job of any man, even saints (who at any rate were at least unwilling to take it on)"; Tolkien continues to elaborate,

the most improper job... is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek opportunity. And at least it is done only to a small group of men who know *who* their master is. The medievals were only too right in taking *nolo episcopari* as the best reason a man could give to others for making him a bishop. (*Letters* 64)

This emphasis on humility, I argue, forms the root of Hobbit virtue, for "seeking opportunity" and "bossing other men" illustrate the "most improper job" for humanity. Yet, Tolkien's mythos social dynamics seem to rely on a feudalistic system of social dynamics. Despite Tolkien's reverence for humility, the presence of kings and lords

throughout the various races of Middle-earth suggest a pre modern social hierarchy. Since the music of Creation, Ilúvatar stands as “The One”, the Ainur become the interpreters of the will of Ilúvatar, the Maiar come to serve the Ainur, the Elves are born as the First Children, and Humans as the Second. The emphasis on genealogical relation is apparent in Tolkien’s mythos, and the Chain of Being theology continues within Hobbit society.

Hobbits build on the social and moral foundations of Humans; like the kingship surrounding Humanity, early Hobbits of the Shire had their own social hierarchy: “while there was still a king they were in name his subjects, but they were, in fact, ruled by their own chieftains” (*Fellowship* 23). Although Hobbit kingship exists on a lesser scale than that of Humankind, their emphasis on traditions and “genealogical lore” (*Fellowship* 21) mimics similar societal values. The aristocratic families of Hobbit society, the Fallohides were “more friendly with Elves”, and the implications of that friendship can “still be noted among the greater families, such as the Tookes and the Masters of Buckland” (*Fellowship* 21). Despite the Hobbit virtue of humility, their social history still relies on royal bloodlines and class distinctions. In contrast, the other “breeds” of Hobbit are accompanied by more negative connotations. Tolkien’s illustration of the Harfoots as having “much to do with Dwarves in ancient times” and the “most normal and representative variety of Hobbit” highlights their socially common nature. The Stoors, like Sméagol, are “less shy of Men” and seemingly share a similar susceptibility to the dark powers.

Although Hobbit society functions on “greater” and lesser families, which illustrates an inherent class structure, Tolkien creates an intimate kinship between all the

families. In contrast to Humans, Hobbits “developed a more settled and elaborate social life, in which the importance of kinship to their sentiment and customs was assisted by detailed traditions, written and oral” (*Letters* 290). Tolkien describes the minute details, which I will explore here, of the tradition of giving gifts as a representation of the societal intimacy: the “*receiving of gifts*: [this] was an ancient ritual with kinship”, but “*giving gifts*: was a personal matter, not limited to kinship” (*Letters* 291). Tolkien’s genealogical emphasis illustrates a natural predisposition to specific proficiencies, for example being a “Master”, but the intimacy of the community celebrates the similarities and acceptance of all Hobbits, regardless of inherent social structure.

Because of the juxtaposition of Hobbit kinship with Humanity’s pride, the implications of the third phase of the Fall, the worship of the Dark and the breaking of the Ban, lie in a more theological plane. Humankind’s obsession with immortality leads to the rise of the “cruel and wicked lords of necromancy” (*Letters* 156) and the “cult of Morgoth” (*Letters* 194). The pride of Humanity inspires the “forging of arms and engines” (*Letters* 155) and eventually leads to the rebellion against Death and thus the Valar. But Hobbits have no such “ambition”, and their innate humility negates any temptation to bypass the natural cycles of the world. The Hobbits’ “close friendship with the earth” (*Fellowship* 20) reflects their acceptance of nature’s cycles, including Death. Tolkien elaborates on the spirituality of Hobbits by saying, “I do not think Hobbits practiced any form of worship or prayer (unless through exceptional contact with Elves)” (*Letters* 193). No formal religion exists in Middle-earth, and much like the ancient pagans, Hobbits look to nature for their spirituality and faith. In this regard, Hobbits are more akin to Elves in their spiritual connection with the earth.

Although both the Hobbits and the Elves have a deep respect for the natural world, Tolkien takes care in illustrating their interactions with the earth in very different ways. Elven society appreciates and respects the earth as another creation of “The One”. Their “‘magic’ is Art...[it is] sub-creation not domination and tyrannous re-forming of Creation” (*Letters* 146). This lack of dominance is seen upon the Fellowship’s arrival in Lothlórien, Legolas illustrates the Elves’ reluctance to damage nature: “it is told that she had a house built in the branches of a tree... The people of the woods did not delve in the ground like Dwarves, nor build strong places of stone before the Shadow came” (*Fellowship* 404). The Elves live off the land without tampering or disturbing the natural habitat; their interactions can be thus defined as generally primitive and animalistic.

In contrast, the race of Hobbits “never, in fact, studied magic of any kind” (*Fellowship* 20), and “they are entirely without non-human powers” (*Letters* 158). Their relationship with the earth is more symbiotic, where they care and cultivate the earth to create a specific outcome (i.e. agriculture). In addition, their cultivation of the earth reflects the Biblical Fall, for once Adam and Eve are dispelled from the Garden of Eden, God says, “cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. / It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. / By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground” (3 Genesis: 17-19). Fallen humanity, according to Christian theology, is left to fend for themselves through their own hard work and cultivation of the land, and Hobbits accept and enjoy this toil: “they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favorite haunt” (*Fellowship* 19).

I argue that Hobbit society accepts the will of the Christian God and thus accepts the implications of the Biblical Fall, and it is this separation that differentiates the Hobbit relationship with the earth from that of the Elves. Unlike the Elves, Hobbits illustrate dominion over the land, yet their mastery signifies love, knowledge, and understanding for the natural world. Their cultivation of the land parallels Tolkien's description of Humanity's nature as a seed; the land has a predisposed nature created by "The One", but through conscious work the "gardener" can "modify innate tendencies" to greater results. Despite the lack of organized religion among Hobbits, their "close friendship with the earth" implies a respect for the veiled Truth behind all of Ilúvatar's creations.

Tolkien's devout religious and spiritual beliefs encourage a deeper examination of these humble heroes. The Hobbits' strength of spirit, love for the community, and respect for the natural world contrast the downfall of Humanity, suggesting a new standard of righteous action for Middle-earth. Tolkien summarizes a comment from C. Williams where the center of the tale "is not in strife and war and heroism (though they are understood and depicted) but in freedom, peace, ordinary life and good liking" (*Letters* 105). Where Humankind exhibits the cardinal, or Pagan, virtues of classical antiquity (prudence, courage, temperance and justice), Hobbits expand Middle-earth's value system to include, and prioritize, the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity/love. Chance examines Tolkien's value of service and concludes that the "desire to serve, whether herald by individual or community, marks the 'paradise within'" (*Mythology of Power* 137). Highlighting this quality within the Hobbits illustrates Tolkien's idealized vision for a unified community based on the cycles of service. 'Righteous action' encompasses a wide and often generalized set of values; therefore, my

examination will focus on the theme of service regarding all forms of God's creation through the lens of the Biblical theological virtues.

Chapter 4 - Hobbit Heroics

The first three chapters of my examination have paved the avenue for applying the value of service, organized by the three theological virtues, as the crux of *The Lord of the Rings* saga. The Christian theology admits to an inherent natural hierarchy, and humility rests as “the distinguishing mark of all Christians” (Feldmeier 84). Feldmeier continues to comment on the importance of humility: “what is involved here (as Paul has already stated in Phil 2 and Rom 12) is not a self-diminution but a mutual consideration that allows love to take on a concrete form”. The virtue of humility affords the human consciousness to grasp the most tangible of the three theological virtues: charity/love. In this way, communal charity becomes the manifestation of faith and hope.

I argue that Tolkien views communal success as reliant on the individual; all parts are needed for the wheels of the world to function. Individuals utilize their inherent strengths to best support the good of the community. Elrond comments on this dynamic during his “Council”: “this quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere” (*Fellowship* 323). Although Elrond uses diminutive language to refer to the hobbits, the root of his perspective highlights a natural hierarchy where every member, weak or strong, has a part to play. Just as in Tolkien’s music of Creation, multiple pieces must work in unison for the greater “harmony”. In addition, Tolkien’s emphasis on humility stresses the dynamic of personal action, rather than authoritative decree. “Bossing other men” is “the most improper job”; therefore, individuals must embody their societal niche and labor and serve reliant on their own free will.

Just as the medieval notion of “*nolo episcopari*” fits a Bishop for service, “*nolo heroizari* is of course as good a start for a hero” (*Letters* 215). Humble and willful service solidifies Tolkien’s foundation for the new Christian hero. Frodo, arguably the explicit protagonist of the epic, exhibits these qualities. Indeed, Tolkien often depicts Frodo as reluctant, but willful and humble toward his task. As Gandalf conveys the situation, Frodo’s immediate reaction illustrates his humility: “I am not made for perilous quests” (*Fellowship* 87). Frodo’s assumption that someone of greater stature, strength, and experience is required to succeed in this quest contrasts with his eventual acceptance of his dark journey. During the “Council of Elrond”, Frodo witnesses many great figures of legend, yet none of them are fit for the task either. Seeing the flaws within all individuals suggests a new humbling where he can accept the quest while admitting his ignorance and inexperience: “I will take the Ring... though I do not know the way” (*Fellowship* 324). Frodo accepts his role in the larger schema with humility and grace, but the journey tests his faith and spirituality, a test that Tolkien calls a “failure”.

Talk of Frodo’s heroics inevitably lead to his failure on Mount Doom, but Tolkien narrows the conversation by exploring the morality on the success/failure binary. Tolkien admits that “Frodo indeed ‘failed’ as a hero... he did not endure to the end; he gave in, ratted”, but the idea of assessing another person’s morality should not be left to “simple minds”:

I do not say ‘simple minds’ with contempt: they often see with clarity the simple truth and the absolute ideal to which effort must be directed, even if it is unattainable. Their weakness, however, is twofold. They do not perceive the complexity of any given situation in Time, which is an absolute requirement in moral judgement (since it is present in Divine nature). In its highest exercise it belongs to God... We are finite creatures with absolute limitations upon the powers of our soul-body structure in either action or endurance. Moral failure can only be asserted, I think,

when a man's effort falls short of his limits, and the blame decreases as that limit is closer approached. (*Letters* 326)

Tolkien's base argument addresses the problem with morally judging another human being; this perspective pairs with the famous Biblical quote: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone" (John 8:7). Humankind does not possess the mental capability to accurately witness, assess, and conclude another individual's moral actions. As highlighted by the Tolkien's emphasis on the Fall, human nature is imperfect, and only a perfect being can accurately judge a human's actions. In this way, Frodo's failure is not a moral failure, for he endured to the limits of his spirit. Tolkien mentions that anyone who endures fatigue, hunger, and stress whilst carrying the Ring is destined to "fail" because Humans are finite and imperfect creatures. Frodo's "failure" does not belittle his heroic qualities, but, I argue, his life experiences and "cultivation" of character elevate his status to that of traditional heroes.

Frodo's humility and willingness to sacrifice himself seem to illustrate emerging Christian heroic themes, but in fact, Frodo's heroism still closely mirrors the moral and spiritual journeys of great legends. His relationship with elves, mainly through Bilbo and Gandalf, predispose him for ennoblement. Tolkien discusses Frodo's heroics by saying, "Frodo is not so interesting, because he has to be high minded, and has (as it were) a vocation... Frodo will naturally become too ennobled and rarefied by the achievement of the great Quest, and will pass West with all the great figures" (*Letters* 105); in essence, "his humility (with which he began) and his sufferings were justly rewarded by the highest honour" (*Letters* 326). This "highest honour" is the result of his sacrifice, but his ennoblement transforms him into something more than Hobbit. Tolkien claims that Frodo's journey is "a study of a hobbit broken by a burden of fear and horror-broken

down, and in the end made into something quite different” (*Letters* 186) for “suffering and experience (and possibly the Ring itself) gave Frodo more insight” (*Letters* 191). The complex and spiritual nature of his journey denigrates his rustic and innocent hobbitness. His experience and ennoblement transform him into something not fit for the peaceful simplicity of the Shire:

it was not only nightmare memories of past horrors that afflicted him, but also unreasoning self-reproach: he saw himself and all that he done as a broken failure. ‘Through I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same, for I shall not be the same.’ That was actually a temptation out of the Dark, a last flicker of pride: desire to have returned a ‘hero’, not content with being a mere instrument of good. And it was mixed with another temptation, blacker and yet (in a sense) more merited, for however that may be explained, he had not in fact cast away the Ring by a voluntary act. (*Letters* 328)

As Frodo returns to the Shire, he finds himself uneasy and empty. Tolkien highlights that his unhappiness “was actually a temptation out of the Dark”, like Gollum, the Ring’s effect remains. Frodo’s pride emerges despite his humble hobbit nature, and he cannot live peacefully with these unyielding thoughts. Although Frodo’s failure was not a “moral failure”, circumstances force him to live on with his choices, experiences, and regrets; therefore, his nature no longer correlates to the rustic innocence of the Shire, and he must spend his days in the Grey Havens (*Return* 346-7). I will note that Tolkien’s belief in repentance and redemption have the ability to come into the conversation, for even Gollum, at one point, reaches toward a future of healing, but Frodo’s sacrifice grants him entrance to the West.

Tolkien attempts to contrast the obvious traditional heroics within his epic by incorporating Hobbits, but Frodo falls short in his attempt to highlight complete humble service because of his ennoblement. Chance says, “the servant, Sam or Gollum,

ultimately contributes as much or more to Middle-Earth than the Master Frodo” (*Mythology of Power* 35). Sam’s service emphasizes Tolkien’s “hobbito-centric” story, for “none of the hobbits come out of it in pure Shire-fashion. They wouldn’t. But you *have* got Samwise Gamwichy (or Gamgee)” (*Letters* 186). I argue that the text’s highlighted servant, Sam Gamgee, acquires and illustrates the emerging Christian theological virtues by the end of epic. My next few sections examine the Christian implications behind Sam’s actions, and reactions, through the lens of faith (illustrated through a reliance on the natural world), hope (expressed by his hobbitness in times of despair), and charity (emphasized through his eventual pity of Gollum).

Tolkien’s “Jewel Among the Hobbits”: The Nature of Samwise

Because Middle-earth has no formal or standardized religion, the theological virtue of faith cannot be expressed in traditional means. I argue that Tolkien’s illustration of faith is based on a recognition of the natural world, both through an ownership of personal strength and through an acceptance of the Great Chain of Being perspective. Despite the absence of an explicit Christian religion in the mythos, the values remain. The acceptance of a natural hierarchy solidifies “the necessity of superior and lower positions, of command and obedience” (Feldmeier 42); the service and love toward God translates to a service for all of God’s creations, including fellow Humans and the natural world. Sam’s humility, strength of spirit, and willingness to serve highlight his unique characteristics among the other hobbits of the epic.

Tolkien’s inspiration for Sam Gamgee is rooted in the theme of service. Through his experience in World War I, Tolkien comes to revere the qualities involved in active service; he says, “my ‘Sam Gamgee’ is indeed a reflexion of the English soldier, of the

privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war, and recognized as *so far superior to myself*' (Carpenter 81). The batmen were soldiers who are tasked with looking after an officer's kit, cooking, and cleaning (Garth). These soldiers would support and tend to an officer's wants and needs in an attempt to incorporate some stability and regularity in pressing times. Despite the disparity in military rank, Tolkien views the batmen as "so far superior" with their humility, loyalty, and strength of will. Those who act off the main stage support the larger system, no matter how small, have their part to encourage a communal unity even in the most trying of times.

Inspired from the English batmen, Sam highlights Tolkien's reverence for humility through his rustic innocence. Tolkien isolates "hobbits of [Sam's] class" as having "very Saxon names as a rule", but he wishes that he could "change it to Goodchild" (Letters 83) to increase Sam's "comicness" and "peasantry" (*Letters* 88). The effect of this change would accentuate Sam's lowly status and liken him to that of a child filled with an innocence and curiosity to explore the world. This reverence for the simplicity of children mirrors Carlyle's earlier comment regarding Norse mythology's exploration of the natural world; the old Norsemen were "most earnest, honest; childlike, and yet manlike; with a great-hearted simplicity and depth and freshness, in a true, loving, admiring, unfeared way". Sam's status as a servant and his childlike personality mark him as the ideal candidate to exhibit the emerging Christian themes.

The imagery of childlike purity translates to the Christian theology. Feldmeier adds to Tolkien's emphasis on humble innocence as he examines the words of Matthean Jesus to emphasize "an ethos of humility and lowliness as the ethical guideline" (47):

Amen, I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this

child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, Welcomes me. (18:3-5)

The Biblical emphasis on humility, as a child to any adult, highlights an acceptance of lower-class station, regarding an ultimate authority. The innocence of children often carries the negative connotation of ignorance, but circumstance and opportunity do not limit a person's humanity. No human is fit to boss or judge another because of the limitations of the human psyche; therefore, a consistent acceptance of humility, innocence, and mental limitations illustrate the emerging hero. An understanding and acceptance of these limitations pair with the innate behaviors existent in the Hobbit race. Hobbit nature favors peace, seclusion, and the simple joys of life, and these qualities come into contact with the larger themes of a greater existence during *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien illustrates Sam's character by contrasting his hobbit characteristics with the influence of Frodo and Bilbo. Sam's reluctance toward change battles with his reverence for things nobler; Tolkien says,

He is a more representative hobbit than any others that we have to see much of; and he has consequently a stronger ingredient of that quality which even some hobbits found at times hard to bear: a vulgarity -- by which I do not mean a mere 'down-to-earthiness' -- a mental myopia which is proud of itself, a smugness (in varying degrees) and cocksureness, and a readiness to measure and sum up all things from a limited experience, largely enshrined in sententious traditional 'wisdom'. We only meet exceptional hobbits in close companionship- those who had a grace or gift: a vision of beauty, and a reverence for things nobler than themselves, at war with their rustic self-satisfaction. (*Letters* 329)

As stated earlier, Hobbits are fairly resilient considering their fondness for the comforts of home, and Sam's depiction as being "more" Hobbit than the others elevate this strength of will. This solidification of his spiritual strength stems from a confidence of his

innate Hobbitness, but Tolkien's depiction of this strength as a "mental myopia" implies necessary "grace or gift". Sam's "cocksureness" illustrates his Hobbit nature, but his "reverence for things nobler" suggest a humility needed for mental and moral growth. "Rustic self-satisfaction" balances with this "vision of beauty" through Sam's fondness for songs and stories from beyond the Shire's borders. While most hobbits within the Shire think of Frodo and Bilbo as "queer" (*Fellowship*) because of their curiosity toward the outside world, Sam consumes Bilbo's stories and mimics Frodo's curiosity to complicate, but not overpower, his natural hobbitness.

Tolkien builds on this foundational spiritual balance by isolating Sam through his openness to the possibilities of the outside world. Sam's affinity for myth and story throughout the epic pair with his lower-class station to illustrate this balance. Sam's curiosity and understanding of the implications behind stories mirror Tolkien's perspectives of language and mythology. Early on, Tolkien illustrates Sam discussing rumors with Ted, another "rustic" hobbit:

'Queer things you hear these days, to be sure,' said Sam.
'Ah,' said Ted, 'you do, if you listen. But I can hear fireside tales and children's stories at home, if I want to.'
'No doubt you can,' retorted Sam, 'and I daresay there's more truth in some of them than you reckon. Who invented the stories anyway?'
(*Fellowship* 68)

Ted's phrasing of "if you listen" and "if you want to" suggests that opening the self to the outside world is a conscious decision; the overall Hobbit community chooses to not listen and disregard these "queer things" because they may complicate their understanding of the world. Ted's belittling of the strange rumors reveals the general slothful and happily ignorance prevalent in the nature of Hobbits, but Sam, the more "representative hobbit" questions the origins and meanings behind these tales. As the "genuine hobbit" (*Letter*

105), Sam's rustic class station affords him a uniquely intimate relationship with the natural order of the world. Although the Shire is generally sheltered, Sam's unique fascination with stories and legends suggest a closer comprehension of the Truth.

Sam's childish enthusiasm for songs and tales separate him from the other Hobbits within the Shire. Tolkien's illustration of Sam's fascination regarding these "children's stories" elevates his humility through his disregard for the judgement of others. As Gandalf informs Frodo about the dark complexity of the Ring, Sam eavesdrops because he "couldn't help [himself]"; he says, "Lor bless me, sir, but I do love tales of that sort. And I believe them too" (*Fellowship* 90). Sam's immediate acceptance of this fantastical story illustrates his faith in Truth rooted in all sub-creative stories, but this story, the story of the Ring, is real for these small Hobbits. In addition, Sam's physical reaction, by "choking", upon hearing that Frodo will be leaving the Shire builds on his childish nature. Just as a child listening in on parents, Sam knows that he should not be eavesdropping, but his emotions get the better of him as he fears for Frodo's departure. Despite all of the dark omens that Gandalf reveals, when he informs Sam that he is to accompany Frodo, he "[springs] up like a dog invited for a walk... and then burst into tears" (*Fellowship* 91). Although Sam's childish and doglike response appears degrading, the images highlight his humble nature to solidify his natural inclination to service.

Sam's rustic innocence contrasts with his curiosity and interest surrounding the outside world to highlight Tolkien's metaphor of the seed regarding Human characteristics being both innate and conscious. Although Sam holds a fascination for legends and the more "noble" aspects in life, his Hobbit nature limits his ambition. His limited experience is revealed as the hobbits leave the Shire, he says "here is a dry fir-

woods just ahead, if I remember rightly.’ Sam knew the land well within twenty miles of Hobbiton, but that was the limit of his geography” (*Fellowship* 100). Sam’s niche as a gardener highlights his knowledge and relationship with the natural world, but his mastery hits a stark wall at the borders of Hobbiton. Tolkien’s reverence for having a close relationship with the earth contrasts with his emphasis for mental, emotional, and spiritual growth. For the sake of Frodo, and the larger quest, Gandalf forces Sam to accompany Frodo, which begins his spiritual exploration of faith and morality. Tolkien comments on moral weight of this journey when he says, “if there is anything in a journey of any length, for me it is this: a deliverance from the plantlike state of helpless passive sufferer, an exercise however small of will, and mobility -- and of curiosity, without which a rational mind becomes stultified” (*Letters* 239). Here, Tolkien’s emphasis on conscious action, in this case the journey, pairs with the natural virtues of hobbits to suggest the steps to achieve spiritual balance.

Tolkien emphasizes this balance through Merry and Pippin’s journey as well. Although the plot separates Merry and Pippin from Frodo and Sam, the secondary couple of hobbits explore their own balance during their journey to service. As the two engage in their own exploration of heroics, in typical Hobbit fashion, they reveal a similar spiritual affinity for the Shire:

‘Dear me! We Tookes and Brandybucks, we can’t live long on the heights.’
‘No,’ said Merry. ‘I can’t. Not yet, at any rate. But at least, Pippin, we can now see them, and honour them. It is best to love first what you are fitted to love, I suppose: you must start somewhere and have some roots, and the soil of the Shire is deep. Still there are things deeper and higher; and not a gaffer could tend his garden in what he calls peace but for them, whether he knows about them or not. I know about them, a little. But I don’t know why I am talking like this. Where is that leaf? And get my pipe out of my pack, if it isn’t broken.’ (*Return* 161)

Full of Hobbit humility and humor Merry and Pippin illustrate Tolkien's perspectives on human nature. Merry and Pippin separate from the Fellowship and choose to serve the courts of Théoden and Denethor, respectfully. Their service affords them the opportunity to "honour" "the heights"; through this, they both are able to expand their understanding of the world. Despite their experiences, they retain their Hobbitness, illustrated through Pippin's concluding statement: "But I don't know why I am talking like this. Where is that leaf? And get my pipe out of my pack, if it isn't broken". This scene directly contrasts Pippin's spiritual epiphany, depicted through an engagement with the outside world, with his innate love for the Shire, illustrated through the emphasis on his pipe. Like Sam, both Merry and Pippin expand and cultivate their own heroics through service without sacrificing their Hobbitness, as Frodo did. Despite this illustration of balance, Sam and Frodo's journey carries the moral weight of the story.

Tolkien highlights Sam's personification of humility by contrasting his Hobbit nature with the virtues of the classical hero in Shelob's lair. During this scene, Sam's traditional role as humble servant becomes overshadowed by Tolkien's portrayal of Sam's embodiment of Pagan heroic strength through individual prowess:

On the near side of him lay, gleaming on the ground, his elven-blade, where it had fallen useless from his grasp. Sam did not wait to wonder what was to be done, or whether he was brave, or loyal, or filled with rage. He sprang forward with a yell, and seized his master's sword in his left hand. Then he charged. No onslaught more fierce was ever seen in the savage world of beasts, where some desperate small creature armed with little teeth, alone, will spring upon a tower of horn and hide that stands above its fallen mate. (*Two Towers* 398)

Sam's immediate and "desperate" attempt to defend Frodo without "wait[ing] to wonder what was to be done" illustrates his actions as bestial and primal. Although he did not consider "whether he was brave, or loyal, or filled with rage", traditional considerations

driving pagan virtues, these non-Hobbit instincts emerge and overtake the small Hobbit. At this point, Sam neglects his Hobbitness and attacks instinctually with greater ferocity “ever seen in the savage world of beasts”. This scene contradicts Sam’s seemingly constant reliance on his Hobbit virtues up until this point; therefore, I argue, this moment where he reacts without reason belittles Sam’s character to a flat archetype of ‘the traditional hero’. Sam’s virtue comes from his faith in his Hobbit nature and in things nobler than himself, so his disregard of these virtues, in this scene of apparent ennoblement, segregate his Hobbit spirit thus resulting in a loss of faith.

Soon after the battle scene in Shelob’s lair, Sam regains his Hobbit nature through an outreach to Middle-earth’s higher spiritual powers. Although Sam lacks an intimate connection with the First Children of Ilúvatar, his general fascination and reverence for their mysterious and apparent divinity. The Elves act as a spiritual bridge connecting Middle-earth to the Blessed Realm. After Shelob’s defeat, Sam regains his humble virtue through elvish inspiration and intervention:

‘Galadriel!’ he said faintly, and then he heard voices off but clear; the crying of the Elves as they walked under the stars in the beloved shadows of the Shire, and the music of the Elves as it came through his sleep in the Hall of Fire in the house of Elrond.

Gilthoniel A Elbereth!

And then his tongue was loosened and his voice cried in a language which he did not know:

*A Elbereth Gilthoniel
o menel palan-díriel,
le nallon sí dinguruthos!
A tiro nin, Fabuilos!*

And with that he staggered to his feet and was Samwise the hobbit, Hamfast’s son, again. (*Two Towers* 400)

Elbereth Gilthoniel, or Varda, is the Valar associated with the stars and light; Sam’s invocation of specifically Varda in this instance highlights Sam’s spiritual suffocation

from Shelob's darkness. Shelob directly descends from Morgoth's brief partner Ungoliant, whom is most notorious for "sucking up" the light of the two trees and thus bringing darkness upon Valinor (*Silmarillion* 81). The historical emphasis on the dichotomy of light and dark, between the Valar and the Morgoth, manifests within Sam's spiritual struggle to regain his Hobbit nature. By means of deus ex machina, Sam suddenly gains the ability to speak elvish and calls for Elbereth specifically. Only after the divine and spiritual inspiration from the elves is Sam able to reunify with his hobbit identity, and thus his true nature.

Sam embodies the fiery spirit of classical heroes as he defeats Shelob, and his reliance on bestial instinct reveals a need to return to his humble spiritual state. This, possibly unintentional, rejection of reason introduces a new layer to this scene by suggesting a neglect of his nature, but I will also point out, relying on reason alone also results in a rejection of faith in one's innate character. Tolkien illustrates the problem of relying solely on logic through Sam short time as Ring-bearer. With the acceptance of Frodo's apparent death, Sam chooses to continue the quest on his own and "stumbled on into the glowing dark" (*Two Towers* 404). Sam accepts the weight of the task and attempts to act logically: "I've made up my mind,' ... he had done his best to think it out". Despite his contemplation, "what he was doing was altogether against the grain of his nature" (*Two Towers* 404). Here, Sam's effort to continue the quest on his own stems from an understanding of the gravity of the situation, but he neglects his personal Hobbit virtue of service. This rejection of his natural strength, given by the Creator, resists his specific niche in the "wheels of the world". The emphasis on both natural virtue and

human reason accentuates the roots of Tolkien's hero as an embodiment of the natural human "seed" and conscious "gardening".

As Sam comes to a spiritual understanding of himself and his role in the wheels of the world, Tolkien's illustration of the weak/great binary becomes, in natural Hobbit fashion, comical. Running back to Frodo, Sam begs for forgiveness: "'I got it all wrong!' he cried, 'I knew I would. Now they've got him, the devils; the filth! Never leave your master, never, never: that was my right rule. And I knew it in my heart. May I be forgiven!'" (*Two Towers* 414). Soon after this plea, Sam highlights the absurdity of abandoning his nature by buying into the Orcs' expectation of a "great big elvish warrior that's loose!" (414). The image of a great elvish warrior contrasts with the reality of Sam's small and feeble character, and the comical comparison concludes Sam's acceptance and understanding of his Hobbit disposition.

Tolkien's metaphor of Humanity existing as a seed illustrates a dependence on the innate strengths within a person's nature, but his emphasis on the cultivation of character highlights conscious action as an additional factor. Sam's recognition of his humble origins as both a hobbit and a gardener depict an acceptance of the natural orders of the world, and his interest and consideration for "things nobler than [himself]" suggests a communal humility. Honoring his natural rustic station in the larger wheel, while holding a reverence for the stories and elves (i.e. light), illustrate an active spiritual service.

The Hope/ Despair Binary

Arguably, the concept of despair supersedes other forms of Human emotion. Many of the first recorded written tales center and focus on lamentation, and the universality of this sentiment transcends culture and language. Hope, as the second pillar to the Christian theological virtues, acts in opposition to despair. Tolkien defines the hope-despair binary through his creation of the term, eucatastrophe, and his application of the term within “fairy stories” center the virtue of hope as the core of Catholic-inspired tales. In his own text Tolkien unifies Sam with the natural world to highlight hope. Sam’s faith and rustic embodiment of the Shire marks the perfect foil to Frodo, for the Ring stretches and weakens Frodo’s spirit as the text unfolds. Frodo’s necessity on a strong spiritual guide to act as a crutch stresses Sam’s pious service within the text.

Losing his mother at a young age and surviving the horrors of World War I affords Tolkien a unique understanding of sorrow and grief. Despair and sorrow illustrate a weariness that results in spiritual fatigue; because of this, hope exists as a pillar of the Christian religion: “even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; / but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:30-1). These themes translate into his mythos in an integral way. As stated earlier, Tolkien primarily concerns himself with “death as a part of nature... and with Hope without guarantees” (*Letters* 237), and this emphasis on hope inspires his theory on the eucatastrophe.

Tolkien’s eucatastrophe acts in opposition to the standard definition of catastrophe. Where a catastrophe describes a damaging or destructive event, the eucatastrophe is

the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous "turn" (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale)... In its fairy-tale -- or otherworld -- setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (*Monsters* 153)

The natural balance of the world requires sorrow to exist if Humanity expects to experience joy. Despite the necessity for sorrow to contrast joy, despair, the ultimate sorrow, results in a complete abandonment of hope. Despite this necessary balance, Christian fables inevitably end with triumph, "in the afterlife if not on earth" (Spacks). Tolkien stresses this point as he describes that the vision of the "eucatastrophe" takes root within the Christian ethos through the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ. Hope and "Joy" rely on faith "beyond the walls of the world".

Tolkien's includes his perspectives regarding hope through the inclusion of Gandalf, a lesser Valar. During the "Council of Elrond", Erebor confesses the seemingly impossible nature of the task: "that is the path of despair. Of folly I would say..." (*Fellowship* 322). Gandalf responds with, "despair, or folly?... It is not despair, for despair is only for those who see the end beyond all doubt. We do not. It is wisdom to recognize necessity, when all other courses have been weighed, though as folly it may appear to those who cling to false hope". Because despair exists in tandem with a lack of imagination, the theme of despair correlates to Tolkien's primary concern regarding "Death as a part of nature, physical and spiritual, of Man, and with Hope without guarantees (*Letters* 237). When the mind cannot envision a eucatastrophe, it resolves to hopelessness. The destruction of the Ring is a "necessity" for Middle-earth; therefore, the free people must rely on the virtue of hope, regardless of the dire circumstances. Those

who believe the task is “the path of despair, of folly” do not have true divine hope.

Keeping hope in seemingly hopeless situations exists as the true opposition to sorrow and despair.

The power of the Ring wearies Frodo throughout the epic through its constant attempts to be found and thus return to Sauron. Frodo, as the Ring-bearer, must withstand the Ring’s ceaseless attacks against his physical, mental, and spiritual health. Initially, Frodo’s choice to be the Ring-bearer stems from his wish to protect the Shire, and his Hobbit nature seeks to return to the peace that he once knew. Having the Shire as his inspiration, makes Sam the perfect partner for the quest. Sam, as the most “genuine hobbit”, embodies the rustic innocence that Frodo holds dear; Sam’s nature supports Frodo by counteracting the Ring’s attacks with the hope of peace and home. During the scene at Cirith Ungol, Frodo encounters despair, and his spirit wearies, but Sam’s spiritual unification with the Shire:

I am too late. All is lost. I tarried on the way. All is lost. Even if my errand is performed, no one will ever know. There will be no one I can tell. It will be in vain.’ Overcome with weakness he wept. And still the host of Morgul crossed the bridge. Then at a great distance, as if it came out of memories of the Shire, some sunlit early morning, when the day called and doors were opening, he heard Sam’s voice speaking. ‘Wake up, Mr. Frodo! Wake up!’ Had the voice added: ‘Your breakfast is ready’ he would hardly have been surprised. (*Two Towers* 373)

The contrasting tones in this scene center Frodo’s love for the Shire as his strength; his memories of “sunlit early mornings” and Sam’s voice restore Frodo’s will to continue the quest. Frodo’s emphasis on “there will be no one I can tell” suggests a new form of pride highlighting the Ring’s effect. Despite this, his love for the peace of the Shire encourages him to keep pushing to the end. The interaction following this scene depicts Frodo’s acceptance that the act of destroying the Ring may be “all we can do”, with little to no

hope of returning home; this causes Sam to hold Frodo's hand, cry, and "try[ing] to whistle". Sam's immediate reaction to this possible reality causes him to look to music and song for comfort. Sam's spiritual intimacy with the rustic innocence of the Shire qualifies him as the ideal foil and support to Frodo. The further Frodo proceeds with his quest, the more his hobbitness becomes victim to the powers of the Ring, so Sam's embodiment of the very thing that first spurred Frodo to action elevates Frodo out of utter despair.

Although Sam's service to Frodo exists on all levels: spiritual, physical and moral, Sam must also seek, find, and accept the core of his own hope. With a childlike innocence, Sam seeks to find his inspiration for hope and thus strength. Unlike Frodo, his love for the Shire is not enough; Galadriel tests Sam's priorities with the mirror. The mirror reveals to Sam the "devilry at work in the Shire", and he insists that he "must go home!" (*Fellowship* 428). Galadriel questions his exclamation and forces Sam to choose between the Shire and Frodo, and Sam replies by

[sitting] on the ground and put his head in his hands. 'I wish I had never come here, and I don't want to see no more magic,' he said and fell silent. After a moment he spoke again thickly, as if struggling with tears. 'No, I'll go home by the long road with Mr. Frodo, or not at all,' he said. 'But I hope I do get back some day.' (*Fellowship* 428)

Although Sam's personality and morals stem from the Shire, his service to Frodo reveals his conscious efforts that reveal his character. He accepts the fact that he may never see the Shire again early in their journey, and actively chooses to serve Frodo until the end. Sam's acknowledgement of his task to support Frodo through this journey supersedes Sam's love of the Shire. Where Frodo's hope lies in the peaceful serenity of the Shire, Sam's hope takes root in the humility of his service.

Because of Sam's reliance on dutiful service, Frodo's apparent death within Shelob's lair marks the ultimate test of Sam's hope. Sam's decision to continue the quest on his own illustrates his attempt to act righteously, but Tolkien's imagery within this scene highlights his abandonment of hope. As Sam examines Frodo he

lifted up the Phial and looked down at his master, and the light burned gently now with the soft radiance of the evening-star in summer, and in that light Frodo's face was fair of hue again, pale but beautiful with an elvish beauty, as of one who has long passed the shadows. And with the bitter comfort of that last sight Sam turned and hid the light and stumbled on into the glowing dark. (*Two Towers* 404)

The light of the Phial illuminates Frodo's "elvish beauty", and this imagery parallels Sam's earlier evocation of Elbereth. The light from Galadriel and Frodo's elvish appearance suggest an illumination for the true spiritual path, but Sam chooses to "hid[e] the light and stumble[d] on into the glowing dark", implying a loss of spiritual hope. His sorrow from Frodo's apparent death causes him to ignore the light directly in front of him.

The balance between the spirit and the mind becomes key to understanding the new emerging heroic ideal. While one should always attempt to act righteously, humanity must not forget their natural morals. After stumbling in the dark, Sam relearns his unique role within the larger quest, "he flung the Quest and all his decisions away, and fear and doubt with them. He knew now where his place was and had been: at his master's side, though what he could do there was not clear" (*Two Towers* 407). This epiphany stems from the acceptance of his service and overall hobbit nature, which reveals a trust within his unique strength of spirit.

Once he decides to return to Frodo's side, his mind opens up to consider the larger effect of this decision. His affinity for the great legends of the past encourage the implications of his refusal to carry the Ring and defend Frodo's body instead:

I wonder if any song will ever mention it: How Samwise fell in the High Pass and made a wall of bodies round his master. No, no song. Of course not, for the Ring'll be found, and there'll be no more songs. I can't help it. My place is by Mr. Frodo. They must understand that -- Elrond and the Council, and the great Lords and Ladies with all their wisdom. Their plans have gone wrong. I can't be their Ring-bearer. Not without Mr. Frodo. (*Two Towers* 407)

Sam's love for tales and stories pave the foundation to express the effects of his decision. Where Frodo despaired because his success would not be revered by others, Sam's acceptance that "there'll be no more songs" due to his decision demonstrates the severity of his loyalty to Frodo. Sam's submission to his unique task within the larger wheels of the world solidifies his confidence. Although Sam ultimately feels that his decision acts in opposition to the "wisdom" of the "Lords and Ladies", Gandalf (*Fellowship* 91) and Elrond (*Fellowship* 324-5) emphasize Sam's role to accompany Frodo, not to carry the Ring. The decision to return to Frodo exhibits both his natural inclinations to service and "hope without guarantees".

Upon returning to Frodo, Sam encounters a group of Orcs, which forces him to slip on the Ring or be discovered. As he hides with the cover of the Ring's power, he gains the ability to comprehend their language and learns that Frodo is still alive. Sam reflects on his own lack of hope and decides what to do next: "you fool, he isn't dead, and your heart knew it. Don't trust your head, Samwise, it is not the best part of you. The trouble with you is that you never really had any hope" (*Two Towers* 413). Sam's prioritization of the quest over his "master" illustrates a spiritual drifting from his nature,

and this separation results in his loss of hope. Despite this misjudgment, his reunification with Frodo solidifies the foundation of his hope for the remainder of the quest.

The journey continues with Frodo again as Ring-bearer, and Sam encounters a new test of hope. As they approach the final fifty miles to Mount Doom, Sam considers the final leg of the journey and deduces that they only have enough resources to reach the end, and he comes to a dark realization: “never for long had hope died in his staunch heart, and always until now he had taken some thought for their return. But the bitter truth came home to him at last... There could be no return”. Sam accepts the fact that he probably will never return to the Shire again, a possibility foreshadowed by Galadriel’s mirror. Understanding the gravity of the situation, Sam gloomily admits, ““so that was the job I felt I had to do when I started,’ thought Sam: ‘to help Mr. Frodo to the last step and then die with him? Well, if that is the job then I must do it” (*Return* 234). Although Sam saddens with this dire conclusion, he prioritizes his service to Frodo before anything else.

Despite this acceptance of probable death, Sam’s hope survives with thoughts of Gandalf: “I can’t think somehow that Gandalf would have sent Mr. Frodo on this errand, if there hadn’t a’been any hope of his ever coming back at all”. Although Sam cannot conceive an outcome where he and Frodo return to the Shire alive, his faith in Gandalf’s wisdom cements a sliver of hope. Tolkien depicts Sam’s interaction with hope through this contemplation when he writes,

But even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam’s plain hobbit-face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him, and he felt through all his limbs a thrill, as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue. With a new sense of responsibility he brought his eyes back to the ground near at hand...the light grew... (*Return* 234)

Sam's strength revives through his "sense of responsibility," and refocusing "his eyes back to the ground near at hand", he can see the growing light. "Neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles" can overtake this newfound spiritual vigor. Sam's resolution to spiritually support Frodo until the very end drives his strength; his faith in Gandalf and the other great beings give him hope despite his apparent fate.

After the destruction of the Ring, Frodo's burden is lifted, but Sam's service remains. Frodo, although pleased to be released from the Ring, succumbs to despair when he says, "it's like things are in the world. Hopes fail. An end comes" (*Return* 253). The pair of small Hobbits, reluctant to die on the mountain, make their way to the bottom where they settle and accept certain death. Despite this, Sam continues to serve by comforting Frodo's mind through speaking of tales and legends. His unwavering spiritual service and reverence for "things nobler than themselves" illustrates his hope and the inevitable eucatastrophe:

what a tale we have been in, Mr. Frodo, haven't we?' he said. "I wish I could hear it told! Do you think they'll say: *Now comes the story of the Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom?* And everyone will hush, like we did, when in Rivendell they told us of the tale of Beren One-hand and the Great Jewel. I wish I could hear it! And I wonder how it will go on after our part.' But even while he spoke so, to keep fear away until the very last, his eyes still strayed north... and so it was... Gwaihir (*Return* 254)

Sam's mention of these ancient tales and the power of stories is an attempt to give Frodo hope that even in death, he may live on through story. Notably, Sam does not mention his own role "of the Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom"; Sam's absence from this probable tale illustrates his spiritual acceptance of his seemingly minute role in the journey. His dutiful service to Frodo in this moment exhibits the Christian virtue of hope. In his attempt "to keep fear away until the very last," he demonstrates hope; therefore, the

fortuitous appearance of the eagles after the destruction of the Ring embodies the eucatastrophe of the tale, and the pair of hobbits “soar on wings like eagles” (Isaiah 40:31).

Examining the virtue of Hope continues to build on the crucial balance of conscious action and natural strength. Sam’s spiritual realization of his specific niche within the larger journey allows him to retain hope when facing death. His faith in the natural workings of the world result in a sureness and confidence that gives him hope. Supporting Frodo by embodying the virtue of Hope paves the avenue for Tolkien’s eucatastrophe, the chief dynamic of any Christian tale.

Dynamics of Charity, or Neighborly Love

Charity, the third pillar of the Christian ethos, values a universal understanding that all humans are children of God, and therefore must be treated with love and acceptance. With emphasis on engaging in the civic life and service of the community, Humanity should “above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). I argue that Tolkien applies Charity to directly address the nature of evil within Humanity. Since “the power of evil in the world is not finally resistible by incarnate creatures, however ‘good’” (*Letters* 252), the themes of pity, mercy, and love emerge as the main crux of the text. The New Testament emphasizes love and forgiveness above all else, and similarly, *The Lord of the Rings* echoes the necessity of this Human virtue in order to achieve a functioning and healthy community.

Again, Gandalf lays the foundation to examine the theological virtues throughout the text. The first illustration of Charity appears when Gandalf first speaks to Frodo about the nature of Gollum and the Ring. Gandalf highlights the universal susceptibility toward “evil”: “I think it is a sad story,’ said the wizard, ‘and it might have happened to others, even to some hobbits that I have known” (*Fellowship* 79). The notion that Gollum could have resulted from other hobbits suggests that he alone is not to blame, for the Ring’s corruption and manipulation can overtake even the strongest of hearts; therefore, Gollum should be pitied. Despite this, Frodo succumbs to his fear of the unknown, and he says, “I am sorry,” said Frodo. “But I am frightened; and I do not feel any pity for Gollum... he deserves death” (*Fellowship* 85). Despite their hobbit comradeship, Frodo’s defection to the emotion of fear ‘others’ and distances him from Gollum, thereby making him unable to feel pity in the beginning of the saga.

Gandalf, the moral compass of the mortal world, criticizes Frodo's solely reactionary disdain toward the fallen hobbit. He chastises Frodo's and counters his accusation by saying,

deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. (*Fellowship* 85)

Gandalf's first point addresses who should and should not pass judgment on others; only those who can control the dynamic of life and death have the wisdom and knowledge to accurately assess judgement. His statement that "even the very wise cannot see all ends" pairs with Tolkien's logic upon assessing Frodo's "failure" at Mount Doom. All incarnate beings have finite limitations on their soul and body; therefore, no human is inherently evil, and no human is above evil. Gandalf's emphasis on repentance and redemption mark the basis of pity and mercy. Both Frodo and Sam must learn the value of pity toward Gollum in order to complete their journey.

The more Frodo interacts with Gollum, the more Frodo heeds Gandalf's lesson. Frodo learns to pity Gollum, while Gollum battles his inner hobbit. Gollum, like Sam, accepts the task to serve Frodo, and because Gollum remains in close proximity of the Ring, he continuously struggles against its corruption. By the end of the text, contrary to Gandalf's hope, Gollum fails to fully repent, and the temptation of the Ring overtakes him at Mount Doom. Despite this, Gollum's actions at Mount Doom act as the "only thing that could have roused the dying embers of Frodo's heart and will" (*Return* 245). Without Gollum, Frodo would not have been able to discard the Ring. Frodo accepts Gollum's 'service' and reflects on Gandalf's earlier comments regarding mercy:

‘But do you remember Gandalf’s words: Even Gollum may have something yet to do? But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over. (*Return* 250)

Frodo’s pity and eventual forgiveness illustrates the various interpretations of service.

Gollum’s role within Middle-earth is not based in his corruption, for Tolkien addresses the scenario of Gollum’s repentance in his 1963 letter: “he would have stolen the Ring or taken it by violence (as he does in the actual Tale). But ‘possession’ satisfied, I think he would have sacrificed himself for Frodo’s sake and have *voluntarily* cast himself into the fiery abyss” (*Letters* 330); repentance or not, the results would be similar. Despite this theoretical scenario, Tolkien’s focus remains on Frodo and Sam come to pity and have love for this Fallen being.

Because Gollum would have died in “the fiery abyss” either way, Tolkien addresses the accusation that Frodo’s mercy only exists because of his need for Gollum to rouse the “dying embers” in Frodo’s heart. The theme of pity surpasses Gollum’s action through Tolkien’s definition of mercy; he states,

In this case the cause (not the ‘hero’) was triumphant, because by the exercise of pity, mercy, and forgiveness of injury, a situation was produced in which all was readdressed and disaster averted. Gandalf certainly foresaw this... Of course, he did not mean to say that one must be merciful, for it may prove useful later — it should not then be mercy or pity, which are only truly present when contrary to prudence. Not ours to plan! But we are assured that we must be ourselves extravagantly generous, if we are to hope for extravagant generosity which the slightest easing of, or escape from, the consequences of our own follies and errors represents. And that mercy does sometimes occur in this life. (*Letters* 253)

Here, Tolkien’s emphasis on the “cause, not the hero,” places the weight on the communal dynamic, not the individual. Treating others with a sense of Charity, without active planning or foresight, results in “the easing of, or escape from, the consequences of

our own follies and errors”. Not to say that “the easing of” “our own follies and errors” should be the catalyst for charitable action, but because all humans have finite capacities, building a community on love and forgiveness becomes essential. Frodo’s mercy stems from the theological acceptance that humans are innately susceptible to the corruption of evil. His acknowledgement of Gandalf’s lesson leads him to the true comprehension of mercy and pity, but Sam takes longer to learn this lesson.

Sam’s unique loyalty and love for Frodo contrasts with his shortsighted and direct nature to result in what Tolkien calls “the most tragic moment in the Tale” (*Letters* 330). Although Hobbits embody Tolkien’s theme of redemption, Sam neglects to acknowledge the repressed humanity within Gollum:

Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired. A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate. Then he came back, and slowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee - but almost the touch was a caress. For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing. (*Two Towers* 382)

This scene allows the “old starved” Sméagol to temporarily overcome the corrupted Gollum, and this description highlights his humanity. Sméagol is “hungry”, “old, and tired,” and he could be easily likened to an “old weary hobbit.” Here, he is no longer a vile creature chasing greed and power but rather someone removed from “friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth”. Where Sam finds strength in his connection to the natural world and through Frodo, Sméagol has been long removed from his

community and his home. This lack of support leaves Sméagol spiritually “starved” and in dire need of love and pity.

Despite this crucial and sensitive moment, Sam awakens from sleep and questions Sméagol in an accusing tone. Sam’s lack of sensitivity and pity cause him to jump to the conclusion that Sméagol’s intent is to harm Frodo. Unfortunately, as Tolkien highlights as “the most tragic moment in the Tale”, Sam’s accusation causes Sméagol to recoil and withdraw from whence he came, and Gollum emerges “almost spider-like he looked now, crouched back on his bent limbs, with his protruding eyes. The fleeting moment had passed, beyond recall” (*Two Towers* 382). His glimmer of repentance fades, and his humanity recedes into the depths of his consciousness thereby solidifying his corrupted nature.

Sam’s rash judgement and inability to recognize the Humanity within Gollum demonstrates the instrumental weight of the virtue Charity. Having love for all creatures of Creation lays the foundation for Sam’s final moral trial. His single mindedness, and perhaps ignorance, bars him from perceiving Gollum’s repentance, which destroys any trust Sméagol had in that moment for Frodo. Tolkien examines Sam’s inability to sense the humanity within Gollum in the following passage:

Sam was cocksure, and deep down a little conceited; but his conceit had been transformed by his devotion to Frodo. He did not think of himself as heroic or even brave, or in any way admirable—except in his service and loyal to his master. That had an ingredient (probably inevitable) of pride and possessiveness: it is difficult to exclude it from the devotion of those who perform such service. In any case it prevented him from fully understanding the master that he loved, and from following him in his gradual education to the nobility of service to the unlovable and of perception of damaged good in the corrupt. (*Letters* 329)

Sam gives his whole being into serving Frodo, but because of this, he neglects to serve “the unlovable”. Sam’s innocence and ignorance prevents him from seeing “the damaged good” within the fallen hobbit. His reactionary assumption of ill-will implies judgment, which acts in opposition to the Christian virtue. Despite this spiritual tragedy, Sam eventually learns what it means to pity “the corrupt”.

After this “failure” within *Two Towers*, Sam eventually reaches an understanding of Charity, and this insight illustrates his embodiment of all three theological virtues. Once Sam experiences the spiritual weight of the Ring after Shelob, he realizes the universality of corruption and begins to sympathize with Sméagol. In *The Return of the King*, Sam is finally able to demonstrate his comprehension of pity:

Sam’s hand wavered. His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved; and also it seemed the only safe thing to do. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum’s shriveled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again. But Sam had no words to express what he felt. (*Return* 246)

Although Sam still judges Gollum as a “treacherous, murderous creature”, his ability to empathize with Gollum fosters a small sliver of restraint. Finally understanding Gollum’s inability “to find peace or relief ever in life again” oppose Sam’s previous conception of the nature of evil. To highlight Sam’s shock from this realization, Tolkien depicts him as having “no words to express what he felt”. In this moment, Sam perceives the nature of corruption and accepts the necessity of pity and mercy for fellow humans. His understanding of the nature of evil through Gollum affords him a higher spiritual realization for the virtue of Love.

Charity, I argue, exists as the heart of social dynamics within the primary world. Understanding that Humans are inherently imperfect paves the avenue for all Humans to have sympathy and even empathy for others. The immediate applicability of charitable action makes it the most tangible virtue. Sam's eventual realization of Charity completes his spiritual journey and solidifies his emergence as a Christianized hero within Middle-earth.

Conclusion

As the root predecessor of the modern fantasy genre, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* offers a peak into the moral complexities of the human condition. Sam, as a Christianized hero, embodies themes of growth through cultivation and conscious action. Regardless of religious connotations, viewing morality as a personal process instead of the traditional good and evil binary affords modern thinkers to examine the nature of evil as a primitive perspective. Because the human mind is limited, in relation to the omniscient, one person can never fully understand the struggles of another. Morality thus exists within the individual, and this perspective contradicts modern understandings of right and wrong.

The examination of morality, rooted in mythology, unveils the implicit cultural dynamics of ancient communities and introduces modern perspectives to complicate our current vision of morality. Although Pagan and Christian perspectives exist on a spectrum of morality, the transitional period, as exhibited in Tolkien's work, highlights the seemingly contrasting values. By familiarizing ourselves with the religious and theological backgrounds of these ancient cultures, modern audiences can contemplate and assess the innerworkings of our own communities.

Modern pop culture, especially during the time of my writing, is obsessed with fantastical depictions of the human condition. The mass consumption of these seemingly larger than life icons illustrate the modern interest and applications of these age-old fascinations. Our culture remains fascinated with concepts surrounding hero dynamics and morality, so we are not finished with exploring heroics just yet.

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