

Tolkien's women (and men): the films and the book

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J. R. R. Tolkien's epic fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings*, is now beginning to be accepted by the academic world as canonical in the literature of the twentieth century, in part because of the BBC/Waterstone Bookstore's book poll in Britain in the 'nineties (Shippey, *Author of the Century* xxi), but more importantly because of the three recent films by New Zealand director Peter Jackson for New Line Cinema, in 2001, 2002, and 2003.¹ The films' popularity has prompted Tolkien fans, readers, and scholars to ask how clearly and well Jackson has adapted to film medium this important modern classic, and what in particular he has left out or changed (and to what purpose).

These questions bear a certain importance for scholars, in particular, who know something about the medieval genre of *The Lord of the Rings* – epic and romance – given Tolkien's own postmodern understanding in his book, of epic as "anti-epic." Certainly Oxford medievalist Tolkien, stirred by the heroic exploits of Beowulf and The Battle of Maldon, Old Norse sagas, Welsh romances, and the Finnish epic, *Kalevala*, re-created his own version of the Middle Ages in the world of Middle-earth (Chance, *Tolkien's Art*; Chance, *Tolkien the Medievalist*; Chance, *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth*). However, wounded spiritually by his own participation in the Battle of the Somme during World War I – a battle in which he lost important school friends (Garth) – Tolkien recast the medieval hero in this world in new, unlikely, and multiple forms. These forms include small hobbits, suspiciously dark Rangers like Strider, sisters and sister-daughters (nieces) like Éowyn, sister of Éomer and niece to King Théoden, and second sons like Faramir, younger brother of Boromir². Tolkien chose as the heroic adversary not the Vikings or a monster like Grendel or the dragon, but the antiheroic and formless tyrant Sauron, a fallen tyrannical Maia who longs for power. Most importantly, Tolkien changed the nature of the epic quest from a journey to join in the war of nations to an anti-quest, a non-battle, and a lonely trip to run an errand – to throw something away – across the margins of the battlefield.

What has Jackson done to Tolkien's anti-epic? First and most obviously, he returns it to the film genre of the Hollywood epic by transforming *The Lord of the Rings* into a high-tech CGI adventure. The never-ending scenes with goblins, orcs, the cave troll, and the winged balrog, or with wargs, oliphaunts, ents, men, and nazgûl, flash by so indiscriminately that the eye cannot focus on a single unifying thread, although in Tolkien's book such battling occurs offstage and in relatively little narrative space. Most unaccountably, there are few quiet moments in these films, despite Tolkien's penchant for the moving intimate exchange between two characters or for dramatic inner revelation. Even in the few scenes of anger, love, and grief, Jackson pushes the envelope.³

Such rewriting is not wholly unexpected on the part of horror-film-specialist Jackson. The dead bodies and severed heads littering the floor of the Mines of Moria constitute the same kind of Jacksonian grotesquerie found in his film *The Frighteners* (1996). But this is an inexplicable step backward from his fine, critically acclaimed film *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), which dealt with the murder of a mother by her fourteen-year-old daughter and her daughter's best friend, Juliet Hulme (later to earn fame as Anne Perry, detective-story writer). The sensitivity shown in this film would have enhanced his treatment of the quieter scenes in *The Lord of the Rings*.

If Jackson's film adaptation of Tolkien may more precisely be designated as just one interpretation, or "translation" – to borrow a term from some of the Oxford don's most important scholarly articles about the necessity for literal accuracy in any scholarly rendition of a work in a different language⁴ – then how has Jackson interpreted Tolkien? What has Jackson omitted from, added to, and changed in Tolkien's text in a way that distorts the meaning of epic (or anti-epic)?

To answer these questions it is necessary to explain, first, the screenwriter's tight focus on selected, representative incidents and his or her omission of the didactic and non-dramatic – non-visual – portions of a text. Jackson has had to reduce *The Lord of the Rings* to three relatively spare action films. This demand results from the nature of the medium: if in a screenplay one page counts as one minute of film time, the screenplay for each four-hour film must be about 240 pages long – but Tolkien's single-spaced, crammed pages in *The Fellowship of the Ring* alone amount to 479 pages, or the equivalent of about 960 double-spaced screenplay pages. Further, each film is not divided into two consecutive books, as are *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*. The first half of *The Fellowship of the Ring* film – the first twenty-seven scenes of the extended version – is equivalent to the twelve chapters of the first book, which ends with the Flight to the Ford. In the second half – another twenty-one scenes – the film compresses ten chapters. Deleted from the first film are central episodes primarily from the first book, such as Tom Bombadil's rescue of the hobbits from the Old Forest and the Barrow-downs. Although these omitted episodes may not seem so crucial to the dramatic narrative, they (and others that precede them) constitute about seven of the twelve chapters in the first book of *The Fellowship of the Ring* alone.

By changing the focus from Frodo's hero-journey in the book to the love story of Arwen and Aragorn in the film, Jackson subordinates and devalues (or at least defers) Tolkien's key theme of the ennoblement of the ordinary to the more ordinary marriage of the nobility. In the first film, in the

This essay was first published under the same title in *Tolkien on Film: essays on Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings*, edited by Jay Brennan Croft, Mythopoeic Press 2004, 175-193, Altadena CA.,

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"Flight to the Ford," Jackson substitutes Arwen (Liv Tyler), daughter of Elrond (Hugo Weaving), for Frodo's rescuer, the Elf-lord Glorfindel on his horse, Asfaloth (Fellowship, scene 21). Although Jackson makes other changes to Tolkien's text in all of the films, the emphasis on Arwen as a feminised Amazon/Valkyrie warrior astride her own white horse, along with what might be termed an infantilisation of Frodo and the hobbits, represents his most egregious refiguration of Tolkien's epic. In the first film, Jackson dilutes the heroic development of Frodo and the other hobbits, just as he similarly weakens the role of Aragorn to bolster Arwen. In the second film, under the director's even freer hand, Aragorn becomes stronger and more decisive, while a fight seems to be shaping up on his account between Arwen and Éowyn. The hobbits are lost in the narrative amid the thunderous battles, despite moments of heroism by Merry and Pippin and Frodo and Sam. In the third film, Arwen finally chooses her own destiny because of a vision of her future child and at the end marries Aragorn, while the hobbits, whose heroism saves the day in many ways, accomplish much of their action through unseemly violence against adversaries and companions. At the same time, the hobbits' loyalty and love for one another contrast starkly with the murder of Déagol by Sméagol after he finds the Ring, in a scene that Jackson pulls from the first volume and inserts as an overarching theme at the beginning of the third film. Why has Jackson infantilised Frodo and the hobbits, reduced the manliness of Aragorn, and enhanced the power of Arwen in all three films?

What Tolkien has to say about the role of Arwen and Aragorn and the journey of the hobbits, in a draft of a letter to Michael Straight written in January or February 1956, is most important for understanding Tolkien's postmodern anti-epic of *The Lord of the Rings*:

I regard the role of Arwen and Aragorn as the most important of the Appendices; it is part of the essential story, and is only placed so, because it could not be worked into the main narrative without destroying its structure: which is planned to be "hobbito-centric," that is, primarily a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble. (Letters, 237)

Tolkien speaks, surprisingly, about the importance of Arwen and Aragorn to the story. But it is a story he has for the most part placed, not in the narrative of the epic (or anti-epic) fantasy, where his primary concern is to ennoble the hobbits, but in the back, in the appendices.

Truly, this theme of ennoblement of the humble is the heart of the narrative in Tolkien's book. *The Lord of the Rings* is not about large battles and the killing of the enemy by the aristocracy of Middle-earth, be they regal men or reigning elves and wizards. Instead, this anti-epic is about the way that the humble – the hobbits – come to be ennobled, empowered as heroes, and how they earn their place in an epic narrative in which the background of the battle scenes and the clash of metal on metal have become, strangely, the foreground. What is lacking in the films is depth of characterisation, and therefore the acting is offset by the fellowship of the ensemble. However, just as the first film presents Frodo, Merry, Pippin, and Sam as childish hobbits and the rightful king, Aragorn, as passive, the second and third films compensate by tracing their growing maturation.

Having criticised Jackson's treatment as being unreflective of Tolkien's intentions, I will seem to contradict myself by now suggesting that Jackson's changes are truer to Tolkien's overarching drama, the story of Middle-earth and its four ages, in which *The Lord of the Rings* portrays the transition from the Third Age, of Elves, to the Fourth Age, of Man. Jackson's most important changes in all three films, which generally appear to give women – in particular, Arwen – a greater role than that found in Tolkien's anti-epic, are actually intrinsic to Tolkien's larger contextualising mythology, which features Arwen's great sacrifice of her elven immortality. Less justifiably in Jackson's version, a puerile Frodo and Sam demonstrate the effect of the Ring through violence, at least in the third film, which exaggerates the heroic change in their characters at the end by means of dramatic contrast, as does the establishing shot in the third film, in which a more hobbit-like Sméagol murders Déagol because of the Ring. I will first examine Jackson's changes in the hobbits before returning to his emphasis on the story of Arwen and Aragorn.

Hobbit children

Of the changes most important in the first film, the infantilisation of the hobbits (in part to appeal to the nineteen- to twenty-six-year-old male youth market) stands out most glaringly⁵. Frodo diminishes from a fifty-year-old hobbit to the boyish (even childlike) Elijah Wood in the central role as he begins the quest. Even if it is argued that Frodo, at thirty-three, is in fact just coming out of his "tweens" at his coming-of-age party in the text of *The Fellowship of the Ring* – a "Long Expected Party" like Bilbo's own birthday party in the text – he does not leave on the quest for some fifteen to twenty years after that party, at a "sober" age that Tolkien describes as "significant": "So it went on, until his forties were running out, and his fiftieth birthday was drawing near; fifty was a number that he felt was somehow significant (or ominous); it was at any rate at that age that adventure had suddenly befallen Bilbo" (*FR*, 66). Tolkien himself would have been nearing fifty in the late 1930s when he began *The Lord of the Rings*, and he was into his sixties at the time that it was first published, in 1953. It seems unlikely that Tolkien intended Frodo to resemble a teenager, especially taking into consideration Tolkien's remark to Deborah Webster, in Letter 213, that "I am myself a hobbit" (Letters, 288). Further, the films' logic about the reason for the hobbit's youthfulness is inconsistent. Although Frodo appears young because of Elijah Wood's own youth during this period of passage while Bilbo still possesses the Ring – which according to Tolkien's text preserves youthfulness – Bilbo (as portrayed by Ian Holm) always appears extremely old, even at the moment he gives up the Ring to Gandalf.

That literal childishness we see in Frodo is characteristic of all the hobbits of the Fellowship and not just the Ringbearer. For example, in the first film, when Merry (Dominic Monaghan) and Pippin (Billy Boyd) burst forth exuberantly from the cornfield with some carrots and other vegetables stolen from Farmer Maggot's garden, they literally bump into Frodo and Sam (Sean Astin). This encounter conflates episodes from the book's Farmer Maggot chapter ("A Short Cut to Mushrooms," *FR*, chapter 4), in which it was Frodo in particular who as a child used to steal mushrooms from the farmer. And in the film at the Inn of the Prancing Pony (*FR*,

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chapter 9), the hobbits, like typical university students, all want a pint of beer (*FR*, 240). In the film Pippin is criticised by Gandalf at the Mines of Moria when he terms the hobbit's deed of knocking a dead man into the well "stupidity" ("Fool of a Took!" is the wizard's response to this "nuisance" in *Fellowship* [*FR*, 373]). Certainly it is stupid, for in the film Pippin thereby awakens malice in the persons of the orcs; simple Pippin, also always hungry, elsewhere in Tolkien's book and in the film wants second breakfasts, elevenses, lunch, tea, and dinner. But in the text, it is not a hobbit alone who awakens the orcs or the balrog: it is the man, Boromir, whose stone first causes trouble before they enter Moria by alerting the Watcher in the Water – and there are no dead orcs or dwarves perched on the well [*FR*, 366-67]).

Jackson de-emphasizes the hobbits and Aragorn in the first film so that he can empower and ennoble them in the later films. In support, Jackson emphasises male bonding at the end of the first film in an understanding of Tolkien's own interest throughout his life and works in male camaraderie and heroic friendship and service: mainly through showing Aragorn (Viggo Mortenson), Gimli (John Rhys-Davies), and Legolas (Orlando Bloom) – as man, dwarf, and elf – committing themselves to the pursuit of the captured Merry and Pippin. Accompanying this male camaraderie in the film is Boromir's redemptive confession to Aragorn at the moment of his death and his formal submission as guardian of Gondor to his king, just as Sam is also rescued from drowning by his master, Frodo, in the boat and expresses his love for him (*Fellowship*, scenes 45 and 46, "The Departure of Boromir" and "The Road Goes Ever On"). These are all rich, masculinised, Tolkienian

moments, true to the text in a figurative sense.

Expanding Arwen

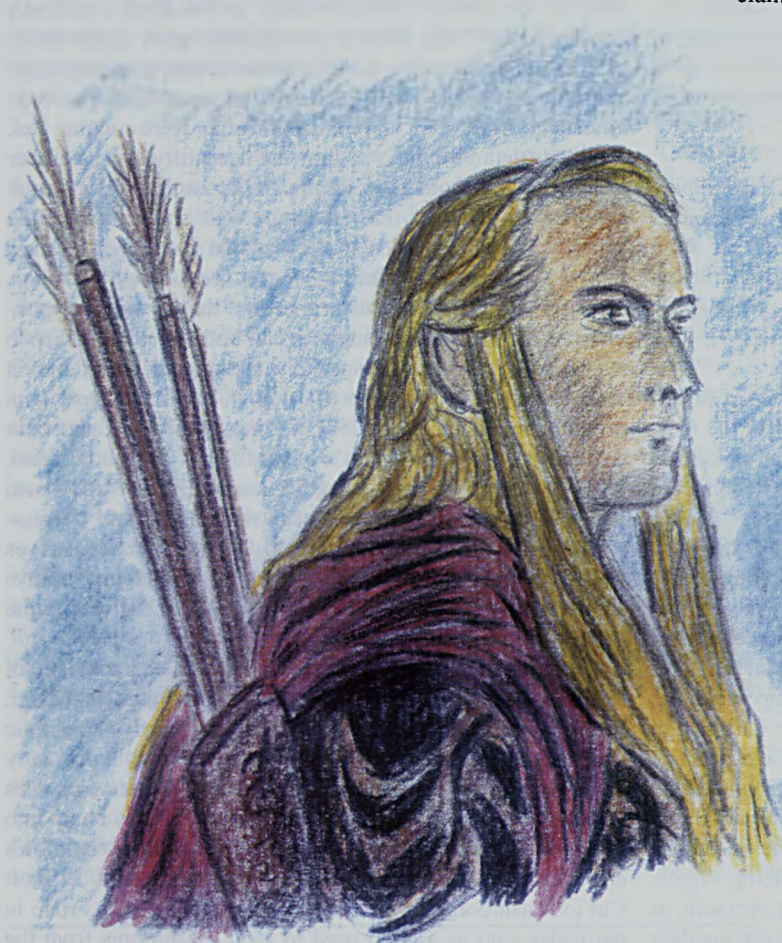
As Frodo and the other hobbits diminish into naughty children in the film of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, so also is Arwen made into a hero, chiefly in the Flight to the Ford scene (*Fellowship*, scene 21). Arwen's beefed-up role in the film creates a female presence where there was none in Tolkien's text. In the film the Black Riders pursue Arwen, who carries Frodo protectively on her white horse like a mother clutching her baby (*Fellowship*, scene 21). Arwen takes Frodo herself because she can ride faster than Aragorn – a characterisation wholly missing in Tolkien's book. In fact, when Arwen first appears in the scene, she has been out looking for Aragorn, as Glorfindel was looking for Frodo in the book. She herself carries Frodo to Rivendell on her white horse rather than permit him to ride Asfaloth alone and confront the Black Riders at the Ford.

Second, in the film Arwen tells Aragorn she will forsake immortality (in a scene that jumps ahead to the third volume of the trilogy) – reminding us of her role in and importance to Tolkien's mythology as revealed in the appendices and *The Silmarillion*, which depends upon her uniting of elf with man to bring about the peaceful transition to the Fourth Age, of Man.

Third, in the film, at the Ford itself, Arwen rescues Frodo from the Black Riders, as an overpowering *dea ex machina* in the guise of an Amazon warrior, an event absent from Tolkien's *Fellowship of the Ring* (and from either of the other two volumes, for that matter). "If you want him, come and claim him" is the challenge she hurls at them, while

the passive and drooling Frodo gazes blankly into the sky. Jackson, by stripping Tolkien's text of early episodes in which the hobbits play key roles, reduces Frodo to a two-dimensional hero whose supposed courage as a hobbit is only rather suddenly and abruptly acknowledged by Elrond at Rivendell.

In the text of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, in contrast to its visualisation, Frodo demonstrates his heroism through his bold oath to Varda and Lúthien: "By Elbereth and Lúthien the Fair," said Frodo with a last effort, lifting up his sword, "You shall have neither the Ring nor me!" (*FR*, 262). With this action Tolkien provides the climax of Frodo's physical evolution as a hero in the first book of *The Fellowship*: the hobbit is torn, on the one hand, between the Ring demanding that he put it on as the nine Black Riders call him back and, on the other, the goal of reaching safety at Elrond's Rivendell house on the opposite side (repre-



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senting elven goodness and security and power). Further, Elrond, not Arwen, commands the flood, and Gandalf, through the encouragement of Glorfindel – as we learn later – adds to its tumultuous power the marvellous white water horses (see *FR*, 271).

In contrast to the dominant Valkyrie Arwen, in the first film Aragorn is strangely deflated in some ways, in other ways pumped up. In scene 25, “The Sword That was Broken,” as if in symbolic agreement with his missing virility, the blade that cut off the Ring lies broken, its shards posed as if a relic passively stored in a museum. In the book the sword is reforged and raised up by Aragorn’s hand after the Council of Elrond, before the Fellowship departs. At the end of the first film a regretful Aragorn appears, to tell Frodo “I would have gone all the way to the end – to Mordor,” he says to the hobbit, then telling him to “Run!” (Fellowship, scene 43, “Parth Galen”). Indeed, it is Boromir and not the sentimental Aragorn who shines most brightly at the end of the first film: Boromir seems to be picking up firewood and not deliberately following Frodo (as he is in Tolkien’s book) when he makes his grab for the Ring (Fellowship, scene 43, “Parth Galen”). When Jackson’s Boromir later compensates for his deed by bravely protecting the Merry and Pippin, the Man from Gondor is slain in a very long death scene in which he is pierced by many arrows (Fellowship, scene 44, “The Breaking of the Fellowship”). Further, Boromir also quite movingly confesses his guilt and, after Aragorn refers to “our people,” pledges his support to Aragorn and then dies (Fellowship, scene 45, “The Departure of Boromir”). It is curious that Jackson has tacked on here the beginning of book 3, even if with an eye to a “happy ending” that will satisfy viewers and impel them to see the second instalment. Jackson will similarly defer the unhappy ending of *The Two Towers* – the encounter with Shelob – until the third film, *The Return of the King*.

Creating Éowyn

The second film also changes central features of Tolkien’s epic, adds material not found in the text of *The Lord of the Rings*, and omits other material.⁶ In one of the most important additions, as we shall see in returning to Jackson’s emphasis on Arwen and Aragorn, Éowyn, sister-daughter of the king of Rohan, epitomises the female stereotype of caretaker for the children and aged of the kingdom and the eroticised object of



Gríma’s desire. Note that she is perceived as “fair and cold” when he attempts to intimidate her over the dead body of King Théoden’s son Théodred (*Towers*, scene 20, “The King of the Golden Hall”).

Éowyn’s role in Tolkien’s *Two Towers*, however, is fuller and more balanced in terms of her social and political role as shield-maiden, leader, and future ruler. There she also assists her uncle, King Théoden, at the meeting with Gandalf and the company, and, though “stern as steel” and the “daughter of kings,” appears to Aragorn incomplete, or at least immature – “like a morning of pale spring that is not yet come to womanhood” (*TT*, 141). Like the Old English queen Wealhtheow in *Beowulf*, wife of Danish king Hrothgar, Éowyn in Tolkien’s text passes the cup at a hall ceremony to knit up peace after feasting in a joyful gift-giving – specifically, the shining mail and round shields bestowed upon Aragorn and Legolas and the cap of iron and leather chosen by Gimli from the king’s hoard. In Tolkien’s text, “The king now rose, and at once Éowyn came forward bearing wine. ‘Ferthu Théoden há!’ she said. ‘Receive now this cup and drink in happy hour. Health be with thee at thy going and coming!’” The Rohirrim (modelled on Old English) means “Fare well [hale] Théoden!”⁷ In the text she also passes the cup to Aragorn (but trembles as she does so to show her infatuation).

Although in the text of *Two Towers* Théoden names Éomer as his heir, upon the suggestion of Háma the hall-guardian (who has released Éomer from prison), it is to Éowyn that Théoden entrusts his people – no mean responsibility – when

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he and the Company depart for battle. In the film, in contrast, Éomer is banished by Gríma-Wormtongue (Towers, scene 8, “The Banishment of Éomer”) and Éowyn appears to be primarily a nurturing caregiver to her uncle (and king) and her people (Towers, scenes 27 and 35, “Exodus from Edoras” and “Helm’s Deep”). In Tolkien’s book, Théoden is not thinking of Éowyn when he asks Háma for someone in whom “my people trust.” For Théoden, Éomer is he whom he is unable to spare or leave behind, “the last of that House” (of Eorl). Háma corrects him: “I said not Éomer And he is not the last. There is Éowyn, daughter of Éomund, his sister. She is fearless and high-hearted. All love her. Let her be as lord to the Eorlingas, while we are gone” (*TT*, 151). In Théoden’s absence, as lord she will lead the folk of the Golden Hall. Thus, in the text, as the splinter Fellowship departs, Éowyn stands dressed in mail and lays her hands upon the hilt of a sword. We will not see her again until the third volume. But in the film, she seems to be herding her people in an exodus to Dunharrow – in advance of their flight in volume three. And in the film, like the shield maiden she will become only in the third volume of the text, she attempts swordplay with Aragorn, who offers in defense a knife – a scene of sexual symbolism nowhere found in Tolkien’s text – and speaks of her caretaking role as a “cage” (Towers, scene 26, “A Daughter of Kings”).

Arwen’s choice

In the second (and third) films the figure we see more of than in Tolkien’s narrative is, of course, Arwen, Elven beloved of Aragorn and symbol of wisdom who will be, apparently, lost to Men after the passing of the Elves. Initially, her importance in the film of *The Two Towers* is not entirely clear. Her providential role is underscored in Aragorn’s two dreams. First, after Aragorn smokes, she visualizes before him to tell him to sleep, that this is a dream, and to kiss him; she also instructs him to follow the path, not to falter (Towers, scene 33, “The Evenstar”). Second, Arwen appears in a scene that does not exist in the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* but instead only in the appendices: she is told by her father, Elrond, that her time on Middle-earth is ending and that she must sail with her kin to the Undying Lands – although she will ultimately decide to stay with Aragorn (Towers, scene 38, “Arwen’s Fate”). In fact, in the text, at the end of the trilogy, it is Galadriel and her elves and not Arwen who must depart for the Undying Lands when the Third Age dissolves into the Fourth; Arwen gives away her passage to Frodo (*RK*, 282). This departure, earned by Galadriel’s rejection of Frodo’s proffered Ring, represents forgiveness for Galadriel’s own role as half-niece to Fëanor and participant in the revolt of the Noldor (described in *The Silmarillion*). Because of her disobedience, she was banned from joining the other Elves in Valinor for long years.⁸ This fact’s importance for Tolkien, if not for *The Two Towers* or even *The Lord of the Rings*, cannot be underestimated, for the harmony that will exist at the beginning of the Fourth Age, of Man, following the ending of the bellicose Third Age, of Elves, will be symbolised by the marriage between the Man Aragorn and Half-elf Arwen.

The endpoint toward which much of the film narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* has been moving rests upon Arwen’s decision to stay behind in Middle-earth with Aragorn and thereby sacrifice her immortality out of love for a human. This final decision of Arwen is anticipated in the film (but not the book) of *The Two Towers*, when Aragorn is injured in a battle with Wargs prior to the battle of Helm’s Deep and floats away.

Aragorn seems to be nearing his own end although he is watched over by natural and supernatural forces – for example, a vision of Arwen kisses him while his horse awakens him and kneels for him to mount (Towers, scene 35, “The Grace of the Valar”). Indeed, to the choice that Arwen’s father, Elrond, offers Arwen – death with Aragorn or life in the Undying Lands – Arwen replies, “You have my love, father,” and is shown departing Middle-earth with the other elves of Rivendell (Towers, scene 38, “Arwen’s Fate”). As if this ominous sign were not enough, Galadriel offers Legolas an analogous choice when she notes that “the time of the elves is over. Do we leave Middle-earth to its fate?” (Towers, scene 39, “The Story Foreseen from Lórien”). Clearly man is in danger: Galadriel declares prophetically in the film that “Sauron will try to destroy Rohan. The Eye turns to Gondor, the last free city of men,” and she predicts that the Quest will claim the Ringbearer’s life and that “the Ring is close to achieving its goal.” The end of the second film, however, leaves the audience with the impression that Arwen and Aragorn will never marry, in spite of her promise to relinquish her immortality for Aragorn’s sake in the first film.

The heroism and loyalty of hobbits

In the third film, two scenes at the beginning serve as establishing shots – frames for the final film that help to unify it thematically as well as mark its importance as the endpoint in the trilogy. The first reveals Sméagol’s murder of his cousin Déagol in order to obtain the Ring that the latter has found on Sméagol’s birthday, a scene that should have been part of Gandalf’s explanation to Frodo of the history of the Ring in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, as that is where it is found in Tolkien’s book. The second offers a vision of the child Arwen ought to have had with Aragorn and her confrontation with her father, Elrond: in a moment of transcendent love for a being of different kindred she says to him, “You saw my son – it is not lost. Some things are certain – if I leave him, I will regret it forever. . . . Reforge the sword!” (Return, scene 7, “Arwen’s Vision”). This latter theme unifies all three films and explains all the individual films’ emphases, on hobbits as halflings, on diminished man, and, most importantly, on Arwen as a half-elf.

The first establishing shot in *The Return of the King*, the kin-killing by Sméagol, signifies in halfling fashion the equivalent of Fëanor’s kinslaying in *The Silmarillion* and is similarly followed with consequences grim and terrible. Sméagol’s physical degeneration into Gollum, a being set apart from his kind both physically and spiritually, provides obvious evidence of his descent into evil. As a theme it anticipates the division, discord, and disloyalty that arise between Frodo and Sam, as the Ring’s influence becomes more pronounced as they near Mount Doom. The theme also anticipates the self-division and discord within Gollum himself, as he debates the pros and cons of whether he should betray his master, Frodo, to win the Ring (a more powerful master still). In general, the increasing violence by Frodo and Sam in the film graphically represents the effects of greed and pride on the hobbits.

In the text, of course, neither hobbit displays the physical violence exhibited in the film. In the film Sam attacks Gollum just as Gollum – Narcissus-like looking into a pool – debates whether he should let Shelob have Frodo; Sam’s actions tip the balance toward Shelob. In the text, Gollum shows concern and love for his sleeping master by almost touching his knee, which Sam mistakes for a threat. Sam’s chastisement for

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Gollum's one kind gesture unfortunately compels Gollum's betrayal of them to Shelob. But Jackson adds Gollum's unlikely staged set-up of Sam as a greedy thief of lembas: the degenerate hobbit sprinkles crumbs on Sam. This malicious sprinkling leads in the film to Sam's attack on Gollum and Frodo's suspicions of Sam, suspicions sufficiently keen to arouse Frodo's demand that his friend and servant go home. Later in the film, Gollum himself will attack Frodo in a manner very un-Tolkienian in nature: in the text, Tolkien clearly marks Gollum's faithfulness to his master by having Frodo make him swear a feudal oath of fealty to "Master," a rite ambiguous in nature because it is unclear whether it is Frodo to whom he is swearing or to the Ring (TT, 265-66). Further, in the film Sam never deliberates the ethical issue of bearing of the Ring to Mordor to complete the quest as he does in the text when he thinks his master, Frodo, is dead and the mission must continue; he merely tells Frodo when he presents it that he took it for "safekeeping".

Jackson, in his preference for graphic violence, may ignore the subtleties of the master-servant/knight-squire relationship that Tolkien has so carefully developed in *The Return of the King*. Nevertheless, in the third film, by means of several visual markers of separation and connection, Jackson truly renders the bond of friendship and caring between Frodo and Sam and among the three hobbits whom Frodo leaves behind in the Shire at the end. These visual markers contrast with the unlikely violence that has continued to take centre stage in all three films in a way not present in the anti-epic. In the film of *The Return of the King*, just as Gandalf beats up Denethor and then participates vigorously in battle, including the attack of the Nazgûl, Sam kills orcs, Sam fights Gollum, the eagles fight the Nazgûl, and Frodo battles Gollum. The visual markers that Jackson provides to counter the violence are equally stunning. In Jackson's depiction, Frodo perilously hangs from the edge of Mount Doom as Sam, like Michelangelo's God touching Adam's finger at the moment of creation, reaches out to grasp him and thereby return Frodo to Middle-earth and safety. Literally, Sam saves Frodo; figuratively, love and friendship and loyalty – the glue of Middle-earth – save the hobbit hero. Later, Arwen joins Aragorn in a scene of spring blossoms and song to usher in the Fourth Age, of man – and the end of the Third Age, with the departure of the elves, the Three Rings, and Arwen's father and their people. Finally, Frodo and the elves accompany the decrepit Bilbo to the boat to ferry him over to Valinor; the other hobbits have to bid goodbye to their beloved Frodo in a wrenching end-scene – that finishes, curiously, with Frodo's smile of acceptance. If the opening scene of Sméagol's murder of his cousin in the film of *The Return of the King* provides a clear definition of evil as greed, pride, and selfishness at the expense of the Other, then at the end the rectification of that crime is the love that binds the Fellowship.

Of Beren and Lúthien

What Jackson sees in the heroism and loyalty of the hobbits in this third film is linked to the loving union between the Valkyrie-like Arwen, half-elf, and Aragorn, man, the theme that for Jackson unifies all three films—clarified by what I have called the second establishing shot in *The Return of the King*, "Arwen's Vision." It seems equally clear in the film that

Jackson's invented scenes concerning Aragorn and Arwen are meant to mirror the pattern of the quest of their ancestors Beren and Lúthien. This love story of two kindreds in *The Lord of the Rings* echoes that told in *The Silmarillion* (and in the appendices to the trilogy) of the man Beren and the half elf /half maia Lúthien. Aragorn and Arwen must overcome the obstacle set by Elrond that Aragorn must be worthy of marrying his daughter, which he does by being crowned king. Beren and Lúthien are essentially prohibited from marriage by her father, Thingol, when he demands an extraordinary boon of Beren in return for his daughter's hand – the retrieval of one of Fëanor's captured jewels, the Silmarils, from Morgoth's crown.

In *The Silmarillion*, during Beren's quest for the Silmaril, Lúthien, like Jackson's Arwen, functions as hero equally with her male lover, in fact transcending him in her artistic and heroic roles (*Silmarillion*, chapter 19). For example, Rapunzel-like, Lúthien escapes imprisonment by her father by braiding her hair into a rope; further, her singing has a power that stuns her adversaries. Indeed, through her efforts and those of her maian wolfhound, Huan, she escapes capture by Celegorm, conquers Sauron (whose form is wrested from him in combat with Huan), and rescues Beren from imprisonment. Further, like Elrond to his daughter, Arwen, in the film, loyal Lúthien offers Beren the choice either of relinquishing the quest and wandering the earth or of challenging the power of darkness, although she promises that "on either road I shall go with you, and our doom shall be alike" (*Silmarillion*, 214). Lúthien matches in knowledge or artistry whatever Beren accomplishes in brave feats: for example, when Curufin, brother of Celegorm, tries to shoot her with an arrow, Beren steps in front and is himself wounded – but then Lúthien heals him. She sings for Morgoth, blinding him, so that Beren can steal the Silmaril. Lúthien sucks out the venom from Beren after the wolf Carcharoth has bitten off Beren's hand holding the Silmaril (*Silm*, 182). Although Beren also dies upon the successful completion of the quest, Lúthien sings to him and they meet again "beyond the Western Sea," where she is offered the choice of mortal life with Beren without certainty of joy, which she accepts.

But Beren and Lúthien are not only romantic paradigms and antecedents for Aragorn and Arwen; they are also their ancestors. Significant in this respect is the ennoblement of the man Aragorn through his elven-maian blood and also the fact that he is related as cousin to half-elf Arwen, who herself mixes the blood of different branches of elves. Aragorn descends ultimately from Elros, the brother of Arwen's father, Elrond; both of these elves are the children of Eärendil and Elwing and – not surprisingly – the great-grandchildren of Lúthien and Beren. Arwen is the daughter of Celebrían and Elrond and granddaughter of Galadriel and Celeborn (a connection that explains why the filmic Arwen might meet for advice with her grandmother Galadriel in Lothlórien). Certainly in the appendices to *The Lord of the Rings* Arwen is described as having spent time in Lothlórien both before she meets Aragorn and then after he dies.

The family backgrounds of Arwen, Galadriel, and Lúthien are important to Tolkien's mythology and also explain Jackson's filmic emphasis on the Arwen-Aragorn story. All three family lines mix the blood of different kindreds or tribes,

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symbolic of Tolkien's appropriation of the ideal of peace-weaving pursued by Anglo-Saxon noblewomen⁹ and the utopian goal of the unification of differing cultures. Arwen is half-elf and granddaughter of Galadriel, who herself unites the Noldorin-Vanyarin elves with the Teleri through her mother, Eärwen, daughter of the Teleri's Olwë of Alqualondë. That is, through Galadriel's father, Finarfin, the half brother of the important *Silmarillion* anti-hero Feanor, Arwen is connected to both the Noldor and the Vanyar. Finarfin's mother, Indis of the Vanyar, was the second wife of the Noldo Finwë.

But Lúthien's ancestry is even more impressive in its symbolic uniting of differing peoples: Lúthien's mother was Melian the maia (servant to the Valar), and her father was Thingol (or Elwë), the brother of Olwë of the Teleri. The linking of all families of elves with the progeny of different kindreds, maia, elf, and man, for Tolkien suggests the harmonious reconciliation of all social differences through peace and harmony in marriage. Modelling these intermarriages and mixed-blood progeny on the classical prototype of the hero as half god, half human, Tolkien finds his ideal union in the coupling of Beren and Lúthien, ancestors of Aragorn and Arwen. Their ideal union is mirrored in that of Aragorn and Arwen, the ideal character of which is merely hinted at in the third volume (and film) of *The Lord of the Rings*.

In the appendices Tolkien explains that only three such unions of Eldar and Edain have existed in the history of Middle-earth – Beren and Lúthien, Tuor and Idril, and Aragorn and Arwen. All three couples, but especially Aragorn and Arwen, are important because of their symbolic role in unifying alienated, diverse, or separated peoples: “By the last the long-sundered branches of the half-elven were reunited and their line was restored” (*RK*, app. A (i), 350). The long history of the elves dramatises the division of the three branches, the Noldor (joined by men), the Teleri, and the Vanyar, at various times alienated or geographically separated from each other. Specifically, in *The Silmarillion* the Noldor, headed by Feanor, are exiled from the Blessed Realm because of the Kinslaying; from them and their alliance with the Edain – men of the Three Houses of the Elf-friends who came to the West because they were attracted to the light and joined the Eldar against Morgoth – descends Tolkien's ultimate hero, Eärendil the Mariner. As the son of the man Tuor and the elf Idril (the third important union in Tolkien's mythology), Eärendil the Mariner represents both the Elves and the Men.¹⁰ From him spring the half-elven sons Elros and Elrond – father of Arwen.

The unification of man, elf (all the branches), and maia through the marriage of Aragorn and Arwen comes about only through the sacrifice and suffering of the lovers, chiefly because of the Doom of Men (Tolkien's euphemism for mor-

tality, also called a “Gift”). In the appendices (A 5) – which form a part of the tale of Aragorn and Arwen – after the death of his own father, Arathorn, the mother of two-year-old Aragorn takes him to live in the House of Elrond, where he is called Estel, “Hope,” to disguise his true identity from the Enemy. On the very next day after Aragorn's foster father, Elrond, reveals Aragorn's true identity as the Heir of Isildur – when he turns twenty – Aragorn first sees Arwen (who has been living in Lothlórien with her mother's kin) and, thinking she is Tinúviel (Lúthien), falls in love with her. He does so even though his mother, Gilraen, warns him that “it is not fit that mortal should wed with the elf-kin” (*RK*, app. A 5, 384) and, additionally, even though Elrond informs Aragorn that Aragorn will not have any bride until he is found worthy (Aragorn will be at least fifty years old when he earns that honour) (*RK*, app. A 5, 385). In these relatively mild twin obstacles we can see a parallel to those to the marriage of Beren and Lúthien. Further, there is an additional “doom” laid upon Elrond and Arwen (exile, because of the Kinslaying) to remain with the youth of the Eldar until Elrond must depart, when Arwen can choose to accompany him or not. Although Arwen accepts human mortality in order to marry Aragorn, she must also accept parting from her father and her people – and, along with that parting, the demise of Aragorn before her.

Thus, while Jackson does not finally follow the literal line of Tolkien's narrative in his films, the director appears to be establishing this central concern of the overarching mythology through Tolkien's focus on the relationship between Aragorn and Arwen that appears in the appendices. For this mythological reason also, Jackson brings into the forefront the epic battles in the War of the Ring that Tolkien, for the most part, uses only as background to the drama of the ennoblement of the hobbits, through their quest to return the Ring to its source. Within a filmic context, both of these mythological events – the union of Aragorn and Arwen and the War of the Ring – as dramatic narratives may be visually superior to that of the psychological journey of the Company – and the halflings in particular – and their saving of Middle-earth.

But these are not the themes Tolkien chose to emphasise in his anti-epic. Within the literary masterpiece and the medium of print, the journey and the knitting together of a peaceful end are of paramount importance to Tolkien. It is at the expense of Frodo's character, who, unlike Arwen's, does cross over to Valinor, that the aims of the film are achieved. We ought to remember that Frodo's dilemmas, not Aragorn's or Arwen's, are most important in the story Tolkien told and provide a paradigm in the text for the ennoblement of the ordinary, today and always.

Notes

Portions of this essay were originally published in Jane Chance's film review, “Is There a Text in this Hobbit? Peter Jackson's Fellowship of the Ring,” for *Literature/Film Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2002): 79-85, and are reproduced here by permission of the editor. Portions of this essay were previously also presented as part of various invited lectures: “Peter Jackson's ‘Hobbito-Centric’ Fellowship of the Ring?,” for the Rice University Alumni Group, Denver, CO, April 29, 2002; “Filming an Epic: Peter Jackson's Interpretation of Fellowship of the Ring,” for the Rice University Alumni Group, Austin, TX, October 10, 2002; “Tolkien and Middle-earth,” for the Rice University Society of Women, St. Paul's Methodist Church, Houston, TX, November 11, 2002; “Tolkien's Women: The Film and the Book,” at Houston Baptist University, Houston, TX, January 14, 2003; and “Tolkien and the Re-making of the Middle Ages: The Epic and the Book,” in the Medieval Fact and Fiction Track, for the Rice University Alumni College, Rice University, Houston, TX, March 1, 2003. With the same title as this essay, this essay was delivered as a featured lecture at the Tolkien Society Oxonmoot (“Bilbo's 111th Birthday”), St. Hugh's College, Oxford, UK, September 20, 2003; and as guest lectures at the English Department, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Piliscsaba, Hungary, April 26; the English Department, Károli Gáspár Protestant University, Budapest, Hungary, April 27, 2004; and in a seminar on “Reading Tolkien and Living the Virtues” (a month-long seminar funded by the Lilly Foundation and directed by Professor Ralph Wood of the English Department), at Baylor University, Waco, TX, June 23, 2004.

I am grateful to have had the benefit of the audiences' questions and points in revising this essay for publication. My thanks also go to Teresa Munisteri, editorial assistant for the Rice English department, for advice on styling this essay for publication.

Tolkien's women ...

References

1. All references are to the scene numbers in the extended versions of the three films on DVD, where available at the time of publication.
2. Eowyn is niece to Théoden, brother of her mother, Théodwyn. In the medieval romance the quest-hero frequently appears as the nephew to the king – the son of the king's sister, or "sister-son" – as was Gawain, nephew to King Arthur in the fourteenth-century *Gawain and the Green Knight* and son of Morgan la Fay and her half-brother, Arthur, in the fifteenth-century Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. To my knowledge no woman has played this role in a medieval romance or epic.
3. For example, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when Jackson's Gimli, who has imagined that Dwarf hospitality would be extended to the Fellowship by his kinsman Balin as a respite from the rigors of the journey (although Dwarves are not known for their hospitality elsewhere in Tolkien's work), finally finds the tomb of Balin, he sobs horribly in a most un-Tolkienian moment of grief. In Tolkien's text Gimli merely "cast his hood over his face" (FR, 380).
4. See my discussion of Tolkien's various comments about the translator's obligation to provide a faithful rendering of the text in Chance, Tolkien's Art, 26-28, which assimilates comments from the preface to Tolkien and E. V. Gordon's *Gawain* edition; the preface to Tolkien's translation of *Sir Gawain, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo*; and the 1940 prefatory remarks to the John Clark-Hall translation of *Beowulf*, among other works of which Tolkien taught and was fond.
5. Aspects of the respite in Lothlórien are also changed or omitted in the first film, but in line with the general patterns we have detected. Only Frodo, not Sam, looks into Galadriel's mirror. Gifts from Galadriel are not given out to all three Hobbits (except in the extended version) (*Fellowship*, scene 41, "Farewell to Lórien"). Nor, looking ahead, does Jackson plan to return us to the Shire to see it scoured, as it is at the end of book 6 of *The Lord of the Rings*. Galadriel -- played admirably by Cate Blanchett as simultaneously regal and ethereal -- does not explain any of her history: why she might be expected to want the Ring (which we learn in the chapter on Galadriel in *Unfinished Tales*) and why Galadriel's refusal means she has, in fact, won while seemingly losing power and being diminished (which means, that is, she must cross over to the West and give up rule of Lórien). Her mate, Celeborn, seems to have been erased in importance completely, although intermarriage of different branches of the Elf family (Telerin, Noldorin, Sindarin), as in the marriage of Celeborn and Galadriel -- or of different kindreds, Maia and Elf, Elf and Man -- looms throughout Tolkien's mythology as an important theme. In the extended version of the film, in this same scene, Celeborn does address Aragorn as the heir to the throne.
6. For example, one of the most crucial changes--and a distortion of Tolkien's text--is the continuing notion (picked up from the first film) that Saruman and Sauron are in league together: Saruman says, close to the beginning of the film version of *Two Towers*, "Together we shall rule Middle-earth" (*Towers*, scene 4, "The Uruk-Hai"). At no time, however, does Sauron in Tolkien's book imagine he needs Saruman as an ally, although the Dark Lord uses those times when Saruman peers into the palantír to obtain information and thereby help subvert him. Certainly Saruman never imagines that he is using Sauron -- in fact, he breeds a new species of Orc that can function during the day in order to wrest power from Sauron.
7. See T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s.v.
8. See the different unused texts that appear in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, ed. Christopher Tolkien.
9. See the discussion of Anglo-Saxon gender roles in Chance Nitzsche, "The Structural Unity of *Beowulf*: The Problem of Grendel's Mother," 287-303, and also "Peace-Weaver, Peace Pledge: The Conventional Queen and Ides," chapter I of *Chance, Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*, 1-12. Tolkien was familiar with *Beowulf* and with the symbolic importance of the monsters and the failure of heroes: see his important essay: J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 245-95; reprinted in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, 5-34.
10. Idril, an Elda and daughter of Turgon, king of Gondolin, marries Tuor, human son of Huor of the House of Hador (Third House of the Edain) and gives birth to Eärendil the Mariner. Through this special position of mariner, ideal hero Eärendil sails to the Uttermost West as "ambassador of both Elves and Men" to obtain the help that will defeat Morgoth. His ship is thereafter transformed into a star to provide hope to voyagers (RK, app. A 1 (i), 351).

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