

ABSTRACT

DAVIS, JASON LARRY. *Heroes, Gods, and Virtues: a comparison and contrast of the heroes in the Aeneid and The Lord of the Rings.* (Under the direction of Robert V. Young.)

The heroes in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* are compared and contrasted. Some of the heroic characteristics that Tolkien instills in his characters are similar to Aeneas's, but the primary heroes—Frodo, Sam, Aragorn, and Gandalf—display particularly Christian virtues that complement and fulfill Virgil's pre-Christian ideals. The comparison begins with Aeneas's and Frodo's choices to leave Carthage and Lothlorien because those two cities pose similar temptations. However the protagonists' decisions have differing motivations. Motive marks the beginning of the contrast which then proceeds to analyze goals and hopes of the characters. The virtues advocated by the two authors are directly connected to the theologies at work in their plots, and the varying celestial powers and forces of evil are contrasted as well. Finally, the conclusions of the two works reveal the greatest difference between the heroes—the power and importance of mercy rather than strength.

HEROES, GODS, AND VIRTUES:
A COMPARISON AND CONTRAST OF THE HEROES IN THE *AENEID* AND *THE
LORD OF THE RINGS*

by
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BIOGRAPHY

I have always enjoyed fantastical fiction. Many hours of my childhood were spent watching cartoon magical heroes defend the world from evil villains. When I began to read books in the adult section, I immediately was attracted to fantasy novels such as Terry Brooks's *Sword of Shannara*. Beginning my junior year of high school, I learned that fantastic literature can reveal as much if not more about the human condition and psyche than any "realistic" work. Upon beginning my work as an English Major at Campbell University during my undergraduate education, I was encouraged to explore my religious and philosophical ideas in terms of the literary cannon. College always challenges predispositions, but discovering the stability and sacredness of Middle Earth's values (during my junior year of undergraduate work), written in the midst of great turmoil, encouraged me. I had finally discovered a work of fiction that combined the Christian values and wonder of magic with the ordinary hero of Frodo Baggins, who is not much different from many people I know. I am now preparing to continue my education by helping other incoming freshmen gain theirs at Campbell University.

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One of the shared purposes uniting most forms of storytelling is teaching, particularly the transmission of values. From morality plays such as *Everyman* and fables and parables with clear didactic purposes to histories, which are retold from the victor's point of view, to the most outlandish fiction, most tales have a hero or set of heroes who embody a key virtue or represent the thematic idea. Mythology tends to have particularly grand purposes and themes. Virgil's *Aeneid*, for example, is an epic myth describing the origins of the Roman Empire and advocating the imperial virtues of piety, nationalism, and peace via conquest. T. S. Eliot declared that the *Aeneid* is the epic of Europe. Nearly 2000 years later J. R. R. Tolkien creates what he intends to be a mythology for England. While he intended *The Silmarillion* to be that epic mythology, *The Lord of the Rings* is the work for which Tolkien is famous and is the work that conveys his particularly Christian values. Being a small portion of Tolkien's larger mythology, *The Lord of the Rings* advocates values via its heroes as all myths do and shares some similarities with the *Aeneid*. In the professor's published lecture "On Fairy-Stories," he teaches that a major purpose of fantasy storytelling is to present whatever is common and taken for granted in new images and metaphors in order to restore its potency to the reader. His fantasy classic does exactly that by presenting heroes who are implicitly Christian without making any direct reference to his Catholic faith. The *Aeneid*'s proximity to Christianity's origins and the similarities shared between Virgil's and Tolkien's national epics make contrasting the heroes of these stories reveal distinct differences between the virtues and types of heroism in Virgil's classic epic and Tolkien's fantasy romance.

Some temptations and challenges that Tolkien's heroes encounter are similar to those the classical hero Aeneas faces in Virgil's *Aeneid*, but a comparison between the heroes' responses and the accompanying virtues that are advocated reveals a striking difference. Tolkien's heroes are more selfless, must surrender power rather than gain it, and interact with higher powers who require free choice and obedience to the dictates of virtue, making them vastly different from the pantheon depicted in the *Aeneid*. Whereas Aeneas stands virtually alone, modeling the powerful and assertive individual, Tolkien's major heroes, Frodo, Sam, Aragorn, and Gandalf, exhibit these virtues and display great mercy, revealing the Christian heroic traits Tolkien is attempting to portray while never explicitly referring to them as such.

Both quests are divided into two sections, early and primary. Aeneas recounts his early quest to Dido and the Carthaginians in Books II and III of the *Aeneid*. Carthage is the setting for the transition period, and soon after leaving Carthage, Aeneas journeys into Hades. This journey changes the nature of his quest, as many critics have already illustrated. Similarly Frodo's journey is quite different after Gandalf falls in Khazad-dûm because the fellowship begins to break apart and Frodo is forced to make his decision about leaving the company. In Carthage and Lothlorien Aeneas and Frodo encounter similar situations and temptations to abandon their quests in those haven-cities, which prove to be the sites for the major turning points in both quests.

After traveling the long and storm-tossed path from Troy to Carthage, the Trojans are yearning for a reprieve from the threatening weather and some solid ground on which to rest. The Carthaginian harbors offer a place where "no storms they fear" (1.240). So happy the Trojan refugees are to find a safe harbor that "The Trojans, worn with Toils, and spent with

Woes, / Leap on the welcome Land, and seek their wish'd Repose" (1.243-44). For the Trojans, their fortune seems finally to be improving as they go from storm-tossed seas to a gentle harbor and the splendor of Carthage. In Carthage they find a busy and productive town along with beautiful temples and palaces in the process of being constructed. To those whose kingdom and homes had been destroyed, Carthage is an embodiment of the rebirth process that they have so long hoped for.

The welcome they receive from Dido and her people is better than could have been hoped. Their good will is evident even before Cupid poisons the queen to guarantee her love for Aeneas. The Carthaginians are already aware of the Trojans' plight and are sympathetic to them, signified by their murals dedicated to Troy. Dido, who is also in exile, welcomes the Trojans, inviting them to join forces with her, even before Aeneas reveals himself (1.803-05). The Trojans are presented with a choice between, on the one hand, a growing city with much potential for prosperity and beauty, new allies, and a stable environment and, on the other hand, deadly weather, lost companions, and an empire based on the dubious promises of gods. The gods themselves are indifferent at best about the welfare of the individual Trojan survivors; they are concerned with the rise or destruction of the future Roman Empire. However, the Carthaginians present a much more sympathetic and hospitable alternative to the Trojans' dangerous quest for an alien and uncertain future. The Carthaginians are welcoming and supply the fugitives with everything they could hope.

Dido herself adds to Aeneas's temptation to remain in Carthage. The queen is "Beauteous Dido" who "charms the sight" (1.697, 700). While the beautiful and graceful queen falls desperately in love with Aeneas, at least in part because of Cupid's poison,

Aeneas freely reciprocates her feelings. Having recently lost his father and his wife and having a standoffish goddess for a mother, Aeneas naturally longs for human contact free from the pressures of leadership, which oblige him to continue a façade of being hopeful for his people (1.291-92). Dido seems like a perfect lover and possible mate according to any human understanding because she is beautiful, graceful, welcoming, and already has an established nation. Leaving Dido requires Aeneas to fight against his own heart and immediate desires. He could not suffer “Love to rise, / Tho’ heaving in his Heart” (4.481-82). The command of the gods and dictates of Fate are the only things that could rouse Aeneas out of his complacency. Without the fearful command of the gods, Aeneas would have been content to establish his kingdom with Dido. He and Dido were “both forgetful of their better fame” (4.325). However, Aeneas’s desire for fame and a nation of his own proves more powerful than his desire for rest and love. Rejecting Dido and the safety that Carthage offers is a major display of Aeneas’s exemplary piety. Aeneas is directed by the gods and piously obeys Jupiter’s command; however, Aeneas does not only obey for piety’s sake. Hermes’ message reveals that the gods know fame is a powerful motivation for Aeneas.

Thou Woman’s Property, what mak’st thou here,
 These foreign Walls, and Tyrian Tow’rs to rear?
 Forgetful of thy own? [. . .]
 If Glory cannot move a Mind so mean,
 Nor future Praise, from flitting Pleasure wean,
 Regard the Fortunes of thy rising Heir;
 The promis’d Crown let young Ascanius wear.
 To whom th’ Ausonian Scepter, and the State
 Of Rome’s Imperial Name, is ow’d by Fate. (4.390-401)

The implication is that Glory should cause a mind to transcend “mean” concerns. Aeneas has become base by forsaking his greater destiny, and being reminded of greater

future achievements frees Aeneas from his love-induced stupor. While the guilt-ridden Aeneas protests to the shade of Dido that “Unwilling I forsook your friendly State / Commanded by the Gods, and forc’d by Fate” (6.622-623), the willful actions of other key characters such as Juno and Turnus reveal that Virgil’s universe allows for free will to the extent of helping or hindering (though not thwarting) fate’s decrees. Aeneas could struggle against the fated establishment of Rome, but the powers that be have unequivocally declared that Ascanius will wear the crown and the ruling line of Rome will descend from Aeneas. He realizes that the glory will not be as great and the sacrifice of such valiant men as his father will not be honored if the Trojans remain in Carthage. The Roman hero, to the credit of his piety, chooses to obey Jupiter’s command, honor his deceased father, and provide for his son by pursuing the elusive Roman goal. The weight of fate and his own piety urge Aeneas to accept the fame that has been decreed to him. Fate owes Aeneas’s descendants Rome (4.401), and he will not settle for anything less than his full due even though this course is much less easy and more likely to fail, as far as could be humanly determined.

Aeneas undoubtedly loves his people, especially his son Ascanius, and the way he provides for them is by struggling to establish a famous name. The connection between his love for Ascanius and desire for fame is revealed in Aeneas’s final words to his son. He gives Ascanius two reasons that he is fighting Turnus: one, “This Day my hand thy tender Age shall shield” (12.647) (i.e. he’s fighting for his son’s life) and two “And crown [his tender Age] with Honours of the conquer’d Field” (12.648). The juxtaposition of these reasons reveals that hope for the future and honors gained in combat are interwoven for Aeneas. Having a name and heritage that commands respect and displays military security is

essential for a fledgling nation. This type of hope is very understandable and tangible for the war-familiar Trojans. Dido and Carthage are the lesser but easier goods that tempt Aeneas to reject his destiny. However, he overcomes that temptation through ambition. Frodo is similarly tempted to avoid the doom placed on him by the safety and pleasure the elven realm of Lothlorien provides. The hobbit's situation in Lorien is similar to Aeneas's at Carthage.

Frodo Baggins is confronted with the desire to surrender his quest to destroy the Ring when he is in the elven realm of Lothlorien. As Aeneas has recently suffered the grief of losing his father and advisor, Anchises, before reaching Carthage, Frodo and the Fellowship have just escaped from Moria and lost their guide and mentor, Gandalf. Having lost their way, their guide, and nearly lost their lives, the company of eight are seeking rest and repose in the haven of Lothlorien. Just as Carthage seems ideal to the Trojans, Lothlorien is described as a paradise. Legolas reports the fabled beauty of the elven haven: "the floor of the wood is golden, and golden is the roof, and its pillars are of silver" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 396). This description is reminiscent of the biblical description of Heaven as having streets of gold and gates of precious gems. Frodo perceives Lothlorien as a paradise but in particularly Tolkien-esque terms. In Tolkien's mythology, described in detail in the *Silmarillion*, the perfect state of being is a type of musical harmony; everything and every act resonates like sound in the incredibly elaborate song of Iluvatar (God), who sang the universe into existence. Lothlorien is described, in part, like living music. "It seemed to [Frodo] that he would never hear again a running water so beautiful, for ever blending its innumerable notes in an endless changeful music" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 409). In Lothlorien Frodo could

begin to hear the beautiful living song of the river and the land and experience the ideal harmony on a deep and transcendental level.

The closest to the ideal state that is accessible to any character in *The Lord of the Rings* is Valinor, the Blessed Realm, in the West. The Valar, Iluvatar's stewards over Middle Earth, reign in Valinor, and have fashioned the Blessed Realm in close accord with Iluvatar's harmonious design. Tolkien's elves are the only living beings in Middle Earth, other than the wizards, who have been to the Blessed Realm and can return there, so describing Lothlorien in terms of its elven-ness and strong connection with the past emphasizes its ideal nature. Ages ago many Elves lived in Valinor, and most will return after the ending of the Third Age, signifying that elven connections to the past are associations with the ideal. Elves have a connection with the West that enhances their nobility and beauty, and Lothlorien is the most elven of places remaining in Middle Earth. It is "the heart of Elvendom on earth," according to Aragorn (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 416). Even Rivendell, the Last Homely House, contains only the "memory of ancient things," but in Lothlorien, "the ancient things still lived on in the waking world" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 413). Like Carthage, Lorien presents the company with an ideal haven, and both havens have a strong connection with the past to which both heroes must respond. Lothlorien's idyllic nature stems from its connection with the past and the utmost West, as Carthage's appeal derives from its reminiscence of Troy.

Lorien and Carthage tempt the heroes in similar ways because they have such powerful associations with the past, even though the relationship between the heroes and the past is strikingly different. As Otis points out, Aeneas "can never go home" (232). Looking

back towards Troy overmuch is the flaw that Aeneas must overcome; the hero must become future focused. Desiring to rebuild Troy as quickly as possible, contrasted with establishing a new state, is one reason Aeneas desires to stay in the Troy-like Carthage. Aeneas can form another Troy from Carthage, but he cannot form the new Roman Empire. This desire is also used by Iris to tempt the Trojan matrons to burn their ships in order to remain in Sicily and rebuild Troy there. Since time is cyclical and crushes all that is in the past (as Aeneas learns in Book VI), no hope can be found in attempting to regain past glories or rebuilding fallen homes.

However, in *The Lord of the Rings*, time is linear, flowing in a seasonal manner in which similarities from age to age exist, but are not repeats. Similar conflicts arise, the forces of evil return, and heroes with associations from the past appear, such as Aragorn whose Numenorean blood runs truer than most men remaining from the West. However, these heroes are individuals with one life allotted to them, not heroes reborn. As Aragorn says, “I am but the heir of Isildur, not Isildur himself” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 298). Time being linear, a connection with the past is important, as the power of such characters as Aragorn and Denethor, both of Numenorean descent, reveals. Also, the wisest of the allies of the free people, Gandalf, gains his wisdom from his knowledge of the past and the lore of many peoples. The virtues and powers remembered in storytelling are vital to the success of the Quest because they provide inspiration and encouragement to continue. However, for both heroes, attempting to recreate or dwell in the past is a dangerous temptation.

While a connection with the past has power to inspire and sustain, as the memory of Troy does for Aeneas and his companions, it is also the root of the temptation of the elves to

struggle against change. “The Elvish weakness is . . . to regret the past, and to become unwilling to face change” (Tolkien, *Letters* 236); therefore, the elves fade into the West when the age of man comes to Middle Earth. Lothlorien is an appropriate haven for a brief rest because it has such a powerful connection with the past and the Blessed Realm, but the fellowship must not remain there because Lorien will fade. They are not permitted to live in the past, only learn from it, as is Aeneas. The company from Rivendell must remember and learn from history but apply that inspiration and wisdom to the future. Likewise, Troy and the Trojan name will die and remain only in history; Jupiter declares, “all shall be Latium; Troy without a Name: / And her lost Sons forget from whence they came” (12.1214-15). However, the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* need to balance their ties with the past, their actions in the present, and their hope to establish a peaceful future.

While Gandalf does teach that man’s responsibility is to “do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set . . . so that those who live after may have clean earth to till” (Tolkien, *Return* 170), the heroes of the past inspire because they are higher and more noble than the modern heroes and because the virtue of the Valar is constant. In *The Lord of the Rings*, time flows rather than turns. The power and height of the past is fading but also moving into the promised return to harmony. The past is vital for the present action, which determines the future, but the past must also flow into that future. In the *Aeneid*, however, the past must be overcome and left behind, as Aeneas must leave his wife and father behind, for a future that is already determined. Both heroes must struggle to release the hold they have on their former homes and the familiar past, but they can use their respective histories differently.

Besides being a living memory of the past glory of the elves, Lothlorien provides safety and rest for the travelers, as does Carthage for Aeneas. Crossing the river Nimrodel revives the weary travelers, and they have the time and safety in Lothlorien to complete their grieving for Gandalf. Outside the borders of Galadriel and Celeborn's realm, darkness and evil lurk, but "on the land of Lorien no shadow lay" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 413). Providing safety, peace, healing, and beauty, Lothlorien seems to be the ideal place to remain, if possible. Frodo summarizes the threat to the Quest and, thereby, to the world when he tells Sam, "I am content" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 426). That contentment and the following desire to surrender his quest in order to remain content are threats greater than even the Balrog because they wear away at Frodo's heart.

The temptation to surrender the Quest does not come from invitations to remain in Lothlorien. The temptation to which Frodo succumbs is the desire to rid himself of the burden of the Ring. He offers it to Galadriel, who tempts the Fellowship in order to test them by offering them the wonderful opportunity of leaving the quest. "All of [the eight companions], it seemed, had fared alike: each had felt that he was offered a choice between a shadow full of fear that lay ahead, and something that he greatly desired To get it he had only to turn aside from the road and leave the Quest" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 422-23). After being offered the Ruling Ring, Galadriel declares, "gently are you [Frodo] revenged for my testing of your heart at our first meeting" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 431). This temptation comes to a head after Frodo looks into the Mirror of Galadriel. Frodo freely offers the Ring to the Lady because she is "wise and fearless and fair," and she already possesses one of the rings of power. She is one of the Wise who has striven against Sauron's evil, and she already has

mastery over one of the Great Rings. Galadriel seems to be the perfect choice to be the Ringbearer, much better than a small, frightened hobbit. Unlike Aeneas, who is told about his future filled with trials that will eventually create an empire and who is commanded by gods and motivated by ambition to leave Carthage, Frodo is given a more immediate reason to continue his quest. Galadriel rejects the Ring because she would be corrupted by the Ring and replace Sauron as a dark queen.

Ironically, Frodo's desire to rid himself of the Ring, while a dangerous temptation, is also a result of the humility that saves Frodo from the desire to use the Ring and put himself forward, a desire that threatens several other main characters, such as Boromir and Saruman. Saruman and Boromir are obvious examples of the Ring's ability to pervert good intentions into simple lust for power and domination over others. However, Gandalf and Galadriel, who both resist the lure of the Ring, also demonstrate the awful temptation of power in their response to being offered the Ring freely by Frodo. When Frodo asks Gandalf to take the Ring, the wizard responds violently. "‘No!’ cried Gandalf, springing to his feet. . . . His eyes flashed and his face was lit as by a fire within. ‘Do not tempt me!’ . . . ‘Do not tempt me!’ . . . ‘The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength’" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 87-88). Gandalf the wise and powerful, to whom Frodo turns for counsel and strength, knows he would not be able to carry the Ring without succumbing to its power. Similarly, the Lady Galadriel knows she will become a terrible queen if she accepts the Ring (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 431-32). The mighty and wise know that they need the lowly and humble, such as Frodo, to sacrifice the Ring of power.

Frodo's salvation is his weakness. Because he is not strong and his will has not been trained, the hobbit does not have the vision and power to dominate others, and, therefore, he does not have as great a temptation. Frodo has the chance of destroying the Ring because he has the ability to sacrifice its power. This ability is foreshadowed in *The Hobbit* when Bilbo gives up the Arkenstone in order to stop the violence between the Elves, Dwarves, and Men. Frodo's weakness, which is, in this case, his strength, results in a motivation for continuing his journey quite different from Aeneas's. Frodo's original motivation is revealed when he first leaves the Shire. He learns that servants of the great enemy are seeking him and will destroy his home and neighbors to find the Ring; therefore, he leaves to protect them. His motivation is a love resulting in self-sacrificial righteousness, doing what is necessary to protect and defend those who cannot defend themselves. This same service is demonstrated by the Rangers, who endure harsh conditions and constant danger to protect people such as Barliman Butterbur, people who scorn their protectors out of ignorance (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 299). Also, the company as a whole is held to their quest by the commitments they make at the Council of Elrond, and such steadfast commitments of righteousness and devotion are necessary for their success because they bind the company together.

Ultimately, both Frodo and Aeneas must continue their quests because a heavy doom is set upon them; only they can fulfill their respective destinies and achieve the desired ends. Whereas Aeneas's bold and resolute response to Hermes' chiding is assertive and appropriate for Virgil's mythos, Frodo must find a balance between not succumbing to the desire to rest and escape the quest and not overly asserting himself. When he does claim the Ring and asserts himself as the new lord of the Ring at Mount Doom, he again threatens to bring the

world into ruin. While Aeneas boldly continues his journey in order to establish his place in history and an empire for his son, Frodo's motivation for leaving Lorien, and the Fellowship, is his selfless desire to save them from the destructive power of the Ring. Frodo displays this love for his companions by leaving them after Boromir attempts to wrest the Ring from Frodo. The hobbit knows that the Ring will destroy the entire fellowship in time unless he leaves them.

The heroes' temptations in Lorien and Carthage reveal differing motives for continuing their respective quests. The types of hope that sustain them throughout their journeys are also quite different. Frodo's journey must be more self-sacrificial because he has no hope of future glory or reward, nor should those possibilities motivate him because the temptation to gain for oneself can be used by the Ring. When Frodo realizes the danger he and the Ring pose to the Shire, he determines to leave, knowing he will probably go into exile, "a flight from danger into danger, drawing it after [himself]" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 89), or, as he says elsewhere, drawing him "from deadly peril into deadly peril" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 137). Aeneas also continually encounters obstacles and threats to his destiny but, unlike Aeneas, who has the promise of the gods and various prophecies reassuring him that his company will survive to establish a new and better Troy, Frodo's journey begins with no certainty, only the vague hope of finding a new bearer of the Ring after reaching Rivendell. He is not attempting to gain or create anything.

The type of hope displayed by the hobbits and other heroes of the Third Age represents a major difference between Tolkien's heroism and Virgilian virtues. Tolkien works to illustrate Christian hope throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo's hope begins

very rationally and with a degree of sacrifice. He leaves the Shire, carrying the Ring, with the quite understandable hope of finding another Ring-bearer as soon as possible. At the Council of Elrond, Frodo realizes that this hope is in vain because he is the only one who can take the Ring to Mordor; therefore, his hope must be to complete the quest and return to the Shire that the hobbits fight so hard to preserve. However, this hope quickly becomes increasingly difficult to sustain because Gandalf dies, the company is scattered, and Frodo becomes more and more wearied by the Ring.

However, retaining hope is key to the success of the free peoples, and the most valiant heroes—Gandalf, Aragorn, and Sam—keep hoping despite the apparent hopelessness of their plight. Their hope does not make any rational sense. The pathos of Theoden, when he is under the sway of Wormtongue, and even that of the proud Denethor derives from their understandable conclusion that they and their kingdoms are doomed. The turn to a Happy Ending, which Tolkien calls a eucatastrophe, can “never [be] counted on to recur” because “it is a sudden and miraculous grace” (“On Fairy Stories” 68). This type of hope is similar to the theological virtue of Hope described by the Apostle Paul because both “remain” in the sense of enduring forever (I Corinthians 13:13). Paul teaches that, after all other gifts and man’s temporal understanding are gone, Faith, Hope, and Love remain. Christian hope is rooted in the faith of the unseen God, Who provides for His followers and Who defends the righteous and those who are unable to provide for themselves. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1). Such hope that fastens onto the unseen and unpredictable deliverance is hope for Tolkien’s eucatastrophic resolution, which is the unimaginable reversal into a happy ending.

This type of faith and hope, which endures despite all reasonable arguments to the contrary, is exemplified by the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings*. As the quest of the Ring continues, Frodo's already tentative hold on hope fails entirely. The closer Sam and Frodo get to Mount Doom, the heavier the Ring's oppression grows and the further Frodo falls from hope. He takes no thought to provisions for the return trip from Mordor, and the assumption that the journey will fail consumes him. He continues the quest because he is resigned to the inevitability of his failure not because he holds on to hope or remembers the Shire. Significantly, the narrative focus shifts from Frodo to Sam as the gardener becomes more hopeful and stalwart than his master (without upsetting Frodo's place as master). Until they reach Mount Doom itself with no provision for a return trip, Sam holds fast to hope in an unknown deliverance. "Never for long had hope died in his staunch heart, and always until now he had taken some thought for their return" (Tolkien, *Return* 234).

Aeneas cannot have such faithful hope, however, because his fate is made known and even the gods cannot defeat fate. Several prophecies tell Aeneas about the glorious future of the Roman Empire, and he sees the heroes of the Roman conquest while he is in the land of the dead. Vulcan's shield is the culminating sign of Aeneas's guaranteed victory, and with that shield and the promises it gives, Aeneas figuratively and literally supports himself in the final battle to secure Rome's beginnings. However, this is not true hope because "hope that is seen is no hope at all" (Romans 8:24). Even knowing about his final victory, Aeneas does not have much personally to hope for because he has lost his family, his home, and many companions on his journey to Latium. The war between himself and Turnus proves to be even more costly. Aeneas's virtue lies in piously conforming his will to the dictates of fate

and enduring the opposition of the gods, who are inconsistent from the mortal's perspective. "The order imposed on the world by Fate is a grim and harsh one, with nothing in it to satisfy the moral instincts of man. Nor does it restrain the multiplicity of individual divine powers, the gods, from making him their plaything or their victim" (Camps 45-46). Fate in the *Aeneid* does not provide any source of hope. "The *Aeneid* thus reflects a feeling about the supernatural which on the one hand is congenial to the Roman national sentiment and vindicates the religious system of the Roman state but on the other hand is profoundly discouraging to the individual" (Camps 47). However, *The Lord of the Rings* displays a hope that is very personal as well as all-encompassing. For example, Gandalf has dedicated his worldly existence to defeating Sauron, and victory over Mordor is a personal triumph for him as well as the nations of free men and elves. Aragorn's triumphant claim to Gondor's throne and saving that kingdom from immediate destruction also confirm his claim to Arwen's hand in marriage. Their wedding is the day "that [he has] looked for in all the years of [his] manhood" (Tolkien, *Return* 277). Likewise, the hope of settling down with Rosie Cotton, which is essential to understanding Sam's character according to Tolkien (*Letters* 161), strengthens Sam. Gandalf, Aragorn, and Sam are brave enough to hold onto a personal Hope for success and life despite the apparent foolishness of such hope. The power and virtue of this type of hope is foreign to Aeneas.

This unreasonable hope may seem like childish optimism or naiveté, especially coming from the simple hobbits. Sam expresses the simple, almost pastoral hopes of the hobbits best: "I mean plain ordinary rest, and sleep, and waking up to a bit of morning's work in the garden. I'm afraid that's all I'm hoping for all the time. All the big important

plans are not for my sort” (Tolkien, *Towers* 379). However, this simple hope is the hobbits’ strength and succors them throughout their travels and trials and offers an example of the humility that is the particular grace of Hobbits. The self-sacrifice that Frodo displays from the beginning of his adventure, also revealed in the three hobbits who accompany him, this constant virtue is a contrast to the bold and assertive Aeneas who fights for his future glory.

Bilbo and the four hobbits through whom most of the tale is told reveal a particular Hobbitness that keeps them from putting themselves forward.¹ Sam hopes for a simple garden and a family with Rosie; Frodo wishes simply to return and enjoy life in the Shire. The only time the Hobbits are anything close to ambitious is on behalf of others. For example, Sam, Merry, and Pippin conspire to accompany Frodo on his journey, Sam nearly drowns himself trying to accompany Frodo, and Merry sneaks along with Dernhelm because he desires to serve Theoden. When Sam believes that Frodo has been killed by Shelob, Sam debates with himself what he should do and recoils from the idea of taking the Ring and completing the quest at first. “‘What? Me, alone, go to the Crack of Doom and all?’ He quailed still, but the resolve grew. ‘What? *Me* take the Ring from *him*? The Council gave it to him.’ . . . ‘it’s not for me to go taking the Ring, putting myself forward.’ ‘But you haven’t put yourself forward; you’ve been put forward’” (*Two Towers* 403, emphasis Tolkien’s).

The humility of the hobbits is sharply contrasted with Boromir, the most Aeneas-like member of the Company. Boromir is noble and valiant like Aeneas, desiring to protect and provide for his people through military victory and by claiming what he believes is due to

¹ Note that this excludes the Sackville-Bagginses and the other foolish young hobbits who wanted to be shiriffs.

him. Faramir reports that Boromir was always displeased “that his father was not king. ‘How many hundreds of years needs it make a steward a king, if the king returns not?’” Boromir often asked (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 328-29). Boromir is always eager to claim what is his, or what he thinks should be his; however benevolent his motives and sympathetic his reasons, this desire consumes him and threatens the company. Likewise, his father Denethor is an Aeneas-like character because he is focused on his nation’s future and destiny more than anything else. Gandalf chides Denethor by saying, “you think, as is your wont, my lord, of Gondor only. . . . And for me, I pity even his [Sauron’s] slaves” (Tolkien, *Return* 95). Gandalf, who is the wisest teacher in *The Lord of the Rings*, is advocating a universal concern for all living creatures above a nationalistic pride.

The hobbits are not the only characters imbued with humility. The authoritative Gandalf and the noble Aragorn display their own types of humility despite being key leaders of the free peoples. The wizard Gandalf does not use his power to force others to obey his will. Gandalf limits his power almost exclusively to encouraging and “lighting the fire” in others, as the nature of his great ring indicates (Tolkien, *Return* 417), seen most evidently by the transformation of Theoden. While Gandalf proves himself to be a powerful enemy of Sauron, his primary functions are counseling and teaching. These acts, along with providing inspiration, associate Gandalf with the Holy Spirit, who teaches and empowers God’s servants.

Aragorn, while being a valiant and bold leader and eventual king, displays an assertive leadership that contrasts with Boromir’s, Denethor’s, and Aeneas’s. Though Aragorn is not timid about looking into the Palantir and wresting control of it away from

Sauron, claiming and asserting his birthright as Isildur's heir, or claiming his kingship when the proper time comes, the king makes these bold moves only because the need for them is great. Also, Aragorn leads because others follow him out of love. As Katharyn Crabbe points out, Aragorn frees Eowyn and Faramir to be themselves (that is the healing power of the king and *athelas*); they bind themselves to him out of love, not force (96). When Eowyn first meets Aragorn, she develops an immature love for the future King because he is "high and puissant, and [she] wished to have renown and glory and to be lifted far above the mean things that crawl on the earth" (Tolkien, *Return* 270). Her early love is reminiscent of the admiration and inspiration that Aeneas and other mighty men of arms inspire through their prowess and courage. However, Eowyn learns a more mature love for Faramir after he helps her see the pride and superficial nature of her desire for Aragorn. On the other hand, love in the *Aeneid*, when not manipulated or orchestrated by the gods, is tied to the sword and glory.

Boromir's interests lie in gaining glory through his prowess and the lineage of his family. He does not have a need for the throne of Gondor; he simply wants it. Aragorn, the rightful king of men, only hesitantly and at the greatest need, claims his right to the throne of Gondor. For the King, fighting the Shadow is more important than his renown; therefore, "he went in many guises, and won renown *under many names* . . . then in the hour of victory he passed out of the knowledge of Men of the West" before he claimed his kingship (Tolkien, *Return* 385, emphasis mine). If fame had been important to Aragorn, he would never have changed his name or gone in disguise, nor would he have left at the hour of victory. Humility has guided the heroes' hopes to seek victory outside of military conquests. Virgil and Tolkien both describe major military campaigns that are vital to the success of

their heroes. However, Tolkien gives military prowess and victory a secondary place, emphasizing a surrender of power and authority rather than the use of them.

Whereas Aeneas fights for the proper future of Latium and, eventually, Rome's military victories impose the Pax Romana, Tolkien's military heroes are secondary to the Hobbits who actually save the world. After rescuing besieged Gondor, Gandalf, Aragorn, and their companions must distract the eye of Sauron. In most military campaigns the role of being a diversion is typically allocated to the most disposable asset. In the war of the Ring, that is the task of the more militarily powerful forces of Gondor, Rohan, and their elf and dwarf allies. Whereas Aeneas's quest to secure Italy must end through military conquest, power itself is a danger to the people resisting the Shadow.

The emphasis on cautious use of power (whether it is authority, prowess, or "magic") is seen in the various reasons characters desire or use the One Ring. Sauron obviously desires the Ring in order to increase his own power and dominance, and Saruman similarly seeks the Ruling Ring for his own advancement. Gollum lusts for the Ring because its presence offers the illusion of an emotional completion. While Boromir's desire for the Ring begins with the laudable goal of protecting his people, it degenerates into craving power and honor for himself. Only the three hobbit Ringbearers--Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam--use the Ring with primarily pure intentions, and these intentions provide them a measure of safety against the evil of the Ring. Frodo is not ambitious; he only wants to survive. Sam takes the Ring only because he has no other way to honor his fallen master. Aeneas's goals are more in line with Boromir's. He is truly noble and desires to provide the best for his people, and the only way before him to do that is through glory and military victory.

One of the reasons glory and reputation are so important to Aeneas is his role as a leader to the homeless Trojans. His reputation as a victor in combat, a leader of troops, a valiant and noble man, and the son of a goddess is vital to holding the Trojans together as a people and bringing the future Romans together. Aeneas is a leader who can inspire his men to gain the imperial glory of Rome. He has the support of major gods and goddesses and gains such mighty talismans as the shield forged by Vulcan. His company includes men of great valor and fame. However, the ties that bind the Fellowship together, even after their separation, are bonds of friendship and love that allow them to rely on one another. These ties are greater than the inspiration of the valor and physical prowess of the mighty warriors-- Gimli, Legolas, Aragorn, and Boromir. Such loving fellowship is also a distinctly Christian power. Love is the greatest of all virtues (I Corinthians 13:13) and is the indicator of truly Christian men. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). At the Council, Elrond, who has seen three Ages of Middle Earth, would send mighty elf lords, such as Glorfindel, with Frodo, but Gandalf counsels that they should "trust rather to [the hobbits'] friendship than to great wisdom" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 331), revealing that new types of heroes and new virtues, found in these least likely of creatures, will determine the fate of the quest. The actual fellowship shared among the companions is more powerful than awe-inspiring deeds, as shown by the brotherhood enduring beyond the sundering of the nine companions.

The insufficiency of typical power to complete the quest of the Ring is shown in the progress of Frodo's journey. Early in the quest of the Ring, Frodo's position is similar to Aeneas's. He is in the company of such famous people as Aragorn, son of Arathorn, King of

Gondor; Gandalf the Wise wizard; Legolas, a prince of Elves; Boromir, son of the Steward of Gondor; and Gimli, Gloom's son. The Fellowship carries such talismans as the swords Glamdring and Narsil, which cut the Ring from Sauron's hand, the phial of light from Galadriel, and the extremely valuable coat of mithril mail. Whereas Aeneas gains such allies and devices for victory throughout his travels, adding to his fame (causing more people, such as Evander, to ally themselves with him), Frodo, as his quest progresses, loses the talismans and allies that he has early in the quest. Gandalf and Glamdring fall at the bridge of Khazad-dûm. The company breaks at Eryn Mui, and Frodo leaves without any of his companions except Sam. Their talismans and weapons do prove useful, but, by the end of the quest, Frodo has lost the mithril coat and given Sting and the Phial of Galadriel to Sam. Frodo goes into Mordor with few supplies, one companion, and no weapons. He enters the kingdom of evil as an ordinary Hobbit, one member of the least remarkable of all the rational creatures of Middle Earth. This vulnerability contrasts sharply with Aeneas, who engages in the final battle with several allies, the direct aid of gods, and fabulous weapons, including the shield forged by Vulcan.

The ordinariness of hobbits is emphasized by their relative anonymity among Middle Earth's peoples. Gandalf states, "as far as I know there is no Power in the world that knows all about hobbits. Among the Wise I am the only one that goes in for hobbit-lore." Even Treebeard, the oldest of living things in Middle Earth, is ignorant of the hobbits' existence. Hobbits embody virtues of simplicity and resilience, not valor and heroic deeds sung about in songs. The four hobbits surprise most of the people they encounter because most people are not aware of the existence of hobbits. Theoden's knowledge of the Shirefolk is typical. The

Rohirrim “know no tales about hobbits. . . . there are no legends of their deeds, for it is said that they do little, and avoid the sight of men” (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 192). Frodo and Sam, two of the most apparently ordinary creatures, walking nearly unarmed into Mordor, epitomize Hobbit virtues.

Virgil’s heroes are extraordinary men with supernatural tools and aid. Tolkien’s Frodo is a simple person whose most valuable companion is a plain gardener whose most important virtues sustaining him are steadfastness and Sam’s hopefulness. These virtues are linked with the hobbits’ amazing endurance. For example, Frodo and Merry both recover from wounds given them by the Nazgûl king, which would have been fatal to anyone else. Aeneas’s determination is directly connected with his reassurances from the gods, and he is chided by Hermes for not being steadfast to the destiny proclaimed to him. His chief virtues and weapons are his physical prowess and having the favor of the victorious god. Aeneas’s determination derives from reassurances given from the gods. Only Aeneas’s lineage can support the Roman Empire because he is of divine race and has the fortitude and might that are required. However, Frodo and Sam, stripped of everything that could sustain them in their quest except for their unassuming nature and hope, are the only ones who can sacrifice the Ring of Power. The hobbits exemplify the foolish and humble of the world that will shame the strong and wise. The description Paul gives of the Corinthian church also fits the hobbit heroes.

Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak

things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to *nullify the things that are*. (I Corinthian 1: 26-28 emphasis mine)

In the Shire and among hobbit folk, Frodo, Merry and Pippin are among the influential, and Merry and Pippin are close to being nobility. However, outside the Shire, in relation to the rest of the world, all of the hobbits are among the lowly, having little previous impact on the peoples of Middle Earth. These little people who “will sit on the edge of ruin and discuss the pleasures of the table, or the small doings of their fathers” do seem foolish (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 192). Gandalf himself calls the council’s plan to send hobbits to Mount Doom folly (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 322). However, that foolishness, combined with steadfastness, friendship, and hope, which are used by providence, nullify the powers of evil, which are tangible and obviously potent.

Aeneas’s virtues are many. He is valiant, pious, and committed to his people in order to keep his honor and glory. He inspires through military prowess and courage. However, Tolkien, using similar situations and creating similar needs for his heroes, advocates a more complete set of virtues. The heroes in *The Lord of the Rings* display courage, prowess, and faithfulness, but those virtues are augmented by their selflessness, hope, humility, and rejection of inappropriate power. Tolkien’s major heroes, being ordinary creatures, reveal virtues any one can cultivate.

The difference in the heroism of Aeneas and Frodo stems from the difference in the nature of the gods. Virgil’s gods are temporal beings who can be surprised and are not omnipotent. They, like the people on earth, are trapped within the turning wheel of time,

which repeatedly cycles through history. Unlike the mythology of the *Aeneid*, history in Middle Earth is linear, and Iluvatar (God) is outside of time's constraints. According to the creation myth in the *Silmarillion*, Iluvatar's song will eventually end and all things will be brought back into harmony. Even the forces of evil will show the beauty of his song; therefore, the forces of evil themselves cannot ultimately triumph even if Frodo and Sam fail. Frodo declares that the forces of Mordor "cannot conquer forever" (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 367), and the Sickle of the Valar constellation has been left in the heavens as a sign of the eventual downfall of Morgoth and his evil. Sam relies on the knowledge that the Light is permanent to steady himself while he is searching for Frodo. He sings, "above all shadows rides the Sun / and Stars for ever dwell" (Tolkien, *Return* 204); and later, while looking at the stars one night as Frodo's strength continues to wane, Sam, who carries similar starlight in the phial of Galadriel, is struck by the knowledge that "the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach" (Tolkien, *Return* 220). In Tolkien's cosmology, making a name for oneself or powerfully asserting one's own will is less virtuous than steadfast support of freedom, friendship, and the Western forces supporting the harmony of Iluvatar.

The gods are overtly mentioned and have a major role in the *Aeneid*, but the higher powers are subtler, both in action and description, in *The Lord of the Rings*. Both heroes are chosen by higher powers to fulfill a great doom. Since the gods of the *Aeneid* are in conflict with each other, Aeneas is more a victim of their machinations than a chosen one blessed by the gods; he must act almost in spite of them. Aeneas at least has some freedom of response to the dictates of fate to determine, to some degree, how he arrives at Italy and begins the

new empire. Likewise, some of the gods and goddesses, most notably Juno, have some freedom of response to fate but not the power to oppose it successfully. No definitive goodness can be found in the pantheon of gods because they are not supreme powers (they can be thwarted and the dictates of fate overrule them). Turnus is as obedient to the gods' commands as Aeneas; he heeds Juno's messenger, Iris, as Aeneas does Mercury (IX 1-16). Turnus is also given divine aid and guidance throughout the war. However, the gods using Turnus happen to be working against fate whereas the wills of the deities inspiring Aeneas are not opposed to fate this time. Fate favors no people, virtue, or action. Jupiter reveals the amoral nature of fate, which is unconcerned with individual well-being, when he declares, "Equal and unconcern'd I look on all," says Jupiter; "Rutulians, Trojans, are the same to me" (IX 166-67). Often, gods who are peers act contrary to each other, and those in subordinate positions rebel against the authorities. The nature of these forces makes a man who is powerful and willful enough to withstand the onslaught of the gods and to control his own warring heart worthy to be admired. Aeneas is powerful, valiant, inspiring, and disciplined because those qualities are desperately needed to survive in the world Virgil creates. The cyclical view of history presented in Book VI, in which Aeneas learns of the nature of reincarnation, reveals that only temporary victories over chaos can be achieved and the struggles of mankind will never end. Virgil's audience knows that Aeneas must and will establish Rome; therefore, his obedience to the gods is laudable to Romans under Augustus. In such a world, a man like Aeneas who has the strength, gifts, and luck continually to assert his own will in the face of opposition is the ideal.

The higher powers affecting Middle Earth, however, are clearly allied with definitive forces of good and evil. Sauron was once able to deceive the men of Numenor and some elves, but no longer. The battle lines are clearly drawn. The interaction between the higher powers and the people is more similar to Christianity's understanding of man's relationship with God and devils. The Valar and Iluvatar, who are clearly good and create an absolute morality, contrasting with the fickle-seeming fate of the *Aeneid*, permeate *The Lord of the Rings*, although not as obviously as the Roman pantheon. Loyalty to a worthy lord, friendship, freedom, selflessness and other virtues compose the goodness that Aragorn tells Eomer about. "Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house" (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 48). The distinction between good and evil is constant in Tolkien's mythos. The personal morality in Middle Earth is not simply obedience to a set of instructions but is derived from personal decisions about loyalty, sacrifice, mercy, and struggling to maintain hope. Falling away from the universal good that Aragorn describes is the result of overweening pride and self-assertion.

The rebellion amongst the Valar, who are angelic beings, has already occurred in the First Age and is reminiscent of the Christian legend of the rebellion of Lucifer. Morgoth and Lucifer share the same vice—pride, and the primary weapon—deceit. Both Morgoth and Lucifer defy their superiors, Iluvatar and God because, in their excessive pride, they desire to remake the paradise presented to them in their own images rather than in God's. Moreover, both arch-villains tempt the children of God/Iluvatar (Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis and elves and men in the *Silmarillion*) in order to get revenge and to assuage their jealousy of

these newly favored beings. Morgoth's lies tempt the elves away from Valinor, making the eldest children of Iluvatar resent the rule of Manwe and the Valar. Like Morgoth himself, the rebellious elves abandon their paradise because they desire mastery over their own realm. Similarly, Sauron, Morgoth's lieutenant, deceives the men of Numenor into believing that they can claim immortality by pushing beyond the boundaries set by the Valar. Adam and Eve's fall is also motivated by the desire to disregard limits. Eve, like the Numenoreans, desires to be like God, and she crosses the boundaries set for her, eating the forbidden fruit.

As the falls in Genesis and the ancient history of Middle Earth are similar, so are the various redemptions. A remnant of elves and men always remains faithful. Not every elf rebelled against the Valar, and a small number of Numenoreans, including the ancestor of Aragorn, refrained from heeding Sauron's advice and worshipping Morgoth. The Valar provide the reprobate with multiple chances to repent. For example, Galadriel, who was one of the original elven dissenters, after refusing the Ring, "[passes] the test," and she will "go into the West, and remain Galadriel" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 432). The choice she makes to remain faithful to the western forces of good and refuse Sauron's Ring secure her forgiveness and her return to the elven paradise.

Often in the *Aeneid*, when a mortal's response to a god is not favorable, his or her mind is forcefully changed. For example, Turnus did not originally desire to wage war against Aeneas, but the fury possessed Turnus, driving him to rage against the Trojans. Even if the supernatural elements of the *Aeneid* are interpreted as psychological elements of the human characters (i.e. Allecto represents Turnus's own rage), man's own lack of control is still displayed. Aeneas is allowed more free reign than most characters in the epic, but not

the more complete freedom that the Valar show the elves by allowing them to leave Valinor or the freedom of choice allowed to mankind. Whereas the ultimate fate of Rome is secure, the outcome of the war of the Ring depends entirely on the heroes' obedience to the virtues of mercy and hope. In both tales goodness is, at least partially, determined by one's response to the celestial powers. However, Tolkien's higher powers never force their wills on the free peoples; therefore, the choices to resist the temptation to assert oneself or claim power, choices to follow the universal morality, are more freely made. Because the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are more free, their choices also bring more responsibility and have more potency. Although the higher powers are more hidden and subtle than the gods in the *Aeneid*, the differences between good and evil in *The Lord of the Rings* are more clearly established.

Sauron, unlike Juno, is completely evil. The *Aeneid* is not concerned with evil and lacks a definitive evil, unless it is the passionate and selfish nature Juno displays, which Aeneas must eventually control before he can attain higher levels of piety. The major conflict is caused, not by valiant and righteous men struggling against oppression and evil, but by Juno's lusts for vengeance against the offending Trojans. At the end of the epic, her rage and interference are stopped by Jupiter's authority and bribery. When he agrees that the Trojan name will disappear and that "No Nation more Respect to you shall pay, / Or greater Off'rings on your Altars lay [,] / Juno consents, well pleas'd that her Desires / Had found Success" (XII 1218-20). From a human perspective, the origin of the war between the Trojans and the Italians is equally trivial: Tyrrheus's pet deer is killed by Ascanius, ignorant of whose deer he is hunting, and the neighbors attack and provoke the young Trojans. Juno's

use of these means to cause this conflict illustrates the high degree of her pride and selfishness. Excepting Jupiter perhaps, the higher powers in the *Aeneid* demonstrate entirely human vices, sometimes to a degree that is shameful even for mortals to display. Juno, in all her indignation and fury, is more akin to an infuriated child who cannot have her desires than she is to the cunning and corrupting evil of Sauron. The celestial powers in the *Aeneid* cannot reveal higher forces of Good or Evil, again excepting Fate/Jupiter perhaps, because they are not constant.

In contrast, Tolkien's forces of goodness are noble and high as well as steadfast. The Valar and Iluvatar are even more powerful and "higher" than Gandalf and the Elves, and the highest powers are obviously good and support an absolute virtue. They are at work in Middle Earth and are opposed to Sauron. "Behind [Bilbo's discovery of the Ring] there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. [Gandalf] can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you [Frodo] also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 81, emphasis Tolkien's). Elrond speaks similarly about the council held at Rivendell. The attendees "have come and are here met . . . by chance it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is *so ordered* that [those gathered] must now find counsel for the peril of the world" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 291, emphasis mine). Elrond tells Frodo after the frightened hobbit volunteers to take the Ring to Mordor, "I think that this task is appointed for you, Frodo; and that if you do not find a way, no one will" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 324), emphasizing the decree of providence working in Frodo's quest. Some power that is opposed to Sauron has decreed that Bilbo and Frodo become ring-bearers and

that the council of free peoples meet at Rivendell. Other instances of apparent chance, which prove to be fortunate, are associated with some mysterious but benevolent will. For example, Gildor tells Frodo that the paths of elves and other people seldom cross but that their meeting “may be more than chance” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 114). After Tom Bombadil rescues Merry and Pippin from the willow trees, Frodo asks him if he heard Frodo calling for help or happened to pass by. Tom did not hear Frodo’s calls for help. It was chance, “if chance you call it,” Bombadil tells Frodo, implying that Tom, who is master of his realm, believes some other authority influenced him to meet the hobbits when he did.

Other indications of the influence of a higher power are the scenes involving Sam and Frodo’s inspiration to speak. Several times, one of the companions is inspired to create a song for the moment or to use an allusion to defend himself, as Frodo did at the Ford of Rivendell, calling upon Elbereth and Luthien the fair. However, the boldest example of otherworldly inspiration is when Sam, confronting Shelob, begins speaking in an unknown tongue. “And then his tongue was loose and his voice cried in a language he did not know: A Elbereth Gilthoniel / o menel palan-diriel, / le nallon si dinguruthos! / A tiro nin, Fanuilos!” (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 400). The inspiration and determination accompanying this experience provide Sam the strength to defeat Shelob and are simultaneously Elven/Western and from within the young hobbit.

The simple hobbit farmer Sam is an unlikely hero, but he is given the means of saving his master and the quest by obvious support from providence. An even less likely source of aid comes from characters who are unwilling to help Frodo or unintentionally provide aid to the quest. The higher powers of Middle Earth use even the evil forces that are working

against Frodo for the success of the quest. The clearest example of providence's playing a major role in the success of Frodo's quest comes from the most unlikely source: Gollum. The little villain is a constant menace to the Companions. Sauron uses him to hunt the Ring. Strider and Gandalf painstakingly track him and endure unpleasant hours trying to learn information from him. Despite the care of Legolas's countrymen, he escapes captivity in order to pursue the Ring. He stalks the Fellowship to the great river and follows Frodo and Sam into Mordor. After the supposed taming of Smeagol, he commits his most vicious treachery, leading the hobbits into Shelob's lair. However, Gollum's presence at Mount Doom is essential because he attacks Frodo in order to retrieve the Ring. In their struggle, Gollum bites Frodo's ring finger off and falls into the fires of Mount Doom. The quest of the Ring would be a complete failure, probably resulting in Sauron's recovery of the Ring of Power and domination of all Middle Earth, if Gollum were not present. Sam, worrying about his master, admits to himself that Frodo will not "be able to do anything for himself" once reaching Mount Doom (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 240). And, after the struggle at the Crack of Doom, Frodo admits that "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!" (Tolkien, *Return* 250). Neither Frodo nor Sam desires Gollum's company and they--only grudgingly--use him as a guide. All of the companions see their stalker as a menace from the beginning; even Gandalf, who foresees that Gollum has "some part to play yet" in the fate of the Ring, does not know if that part is "for good or ill" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 86). A power beyond the will and control of the major characters orchestrates Gollum's final encounter with Frodo, yet requires Frodo and Sam's willing participation.

The necessary counterpart of the hand of providence is the free will of the heroes in *The Lord of the Rings*. The members of the Council of Elrond essentially have one choice to make, carrying the Ring to Mount Doom; however, they must make that choice of their own free will. Elrond emphasizes the import of Frodo accepting the burden of the Ring by telling Frodo, “I do not lay it [the burden of carrying the Ring] on you. But if you take it freely, I will say that your choice is right” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 324). Repeatedly, the people of Middle Earth are presented with the choice to stand against the darkness or submit to its domination. The assertion of their wills to resist the evil of Sauron is essential to their victory. Iluvatar is never seen forcing anyone to act against his will, and the Valar have been prohibited from doing so. Even when the elves were leaving Valinor to pursue a foolish vengeance against Morgoth, the messenger from Manwe told Feanor “as ye came hither freely, freely shall ye depart” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 95). The Istari, the wizards sent from the West to oppose Sauron, “were forbidden to match his power with power, or to seek to dominate Elves or Men by force and fear” (Tolkien, *Return* 417). Therefore, Cirdan the shipwright gave Narya, the Ring of Fire, to Gandalf to inspire and encourage the free peoples who had the will to resist evil. Inspired free will is more potent than the manipulations and machinations of the enemy. Aeneas is not as free because even the gods supporting him and his quest use their majesty and authority as gods to manipulate Aeneas. When they leave Aeneas and Turnus to their own devices, the two combatants fall back on primal means of resolving the epic.

Following from the similar beginnings of Frodo’s quest separated from the Fellowship and Aeneas’s flight from Troy and the differing virtues sustaining the heroes on

their journeys, the contrasting climaxes of the quests of the *Aeneid* and *The Lord of the Rings* cement the differences between the types of heroism. Aeneas, Frodo, and Sam make surprising decisions that dictate the outcome of their respective quests, the results of those decisions providing final support for the virtues advocated by the respective authors.

Aeneas, who, throughout the epic, has embodied piety and has struggled to preserve lives and escape bloodshed, ends the *Aeneid* by violently killing Turnus for vengeance and to assuage his conscience. “To his Rage abandoning the Rein, / With Blood and slaughter’d Bodies fills the Plain” (12.723-24). Despite arguing for peace and non-violent solutions to the civil struggles in Latium, Aeneas ultimately asserts the “might-makes-right” values that advocate military and physical prowess and luck above constancy and an absolute righteousness. Similarly, at the Crack of Doom, Frodo rebels against everything the Company had been fighting for when he decides to keep the Ring for himself.

When the time for the final decision comes, Frodo cannot destroy the Ring and attempts to set himself up as a new Ring Lord. The same temptation that Gandalf and Galadriel overcome and to which Boromir succumbs also defeats Frodo. However, unlike Aeneas, whose uncharacteristic murder wins the war and secures the beginnings of the empire, Frodo’s uncharacteristic willful act of self-assertion and failure to destroy the Ring threatens the survival of Middle Earth and is the hobbit’s greatest failure because he is inconstant and rebellious against the goodness in which he begins the quest. As previously noted, Frodo is providentially saved from his own fall by the greater evil of Gollum. Frodo could not have thrown the Ring into the fires of his own volition; therefore, he needed the providential chance that Gollum would be there to take it into the Crack of Doom. The keys

to Frodo's, and Middle Earth's, salvation are the mercy and pity that Frodo freely shows Smeagol before they reached Mount Doom. As Tolkien himself says, having mercy on Gollum is necessary because

At the last moment the pressure of the Ring would reach its maximum—impossible . . . for any one to resist, certainly after long possession, months of increasing torment, and when starved and exhausted. Frodo had done what he could and spent himself completely (as an instrument of Providence) and had produced a situation in which the object of his quest could be achieved. His humility (with which he began) and his sufferings were justly rewarded by the highest honour; and his exercise of patience and mercy towards Gollum gained him Mercy: his failure was redressed. (Tolkien, *Letters* 326)

The same mercy that Bilbo shows Gollum after finding the Ring because he empathized with Gollum's loneliness, the mercy that Gandalf chides Frodo for lamenting, saves Frodo and all the free world. The key to this saving virtue is that it must be freely given. Bilbo takes so little hurt from the evil of the Ring and escapes its control because he begins his ownership of the Ring "with mercy and pity on Gollum" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 85). The mercy is freely given with no thought of reward and with considerable risk to Bilbo. Likewise, Sam, who for so long wants to kill Gollum in order to protect his master cannot bring himself to do so when finally given the chance.

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. (Tolkien, *Return* 246)

Frodo, and eventually Sam, pity Gollum because they can sympathize with his tormented existence. They have borne the Ring and know its decaying powers; therefore, they pity rather than judge Gollum. "In his instinctive wish to save and tame Smeagol rather than destroy him, Frodo creates his heroism" (Sale 52). This type of compassion through one's association with the plight of others is a key Christian virtue. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion . . ." (Col 3:12). It is the same mercy through association that Christ showed mankind by becoming a man, enduring temptation, and bringing all sin upon Himself; it is selfless and brings the power of redemption. Frodo is redeemed from having attempted to establish himself as another Dark Lord because he has mercy on Gollum. In one of the most touching scenes, Gollum nearly repents and truly embraces Frodo as his master because the hobbit shows him mercy. Having displayed this mercy, Frodo also receives mercy and redemption. After Gollum bites off Frodo's ring finger and falls into the fires of Mount Doom, destroying the Ring, Sam experiences complete joy despite his imminent destruction because "his master had been saved; he was himself again, he was free" (Tolkien, *Return* 250). Aeneas made one surprising decision, killing Turnus after he asked for mercy; Sam unexpectedly saves Gollum's life, displaying a mercy that soon comes to fruition. Frodo, however, makes two surprising turns. He asserts himself as the new dark lord, but after his providential salvation,

he returns as the hobbit Sam knows. Frodo has endured all he could endure and spends all of his energy attempting to complete the quest, and providence then provides his redemption. The doubly blessing nature of mercy (the one giving and the one receiving) is a key Christian idea. “Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37b).

Having been shown this mercy, Frodo teaches it to the other hobbits after returning to the Shire. He stays the hands of the vengeful hobbits who desire to kill Saruman after they scour the Shire.² Having experienced the tendency toward evil that is within himself, indeed inside everyone, Frodo does not allow the hobbits to pass judgment on Saruman. While the hobbits must scour their Shire through their typical means of standing fast against their enemies and confronting them with stout hobbit-sense and minimal force, Frodo augments their weaponry against Saruman with pity. Frodo tells his countrymen, “it is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will lead to nothing” (Tolkien, *Return* 333). And when Sam and the other hobbits make a move to attack Saruman, Frodo stops them: “I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find [a cure]” (Tolkien, *Return* 333). By showing the fallen wizard that pity, Frodo has “robbed [his] revenge of sweetness” (Tolkien, *Return* 333-34).

The end of the *Aeneid* is strikingly different. Both pairs of victors and protagonists are opposite each other. Whereas after the final defeat of Sauron’s forces Saruman becomes more and more petty but continues his attacks against the hobbits until they force him away with as little violence as possible, Turnus, when forced to admit his defeat when his sword

² A friend and colleague, Gabriel Johnson, started me down this train of thought.

breaks, runs from Aeneas, who then pursues Turnus as a prey (XII 1083-88). Tolkien creates a sharp distinction between Frodo and Saruman by having the former Ring-bearer wisely restrain the angered hobbits. However, Virgil comments on the similarity between Aeneas and Turnus. “Both engage / with equal fortune yet, and mutual rage” (XII 1016-17), signifying that the two champions begin their duel with the same level of anger and fury motivating them, which is shocking considering Turnus has been influenced by Alecto but Aeneas has not. Turnus proves to be extremely bloodthirsty during the campaign against the Trojans; several times battle fury overtakes him. Yet, he has been, at least somewhat, possessed by the Fury Alecto; “her smould’ring Torch impress’d, / With her full Force, she plung’d into his breast” (VII 638-39). Aeneas’s bloodlust and fury are entirely his own. As Camps says, “Aeneas too becomes bloodthirsty, and even more grossly than Turnus, after the death of Pallas” (39). Aeneas’s wrath against haughty Turnus for causing so many deaths is understandable, as is the hobbits’ anger at being subjugated by Saruman, but the hobbits more display “the most excellent way” (I Corinthians 12:31b).

Unlike the end of the *Aeneid*, which depicts vengeful killing and the resulting establishment of the fledgling Roman Empire, *The Lord of the Rings* shows that the virtues of mercy and pity are powerful against evil and can work to undo the schemes of the wicked. Aeneas, being a noble and good man, is moved to mercy by Turnus’s pleas, but righteous wrath inflames him. He kills Turnus, and that is right because the killing ends the war and allows him to establish the Roman Empire, bring honor to his family, and give justice to Pallas’s family. However, the hobbits’ defeat of Saruman and the later mercy shown toward him are superior to Aeneas’s vengeance. After the advent of Christianity, Tolkien can give

readers a new type of hero, one who stands against evil but offers mercy towards those who are ensnared by the deceptions of evil because he knows how easy such entrapment can be.

Aeneas, like the Rohirrim and the Gondorians, has a value system focusing on family and kingdom, honor and valor. He is a pious and good hero but not the best. At the time of Virgil's composition, the Roman values and piety needed emphasizing. In *The Lord of the Rings*, such values are upheld as models, but not models of complete virtue. Boromir is very similar to the classical hero because he is valiant, strong, handsome, noble, and concerned for his people and for finding the strength to protect them. The tragedy of Boromir is that he has these noble and good qualities but cannot understand the value of sacrificing power and his own glory. Defeating evil by sacrificing power is a uniquely Christian heroism. While both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Aeneid* depict heroes relying on the aid, whether explicit or subtle, of higher powers to defeat other superior beings, in *The Aeneid*, Aeneas and the Trojans use military prowess and violence to defeat another military power. Gods happen to be aligned with one or the other, and Aeneas has the dominant gods supporting him. Aeneas is similar to the type of military messiah that Christ's contemporaries were probably expecting, a mighty leader who would restore the Jews to their kingdom through conquest blessed by God. Aeneas is divinely sent and appears to be the underdog until he gains power, support and divine assistance enough to lead his homeless people to claim their promised land. Many Jews contemporary to Virgil or Christ probably expected their deliverance to appear in the form of another Moses or David, and an Aeneas would have been close to their expectations.

However, the power against evil and oppression that Christ provides is not military. Just as He sacrificed power and majesty, the main heroes in *The Lord of the Rings* are identified as such because they sacrifice the power of the Ring. Tolkien's heroes are struggling against a powerful foe with great military might, but they cannot use the same tactics and forces against Sauron. Using Sauron's Ring against Sauron simply creates another dark lord (Tolkien, *Letters* 93). Perhaps this is part of the reason history is cyclical for Aeneas and his empire. The warrior's piety and virtues are not enough actually to progress, but Tolkien uses the familiarity of works such as the *Aeneid* to reveal what else is required. As John Milton's *Paradise Lost* depicts Satan in terms of a classical hero--powerful, assertive, and bold--in order to contrast those virtues with the Christian hero Adam, and ultimately Christ, Tolkien creates a Romance very similar to the classical epic, and thus contrasts the two types of heroism. While Tolkien's novels describe the end of the Third Age and beginning of the Fourth Age of Middle Earth, they also reveal the new values of the heroes who bring the change of the Age. *The Return of the King* reveals that humility, self-sacrifice, friendship, steadfast resistance to evil, and mercy must complement the older virtues.

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