

THE RIGHT STUFF: THE QUALITIES OF TOLKIENIAN HEROES AND ENEMIES
AND THEIR MEDIEVAL ROMANCE PREDECESSORS

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Right Stuff: The Qualities of Tolkienian Heroes and Enemies and their Medieval
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This paper closely examines the heroic Men and villainous enemies of J. R. R. Tolkien's works, describing in detail the qualities that are required of each. It also draws comparisons between Tolkien's characters and their medieval romance predecessors, showing that Tolkien borrows heavily from that tradition for inspiration. This paper asks what makes a hero; what makes a villain? But while it highlights the clear cut definitions of what it requires to be considered a hero or villain, it also brings light to the questions regarding the goodness or wickedness associated with these archetypal figures. Here, it is argued that Tolkien did not simply choose the medieval romance genre in order to imitate it; he chose it in order to enhance it. The romance draws a clear line between the hero and his enemies, but rarely develops the characters sufficiently to allow the reader to judge their moral qualities. There is a grey area that the romance shows, where the hero is not always good and the enemy is kept too far out of reach for the reader to examine closely, making it easy to call them bad, but more difficult to actually prove it. Tolkien

takes advantage of this grey area and expands on it. He gives detailed histories to many of his villains, as with his heroes. He allows the reader to explore all characters. And he has created a universe where pure evil cannot exist, where evil is only goodness corrupted. He makes all of his characters morally ambiguous at times, which not only makes them more interesting to his readers, but makes them more relatable as well.

Introduction

In the mind of a child, there are only two kinds of characters in stories: the good guys and the bad guys. Despite this necessary distinction, or perhaps because of it, there are always certain questions following it. If so-and-so is good, why is he good? What makes him good? What must he then do to prove that he is good? Additionally, if so-and-so is bad, why is he bad? What makes him bad? Can he ever change? Although this starts with a very simple and generalizing distinction, it becomes rather complicated when one starts to examine the actual qualities of the good or bad characters. What about them makes them good or bad? Can they change? Suddenly we find ourselves wondering if any one character can be wholly good or bad, and what made them this way. Or maybe we should really be asking ourselves, why they *have* to be that way. Why is there a need for a hero? Why is there a need for a villain? Where does this need come from? These distinct character types are ancient. It seems that there has always been a fascination with right and wrong. And, of course, we always want to align ourselves with the hero. We want to see our own qualities in him and his in us. So, there must also be a villain who we can align with our own enemies and who can share their qualities. If a child requires these distinctions to be made, then clearly this desire is a primitive human one. Therefore, it makes sense that in many of the greatest stories ever told, there are clearly distinguishable heroes and villains. The stories told by J. R. R. Tolkien are no exception to this rule, yet Tolkien does not stop with simply making these distinctions; Tolkien asks why and how and what if. Tolkien determines what makes these characters align with good or bad; he chooses what characteristics definitively fit in one category or the other; he also finds the grey area and questions whether all heroes are *truly* good and if all enemies are *genuinely* bad.

The works of J. R. R. Tolkien are extremely well known and vastly popular, more so perhaps after the recent success of the film version of the Trilogy. It seems only logical then, that there would be an increase in Tolkien studies and criticism, and yet while it is more available, it is by no means abundant. Many critics focus the entirety of their attention to the popular Trilogy and heed very little his other works; many of these, mostly published posthumously, are incredibly detailed and expressly highlight his skills as what Thomas Gasque, in his essay “Tolkien: The Monsters and the Critters,” calls him, “a philologist and medieval scholar” that is “steeped in traditional northern mythology” (152). Tolkien studies vary on a range of topics on “the basic questions about such matters as genre, influences, sources, relationships, and the like” according to Neil Isaacs in his introduction to *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, “On the Possibilities of Writing Tolkien Criticism” (3). It is widely acknowledged that Tolkien was influenced greatly by his studies in mythology and medieval literature, but criticism and literary analysis rarely go beyond general themes and commonalities. My interest, and the purpose of this analysis, is in completing a detailed character study of Tolkien’s heroes and enemies, primarily within *The Silmarillion*, though with additional reference to his other works, and specifically regarding the race of Men. In this character study, I intend to draw out the influence of the medieval romance heroes and enemies, as predecessors for Tolkien’s; yet, my focus is not so much in connecting the two, but in showing how Tolkien’s heroic Men and their wicked counterparts fit into the archetypal modes to which the romance also adheres. I plan on exploring the typical characteristics associated with the Tolkienian hero and villain. I intend on showing how certain heroes and villains seems to flawlessly fit into a specific mode, while others diverge, challenging the expectations of the reader. In the same vein, I will discuss how

the expectations of these characters match those of the heroes and villains of medieval romance and how both genres have unique exceptions that perhaps make them all the more interesting.

It is not difficult to see that Tolkien borrows and changes certain archetypal features of the medieval romance hero and villain, but it is also important to consider what is appealing to him about these characters, how his work relates to its predecessors, and why he changes very specific items regarding his characters. What does this suggest about the changes in the desires of his audience as opposed to the audiences of the romance? What does this imply about Tolkien's own preferences about these characters and how they should be viewed? So, before drawing a comparison between the archetypes of Tolkien's heroes and enemies and that of the medieval romance, one ought to know a little bit about the expectations of these figures. Since the overall goal of this paper is to describe, in detail, the Tolkienian hero and enemy, perhaps it would be fitting to first explore the characteristics typically associated with the heroes and villains of medieval romance.

The romance hero is very often a product of noble birth or lineage, described in terms of physical beauty as being fair and often fairest, departs on his quest due to some prompting of either necessity to reclaim his family or personal name or fortune or to win the hand of a maiden, and must succeed in defeating supernatural or nearly supernatural beings before he may make his return journey. He is often tested in his worth through his mental and physical capabilities, his loyalty to God and king, and his overall moral fiber. Additionally, he often either carries some sort of talisman for luck, power, or recognition, or must win one after completing some monumental task. While these characteristics may not specifically belong to only the medieval romance, they generally work,

particularly in regards to chivalric knightly heroes, with exceptions, of course. While some heroes entirely fit this description, many only match it in certain points, and some heroes fail to meet most of these expectations, which begs one to ask if they are in fact a hero after all. As for the enemies, in the medieval romance, as with Tolkien's works, they vary in degrees of wickedness and ability. There are supernatural villains with intellectual capabilities like faeries and fiends, motivated by self-interest and there are supernatural creatures lacking intellectual ability like oversized animals and mythical creatures which may or may not have any motivation for their destructive behavior. There are also enemies found in nature such as other men, frequently foreign and non-Christian, and beasts, that while lacking motivation or intention for wickedness, are simply associated with evil due to their general unpleasantness. Motivation seems like the most important qualifier for evil, yet some villains are just shells, and their motivation eludes the hero and the reader.

For Tolkien's heroes and villains, I propose using the same series of qualifiers as with the characters found in medieval romance. In doing so, I intend on tracing the stories and the specific matching or varying characteristics of three of Tolkien's most famous heroes of Men. The first two, Aragorn and Beren, will be described in terms of how they fit into the majority of the aforementioned archetypal traits. The third hero, Túrin, will be viewed as the hero that diverges in certain respects from this archetype; his character is substantially flawed and his story ends in tragedy, yet in some respects he still has very specific predecessors in the medieval tradition. I will not only show how these heroes stand up to form a specific type, the Tolkienian hero, but how they bring life to Tolkien's vision of the medieval heroes of old. In regards to the enemies, I will define the various types of enemies found in the stories of these three heroes. I will show their

relationships with the hero and how their abilities and motives contribute to their level of wickedness. I will also make comparisons to their medieval predecessors, in order to show how Tolkien borrows from the tradition, yet makes his characters simultaneously new and recognizable. In this paper, I am going to not only look at what these characters are, but what they may stand for, and in some cases why Tolkien or the authors of medieval romance found them so befitting of their work.

The Tolkienian Hero

Tolkien's lays are reminiscent of medieval romance; therefore, it stands to reason that his character types ought to also maintain an air of resemblance to the characters of these distant predecessors. Studying three particular tales, *Of Aragorn and Arwen*, *The Lay of Leithian*, and *Of Túrin Turambar*, I will draw connections between the types of characteristics that are typical in Tolkien's heroes and those of medieval romance. Though each hero has unique qualities, there are also certain unmistakable connections between them, tying them together. Here, I will describe the standard and unique characteristics of the Tolkienian hero and recall their medieval counterparts. The heroes that I focus on specifically belong to the race of Men and their characteristics are uniquely their own, as opposed to the characteristics of Elven, Dwarvish, or Hobbit heroes. Additionally, these heroes, aside from Aragorn, belong to Tolkien's collection of First and Second Age stories, primarily found in *The Silmarillion* and other works that delve into the history of Middle-earth, as opposed to the Third Age described in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Aragorn, however, shares many characteristics with the Men of previous ages and his story is directly linked to the story of Beren, making him an appropriate choice as an enforcer of Tolkien's heroic type. The idea that these are somewhat ancient heroes, found in history and legend, perhaps explains why Tolkien makes them so relatable to the heroes of medieval romance, particularly the knightly heroes. In effect, this section is meant to focus entirely on the hero, his characteristics, his woes, his accomplishments, and essentially what it is that makes him the hero.

In order to address each hero, it is necessary to detail the characteristics of the typical Tolkienian hero. I will break it down into four sometimes-overlapping aspects: lineage, purpose, physical appearance and behavioral traits, and tokens. Tolkien's heroes

are often Men of noble blood, meaning they either come from royalty or their familial line is otherwise noteworthy among Men and Elves. His heroes are typically descendants of a long line of great Men. They are, almost without fail, always Men of high quality ancestry and magnificence seems to run in their blood. In addition to their familial qualifiers, these heroes must have some sort of driving force, a goal, a purpose. Many times this involves resolving a family feud, bringing honor back to one's family, or gaining honor for one's own self in order to match that of one's family expectations. Other times this involves avenging a loved one, settling a debt, or gaining the approval of another. Very often it involves the need to prove themselves to the father or guardian of the woman they seek to marry. The hero, himself, must also be recognizable and heroic in appearance. This means that they are often exceedingly attractive, even when weatherworn or grim. They are frequently described as fair, though also strong or tall, and the choice eye color is grey, as it denotes wisdom. Even in disguise, they are unable to hide the brightness, wisdom, or pity in their eyes. Cares may weigh on them, but when dressed properly and in the right environment, they appear more glorious than any other mortal man and compare in splendor to Elf lords. Lastly, the hero often is in possession of one or more tokens that serve to further set them apart as the hero. These tokens may be heirlooms, emblems, weapons, or garbs. They serve to remind the hero of their past, maintain them in the present, and guide them on the path to meeting their destiny. They represent loved ones and achievements, or sometimes woe. They have practical applications and symbolic significance as well. These attributes of Tolkien's heroes can also apply, in many cases, to the hero character type of medieval romance. I will now dissect three distinct heroes from Tolkien's works, examining them based on the aforementioned qualifications. I will show how two of his heroes are typical of this

heroic archetype in his works, while one diverges in several interesting ways.

Additionally, I will introduce heroes of medieval romance that share in these traits and perhaps function as the predecessors to the Tolkienian hero.

The first typical characteristic of the archetypal Tolkienian hero is that he must have what W. H. Auden in his essay “The Quest Hero” calls “the right qualities of breeding” (44). Essentially this suggests that in order for the man to be considered a hero, he must in some way come from nobility. His ancestry must include Men of great renown, insisting that greatness is in the blood. This idea is not unique to Tolkien; in fact, it is very prevalent in medieval romance. In most cases, the romance hero descends from a line of knights or royalty, with few exceptions. These men, themselves, are often knights or kings and are highly connected to other great figures such as emperors or popes. There appears to be an expectation that goodness is a characteristic that can be passed genetically along with other traits that might set one up to be worthy of heroic action. Consider the hero King Horn, who is described as having none “his iliche” (ll. 20) to match him in valor or worth. He is the son of King Murry, a “gode King” (ll. 33) who died protecting his kingdom from the invading Saracens. Like his father, it is in Horn’s genes to be a good king and a fierce warrior.¹

It is apparent that the writers of these romances would have believed that a person’s destiny is predetermined by one’s genetics, yet what might be the reason for such ideas? It may simply be the idea that one carries certain predetermined tendencies and behavioral traits in their genetic makeup, though medieval writers certainly could not be aware of this. There is also the idea that people tend to imitate the behavioral patterns

¹ Yet, goodness is not the only trait that might be passed on from father to son. In the story of Sir Gowther, the reader learns that he was begotten of a “felturd fende” (ll. 74) of which it is suggested that he inherits his early infamous habits such as murdering the “men of holy kirke” (ll. 170) and raping the inhabitants of the “nonry” (ll. 182).

of those they are surrounded by, particularly in youth. Yet, again, this is unsatisfactory because in many instances, the hero is bereft of his family in his infancy and could not possibly have been personally affected by the habits and manners of his parents. Several romance heroes are considered foundlings and do not know their heritage until they are adults, much past the developmental stages that support the idea of environment determining heroic qualification. So, maybe the answer lies in the author, as opposed to the story. Due to the feudal conditions of Europe at this time, perhaps this is an expression of the possibly engrained idea that one's class, not necessarily their genetics, determines their future. A knight is not likely to be born of a peasant. A peasant does not have the time or the inclination for great deeds. Essentially, one needs time and money to go off on heroic quests; therefore one must be born into nobility in order to have the means to become a hero.

This may answer the reasons why the medieval romance heroes are born high, but it does not sufficiently determine the reason that Tolkien chose to make his heroes nobility. Certainly, in the twentieth century, when Tolkien was writing, the reader did not want or expect the hero to be nobility or royalty. In fact, there is often a desire for the hero to spring from the common people. This notion may also be shared by Tolkien, in certain respects, particularly if one considers that, according to Rose A. Zimbardo's "Moral Vision in *The Lord of the Rings*," "the heroes in every courageous enterprise, those against all expectation prove to be most durable in the face of evil, are hobbits" (100-1), at least in the trilogy. Yet, when building the hero of yesteryear, Tolkien cannot, according to George Clark's "J. R. R. Tolkien and the True Hero," "rid himself of his desire for the glorious heroes of old" (39). For him, it does not appear to be an issue of

class, but a desire to create the perfect hero figure composed from the heroes that he inherited. These heroes have noble lineages, so too must his.

Now that the question of why is answered, it is time to determine the question of how. Are the heroic Men, of Tolkien's world, predetermined by their bloodlines to be heroes? To explore this question I intend to look at the three heroes mentioned previously, Aragorn, Beren, and Túrin, in order to examine their lineage and how it functions in their role as hero. Additionally, in the case of Túrin, I will show how his family history predetermines his role as the tragic hero and functions as the crux of his character flaws.

The first hero is Aragorn, son of Arathorn, ultimately the King of Gondor and Arnor. Aragorn's story is intertwined with the tale of the War of the Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* and is described in more detail in Appendix A of the trilogy, in the fifth section. Tolkien describes the lineage and youth of Aragorn, prior to the War of the Ring and his imminent kingship. Aragorn is a direct descendent of the kings of Gondor and of the people descended from the union of Beren and Lúthien. According to Marion Zimmer Bradley, in her essay "Men, Halflings, and Hero-worship," Aragorn is "the 'born hero' – son of a long line of Kings, born to achieve great deeds in his time" (117). Here, one can see that Aragorn is born into a great family and it is expected, in turn, that he will do great things. Yet, not only is his bloodline noble, but he is raised by an Elf, Elrond, who is widely known for his great wisdom and worth. Aragorn is therefore, by blood and by rearing, not a common man. There is something of the supernatural in him and it gives him uncommon foresight, strength, and goodness. He clearly has a destiny. Therefore, without even meeting the character, the reader should come to expect him to be a hero.

His ancestry and fostering determine his high place in life, despite the near destruction and deprecation of his kin.

Not the least important of Aragorn's ancestors is the second hero that I look to, Beren, son of Barahir, of the house of Bëor. The story of Beren is found in full, in poetic form, in the "Ley of Leithian", in the posthumous volume *The Lays of Beleriand*, and in prose in *The Silmarillion*. Beren's story is entwined with the story of the Silmarils and also serves as a predecessor for the story of Aragorn. Beren, like Aragorn, is a man of high lineage and his lover is an Elf maiden, Lúthien. Beren's paternal line is highly regarded among Men and Elves. The people of this tribe are known to have dark hair and grey eyes, to be "eager of mind, cunning-handed, swift in understanding, long in memory, and they were moved sooner to pity than to laughter" (*The Silmarillion*, 174). These are traits inherited by Beren. Unlike Aragorn, Beren was raised by his father and knows his own bloodline, yet he is separated from his family and knows that he must avenge his father's death and restore their nobility and prestige. His father, being an elf-friend, is connected with the great Elf lord, Finrod Felagund and so too does Beren share in this friendship. The lineage of Beren is great and the expectations of him are also.

The third and final hero is Túrin Turambar. The story of Túrin can be found in both *The Silmarillion* and *The Children of Húrin*, and is much different from other Tolkienian heroes. Túrin's story is considerably darker and his character, itself, is gloomy and tragic. He is associated with doom and his quest focuses mainly on avoiding his own destiny, rather than fulfilling it. However, like the other heroes, Túrin has many of the qualifying characteristics for being considered a hero, preeminently, his lineage. Túrin is the son of Húrin, the lord of Dor-lómin. Húrin is great among Men and is a particular thorn in the side of Morgoth, the dark lord. Túrin's mother, Morwen, is the

daughter of Baragund of the house of Bëor, making her, and him, kin to Beren. His family is known to be enemies of Morgoth and of the Easterlings (Men of the East who are in allegiance with the dark lord). In his early childhood, Túrin's father is taken captive by Morgoth and his home is overrun by Easterlings. His mother sends him to Thingol for protection. Thingol takes in Túrin and raises him as his foster son. He is thus linked very closely to the Elves of Thingol's realm. Based on both his bloodline and his royal and Elvish upbringing, Túrin is clearly nobility and has the promise of greatness inside him. However, aside from greatness, he also harbors a great curse. Like the evil that Sir Gowther inherits from his fiendish sire, Túrin inherits the evil of his own family. His father and all of his kin are made to bear a curse of Morgoth and Túrin is destined to fulfill it. In fact, it is this curse that leads to Túrin's ultimate downfall and what labels him as a tragic hero. While the idea of incest is notable in medieval romance (Sir Degaré, for example, nearly sleeps with his own mother), it is always avoided, even if just narrowly. Túrin is not so fortunate. Growing up away from his family, he does not recognize his own sister, when Nienor, struck with memory loss, crosses paths with him. They mistake their feelings of closeness with love and he marries his own sister. This causes both Túrin and Nienor to commit suicide when they discover the truth.

The second characteristic of the Tolkienian hero that is worth noting is their goal or purpose, the driving force behind the actions that the hero takes. The hero does not just go out and perform great deeds for no reason. Heritage alone cannot make a hero; certain situations must be available and certain criteria must be met. According to Auden in "The Quest Hero," there are six "essential elements" in the "typical Quest story" of which he characterizes the work of Tolkien (44). The first element, which is relevant here, describes the motivation for the quest as being "a precious Object and /or Person to

be found and possessed or married.” Auden’s claim, that the goal of the quest is typically to retrieve an “object” or “person”, can certainly be the very basic idea behind the actions of Tolkien’s heroes, yet there are additional motivations for embarking on a heroic quest. Aside from retrieving an object or rescuing a person, the heroes in Tolkien’s work tend to have a very specific enemy to face, a family name to live up to, and a desire for the greatness that will allow them to reclaim their rightful heritage, avenge a wrong, or marry their lover. These motivations are also frequently expressed by the heroes of medieval romance. Firstly, the desire for the hero to reclaim a kingdom is often a propellant for the heroic quest. Horn, for instance, is banished from his homeland and his rightful kingdom, set upon the sea to drown by the Saracens.

“Yef thus mote to live go
 And thine feren also,
 Yef hit so bi falle,
 Ye sholde slen us alle:
 Tharvore thu most to stere,
 Thu and thine ifere;
 To schupe schulle ye funde,
 And sinke to the grunde.
 The se you schal adrenche,
 Ne schal hit us nocht ofthinche.” (ll. 101-10)

In order to regain his lands, he must prove himself worthy in combat, particularly under allegiance to others. He shows his military prowess and ultimately works his way towards his final combat against the Saracens that took his land. However, reclaiming a kingdom is not the only reason that a man is motivated to heroic deeds; another reason, as is often the case, is to win the affection of a woman and the approval of her father. Keeping with Horn, the other reason for his wanting to fight is Rymenhild, “the brighte” (ll. 394); marriage with her is desirable, but might only be achieved if he earns the blessing of her father and proves that not only is he a good knight, but he can properly

provide for the king's daughter. The hero cannot take a worthy wife until he proves himself to be worthy of her. The reasons are thus fairly self-explanatory as to why these are the main motives for heroic action. A man cannot make a good knight or king if he does not have the ability to function as a leader in battle. A man does not deserve the associations of a good name if he does not earn the reputation befitting it. A man cannot make a good husband if he cannot prove that he is brave enough and strong enough to care for a wife.

As for the how, like in *King Horn*, Tolkien's heroes are motivated to action for various reasons including the desire for renown, avenging a loss or fulfilling an oath, and winning the hand of their lady love. Aragorn has more than one purpose for his heroics. First, he is the heir to the throne of Gondor and, as such, must reclaim his birthright and his people, from the tyranny and oppression plaguing them from the ever-growing dark hand of Sauron. In order to prove himself in his final standoff against the dark lord, he must encounter various minor enemies throughout his life. In order to understand how to lead his people, he must serve under other great lords or alongside other great warriors. He goes into the wild when he is approximately twenty years old, yet does not see the defeat of Sauron until he is in his eighties (his lifespan is much greater than the average man). He battles against orcs and various other fell beasts. He learns the ways and weaknesses of the evil peoples in the South and East. He befriends the wise and strong among Men, Elves, Dwarves, Wizards, and even Hobbits. His entire life, before his confrontation at the gates of Mordor, is in preparation for that final showdown. His second object is the hand of Arwen, the elven maiden and daughter of his foster father, Elrond. Meeting Arwen in the woods, he fell in love with her almost instantly. His intention to marry her is clear, but Elrond does not offer his willing consent; rather, he

tells Aragorn that he must achieve immeasurable greatness if he is to win her hand. He must defeat Sauron and reclaim Gondor. His journey, henceforth, is motivated by fulfilling his destiny and his greatest wish. He must become the king in order to become the proper husband.

Beren, like Aragorn, has several motivations for proving himself heroic, such as his familial obligations. Upon learning of the death of his father, Beren swears an “oath of vengeance” (*The Silmarillion*, 192), seeks the party of orcs that attacked his people, and slays the orc captain who killed Barahir. After this, he is besieged with grief and yet knows that he must hasten to a safer land, so he travels to Doriath, passing through dark lands of “horror and madness” (193) where his valor is tested by unnamed monsters. While, his desire to avenge his father is the initial reason for beginning his quest, it is merely a catalyst leading to his ultimate adventure. Once he reaches the realm of the Elves, he encounters Lúthien and is smitten immediately. Yet, her father, the King Thingol, does not approve of the union between them. Of course, it is now clear that his sole mission in life is to win the approval of Thingol so that he can marry Lúthien, but in order to dissuade Beren, the Elf king sends him on an impossible quest, to retrieve one of the silmarils from the crown of Morgoth and bring it back to him. However, rather than this discouraging Beren, he accepts the quest, thus preparing to fulfill his own destiny and bring honor to his name, making him free to marry Lúthien. He does, in the end, succeed in capturing the silmaril, though it and his hand are consumed by a monstrous wolf; but, his action softens Thingol’s heart and he is permitted to marry Lúthien.

Túrin’s quest is unlike that of Aragorn or Beren, in that he has no female motivator, and though vengeance is part of it, he seems to concern himself mostly with avoiding his fate. He is often in battle, but rarely does he seem to have much purpose.

He is consistently hiding from himself. He changes his name several times because he does not want to be associated with his true identity. He often refers to himself as wronged, bloodstained, and cursed. His journey ultimately leads to him finding himself and being confronted by his name; but unlike the other heroes, he functions throughout his story without coming to terms with himself. He is a great warrior and his deeds are frequently done for others' sakes; however, Túrin sheds a lot of blood, battles fiercely as if it gives him pleasure, and fails to heed the advice of those wiser than him. In this sense, rather than likening him to Horn, he most resembles the medieval romance hero Sir Gowther. Gowther not only appears to enjoy battle, but, like Túrin, hides his own identity for much of his story. As part of his penance, he is forced to be mute, speaking not for "evyll ne gud" (ll. 298). He also disguises himself while in battle against the Saracens, donning three different suits of armor for the three different days, so as not to take credit for his valor. Both Gowther and Túrin are darker heroes and not quite as wholesome as some of their counterparts. They have a curse on them because of their family. Gowther eventually overcomes his evils and becomes a more admirable figure, worthy of societal praise and celebration; Túrin cannot overcome his and falls prey to his tragic fate.

The third qualifying characteristic of the Tolkienian hero is that his appearance must be noticeably more beautiful than other Men, even if sometimes sterner, and his demeanor must be patient, wise, and morally upright. In regards to physical beauty, most of Tolkien's heroes are noted to have grey eyes, fair skin, and are often exceedingly handsome when properly adorned. They are beyond compare with other Men, and are frequently described in terms of elven beauty. In medieval romance, the hero is almost always described as "fair." Gowther is described as the "feyryst that ever y sye" (ll. 340)

upon entering the Emperor's court. Horn is credited as being "faireste / And of wit the beste" (ll. 177-8) and because of this is spared by the Saracens. Nearly every romance hero is noted for his physical beauty and it seems to be attributed to his other characteristics as well. Gowther is not called fair or described in any positive terms, physically, until he repents and chooses to have a better moral character. At that point, even when pretending to be mute and when fighting in full armor, he is unable to hide his beauty. Horn, is beautiful from the start and this is reflective of his exemplary character. The hero is called fair, in order to emphasize his physical appeal; but this is almost always directly related to him having a fine character. This comes from the concept that outer beauty represents inner beauty. The hero must have inner goodness and if this is so, it will show in his outer appearance as well. Particularly for Tolkien's characters, this is represented in a polarizing of the physical coloring of his characters. The fair, light skinned characters are almost always inclined towards goodness. The heroes have a shining inner light that can sometimes even be seen in their eyes. On the other hand, the darker characters are lacking this inner light and goodness, so their physical appearance becomes dark and shadowy, symbolizing the extinguished or nonexistent illuminating soul.

For Tolkien's hero Aragorn, these characteristic traits regarding his physical beauty and its relationship to his virtues are fairly clear and consistent. Physical descriptions of Aragorn are given throughout his narrative and within the trilogy. As a young man of approximately twenty, he is called "fair and noble and was early to come to manhood" (*The Lord of the Rings*, 1057). Yet after years of toil in the wilderness, he is described as "grim to look upon, unless he chanced to smile", though he is said to have "a light in his eyes" despite being "sad and stern" (1060). But when he is dressed in fine

clothes he appears “more than any kind of Men” and “seemed rather an Elflord from the Isles of the West” (1060). Frequently called tall and grim, Aragorn is formidable in battle; and despite his often worn clothing, he has an inner greatness, noticed by friend and foe, in his expressions and grey eyes. It seems that regardless of his shabby raiment, he is unable to conceal his heroic features, suggesting that there is something innate in his appearance that cannot be completely masked by costume or behavior. Neither dirt and rags, nor armor and helmets can hide the true identity of the hero. Yet, for all his physical beauty, Aragorn’s most attractive features are his bravery and valor, his kindness and fairness, and his wisdom and patience, all attributes of a great king and worthy friend.

Like Aragorn, Beren’s physical description is no less important than his bloodline. Beren is known to have dark hair and grey eyes. His life is hard and battles are not kind to him. As a young man he is called “grey and bowed” (*The Silmarillion*, 193) and before he is resurrected he is “one-handed” and “graven in his face” (216). Oddly enough, however, he is not praised for his physical beauty or fairness. Tolkien does not focus on Beren’s appearance, though he emphasizes it in other characters. This is strange, but one must consider that Beren’s story is not just his; he shares his story with Lúthien. Lúthien, is so frequently noted for her beauty, that Beren must surely pale in comparison. Beren does, however, belong to a line of Men that are recognized by their fair features and noble mien, so it is implied that he shares in this familial trait. For Beren, it is his bravery and determination that are his most valuable features.

As with Aragorn and Beren, the appearance of Túrin is rather important in classifying him as a hero. He is described as “fair and strong” though “marked with sorrow” (*The Silmarillion*, 237), before he even reaches manhood. At seventeen he dons

his armor for the first time and seeks battle. By twenty, he is described as “unkempt” and “wayworn” (238). After his unfortunate role in the death of an elf, he leaves Thingol and joins a group of outlaws, quickly becoming their leader. At this point he is seen as “hard” and “stubborn” (240). Once he reaches full manhood, he is often referred to as being “very tall” (247) and even “tall and terrible” (254). Despite this, he is also described as “dark-haired and pale-skinned, with grey eyes, and his face more beautiful than any other among mortal Men” (251). Yet, this cursed hero is often plighted by trouble and after accidentally killing his friend he is seen as “crazed and unwitting” (249), with grief “graven on [his] face” that “never faded” (249). Túrin’s physical appearance is so frequently mentioned, that it is hard not to notice. He is simultaneously beautiful and grief-stricken, fair and terrible, dark and pale. His appearance would certainly not go unnoticed. It also links him closely to his heritage, his physical appearance being so much a signifier of his family line. Túrin is marked as fair and tall but also sorrowful and terrible, indicating that he is destined to be great, but troubled.

The fourth and final necessary signifier of the Tolkienian hero is that the hero figure is in some way tied to some sort of token or talisman. The token can be either the reason for the quest, as suggested by Auden, as a means of accomplishing the quest, or as a reward for accomplishing the quest. Tokens range from magic rings to cursed swords, suits of armor to priceless jewels. The purposes of the tokens vary depending on the individual and the token itself, but in general, they serve as emblems, heirlooms, or as practical and functioning items. This is no different for the knightly heroes of medieval romance. Gowther wears three symbolic suits of armor while doing his penance. In his first battle with the Saracens he appears at his chamber door, wearing “armur, is sted was blacke color” (ll. 412). In his second battle he is “areyd in red, / Bothe his armur and his

sted” (ll. 483-4). In his final battle he appears dressed in garments “mylke whyte” (ll. 563). His armor is not only symbolic of his penance and his journey to become a hero that serves God, but it has a practical function as well. In the story of *Sir Degaré*, Degaré is given “a paire glove” (ll. 194) to be recognized by his mother and a “swerd” with a broken head to be recognized by his father. In this story, the tokens are heirlooms and serve as physical objects of recognition for the hero and his kin. In both these cases, the object is significant to the hero, but not the reason for or only means of achieving the quest. In the story of *Sir Orfeo*, his wife is kidnapped by a faerie king and he has to get her back. As it turns out, the only means he has of rescuing his wife is with the help of his token, his harp. In playing for the faerie king, his music is “so swete” (ll. 442) that the king makes him an offer:

“Menstrel, me liketh wel this gle.
 Now aske of me what it be,
 Largelich ichil the pay;
 Now speke, and tow might away.” (ll. 449-52)

Orfeo wishes for his wife and the faerie king consents. Here, the token is pivotal in the hero obtaining his desire and fulfilling his quest.

Magic tokens are an obvious part of Tolkien’s body of work, but it must be noted that rings are not the only tokens of value or of supernatural merit for Aragorn. There is, in his case, the heirloom. For Aragorn, when he comes into manhood, he is told who he really is and he is given his family heirlooms, the Ring of Barahir and the shards of Narsil. He is also shown the Sceptre of Annuminas, though it is withheld from him until he earns it (*The Lord of the Rings*, 1057). The ring is significant in that it represents his kinship with Elrond’s people, his distant connection to the Elves. The shards are significant because they are remnants of the sword wielded by his ancestor, Isildor, who

cut the ring from Sauron's hand. It directly links him to the rule of Gondor and also binds him to the war with Sauron. Once re-forged, it will represent the reforming of the line of kings. The sceptre is something he must strive for. These tokens are direct links between his past and his future. They are what make him recognizable to his friends and foes. They are reminders of duty or loyalty, and sometimes of hope and love.

While Aragorn maintains family heirlooms as his heroic tokens, Beren's tokens are badges of honor. He carries two particularly important tokens: the ring of Finrod Felegund and the silmaril. The ring symbolizes his friendship with the Elves, his loyalty to Finrod, his kinship to his father, and his bravery. The ring was earned by Barahir for his valor and Beren bears it as a reminder of the kind of man he has to be. It allows all who see it to know that he is Barahir's son and Finrod's friend. The silmaril is a powerful jewel that Beren briefly possesses, but represents a lot to him. First, it is a representative of the light of the Valar, which has since been lost, thus it is a prized possession that many Elves seek. Second, it is emblematic of Beren's action; he stole the jewel from Morgoth's crown, a deed no other man or elf could accomplish. Third, it is the sole requirement posed to him, by Thingol, in order to marry Lúthien. Though Beren only briefly possesses the silmaril, his missing hand serves as a constant reminder of the jewel and its meaning in his life.

As with Aragorn and Beren, Túrin also carries various tokens that hold significance to his particular brand of heroism. While Aragorn's heirlooms remind him of his destiny and Beren's emblems signify his bravery, Túrin's tokens are very linked to his role as a warrior and have very practical as well as symbolic functions. Túrin carries Gurthang, the black sword, and the Dragonhelm of Dor-lómin, his armor. The sword came to him when Beleg, his friend, rescued him from a party of orcs; however, in his

delirium, Túrin took the sword and slayed his friend. From then on, Túrin carried the sword as a reminder of what he had done. The sword is not only a symbol of his sin, however, because it is a uniquely crafted sword, one of only two that were ever made from the iron of a meteor. The craftsmanship and coloring of the sword make it very different from other swords and like Túrin, who carries a shadow on him, the sword also carries a dark memory. His armor, the Dragonhelm of Dor-lómin, foreshadows his faceoff with the dragon Glaurung, while simultaneously hiding and displaying his identity. Though the armor covers his body, it is known to be a family heirloom and reveals his identity to those who see him. Both the sword and the armor have symbolic meaning, but they are both equally practical. Túrin is constantly at battle and is known for his skills in fighting. These tokens support him in his deeds and wishes. The sword is the means of his destroying the dragon and also of his killing himself.

The Tolkienian hero indeed has many similar features to the medieval romance hero, yet at the same time, he seems to be perhaps what Tolkien would like the romance hero to be. Tolkien takes the formulaic characteristics from medieval and even earlier heroes and makes them his own. Aragorn and Beren may fit neatly into the hero package on the surface, but he gives them a depth that is not always present in a medieval narrative. These heroes are multidimensional; He gives them a personal history that is detailed. The reader can see that Aragorn grows up without his father and that he is filled with pride when he discovers his roots. Beren falls in love in the forest and stands there completely frozen for a season; he is so overcome by emotion. And then there is Túrin, the tragic hero. He fits the basic description of the hero, yet in every respect is tragically flawed. He is handsome, but somber. His family is noble, but cursed. He carries a powerful sword and helm, yet kills himself upon his own sword, after he slays the

dragon. He fights to protect his family, yet is the reason that his sister kills herself. He tries to do everything right and yet everything turns out wrong. Tolkien takes this hero and gives him such a complex story, making him both everything and nothing like the other heroes. He is, what Patricia Meyer Spacks, in her essay “Power and Meaning in *The Lord of the Rings*” describes as one who “operates under the shadow of fate” (85). His choices seem futile, yet only because he is tragic. The other heroes are also seemingly predestined to meet their fates, but seem triumphant in doing so, whereas Túrin’s story is “a very great story and most tragic” (*Letters*, 7).

The Tolkienian Enemy

Like Tolkien's heroes, who have certain stock characteristics and who share many of these with the heroes of medieval romance, his enemies also have a certain number of relatively general characteristics and qualifications that make them villains and mark their rank among them. In both traditions, with my primary focus on Tolkien's, I will explore the different types of enemies, what their general characteristics require, and what relates them to their medieval predecessors. I shall, as such, break the villains into the following categories: supernatural-sophisticated, supernatural-brutish, natural-sophisticated, and natural-brutish. The supernatural implying that the villain is not simply man or mortal, but either otherworldly, immortal, or fantastical. As to natural, I mean mostly being man or beast, found in nature and not requiring imagination, nor representing the fantastic. In regards to sophisticated or brutish, I suggest that some beings are intelligent, intentionally villainous, and have their own purposes for their villainy, whereas others are little more than trained animals, unmotivated foot soldiers, or choice-less slaves. Remaining with the three stories specified in the section on heroes, I will look at the various villains, categorize them accordingly, and determine the general components of the enemy's character type.

The supernatural-sophisticated enemies in the works of Tolkien are relatively common. He frequently creates beings with other-worldly abilities and insatiable appetites for evil-doing. While they vary in rank and ability, there are certain elements that they almost always have in common. The being is conscious; by that, I mean that it is aware of not only itself and its actions, but that its actions are wicked and affect others. The supernatural-sophisticated villain is conscious of the hurt that it inflicts and the damage it does, though it feels no remorse. The being is also self-motivated, or has its

own purpose or intentions regarding its deeds. Power, greed, revenge, and lust are frequent motivators for wickedness; yet, in some cases, the evil is done out of sheer hatred and malice, with no remotely justifiable reason to defend it. In any case, evil deeds are committed and the doer is more than aware of their actions. These enemies are also very intelligent, typically of human or above human levels of intelligence. They are capable of thoroughly thinking through the possible outcomes of their actions and can exhibit incredible patience while executing their plans. They are frequently manipulators, the so-called devil on the shoulder, and are cunning with their lies and truths. In addition to their villainous traits, these beings are of supernatural origin, making them even greater challenges to the mortal hero. The supernatural-sophisticated enemy is at least, if not more than, as powerful as a human. In many cases, they exhibit superhuman powers of foresight, insight, and incredible strength. They are long-lived, if not immortal, and despite their actions, can appear fair or at the very least impressive. They are usually solitary figures, though they sometimes work for or with others.

Tolkien's supernatural-sophisticated enemies are the top of the hierarchy in regards to his evil beings, but even this list has a specific ranking system among its members. The top of the list is the Satan-figure, Morgoth. Morgoth, originally Melkor, makes his appearance throughout *The Silmarillion*, and plays a key role in the War of the Jewels. He is the principle villain according to this history of the Elves. Created before Middle-earth, Morgoth is a Vala, and his desire for knowledge and power led to his fall, much like the figure of Lucifer in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This connection to the devil is made primarily due to the nature of his sin and fall, and according to Charles W. Nelson, in his essay "The Sins of Middle-earth: Tolkien's use of Medieval Allegory," Melkor's sin is pride. "Pride is the most ancient of evils and the worst of these offenses. It was,

after all, the sin of Lucifer” (86). His sheer hatred for the other creations of God, or Ilúvatar, is his motivation for destroying Middle-earth and its inhabitants, mostly Men and Elves. He wages war on the children of Ilúvatar, destroying anything that is good and trying to create his own beings in their stead. Yet his is unable to truly create, he can only corrupt or destroy.

Yet it is told among the Eldar that the Valar endeavoured ever, in spite of Melkor, to rule the Earth and to prepare it for the coming of the Firstborn; and they built lands and Melkor destroyed them; valleys they delved and Melkor raised them up; mountains they carved and Melkor threw them down; seas they hollowed and Melkor spilled them; and naught might have peace or come to lasting growth, for as surely as the Valar began a labour so would Melkor undo it or corrupt it. (*The Silmarillion*, 12)

Being one of the Valar, Morgoth has incredible power and strength, compared to any Mortal being. He is immortal, but unlike the Elves, he cannot be killed. His physical form can only be temporarily destroyed. Both Beren and Túrin have dealings with Morgoth, though Beren comes in direct contact with him, while Túrin deals primarily with his underlings. For Beren, Morgoth is the possessor of the Silmarils, of which he must obtain one in order to be permitted to marry Lúthien. So Morgoth must be faced head-on, and immediately Beren can feel his opponent’s power. Upon entering Angband, “upheld by horror, lit by fire, and filled with weapons of death and torment” (213), Beren freezes in his disguise in the presence of Morgoth. Lying upon the ground, like a “dead beast” (214), Beren is incapable of moving until Lúthien lulls Morgoth into a trance. Morgoth, though temporarily distracted, shows here that he can stop the hero without even speaking; he can control a man without rising from his seat. Additionally, Morgoth’s most influential power is in his power over others. He has many followers and creations, or rather “perversions or mockeries or counterfeits” (Zimbardo, 103), which do his bidding. He can manipulate even the strongest of heroes into doing his will.

His power extends beyond his immediate vicinity as well, as in the case of Túrin. He places a curse of Húrin and “all his kin” (*The Silmarillion*, 250), that comes to fruition with the unholy union of Túrin and his sister, and the subsequent suicides of both.

The second Tolkienian enemy, in rank, is Sauron, the Maia and first follower of Morgoth. Sauron is, like Morgoth, an angelic figure, though lower in rank. Like Morgoth, “Sauron had to fall from goodness” (Zimbardo, 105). He is therefore, nearly as powerful and his deeds and capabilities are similar. He, too, has an irreparable hate for the children of Ilúvatar and nothing pleases him more than to wage war upon them. He desires power and control over Middle-earth, which second to his sheer malice, is his primary reason for the actions he commits. He has an insight into the minds of Men and Elves, knowing their weaknesses and toying with them. He also is gifted with cunning and the ability to disguise his wickedness. In appearing fair, which is a physical trait often associated with the hero, he is able to lull Men and Elves into submission.

Of old there was Sauron the Maia, whom the Sindar in Beleriand named Gorthaur. In the beginning of Arda Melkor seduced him to his allegiance, and he became the greatest and most trusted of the servants of the Enemy, and the most perilous, for he could assume many forms, and for long if he willed he could still appear noble and beautiful, so as to deceive all but the most wary. (*The Silmarillion*, 341)

This is how he is able to learn the craft of ring-making from the Elves, and create his own ring to control them all. He can cast spells, create and command monsters, and occasionally appears in battle himself, making him a fierce opponent and a much feared one. His villainy appears in both the stories of Beren and of Aragorn. It is Sauron who captures Beren before he can reach Angband and Morgoth. He tortures him and slowly kills each of his companions. He casts a spell on Finrod, in order to imprison him. He even takes of the form of a werewolf when provoked into battling Huan, the greatest of

the race of dogs. His physical form can and has many times been destroyed, yet his blackened spirit does not cease until the ring is destroyed by Frodo Baggins in the War of the Ring. During said war, Sauron is labeled the principle villain against Aragorn and the free peoples of Middle-earth. “He is a dark shadow, the negation of positive being itself. He has become the very principle of misdirected, self-directed will” (Zimbardo, 105). Sauron is responsible for the death and decay of the bloodline of Men and the steady diminishing of the Elves.

Although it is difficult to find sufficiently evil villains in medieval romance, there are certain features of both Morgoth and Sauron that are similar to supernatural-sophisticated enemies in romance. In the medieval romance, there are supernatural beings that for their own reasons cause mischief, and often their reasons are as difficult to understand as those of Morgoth or Sauron. For example, in *Sir Orfeo*, Orfeo’s wife is kidnapped by a faerie king. For no apparent reason, the king decides that he must take this woman as a wife. Because of this irrational behavior, Orfeo is at a loss and must find a way to retrieve his wife from the mystical realm of faerie. Because the enemy is of the faerie people, he is capable of hiding from Orfeo and of controlling Orfeo’s wife. He poses a threat that mortal man cannot fight. Another possible connection is found in the duplicitous appearance of Gowther’s fiendish sire. Like Sauron, this fiend is capable of atrocities and yet can appear fair if he chooses. He is not hesitant to violate something pure and proves this in the rape of the duchess.

In hur orchard apou a day
 Ho meyt a mon, tho sothe to say,
 That hur of luff besoght,
 As lyke hur lorde as he might be;
 He leyd hur down undur a tre,
 With hur is wyll he wroghtth.
 When he had is wyllle all don

A felturd fende he start up son,
And stode and hur beheld; (ll. 67-75)

In this scene, the fiend appears fair and in the form of the duke, until after his sin is committed. He is able to change his appearance to suit his purpose. Yet, while in both cases there are similarities to the wickedness of Tolkien's supernatural-sophisticated enemies, Tolkien seems to create something entirely more complicated than the villains of medieval romance. He gives his villains complete histories, motivations, and even weaknesses. The desire for a more complicated villain seems to stem from the ideological perception that nothing can be purely evil, that it can only be good that has been marred. In believing this, there is a lot that needs to be explained as to why these characters are so wicked and what their motives can be.

The third and last of the supernatural-sophisticated enemies is the dragon, a creature both mystical and incarnate, bestial and intelligent. Dragons are clearly a fascination for Tolkien and he uses them in several works, always as an intelligent, self-serving, wicked being. According to Jonathan Evans, in his essay "The Dragon-Lore of Middle-earth: Tolkien and Old English and Old Norse Traditions," Tolkien borrows, yet rewrites the traditional dragon figure, from more ancient sources. He claims that "there is something in Tolkien's use of traditional medieval and nineteenth-century dragon-lore that transcends his sources" (22), meaning that Tolkien takes famous dragon-lore and adds his own spin to it. Some examples of his more famous dragons are Smaug and Glaurung; though Smaug's tale is not related to the heroes previously mentioned and therefore will not be the focus of this particular example. Glaurung, however, is very much a part of the story of Túrin. Glaurung is a servant of Morgoth, but also has his own desires, to wreck destruction upon the people of Middle-earth and to hoard great

treasures. He is initially sent forth to face Túrin and he quickly succeeds in defiling the waters of Eithel Ivrin, burning the Guarded Plain, and essentially destroying the “pride and host of Nargothrond” (*The Silmarillion*, 254), before he comes face to face with Túrin. Coming upon him, Glaurung speaks to Túrin, who looking into his “serpent-eyes” falls “under the binging spell of the lidless eyes of the dragon” (256). He then speaks:

“Evil have been all thy ways, son of Húrin. Thankless fosterling, outlaw, slayer of thy friend, thief of love, usurper of Nargothrond, captain foolhardy, and deserter of thy kin. As thralls thy mother and thy sister live in Dor-lómin, in misery and want. Thou art arrayed as a prince, but they go on in rags; and for thee they yearn, but thou carest not for that. Glad may thy father be to learn that he hath such a son; as learn he shall.” And Túrin being under the spell of Glaurung hearkened to his words, and he saw himself as in a mirror misshapen by malice, and loathed that which he saw. (256)

Glaurung is cunning in his twisting of truth and lies, and through his words, is able to cause Túrin to forget himself and his mission. Rather than save the elfmaiden Finduilas, he seeks, vainly, his kin and allows the maiden to perish. Glaurung, however, successful in his mission, does not return to his master; rather, he seeks to hoard the treasures of Nargothrand and awaits more chances to create mischief and havoc. Treasure becomes his new focus and “ferocious greed provokes [him] to violent deeds” (Evans, 31). Additional dangers associated with the dragon, aside from the obvious traits, fire-breathing and flying, are that Glaurung is keen-sighted, cunning, and his words are spell-binding. And, compared to his mythical and medieval predecessors, Tolkien designs him to be a uniquely “speaking, rational brute beast” (33), making him perhaps, all the more intimidating.

Dragons and other mystical creatures make their appearances in medieval romance; however, they are not necessarily as sophisticated as the dragons of Tolkien’s

creation. In *Eglamour of Artois*, Sir Eglamour encounters a dragon, and though it is considered evil and dangerous, it is more bestial than sophisticated.

“Syr, at gret Rome, as I the tell,
Ther lyves a dragon, fers and fell,
Herken what I schall the say.
That fend is of so grett renown
Ther dar no man neygh the town
Be seven myle of way.” (ll. 685-90)

The dragon is called “fers and fell” (ll. 686) and upon seeing it the hero’s “herte began to colde” (ll. 714), causing both knight and steed to fall to the ground. It is called “wykked” (ll. 719) and it bites Eglamour, but it never speaks; it casts no spells; it shows no form of intelligent design in its destructiveness. It is not so much the dragon that is important, in this case, but the dragon-slayer whose story matters and his destruction of the dragon serves only to enhance his own reputation. While the fantasticality of the creature is sufficient to strike fear into the heart of the hero and simultaneously make it the most glorious object for a knight to slay, it is much less of a challenge than the dragons in Tolkien’s lore, making its place on the cusp between this category of supernatural-sophisticated and the next, supernatural-brutish.

The supernatural-brutish enemies are much less interesting than their sophisticated masters, yet continuously play a role in the hero’s quest as a seemingly indefatigable source of villainy. Creatures that fall into this category are still supernatural, being not products of nature, but lack the intelligence and motivation of the sophisticated villains. In essence, they are more or less bestial, rather than humanoid. They may be found in larger numbers and frequently make up brute forces in armies. Creatures such as vampires and werewolves fall neatly into this category, as represented by Tolkien, yet trolls and orcs, though not quite natural, are more or less humanoid and

are rather devoid of supernatural gifts, and subsequently fall into the grey area between this category and the next, natural-sophisticated. However, for the sake of comparison to the supernatural brutes of medieval romance, they will be described in this category, though with the concession of their duality.

Werewolves and vampires are mentioned though not thoroughly described in the works of Tolkien. In the story of Beren, for example, Beren and Lúthien don the flesh of a werewolf and a vampire in order to traverse the lands of Morgoth unmolested. Yet, these creatures, aside from being associated with wickedness and suggested of being rather foul, are little described. The reason for their insignificance is that they are not the primary villains and are likely considered brutish, or animalistic. The werewolf is described as having the flesh of a wolf, but possessing an evil spirit. The vampire is quickly described as a “bat-like creature clinging with creased wings” (*The Silmarillion*, 212). In Tolkien’s myth, they are supernatural only in their being servants of the dark lord, animal bodies possessed with foul spirits. They show no sign of self-interest or motivation, other than to follow orders. Their destructive natures are little more than the result of slave labor.

Trolls and orcs, though humanoid, are not natural and are in most cases not motivated by their own interests, making them also fit into this category, however loosely. Both have the ability to think, somewhat logically, and their evil deeds can be done of their own will, but in most cases, they serve a higher evil master. Their numbers are huge and their purposes are generally to be foot soldiers or laborers. In the cases of all three heroes, Aragorn, Beren, and Túrin, these creatures take up the bulk of their fighting efforts; though, they are always viewed in the plural and never as an individual.

Yet orcs, specifically, have been the subject of quite a bit of Tolkien criticism, and perhaps therefore it is necessary to delve deeper into their characteristics.

An orc is described as “savagely selfish and shows little spirit of cooperation. He is the dark counterpart to the elf and the dwarf, cutting down trees and desecrating caves” (Gasque, 162). Gasque suggests that the orcs should be capable of having better virtues, but are the exact opposite of Elves and Dwarves, and can only destroy, not heal. Their darkness is also a problem; they lack the inner light that is apparent in the children of Ilúvatar. However, Tom Shippey, in his essay “Orcs, Wraiths, Wights: Tolkien’s Images of Evil,” suggests that orcs are aware of these deficiencies of goodness, but simply are unable to “judge their own actions by their own moral criteria” (189). The “orcs recognize the idea of goodness, appreciate humor, value loyalty, trust, group cohesion, and the ideal of a higher cause than themselves, and condemn failings from these ideals in others” (186). He cites conversations between orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, demonstrating their, at least, awareness of virtue and appreciation for it. He also claims that orcs have a sense of humor; this can only mean that there must be some slight inclination towards goodness in them, because evil is only “good that has been perverted” (Zimbardo, 105). According to this description, one might also have to wonder if they are in fact as brutish as they are frequently portrayed, or is their brutal nature just a result of their position as slaves, rarely as individuals, under the will of Sauron.

The lack of individuality and of motivation for a brutish but supernatural creature suggests that the creatures that the hero fights must remain nameless; they should not have a personality or backstory. This likely is so that the hero is not accountable for the inevitable slaying of multitudes of enemies. They are not human, therefore the hero cannot be charged with murder. They are not unique; therefore the reader will not feel

sympathy for them. They commit evil deeds in the name of others so that the hero and the reader can be reminded that there is a bigger villain out there and that these creatures are not important enough to focus on. They are very temporary. In the medieval romance one then may look to giants or other mystical creatures as brutish, but otherworldly enemies. They may be unmotivated or only motivated by simple factors like hunger, greed, or revenge. The giant in *Eglamour of Artois*, for example, is motivated to destruction merely for avenging the death of his giant boar. He announces his ambition to destroy those responsible for the death of his pet when he cries out:

"Theves, traytours, ye shall abyge
 For sleynge of my bare.
 The ston wallis I woll down dyngre,
 And with my hondis I wyll you hynge
 Or that I fro you fare!" (ll. 545-9)

The giant's motives are simple; he must avenge the death of his boar. Yet, there is no sympathy for him. He has no name. He is simply the giant and he is a stepping-stone for the hero that must be conquered before the marriage can occur. The giant is humanoid, but rather subhuman. He represents something primitive in the natures of humanity and perhaps he might signify pre-civilized or even pre-Christianized man. What is wicked in a creature like this is not necessarily an inclination to evil, but a lack of an inclination to good.

While the supernatural-brutish creatures can sometimes border on humanoid, the natural-brutish villains cannot. In fact, it is almost difficult to consider them villains at all, because of their lack of comprehension of their villainy. Yet, there must be some concession made for the idea that some beasts are always associated with evil deeds, while others are not. This guilt by association is saved namely for certain creatures that are frequently found to be causing woe to the hero, serving the more sophisticated

villains, and being generally disagreeable. For Tolkien, these villains, though still brutish, may sometimes show glimpses of consciousness, but are almost always under the dominion of a higher power and are too often natural, despite tinges of corruption. Some of these natural-brutish enemies are wolves, bats, and spiders, essentially, the types of creatures that are naturally unpleasant to most.

Though spiders and bats are mentioned among the unpleasant and ill-natured in various works by Tolkien, wolves are described in a lot more detail in the story of Beren, and are very clearly marked as evil by nature. Wolves are described in two capacities: the first being that they are treated as means of transportation for orcs and the second that they are fierce fighters and the strongest and most suitable opponent to dogs. In regards to transportation, wolves are frequently ridden in “the fashion of a steed” (*The Silmarillion*, 204) by orcs, for their great strength and speed. They are bred by the dark lord to serve him as steeds and as killers. They are sent to guard the gates, attack unwelcomed guests and prisoners, and, in some cases, are bred to be particularly menacing. This is the case for Carcharoth, raised and fed by the hand of Morgoth “upon living flesh” (212). He was “filled with a devouring spirit, tormented, terrible, and strong” (212) and destined to do great evil. This particular beast bit the hand off of Beren, swallowing the silmaril, and in his rage killed many Men, Elves, and beasts that got in his way. However, though these creatures are wicked, they are raised to be so. They are bred for the purpose of doing evil.

Natural-brutish enemies in medieval romance are also frequently unpleasant creatures that by happenstance or through misguidance do wrong. Consider the boar in *Egalmour of Artois*, called “wykked” (ll. 500) and yet its wickedness is merely its natural tendencies, combined with its extreme size, which causes problems for people. This

beast is not only quite large, but also rather aggressive, a deadly combination for whatever gets in its way.

Best and man, all sleys he
 That he may with ye se,
 And wondes them wondur sore.
 His tusschus passen a yerd longe:
 The flesch that they fasten amonge
 Hyt coveres nevyr more. (ll. 352-7)

This boar is a wild animal; it requires land to eat and roam. Unfortunately, it inhabits land that people feel inclined to live in or at least pass through. Due to its immense size (its tusks are a yard long) and its naturally aggressive temperament, it kills all the men and beasts that it encounters. The boar's natural tendencies, combined with its individual breeding, make it a formidable beast. It seems, in this case, that some creatures are just inherently bad. However, what makes these enemies different from Tolkien's is that they are simple. They are not malicious, or trained to be so. They are naturally aggressive or large, or both, which leads to the inevitable destruction of property. They are motivated by instinct, to feed or breed, not to kill or maim, though that is often the consequence of their cohabitation with man. Tolkien's natural-brutish enemies are, while by nature unpleasant, often forced or trained into evil-doing. The wolves do not naturally accept riders on their backs, but they will carry them if they are raised to do so. So, while the medieval beasts are wicked because they interfere with man, Tolkien's beasts are wicked because man interferes with them.

The last category of villains is the natural-sophisticated villain, most specifically, evil humans. In the works of Tolkien, there are always those few individual Men who, despite their genetics, are simply wicked, while there are also entire races of Men who are inherently wicked. The difference between the two is that the races of Men who are

bad are typically foreign, or non-western, whereas the individuals are considered oddities because they are not foreign and belong to a more respected group of people, such as the Men of Gondor or Rohan. According to Auden, “Good and Evil are to be incarnated in individuals and societies,” that “every sane man, irrespective of his nationality or culture, would acknowledge as evil” (51). Tolkien creates enemies for the hero that are simply designed to be villainous. They are recognizable, regardless of the preconceived notions of the reader.

The wicked individual can come from any group of men, or, in Tolkien’s world, Elves. They vary in appearance, race, and background. These individuals are frequently misfits for some reason or another. Often their motivations for evil doing are either innate, such as greed, lust, jealousy, and desire for power, or from outside influences, such as fear, self-preservation, or bribery. In the story of Beren, for example, there are Elves who are motivated to do wicked deeds for both innate reasons and outside influences. Brothers, Celegorm and Curufin, are the sons of Feanor and have sworn oaths to reclaim the silmarils that he made. They jealously seek them and are willing to kill their own people in order to possess them. This oath is an outside motivator for their wickedness, yet they also display other weaknesses that lead them to stray. When they come across Lúthien, Celegorm becomes so “enamoured” (*The Silmarillion*, 204) with her that he hides from her his knowledge of the whereabouts of Beren and then imprisons her, attempting to force her to marry him. Not only is he driven by lust, but both the brothers are driven by the desire for power, because if they succeed in forcing this marriage, they would effectually “advance their power, and become the mightiest of the princes of Noldor” (204). This power would allow them the use of the greatest armies of Elves and give them the chance to reclaim the silmarils from Morgoth.

In medieval romance, there are often wicked individuals, who cannot blame their wickedness on their race or religion. These are men who ought to be good, in the calculus of the story, because they are western and Christian, but are overcome by sinful desires. An example of a man that, by nature, ought to be good, but fails, is the eldest brother of Gamelyn. In *The Tale of Gamelyn*, there are three brothers, the youngest being Gamelyn. When the father dies and has chosen to leave a large portion of his property to his youngest son, the eldest is made his guardian until he is old enough to claim it. Rather than maintain the property and treat Gamelyn like a foster son, the eldest brother cheats him and questions his birth, calling him a “gadlynge” (ll. 102). He treats Gamelyn like a serf and tries to have him killed. In this case, jealousy and greed are the primary motivators for the wickedness of the older brother. Despite his appearance and family heritage, this man turns out to be a “moche schrewe” (ll. 6).

The individual can be wicked despite his genetics, but there are, for both Tolkien and medieval romances, entire races of people who are naturally bad. For Tolkien, the Easterlings, Haradrim, Southrons, and Variags, are wicked races of Men from the South or East. Unlike the good and wise Men of the North and West, these Men are considered practitioners of the occult, servants of the dark lord, and natural enemies to the people of the West. The Easterlings serve as catalysts in Túrin’s story, being the foremost reason that he is sent away from his family; his mother feared that he would be “taken from her and enslaved” (*The Silmarillion*, 237). These people are described as oppressors of the people of Hador, who “took their lands and their goods, and enslaved their children” (236). They are foreigners and therefore are automatically viewed as usurpers and wicked people. The others are described during the War of the Ring in *The Lord of the Rings*, as foreign Men with monstrous creatures at their command. The Men of the Far

Harad are physically characterized as “black men like half-trolls with white eyes and red tongues” (846). The stark comparison between the tall and fair hero Aragorn and these “black men” only serves to exaggerate the foreignness of these people. They are frightening because they are different. They are physically and culturally very different from the Men of the West and are automatically viewed with suspicion. To add to that, they are fighting for the enemy, emphasizing how different their morals are as well. Theoretically, if successful, these people will slaughter and enslave the Men of the West, taking their land, their possessions, and perhaps their women. But, Tolkien’s dark descriptions of these Men serve a purpose. They are not evil because their skin is dark; their skin is dark to emphasize their otherness, their foreignness. The fear of the unknown is natural. The idea that an outsider could usurp what is viewed as one’s birthright is frightening. Additionally, the question of religion must be addressed, in that with these foreigners comes a foreign religion. If the West, in Tolkien’s work, is comparable to Western Europe, with Christianity as the dominant religion, then the East and South may just as well represent Asia and Africa, where Christianity is not the dominant religion. The introduction of a foreign culture and religion would be viewed as a disruption in the lives of the people of the West. Their heritage is at stake.

This type of enemy, having a dark complexion and a foreign god, is clearly connected to the villain prevalent in medieval romance, the Saracen. Saracens appear in many romances, where they are abhorred because they are not European or Christian. In most cases they are exaggerated representatives of the Muslim world, of either Asian or African descent, and appear in the romance as a conquering force that must be quelled by the hero. In *King Horn* they are presented as pagans that steal the land of the king and slay Christians. Their desire is clearly laid out immediately when they say:

“Thy lond folk we schulle slon,
And alle that Crist luveth upon
And the selve right anon.” (ll. 46-8)

In *Sir Isumbras* the title character also has a run-in with the Saracens. After losing his children to various beasts, he and his wife come across a mass of ships. “A hethene kyng” (ll. 202) was aboard and his goal is to “wynne” all of “Crystendome” (ll. 203). Yet, upon seeing Isumbras’ wife, his immediate goal is to buy her or take her by force. Not only does this Sultan want to conquer the Christian lands, but he wants to steal the Christian, and “whyt” as “whales bon” (ll. 238), woman. Here, one can clearly see the fears of the West being realized. These foreigners want to steal their land, replace their God, and marry their women. Margaret Sinex, in her essay “‘Monsterized Saracens,’ Tolkien’s Haradrim, and Other Medieval ‘Fantasy Products,’” also makes this comparison between the southern and eastern Men of Tolkien’s work to the Saracens of the medieval romance. She very clearly explores the relationship between these “fantasy products” and makes the claim that:

Keeping Freedman’s cautions in mind, when I assert that Tolkien mirrors the Western Europeans’ methods of constructing their imaginary Saracen I am suggesting that he is necessarily mirroring the othering process of the Christian West. Three characteristics of the othering processes of medieval Europe are especially relevant to the Haradrim it seems to me. The first is the reliance on binaries (inner/outer, light/dark, Scythian/Ethiopian, saved/damned). Both medieval Church authorities and ethnologists reconceptualized pairs of opposed elements that they had inherited from the classical period. The second feature is the determining power of climate on various races and thus the crucial significance of geography in racial theorizing. And the third is the use of color as a tool with which to guide audience response to characters in literature and the visual arts of the late Middle Ages. (176)

She very carefully traces the similarities between the Saracens and Tolkien’s darker-skinned men, claiming that his use of dark complexion is not due to racism on the part of the author, but merely to emphasize the foreignness of these men in a world that is

modeled very much after Northwestern Europe. She details the similarities between these men and the men of Gondor and Rohan as well, marking their delight in brightly colored and highly decorative armor. She also claims that Tolkien suggests that they are not evil, but misguided, and are motivated by their desire to protect their own people and lands from the dark lord. Additionally, she takes particular notice of the colors associated with these foreigners: black, yellow, and red. She claims that Tolkien is “well aware of this color-coding as part of the negative visual vocabulary used for the target races in the medieval period” (185), recalling that the medieval romance writers used these colors as a means of helping the “European viewers recognize their perceived foes, its target races (Saracens, Jews, Tartars and others)” (184). However, despite his apparent knowledge of these traits, Sinex argues that Tolkien shows that he does not entirely share this opinion of these foreigners by comparing the physical descriptions of the Saracens in medieval literature and of Tolkien’s Haradrim.

The demonic spiritual darkness of the Saracen conjured by these English romances is marked in his flesh by bestial appendages, supernatural dimensions and other grotesque distortions. While well aware of these conventions, Tolkien chose not to inflate particular body parts of his Haradrim. No man of Harad has a nose one foot wide, nor shoulders fifteen feet across. None can rival Aregeous standing at twenty feet. Instead, the text emphasizes their affinities with the other races of Men. (187)

Tolkien frequently draws connections between all races of Men and shows that being human is the most important qualifier of potential goodness. In fact, Aragorn, after the fall of Sauron, forgives these other Men and offers them peace treaties. According to Roger C. Schlobin, in his essay “The Monsters are Talismans and Transgressions: Tolkien and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” as is “typical in fantasy’s and medieval romance’s extreme moral orders, Tolkien is quick to condemn the evil and forgive the

good” (77). Evil, in its most pure form, is Sauron and he is destroyed, but Men, regardless of their race, are not naturally bad and ought to be forgiven.

The enemies, in nearly all categories, of Tolkien’s world are directly correlative to those of medieval romances. The reason is not simply that Tolkien chooses to copy these character types, but that he finds something appealing, or better yet repulsive, in these kinds of enemies. They are perfect foils for the hero. They are easy to hate. The supernatural-sophisticated villain is pure evil, and can appeal to the Christian fear of the Devil. The supernatural-brutish villain plays into the not so distant remembrances of the pagan and mythical creatures that were favorites of the heroes of old. The natural-brutish villain exhibits the tendencies towards wickedness that are seen in animals and perhaps the animalistic side of man. And the natural-sophisticated villain is simply man at his worst, an embellishment of man’s fear of his fellow man, though he is somewhat complicated in the extent of his true wickedness or the motive behind his transgressions. Tolkien does what the authors of the medieval romances do, in that he finds enemies that all men can fear on some level and hate because perhaps they embody all of the qualities that man despises in his own self. Yet, he gives his villains, like his heroes, the benefit of a detailed and complicated history that allows the reader, or perhaps dares them, to examine each character closely before passing judgment.

Concluding Thoughts

As long as there have been stories, there have been heroes and villains. There has always been a need to not only express goodness and badness, but to draw a line of distinction between the two. There are certain people who are simply good and there are those who are simply bad. But this is not entirely the case in Tolkien's world. In fact, this is not entirely the case in the medieval romance, which is why Tolkien models his characters after those of the romance. The heroes and enemies in medieval romance are fairly easy to categorize at first glance; however, there is something unsettling about them. They are not quite as clearly defined as the heroes and villains of old. While these characters are definable, they seem somewhat grey. There are heroes that are noticeably flawed; there are villains who the reader never gets a clear picture of. Although the texts do not question this, or the clear-cut lines between good and bad, the reader can question this. The reader can wonder whether Gowther is worthy of becoming the title hero or if the title of hero necessarily denotes goodness on the part of the character. This ability to question these characters is taken a step further by Tolkien, who refuses to pass a moral judgment on his creatures.

Tolkien does not create characters to be entirely good or bad. He complicates them, giving them detailed histories and motives. The reason for basing them upon the medieval romance heroes and villains is that the romance characters are left open for the reader to question their moral status; therefore, Tolkien can take this openness and develop it. He asks what it takes to be good or bad. He also asks if it is possible for a single being to be wholly one or the other. But unlike the medieval romance writers, Tolkien answers these questions. While he gives clear direction as to how to determine good or bad qualities in a character, he boldly determines that no one except God, or in

his world Ilúvatar, is entirely good and since evil is the corruption of goodness, nothing can be entirely evil. All creatures are then products of their own choices. One is good if they choose to be good; one is bad if they choose to be bad. Freewill is what makes Tolkien's universe so different from those of the heroes of the past, yet so much more like the one we live in. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf tells Frodo that "all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us" (51). Essentially, this means that it is up to the individual to determine how they act, with the choice to behave properly or poorly. Regarding free will, Tolkien, in a letter to a Mr. Hastings in September of 1954, says:

Free Will is derivative, and is . . . only operative within provided circumstances; but in order that it may exist, it is necessary that the Author should guarantee it, whatever betides: sc. when it is 'against His Will', as we say, at any rate it appears on a finite view. He does not stop or make 'unreal' sinful acts and their consequences. So in this myth, it is 'feigned' (legitimately whether that is a feature of the real world or not) that He gave special 'sub-creative' powers to certain of His highest created beings: that is a guarantee that what they devised and made should be given the reality of Creation. Of course within limits, and of course subject to certain commands or prohibitions. But if they 'fell', as the Diabolus Morgoth did, and started making things 'for himself, to be their Lord', these would then 'be', even if Morgoth broke the supreme ban against making other 'rational' creatures like Elves or Men. (*Letters*, 195)

Here, Tolkien is clarifying that in his world each being has the ability to choose how to behave, within a system that offers various possible choices. If one should choose to do wrong, his or her action will not be prevented by a higher power. The idea of free will is not new to Tolkien, in fact, as a devout Catholic, he would have been very familiar with the Church's view of this notion. It is from this choice that one is made capable of sinning; sinful action requires the knowledge that it is sinful and the choice to follow through regardless. From this, stems Tolkien's interpretation of free will, as the right of all of God's creations to choose right or wrong, aware that they must accept the

consequences. In turn, his creations, though capable of choosing good or bad actions, cannot be fully considered good or bad individuals. There must always be a reason that they fall or rise; there must always be an opportunity for redemption.

For Tolkien's works, if a child should ask if a character is a good guy or a bad guy, then one must avoid this generalization and say simply that this character does good or bad things. Determining if one is good or bad is too complicated, just as each character is complicated. Just as in the medieval romance, where heroes and villains are not always completely convincing as fitting of their title, Tolkien's heroes and villains are equally unclear. Yet, what Tolkien does is beyond that of the medieval writer, he insists on making it impossible to completely pass judgment. He takes that power away from the reader and forces them to look closer at each figure. By looking closely at an individual, understanding his or her motives, one must see how difficult it then becomes to pass a moral judgment on them. It is difficult to not see the hero's flaws upon close inspection, just as it is difficult not to feel pity for the enemy when they, too, have been wronged. In this paper, I have not only defined the necessary qualities for Tolkien's heroes and enemies, but I have drawn connections between them and those of the medieval romance, showing that Tolkien found these characters compelling, but incomplete. I argue that by recreating them, he not only completes them, but he complicates them. He gives them life, history, and emotion, making them all the more moving and relatable for his readers.

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