

Gender and Heroism in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien

by

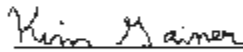
Jay Rimmer

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of English

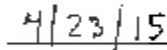
Thesis advisor: Dr. Kim Gainer

April 2015

Copyright 2015, Jay Rimmer

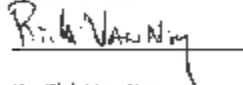


Dr. Kim Gainer

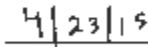


Date

Thesis Advisor



Dr. Rick Van Noy

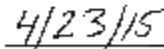


Date

Committee Member



Dr. Jolanta Wawrzycka



Date

Committee Member

Abstract

This thesis will focus on the confluence of gender and heroism in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, a popular fantasy author who was also a specialist in linguistics and Germanic/Norse/Old English literature. This thesis will attempt to fill a gap in Tolkien criticism by applying feminist and gender studies techniques and terminology to selected tales from *The Silmarillion*, a lesser-known work than *The Lord of the Rings*. That gap in scholarship takes two major forms: first, as a lesser-known work, *The Silmarillion* has not been discussed among critics to the same degree as Tolkien's other works; secondly, while many Tolkien scholars have studied *The Lord of the Rings* through a gender-oriented framework, the same cannot be said for *The Silmarillion* tales. This thesis will address both gaps in Tolkien scholarship.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Kim Gainer for her invaluable guidance. Dr. Gainer's knowledge of the field is unmatched, and her attention to detail helped me to hone this project from start to finish. She is a consummate professional, and I found myself constantly inspired by her belief in producing good quality scholarship, both in writing and in research. I am pleased and honored that this document meets her exacting standards.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Introduction and Review of the Literature.....	1
Chapter 1 – Beren’s Road to Heroism.....	0
Chapter 2 – “Our Doom Shall Be Alike” – Lúthien’s Essential Heroic Presence in “Of Beren and Lúthien”.....	0
Chapter 3 – The Two Kindreds.....	1
Chapter 1 – Beren’s Road to Heroism.....	2
Thingol (and Melian).....	3
Finrod.....	7
Beren (and Lúthien).....	9
Chapter 2 – “Our Doom Shall Be Alike” – Lúthien’s Essential Heroic Presence in “Of Beren and Lúthien”.....	16
Chapter 3 - The Two Kindreds: Interethnic marriage and heroism.....	28
Lúthien and Beren.....	30
Túrin and Finduilas.....	32
Idril and Tuor.....	35
Elwing and Eärendil.....	40
Conclusion.....	43
Works Cited.....	45

Introduction and Review of the Literature

A quick and cursory survey of J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy realm Middle-earth reveals a population of heroic male characters. For example, anyone who is familiar with *The Lord of the Rings* (in movie or book form) is sure to notice how much of the story revolves around the adventures of a cavalcade of male characters: the Fellowship of the Ring itself consists of nine male characters; we see the brothers Boromir and Faramir tested by the Ring; Saruman and Gandalf, the wizards, are powerful spirits in the form of men; Denethor and Théoden are elderly patriarchs of their kingdoms, facing the forces of change; even Sauron, the great evil of the tale, is a male character. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, which is the pre-*The Lord of the Rings* history of Middle-earth, features a similar abundance and variance in male characters. Here, we see the tales that are merely hinted at in the rest of Tolkien's works, and an equally-dense list of male characters is at the center of these tales: the brothers Fëanor and Fingolfin, Noldor royalty; Beren One-hand, whose marriage to Lúthien creates a heroic dynasty; and the ill-fated tragic hero Túrin Turambar, just to name a few. But while the cast of Tolkien's tales is admittedly male-dominated, an attentive reader will notice the wide range of variation among these male characters.

Some critics argue that Tolkien's female characters are heavily overshadowed and outnumbered by their male counterparts; this is a valid claim, and one that is difficult to refute. But even if Tolkien's female characters are few and far between, the ones that are present demonstrate a wide array of possible behaviors just like the males. Melian is a divine being who chooses to live in the physical world to protect her realm of Doriath; Galadriel, who is also Noldor royalty, follows in Melian's footsteps, establishing her own realm of Lothlórien; the human Lady Haleth, who lends her name to an entire tribe; and Éowyn of the Rohirrim, who defeats the Witch-king at the Battle of Pelennor Fields. These women are all admirable and heroic figures who do not allow rigid gender expectations to thwart their heroism.

Instead of one set-in-stone ideal of either masculine heroism or feminine duty, Tolkien presents multiple possible approaches to heroism. In Middle-earth, heroic deeds aren't limited to feats of martial prowess; likewise, heroic action isn't exclusive to male characters. In both *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, characters have the agency to act out their own modes of heroism. Tolkien's characters

perform heroically in ways that are not constrained to the expectations of a gender binary. Male characters can be capable healers, and female characters can slay ancient and powerful evils.

From the earliest tragedies in Middle-earth to the joyous celebrations after the fall of Sauron, Tolkien presents characters who respond to the trials of their times in vastly different ways. To examine the behavior of male and female characters in such contexts, I will borrow and adapt Judith Butler's notion of performative gender. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler envisions gender as comprised of a set of behaviors that, taken as a whole, constitutes an identity; she argues that "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (140). In other words, one can only truly understand gender in terms of how it is performed and produced.

I will borrow this concept and apply it to heroism in Tolkien's works because in order to determine if a character is heroic or not, it is essential that we understand the set of behaviors that would constitute a heroic identity. I've christened this approach "performative heroism." Just as Butler's idea of performative gender suggests that gender is understood by understanding the ways in which it is performed, my approach of performative heroism seeks to understand Tolkien's heroes by understanding what makes them heroic. By studying the nature of the characters themselves and how they respond to the situations they encounter, we gain a greater understanding of these heroic characters. We must also take into account a character's social or political contexts, especially as they pertain to gendered expectations levied against a particular character. Studying the heroic nature of Tolkien's characters is best accomplished by studying the context of their tales; this context includes the characters' genders, the expectations of their societies, and their actions themselves.

Many of Tolkien's male characters are brought low by their greed, single-mindedness, and rash decisions; some of the most well known examples from *The Lord of the Rings* include Saruman and Gollum, who are both consumed and destroyed by their obsessions. This trend continues in *The Silmarillion*: Melkor and Fëanor, two of the most major "villains," are driven to their ultimate ends by a fiery lust for the objects of their obsessions. Even Fingolfin, the ordinarily wise and thoughtful High King of the Noldor, is struck down due to a rash decision made in a fit of rage. But while these traits are

exhibited by many male characters, single-mindedness isn't a male-exclusive shortcoming. Single-mindedness can manifest itself as greed or as devotion. Ungoliant, the shadowy and ancient spider, is driven by her insatiable hunger, which also makes her open to manipulation by Melkor. Lúthien, daughter of the Elvish king Thingol and the angelic Melian, forsakes her divine birthright for the mortal Beren. In Tolkien's works, there is often a thin margin separating heroic gumption from hazardous obsession.

In the chapters that follow, I will demonstrate that attempting to compile a list of "male" and "female" traits is far from the best tactic to use. Tolkien's characters are agents of their own wills; male and female characters are free to become heroic (or villainous) on their own terms and in their own contexts. Not all of Tolkien's male characters are sword-wielding, battle-hardened warriors. Not all of Tolkien's female characters are passive women, waiting for the men to win the day. Tolkien's characters perform gender in many different, nuanced ways, perhaps more nuanced than many critics would give them credit for.

While it's certainly not uncommon for literary works to occupy a place in the public consciousness, few other authors have the same kind of widespread popularity and influence as J.R.R. Tolkien. Tolkien's works arguably created the entire fantasy genre, which has grown exponentially to include not only novels, but also video games, tabletop role-playing games, television shows, and movies. Fantasy literature is often criticized for displaying an archaic conception of gender and sexuality. In my mind, this shows that Tolkien's descendants only adopted the sword-and-sorcery aspects of his works while leaving the entirety of Tolkien's moral and social nuance behind. In the course of my thesis, I hope to spotlight some of these nuances because I believe that Tolkien was much more progressive and broadminded than many of his imitators and ancestors.

Furthermore, I envision my thesis as filling a noticeable gap in Tolkien scholarship: there are few articles that seek to study the role of gender in *The Lord of the Rings*, and many critics have examined particular narrative elements from *The Silmarillion*, but precious little has been written about gender in *The Silmarillion*. There are multiple and various paths of understanding, which critics can use (and have used) to study Tolkien's works. As the history of Middle-earth, *The Silmarillion* features characters and

tales that echo throughout the rest of Tolkien's works; studying *The Silmarillion* through the gender studies lens reveals more about the characters which Tolkien considered legendary.

I am certainly not the first scholar to view Tolkien's works with an eye toward the construction and enactment of gender. Melissa McCrory Hatcher's essay "Finding Woman's Role in *The Lord of the Rings*" focuses on the character of Éowyn, the "White Lady of Rohan," who participates in the climactic battle at the end of *The Return of the King* against the orders of her uncle and king, Théoden. While Éowyn eventually gives up the warrior lifestyle in order to become a healer, Hatcher argues that this is Éowyn "[acting] in accordance with Tolkien's highest ideal: a fierce commitment to peace" (43). According to Hatcher, Éowyn's rejection of the ways of war doesn't mean she capitulates to societal pressures; it simply reinforces her desire for peace.

A number of critics have written about the morality of Tolkien's heroes, particularly as it pertains to the influence of Tolkien's Catholic faith.¹ In "'From Mirrored Truth the Likeness of the True': J.R.R. Tolkien and Reflections of Jesus Christ In Middle-earth," Jonathan and Kenneth Padley examine the Christ-like natures of Aragorn, Gandalf, and Frodo; Padley and Padley argue that these characters represent Christ the King, Christ the divine, and Christ the man, respectively. Gregory Hartley's article "A Wind from the West: the Role of the Holy Spirit in Tolkien's Middle-earth" examines the ways that Tolkien's Catholicism influences certain aspects of his fiction; in particular, Hartley observes the ways that divine power in Middle-earth echoes the workings of the Holy Spirit from Scripture.

Another popular mode of criticism involves tracing Tolkien's influences from Norse and Old English literature. Tolkien, often fondly referred to as the Professor, was a linguist and a scholar of literature, so it's unsurprising that Middle-earth is highly influenced by our own world's past. In the article "'In the Hilt is Fame': Resonances of Medieval Swords and Sword-lore in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*," K.S. Whetter and R. Andrew McDonald examine the great number of

¹ In the letter to Milton Waldman reprinted at the beginning of *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien states that his myth-making has been done without the intention of sneaking Christian beliefs into the stories (xii).

named swords in Tolkien's works; these examples include Narsil, the broken sword of Elendil which is reforged as Aragorn's Anduril, and Gandalf's sword Glamdring, which survives the fall of Gondolin thousands of years before. Whetter and McDonald compare these swords from Tolkien's works to swords in such tales as *Beowulf*; as a narrative element or a heroic emblem, swords function much the same way in Tolkien's works as in many older texts.

Tolkien's medieval influences manifest in his works by the use of heraldry in his stories. In the article "Tolkien's Devices: the Heraldry of Middle-earth," Jamie McGregor examines the ways in which Tolkien uses heraldic symbols to convey some element of the character or the group of characters depicted. McGregor primarily discusses the Evil Eye of Sauron, the White Tree of Gondor, and the White Hand of Saruman. McGregor demonstrates how Tolkien uses heraldry in the traditional way, in addition to the ways in which Tolkien differs from the traditions; most notably, the color white is often associated with goodness and purity, but the evil Saruman the White shows that the old depictions are not set in stone.

In the article "Original Sin in Heorot and Valinor," Richard Z. Gallant examines certain of Tolkien's heroes through the lens of Germanic literature. While Tolkien's works undoubtedly owe a lot to ancient tales (including *Beowulf*), Gallant argues that Tolkien criticizes Germanic heroism at the same time that he is influenced by it. As Gallant puts it, "Germanic heroism can be noble and defiant, but it is also often cruel and gruesome"; Germanic heroes often demonstrate "overmastering pride," which is quite possibly the most predominant fault of Tolkien's heroes, as well as his villains (109). Gallant focuses on Fëanor, an impressively complicated character who behaves heroically and villainously at the same time: Fëanor could have been the most heroic character in Tolkien's legendarium, but his fall allows Tolkien to demonstrate the problems with the Germanic-style hero.

T.A. Shippey, one of the best-known Tolkien scholars in the field, attempts to sort through more of Tolkien's influences in the article "Light-elves, Dark-elves, and Others: Tolkien's Elvish Problem." Shippey examines the original Norse folktales that inspired Tolkien's conception of the various tribes of

Elves; Tolkien's Dwarves are also heavily reminiscent of one type of Norse elves. Shippey seeks to shed more light on Tolkien's Elves by examining the seemingly contradictory descriptions of Norse elves.

But while these approaches form the most predominant and ubiquitous critical conversations, and while these approaches are certainly valid and enlightening, I cannot help but feel that these approaches still leave a gap in Tolkien scholarship. As many of his letters reveal, and as many biographers have observed, Tolkien's works were shaped by his World War I experiences. However, it is an oversimplification to boil his works down to a metaphor for global war; Tolkien himself claimed on multiple occasions that his stories were not allegorical,² and that the Ring should not be viewed as a stand-in for the atomic bomb. Tolkien's morality is, of course, influenced by Christian/Catholic doctrine, but it isn't purely Christian in nature. Tolkien is certainly influenced by Norse mythology and Old English/Germanic tales, but tracing Tolkien's influences often seems to verge on the pedantic.

Instead, I believe it is most productive to view Tolkien's works on their own terms. These approaches often overlook the inventiveness, the vivid, life-like world, and careful plotting that have given Tolkien's works long-lasting popularity: because Tolkien blended together many elements from many sources, and because he created so much of Middle-earth completely out of whole cloth, Tolkien's works transcend his influences, whether they are historical, literary, or biographical.

²In the same letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien describes his "passion . . . for myth (not allegory!)" (xii). Later, Tolkien is even more straightforward: "I dislike Allegory – the conscious and intentional allegory" (xii).

What follows is a brief description of the chapters of my thesis.

Chapter 1 – Beren’s Road to Heroism

In this chapter, I will focus on Chapter 19 of *The Silmarillion*, “Of Beren and Lúthien.” Beren and Lúthien are legendary within Middle-earth, and echoes of their actions can be seen throughout the rest of Tolkien’s works. In this tale, Tolkien demonstrates that no one hero is an island unto themselves: everyone benefits when everyone works together. Our heroes succeed because of their belief in cooperation between Men and Elves, and between the genders; the villains in this tale suffer defeat due to their divisive beliefs.

I will argue that Beren, human man and the apparent hero of this story, has two potential blueprints for masculine power in the form of two great Elvish kings who become opposing ends of a binary between selfishness and selflessness. While the narrative action revolves around Beren’s quest to win the hand of the princess Lúthien, Tolkien subverts our expectations by making Lúthien into a vital participant in this tale. Beren’s quest comes dangerously close to disaster at several points; from outside this constructed binary of masculine power, Lúthien saves the day. With Lúthien’s help, Beren rejects a possessive style of masculine authority as illustrated by Thingol, Celegorm, and Curufin.

Chapter 2 – “Our Doom Shall Be Alike” – Lúthien’s Essential Heroic Presence in “Of Beren and Lúthien”

Chapter 2 will also focus on the tale of Beren and Lúthien, but from a different angle. In this chapter, I will examine Lúthien’s integral heroic role in the tale. In Chapter 1, I will demonstrate how Beren, an otherwise brave and capable hero, cannot succeed without Lúthien’s assistance; in Chapter 2, I will examine Lúthien’s heroic behavior, as well as the specific character elements that make her so well suited to a heroic role, despite the gendered expectations of her society. *Who* Lúthien is is crucial to understanding *what* she is: as the product of a unique pairing of an Elf and a Maia (the angelic figures of Middle-earth), Lúthien’s heroic journey is enabled by the very heritage that seeks to restrain her.

Although Lúthien undoubtedly allows Beren's quest to succeed, she cannot go it alone either. This chapter will focus on the obstacles that Lúthien must overcome, as well as why she and Beren must be paired together for best results. Chapters 1 and 2 will form an in-depth study of the two main protagonists of one of the most legendary tales in Tolkien's legendarium; many other events are set in motion by Lúthien and Beren's quest, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

Chapter 3 – The Two Kindreds

The intermarriages between Elves and Men produce some of the greatest heroes in Middle-earth: Beren and Lúthien,³ Tuor and Idril, and Eärendil and Elwing. Aragorn and Arwen are another example of the mingling of the Two Kindreds, with their lineage becoming the rulers of the restored kingdoms of Men after the events of *The Lord of the Rings*. It is also interesting to note that in all these cases, it is a female Elf and a male Man intermarrying, never the other way around. This section addresses the addition of ethnicity to the notion of performative heroism, as well as gender. I will show how heroes are created or enabled by their heritage. I believe it's no mistake that many of the greatest heroes in Middle-earth have a mixed ethnic background: to Tolkien, success only comes through collective effort.

³ Lúthien herself is the product of intermarriage between an Elf and one of the divine beings of the world.

Chapter 1 – Beren’s Road to Heroism

In this chapter, I will focus on Chapter 19 of *The Silmarillion*, “Of Beren and Lúthien.” Here is a story that is legendary even to the denizens of Middle-Earth. In this tale, Tolkien uses the confluence of gender, social structures, and magical confrontations to construct a binary of masculine power by presenting two Elvish lords as potential blueprints of masculinity for Beren to follow. The conflict between different tribes and families of Elves drives the narrative in many tales from *The Silmarillion*; as a result, the differing cultural backgrounds of the two Elvish lords lead to two very different examples of masculine power. But while Beren begins the story attempting to navigate the poles of this binary, he eventually refuses this binary; his bond with Lúthien allows Beren to enact a style of masculine heroism that runs directly counter to the repressive masculinity demonstrated by other characters.

As the ostensible hero of this tale, Beren must navigate between the two poles of this binary. On one side of this binary is Thingol of the Sindar, whose kingdom prospers within the magical barrier constructed by his wife and counselor, Melian; on the other side is Finrod Felagund, king of Nargothrond and preeminent Noldor royalty. Through his desire for the Silmarils, Thingol sets in motion a series of events leading to his death and the destruction of his kingdom. On the other hand, Finrod Felagund represents a style of masculinity which is more focused on duty to others. Finrod gives up his kingdom of Nargothrond, as well as his own life, in order to help Beren with his quest. Finrod’s decision to help Beren is motivated by a sense of duty: because Finrod is Noldor royalty, he believes he should behave accordingly, no matter the consequences. Thingol represents a style of patriarchal masculine authority that is possessive and somewhat greedy; Finrod is focused on duty and pursuit of the greater good.

By the end of the tale of Beren and Lúthien, Tolkien (via Beren) rejects the possessive masculinity typified by Thingol. Celegorm and Curufin, two of the sons of Fëanor who appear in this story, also serve as examples of possessive masculinity when they attempt to seize control of Nargothrond and force Lúthien to marry one of the brothers. With all the examples of masculine possessiveness that Lúthien and Beren have to endure and overcome, Tolkien portrays possessiveness as an inappropriate use of (typically masculine) power. As Marjorie Burns argues in the article “J.R.R. Tolkien: The British and

the Norse in Tension,” possessiveness, including “simple materialism as well as domination, enslavement, and arbitrary control” is “the greatest evil in Tolkien's view”; according to Burns, anyone in power in Middle-earth can exhibit this possessiveness, including those who are born into positions of power (such as the hereditary Noldor royalty) as well as “those who acquire it by force, stealth, or deception” (50). In Tolkien’s mind, using power to steal or to dominate is an enormous transgression. The misdeeds of Thingol, Celegorm, and Curufin are amplified by their positions of power: these deeds are bad enough on their own, but these are characters that should know better. Thingol inhabits a royal position among the Teleri for as long as there have been Teleri; his desire to trade Lúthien for a Silmaril comes after long eons of rule, in Doriath as well as on the arduous journey there in the first place. Similarly, Celegorm and Curufin arguably have a right to the High Kingship of the Noldor, being the sons of Fëanor, but they have been displaced by their disastrous Oath.

While Beren is one of the greatest heroes in Middle-earth, the tale’s focus on his heroics disguises an interesting and subversive aspect: the heroic selflessness of Lúthien. Like a magician performing some sleight-of-hand, Tolkien presents Beren as the male hero that we might expect from a fairy tale or fantasy story. However, Beren comes close to botching the entire quest at several points during the story. At these moments, Lúthien’s interventions save the day. Chapter 2 of my thesis will be an in-depth discussion of Lúthien’s heroics.

In spite of this, Beren is not a bumbling, hapless hero; instead, I would argue, Tolkien is presenting a situation where togetherness trumps divisiveness. Beren cannot succeed alone. His heroic fate, his innate capabilities, and the role models he is given aren’t sufficient to see him through this quest. When Beren falters, Lúthien enacts her crucial role in the quest. Lúthien’s side-stepping of the status quo allows Beren to move beyond a restrictive binary of masculine power. The quest for the Silmarils succeeds through a spirit of cooperation: between Men and Elves, and between male and female characters.

Thingol (and Melian)

The story of Thingol and Melian illustrates the somewhat selfish masculinity of Thingol: while the marriage of Thingol and Melian is beneficial in the long run, it begins with a crisis for the Teleri people. While leading the Teleri west toward Valinor, Thingol “went often through the great woods to seek out Finwë his friend in the dwellings of the Noldor”; hearing the voice of Melian, Thingol “forgot then utterly all his people and all the purposes of his mind ... he passed deep into Nan Elmoth and was lost” (55). Enchanted by Melian, Thingol deserts his people on their journey west, leaving his brother Olwë to take leadership of the Teleri who wish to complete their journey. The Teleri are sundered due to Thingol’s choice: a portion continues on to Valinor, and a portion remains behind to look for Thingol, deprived of both their leader and a life in the Blessed Realm. This remaining portion of the Teleri, unable to complete their journey Westward and unable to find their king, rename themselves the “Eglath, the Forsaken People” (58). Name changes in Tolkien’s works always indicate a change in status as well; the Teleri collectively give themselves a new name in order to reflect the magnitude of their sorrow.

However, Thingol’s desire for Melian undoubtedly becomes a boon for him and his people. We can speculate that Melian’s skill as a magical protector and a wise counselor could be the only reason that Doriath becomes the great and enduring kingdom that we see in *The Silmarillion*; her choice to remain with Thingol in Doriath and maintain the protective barrier is one of the main reasons why Doriath stands when other Elvish kingdoms fall. This foreshadows the way in which Lúthien allows Beren to finish his heroic quest: Thingol might not be powerful enough to sustain Doriath without Melian, even though he is one of the greatest of the non-Valinorian Elves. Likewise, Beren cannot finish his quest without Lúthien.

Thingol is, at times, both short-sighted and greedy, and we can see several examples of Melian’s attempts to quell that possessive streak in Thingol. In addition to her magical powers, Melian is also seen to be a wise and prudent counselor; although it’s a bit of a simplification to say so, *The Silmarillion* would be a very different book if Tolkien had portrayed Thingol as taking Melian’s advice more often. Thingol’s biggest failings as a character and as a ‘role model’ for Beren are his greed, and his rejection of Melian’s counsel. While his greed never makes him an outright villainous figure, the downfall of Thingol, as well as the downfall of Doriath and all of Beleriand itself, all begin with the quest for a Silmaril.

From the outset of the story, Beren is situated between the two Elvish kings, Thingol and Finrod. The tale opens with Beren fleeing the northern regions of Middle-earth, last survivor of a company of Men in the service of Finrod Felagund. Beren is brave and kindhearted, as his adventures in Dorthonion show; after being forced to flee that region, Beren “became the friend of birds and beasts, and they aided him, and did not betray him, and from that time forth he ate no flesh nor slew any living thing that was not in the service of Morgoth” (164). Beren’s vegetarianism might seem like a throwaway detail, but this shows how Beren honors the life-saving assistance he received from the animals. This lifestyle choice is similar in a way to the sense of duty which binds the house of Barahir to the house of Finrod: Beren’s decision to never eat flesh is his way of honoring the help he was given.

Beren arrives in Doriath, where he is somehow able to bypass Melian’s protective barrier “even as she had foretold; for a great doom lay upon him” (165). Melian, the wife and counselor of Thingol, predicts Beren’s coming; this emphasizes Beren’s heroic nature (through the great fate Melian sees for him) as well as Melian’s skill as a seer and advisor. Although Tolkien moves past this moment without much comment, it’s interesting to speculate how Melian’s “foretelling” might have manifested itself. Whether Melian had periodic visions, say, or if her awareness is more akin to consulting a crystal ball, one point is clear: this is Melian’s awareness, not Thingol’s.

Once Beren arrives in Doriath, Thingol demonstrates a possible mode of masculine power, one characterized by overbearing authority and material desire. Thingol calls for Beren to be brought before him for questioning, hoping to discern Beren’s reasons for coming to Doriath. Lúthien appeals to Thingol on Beren’s behalf, establishing his lineage and calling him “lord of Men, mighty foe of Morgoth, the tale of whose deeds is become a song even among the Elves” (166). Lúthien attempts to validate Beren’s presence by appealing to the notoriety that Beren has already gained. Thingol disregards Beren by emphasizing Beren’s mortal nature; although Thingol acknowledges the status of Beren’s father, Barahir, Thingol warns that “a father’s deeds . . . avail not to win the daughter of Thingol and Melian” (167). While Beren is beginning to think of himself in heroic terms, based on his accomplishments thus far and the renown of his family, Thingol is quick to put Beren in his place.

As the conversation escalates, we can see Beren match Thingol's possessiveness with his own. Undaunted and unwilling to let Thingol's authority deter him from his quest, Beren declares his love for Lúthien. Thingol turns Beren's words against him and dares him to challenge the "rock and steel and fires of Morgoth" (167) in order to win a Silmaril; only then will Thingol allow Beren and Lúthien to wed. Here, both Thingol and Beren exhibit a strong sense of possessiveness toward Lúthien: Thingol views Lúthien as his jewel to keep and Beren views her as his jewel to earn. Both Beren and Thingol equate the possession of a Silmaril to the possession of Lúthien. Both characters discuss Lúthien as an object, even as she stands near enough to hear the conversation.

What's worse, at this point in the tale, Beren and Thingol have just fallen into a dangerous motif in *The Silmarillion* by committing themselves to possessing a Silmaril at great peril. In her article "Forging Greed, Hope, and the One Great Work in Middle-earth," Megan Abrahamson describes the exceptional and incomparable appeal of the Silmarils. Several times in Tolkien's works, Abrahamson argues, a "created artifact (or set of artifacts)⁴ is so significant that it drains a part of its creator's power and exists as something which cannot be duplicated" (1). The Silmarils were created to store the light of the original Trees (themselves irreplaceable creations); their beauty and their irreplaceable nature lead several characters in *The Silmarillion* to seek them at all costs. And indeed, several characters meet their end while trying to obtain a Silmaril, including their creator, Fëanor. Single-minded pursuit of an object is always dangerous in Tolkien's works; single-minded pursuit of a Silmaril is always a sign of impending doom. Beren and Thingol join a long line of male characters that tempt fate by vowing to obtain a Silmaril.

In Thingol's mind, he has successfully solved his quandary. By sending Beren into the jaws of Middle-earth's version of Hell, Thingol believes that either he will obtain a Silmaril for himself, or he will be rid of this pesky Man. A win-win situation, on its face. However, Melian warns him that no good will come of his decree, telling Thingol that these actions have "doomed either your daughter, or yourself.

⁴ The Silmarils are one of three examples, according to Abrahamson; the other two are the Trees and the One Ring (1).

And now is Doriath drawn within the fate of a mightier realm” (168). Melian acknowledges the ill fate that befalls all those who seek to possess a Silmaril. Melian, as a preternaturally wise counselor, correctly realizes that both Beren and Thingol have fallen under the Oath of Fëanor. Neither outcome bodes well for Doriath: Thingol has either sent Beren to his death or given away his daughter, but the fates of Doriath and Angband are now intertwined.

Finrod

After leaving Doriath, Beren begins his quest by enlisting the aid of his second possible masculine inspiration, a powerful family friend: Finrod Felagund, liege lord of Beren and his father. “Felagund,” an appellation given to Finrod by his Dwarven allies, means “Lord of Caves,” which refers to the many caves of Nargothrond. Finrod is an interesting counterpart to Thingol who becomes important to this story for two reasons. First, at this point in *The Silmarillion*, there are only three major Elvish kingdoms in Middle-earth: Thingol’s realm of Doriath, Turgon’s hidden kingdom of Gondolin, and Finrod’s Nargothrond. Beren will be personally assisted on his quest by one of the highest Elvish lords in Beleriand. Secondly, Finrod isn’t just Elvish royalty: he’s Noldor royalty. As one of the Noldor, Finrod has absorbed more of the power-granting divine light than Thingol has, which means that Finrod “outranks” Thingol as an Elf by certain metrics. Finrod’s Noldor heritage also gives Beren’s choice a political and ethnic aspect: when Beren has trouble with a Sindar king, he turns to a Noldor king for help.

One major difference between the Noldor and the Sindar is their access to divine and magical sources of power. Thingol never demonstrates any magical power beyond that innate to all Elves, and he only spent a small amount of time in Valinor, so we have to assume that his access to greater magical power comes from Melian. Finrod’s divine capabilities serve as a connection to his noble birthright and the homeland he yearns for. Finrod and the other Noldor lived in Valinor for untold ages; living within that light and in the proximity of the Maiar and the Valar imbued the Noldor with divine magic. As Noldor royalty, Finrod feels duty-bound to wield that power for good. In his article “Divine Contagion,” Roger Ladd discusses the way power is transmitted and shared in *The Silmarillion*, and how characters are shaped by their access to power. Ladd quotes one of Tolkien’s letters in order to demonstrate how the

uses of magical power in his stories “match the moral standing of the users”; these magical demonstrations “add up to the key distinction between positive and negative intention” (35). In other words, Ladd argues, examining a character’s use of magical power illustrates something of their nature.

Finrod becomes an excellent example of the way in which intention dictates our assessment of power when he decides to aid Beren. The light-enriched King Finrod responds to Beren’s appeal in a manner which befits his dual status as king of Nargothrond and friend to Barahir. Finrod makes an impassioned speech to his people in which “he declared that it was laid upon him to aid the son of Barahir in his need” (Tolkien 169). Finrod is fully aware of the risks involved, in terms of the quest itself, as well as the possible political repercussions. Celegorm and Curufin, two of the ill-fated Sons of Fëanor, attempt to undermine Finrod’s attempt to renew the alliance of Elves and Men. Sensing that the tide of popular opinion has moved against him, Finrod leaves Nargothrond with Beren and a small company of Elves, giving up his kingdom in order to fulfill his bond to Beren’s family.

Once Beren and Finrod arrive at Taur-in-Gaurhoth, they are taken captive by Sauron, Morgoth’s lieutenant. Taur-in-Gaurhoth was originally a fortress called Tol Sirion, built by Finrod to prevent the southward spread of Morgoth’s armies; while he could have had his choice of various homes in Beleriand, Finrod intentionally built his fortress here, in the grim and war-torn north, to serve as a bulwark against the evil armies of Morgoth. Once Sauron takes possession of the fortress, he demonstrates his motivations by changing the name and purpose of the fortress. Evil in Tolkien’s works often functions as a corrupting force which attempts to mar beautiful things, or to turn good things against themselves. Sauron demonstrates his evil nature by taking something good, Tol Sirion in this case, and making it serve a different purpose. Taur-in-Gaurhoth isn’t a new construction, but rather a once-noble location made to serve a different master: Tol Sirion began as Finrod’s selfless attempt to staunch the flow of Morgoth’s armies into Beleriand, but Sauron twists it to his own evil ends.

Finrod and Sauron both further demonstrate elements of their character during their magical/musical battle. Magic and music are closely related terms in Tolkien’s works, as magic power often manifests itself in Middle-earth through song: later, as Lúthien attempts to find Beren and Finrod, it

is her song that alerts Beren to her presence. But in this case, magical song becomes weapons of war. Sauron's attack takes the form of a "song of wizardry/of piercing, opening, of treachery"; Finrod responds with "a song of staying / Resisting, battling against power, / Of secrets kept, strength like a tower, / And trust unbroken, freedom, escape" (171). Sauron's song is filled with mistrust and deceit; Finrod's counterattack tells of alliances in opposition to evil forces. Finrod's song builds into a litany of everything the Noldor hold sacred as he sings of the great forests of Beleriand, the sound of the birds and the Sea, and the jeweled beaches of faraway Valinor. Sauron defeats Finrod by twisting his song of beauty into a grim reminder of the Kinslaying at Alqualondë, the greatest sin in the history of the Noldor. Just as Sauron once corrupted the fortress of Tol Sirion, here he corrupts Finrod's sacred memories of Valinor.

While Finrod attempts to make up for the past mistakes of the Noldor, as demonstrated by his willingness to help the mortal Beren, the Kinslaying and the subsequent curse on the Noldor are too powerful for Finrod to overcome. Finrod ultimately dies in magical combat with Sauron, and news of his death reaches Nargothrond, where Finrod's former subjects realize that it was "treachery rather than fear that had guided Celegorm and Curufin" (176). The sons of Fëanor are subsequently expelled from the kingdom. Although it costs Finrod his life, his quest inspires the Noldor of Nargothrond to collectively reject Celegorm and Curufin, as well as their greed and treachery.

Beren (and Lúthien)

Celegorm and Curufin provide an excellent foil for the heroic Beren. Although they are Noldorin Elves like Finrod, they exhibit a style of possessive male authority that mirrors Thingol's. Their first appearance in this tale comes as Finrod speaks to the people of Nargothrond, informing them of his decision to aid Beren. The two brothers seek to undermine Finrod's rule: Celegorm angrily and directly invokes the Oath of Fëanor, vowing that nothing short of the end of the world will save Beren from "the pursuing hate of Fëanor's sons" if he obtains a Silmaril (169); Curufin, the craftier and more subtle of the two, speaks to the gathered crowd "more softly but with no less power, conjuring in the minds of the Elves a vision of war and the ruin of Nargothrond" (170). Celegorm is rash and angry, while Curufin is cunning; Celegorm threatens a war of attrition to retrieve the Silmarils, while Curufin exploits the fear,

mistrust, and back-biting that plagues many of the Noldor after the Kinslaying. The sons of Fëanor seek possession of the Silmarils at any cost, valuing the legendary jewels above all ties of blood and kinship. This sets the brothers in opposition to Finrod's selfless desire for the common good.

Celegorm and Curufin exhibit their possessive brand of masculinity by capturing Lúthien and attempting to ransom her to Thingol. Having learned from Lúthien that Beren and Finrod were being held captive by Sauron, the brothers intend "to keep Lúthien, and force Thingol to give her hand to Celegorm. Thus they would advance their power, and become the mightiest of the princes of the Noldor" (173). By marrying Lúthien to Celegorm and gaining political and military might, the brothers hope to achieve their ultimate goal of possessing all three Silmarils. Their plot echoes the earlier conversation between Beren and Thingol: here again, Lúthien and the Silmarils are conflated into one goal. Celegorm and Curufin equate possessing Lúthien with possessing the Silmarils, just as Beren and Thingol do at the outset of the tale.

Beren begins to reject the possessive style of masculine authority more and more as the tale continues. After being reunited, Beren and Lúthien place their quest on hold for a season:

Beren and Lúthien Tinúviel went free again and together walked through the woods renewing for a time their joy; and though winter came it hurt them not, for flowers lingered where Lúthien went, and the birds sang beneath the snowclad hills." (176)

This idyllic interlude echoes Lúthien and Beren's original meeting, and it also comes in direct opposition to the earlier urgency with which Beren approached his quest. Having obtained Lúthien, the ultimate goal of his quest, Beren is content to allow Morgoth to keep the Silmarils for a time. Lúthien and Beren's reprieve is short-lived, however, as Celegorm and Curufin eventually attempt to recapture Lúthien.

The final showdown between Beren, Lúthien, and the sons of Fëanor allows Beren to reject the possessive masculine authority of the sons of Fëanor once and for all. Celegorm "turned his horse and spurred it upon Beren, purposing to ride him down"; Curufin, the "strong and cunning horseman," grabs Lúthien and pulls her onto his horse (177). Beren defeats the two brothers with the help of the hound Huan, who abandons his master in favor of Lúthien and Beren. After taking Curufin's magic knife,

Angrist, Beren “bade him walk now back to his noble kinsfolk, who might teach him to turn his valour to worthier use” (177). This insult serves to denigrate the brothers and differentiate them from the other Noldor, their “noble kinsfolk”; Beren acknowledges the nobility of the Noldor while emphasizing the nefariousness of Celegorm and Curufin. Beren also demonstrates moderation in his use of force against the brothers. It might not be considered “wrong” for Beren to slay the brothers in combat, but it is certainly more heroic for him to stay his hand; it is also important to note that Beren does so after Lúthien forbids him to kill the brothers. Beren is a great and capable warrior, by all accounts, but he seems to demonstrate more of a regard for life than many other heroes⁵ from *The Silmarillion*.

Tolkien demonstrates that the possessive masculine power of Thingol, Celegorm, and Curufin is a negative quality, but the attempted abduction of Lúthien elevates the sons of Fëanor to a far more villainous level: Thingol eventually relents and gives Lúthien and Beren his blessing, in essence giving up some portion of his masculine authority, but Celegorm and Curufin remain unrepentant to the end. In the article “Corrupting Beauty: Rape Narrative in *The Silmarillion*,” Lynn Whitaker highlights the implicit sexual violence in the confrontation. A series of defeats and embarrassments works the two sons of Fëanor into a violent frenzy. As Whitaker points out, “the insertion of the Curufin/Celegorm banishment into the narrative of Beren and Lúthien builds tension”; by the time that these four characters meet, “we are prepared for trouble” (64). Whitaker is correct: this confrontation adds significant dramatic weight to the tale, since it gives Beren another opportunity to behave heroically. Tolkien could have easily kept the two stories separate, but by blending the two plotlines, Tolkien emphasizes the possessive nature of Celegorm and Curufin, especially as it contrasts with and also threatens Beren and Lúthien.

While Celegorm and Curufin do not initially plan to re-kidnap Lúthien, they certainly don’t hesitate to take advantage of the opportunity. This scene reinforces the Lúthien/Silmaril conflation; the brothers undoubtedly want to continue their plan of forcing Lúthien to marry Celegorm, but they pursue Lúthien and Beren with a vigor that they typically reserve for the Silmarils. Whitaker describes their

⁵ Túrin, for example, probably has a much higher body count than Beren.

motivations here as “opportunistic but also planned”; this attack isn’t a “sudden loss of control or a ‘crime of passion’ in their quest for vengeance” but a deliberate seizing of an opportunity (64). Whitaker positions Celegorm and Beren as “male sexual rival[s]” competing for Lúthien (64). Whitaker describes Celegorm’s spear as a phallic symbol, which might be a bit of an overstatement. I doubt Tolkien intentionally gave Celegorm a spear in order to serve as a phallic symbol, especially since Middle-earth is full of medieval-inspired weaponry. Celegorm isn’t the only person to use a spear, and spears are not explicitly an “evil” or “masculine” weapon. However, Whitaker’s reading of the sexual violence inherent in this scene is otherwise astute.

In Chapter 2 of my thesis, I will cover Lúthien’s heroic moments in more detail, but for the purposes of this chapter, it is worth noting that Beren’s reliance on Lúthien comes into focus as the two are reunited and begin their journey to Angband. Lúthien magically alters their appearance, giving Beren the appearance of a werewolf and herself the appearance of a vampire (Tolkien 179). Lúthien’s magical shape-shifting has some very interesting implications for a discussion on gender performances and heroism, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, but suffice it to say that these disguises allow Lúthien and Beren to journey to the Gates of Angband with relative ease. Arriving in Morgoth’s innermost sanctum, Lúthien sings “a song of such surpassing loveliness, and of such blinding power, that [Morgoth] listened perforce” (180). Overcome by the power of Lúthien’s song, Morgoth and his attendants fall into a deep slumber so that “All things were still” (181). The magnitude of this act cannot be understated: the rest of the quest can proceed because Lúthien put one of the Valar to sleep with a song.

Despite all the progress that Beren makes during his quest, the temptation of the Silmarils eventually becomes too much for him. Beren undoubtedly grows as a hero during the course of this tale. Beren bravely takes Thingol’s challenge, materialistic though it may be, and successfully convinces a high prince of the Noldor to aid him in his quest. Beren and Finrod proceed in the face of near-certain death, and Beren endures his captivity at the hands of Sauron before being rescued by Lúthien. Beren also saves Lúthien from Celegorm and Curufin, who are capable horsemen and warriors in their own right.

Undaunted by these challenges, Beren (with the essential aid of Huan and Lúthien) continues on into the mouth of Hell in order to finish his quest. This quest has tested his resolve: persevering against all odds, passing through all manners of trials, Beren has arrived at the crucial junction of his mission. Beren cuts one Silmaril loose from Morgoth's crown and stands basking in the radiance. However, Beren is not satisfied with a single Silmaril. The notion "came then into Beren's mind that he would go beyond his vow, and bear out of Angband all three of the Jewels of Fëanor; but such was not the doom of the Silmarils" (181). Beren's knife breaks, which awakens Morgoth. Lúthien and Beren flee from Angband, Beren losing both his hand and his Silmaril in the process.

This is a problematic moment for Beren as a hero for a couple of reasons. First, by "[going] beyond his vow," Beren becomes another character who attempts to possess all the Silmarils. Although Lúthien and Beren escape Angband with their lives, this motif typically proves deadly for other characters. Secondly, Beren seems almost to regress as a hero: after spending the entirety of the tale combating possessive masculine authority, Beren gives in to temptation at the most crucial moment of the quest. We would expect Celegorm or Curufin to go for broke and attempt to get all the Silmarils at once, but we might expect better of Beren by this point in the tale.

But perhaps we shouldn't blame Beren for this one moment of avarice. Part of the appeal of the Silmarils is their overwhelming beauty. Contained within the Silmarils is the last remaining light given off by the original Trees of Valinor. These Trees and their light are reminders of the most tranquil days of Middle-earth. The destruction of the Trees is perhaps the first act of evil that takes place in the newly-created world. The Silmarils are singular creations of great beauty; unlike the One Ring or the Elvish rings of power, the Silmarils do not grant any sort of power to their owner. Megan Abrahamson makes a similar argument in her article "Forging Greed." Abrahamson argues that it is the *symbolic* nature of the Silmarils that gives them their undeniable appeal: "for a while, at least, the Silmarils are a symbol of hope in which the Light of the Trees can always live" (2). As a mortal Man confronting one of the Valar for a Silmaril, Beren is out of his depth at this moment in the tale. In reality, when Beren is tempted by having all three Silmarils within his grasp, he is really being tempted by what amounts to a reminder of Paradise:

if the Silmarils weren't supernaturally beautiful and appealing, they wouldn't be such a driving narrative force.

Secondly, while Beren makes huge progress in his development as a heroic character, he isn't perfect and his journey isn't complete. Beren is tempered and improved by his relationship with Lúthien. The fact that Beren arrives at his goal is testament to the benefits of their relationship; the fact that Beren falters in his quest demonstrates how much room remains for his growth.

While Beren has moved closer and closer to rejecting possessive male authority, he hasn't entirely shaken off the yoke yet. Beren yields to Thingol's authority once more, resolving to return to Thingol, "deeming it perilous to set at naught the will of the father, save at the last need" (183). This quote shows how Beren is beginning to disregard Thingol's wishes: at the outset of the tale, Beren deemed it absolutely vital to earn Thingol's approval, but now it's merely a formality. Beren and Lúthien return to Doriath and recount their story to Thingol, who finally relents and gives the couple his blessing. Moved by the tale of their quest, Thingol eventually gives Lúthien and Beren his permission to wed. Thingol recognizes the singular nature of both Beren and Lúthien, both as individuals and as a couple: "it seemed to Thingol that this Man was unlike all other mortal Men, and among the great in Arda, and the love of Lúthien a thing new and strange; and he perceived that their doom might not be withstood by any power of the world" (184). Thingol relents, and while his desire for the Silmarils will later cost him his life, Thingol is moved to pity for a moment. While Beren and Lúthien's quest wasn't exactly successful, it was enough to inspire Thingol to relax his policy of possessive authority. In this tale, at least, Thingol yields in a way that Celegorm and Curufin never do.

Although Beren and company finally kill Carcharoth and remove the Silmaril from its belly, Beren and Huan both lose their lives in the attempt. However bleak this ending may seem, it becomes a vital moment in Beren's heroic journey. In this tale, we see Beren attempting to position himself as a figure of masculine authority before finally rejecting the Thingol/Finrod binary altogether. At the outset of the tale, Beren and Thingol both view Lúthien in a possessive light. Beren benefits from the influence of the selfless Finrod Felagund; Finrod gives up his life to help Beren, and Beren gives up his life

attempting to save Doriath. Thingol is eventually moved to pity by the tale of their quest, a quest which would have claimed Beren's life much earlier if not for Lúthien. Beren's skill as a warrior allows him to defeat Celegorm and Curufin, and to help kill the magically-altered Carcharoth, but Lúthien's assistance is undeniably vital to his status as a hero. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the importance of Lúthien retrieving Beren from the halls of Mandos in more detail, but as it pertains to a discussion of Beren's heroics, Lúthien uses this unprecedented act to free Beren from a pattern of possessive male authority once and for all.

Chapter 2 – “Our Doom Shall Be Alike” – Lúthien’s Essential Heroic Presence in “Of Beren and Lúthien”

In Chapter 1 of my thesis, I discussed Beren’s path to heroism in Chapter 19 of *The Silmarillion*: Beren appears poised to become the hero of this tale by emulating the masculine power of Thingol or Finrod. In this chapter, I will discuss the way Lúthien becomes completely vital to Beren’s quest. Beren arguably fails his quest at a number of junctures, and Lúthien comes to the rescue each time. Lúthien’s unique heritage gives her the heroic agency necessary to sidestep a number of gender-based and social restrictions in the process. When Lúthien rejects Thingol’s masculine authority, she begins to free Beren from the binary. With Lúthien’s assistance, Beren succeeds in his quest, and the legendary couple earns some semblance of a “happily ever after” as they live out their lives in a remote portion of Beleriand. Despite his heroic fate, Beren is incapable of finishing the quest without Lúthien; this is the tale of Beren *and* Lúthien, after all.

From the beginning, Beren finds himself drawn to Lúthien in a powerful way, as if he immediately understands how vital she will become to him. Lúthien and Beren first meet in a scene which echoes the meeting of Melian and Thingol. Again, we see a male character entranced by the mystical beauty of a female character: “all memory of [Beren’s] pain departed from him, and he fell into an enchantment; for Lúthien was the most beautiful of all the Children of Ilúvatar” (Tolkien 165). Both Melian and Lúthien are magically-powerful female characters, and that power manifests itself through their attractiveness to Thingol and Beren, respectively.

In this way, feminine beauty becomes more than just a passing description of a character. Lynn Whitaker argues this point in her article “Corrupting Beauty: Rape Narrative in *The Silmarillion*.” Whitaker makes the claim that the magical beauty of Melian and Lúthien complicates their interactions with male characters; this beauty means that many moments in the tale of Beren and Lúthien qualify as “rape narratives” because of the potential for sexual violence in response to that beauty. As Whitaker argues, “Lúthien’s beauty is more than a personal attribute; it is symbolic of the divine, of her connection

to the Valar and Eru”; this also applies to her mother, as both Lúthien and Melian “establish the feminine capacity to entrance the male with beauty in different forms” (60). I would agree to a certain extent. This is tricky territory, and one could run the risk of victim-blaming if we claim that Lúthien’s beauty drives certain male characters mad; for example, Lúthien’s beauty is not nearly adequate to justify her kidnapping at the hands of Curufin and Celegorm.

When studying particular plot points such as Lúthien’s imprisonment by the sons of Fëanor, it might be more constructive to examine the male response instead of the feminine “provocation.” Feminine beauty (and indeed, beauty in general) reveals certain weaknesses in the male psyche. Many of the greediest and most possessive characters in Tolkien’s works are male, so it’s hardly surprising that male characters would respond possessively to feminine beauty. Lúthien and the Silmarils are constantly conflated into one goal during this tale; it is Lúthien’s unprecedented status that makes her appealing, not just her beauty. To possess Lúthien or the Silmarils is to keep them out of the hands of others. Possessiveness, in any form, is portrayed as the most negative quality a character can have in Tolkien’s works. Therefore, when we study a moment such as Beren and Lúthien’s first meeting, Tolkien’s point isn’t that certain female characters are too beautiful for their own good; rather, certain male characters are too possessive for their own good.

Returning to the description of Lúthien’s appearance and clothing, Tolkien uses this introduction in order to give us insight into her character. Lúthien’s clothing is the blue of “the unclouded heaven”, her eyes are as grey as “the star-lit evening”; her clothing is decorated with flowers of gold, but “her hair was dark as the shadows of twilight” (Tolkien 165). Lúthien’s status as a complex and nuanced character is illustrated with the contradictory elements of her appearance. Just as twilight is the blending of daylight and darkness, Lúthien is the blending of the light of Valinor and the shadows of the Sindar of Doriath. This description of Lúthien isn’t intended to simply show us how beautiful she is, but rather to illustrate what that beauty represents.

In fact, that very blending imbues Lúthien with the magical power to circumvent the masculine binary and inhabit a heroic role in this tale. In her quest, Lúthien defeats Sauron in magical combat and

puts Morgoth to sleep with a song. She also inspires pity in Mandos, “the keeper of the Houses of the Dead, and the summoner of the spirits of the slain” (Tolkien 28). As Roger Ladd argues in his article “Divine Contagion: On the Nature of Power in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*”, certain characters absorb the divine light and then transmit it to other characters. Ladd describes this as “the more secondary transmission of the light of Aman by Melian to the Sindar” (35). During her time in Doriath, Melian passively transmits her absorbed divine light to the Sindar. Speaking in terms of Lúthien’s magical powers, Lúthien is then doubly powerful: not only does she benefit from that passive transmission, she is also the offspring of the greatest Elvish king and the most powerful Maiar. Lúthien then has an innate set of powers and abilities, as well as whatever divine light she absorbs.

This unique confluence of nature and nurture imbues Lúthien with the magically-infused agency to rebel against the patriarchal influence of her father, king Thingol of Doriath. After Finrod and Beren are captured by Sauron, Lúthien’s plan to rescue Beren is uncovered, and Thingol builds a prison of sorts for Lúthien in the forests of Doriath. Lúthien escapes from her treetop confinement by using her innate magical powers: “she put forth her arts of enchantment, and caused her hair to grow to great length, and of it she wove a dark rope that wrapped her beauty like a shadow, and it was laden with a spell of sleep” (172). Lúthien uses the remaining hair to weave a rope which she uses to put her guards to sleep and escape.

This moment is significant not only because it’s one of the first demonstrations of Lúthien’s considerable power, but because of how it emphasizes her femininity at the same time that she seeks to hide it. Lúthien’s beauty, which comes as part of the divine birthright which enables her to take a heroic role in this tale, is momentarily an obstacle that she must overcome. Lúthien’s escape echoes her first appearance in this story; it also encompasses many typically feminine physical characteristics. Lúthien’s hair, one of the specific characteristics mentioned in her introduction, becomes the medium which Lúthien uses to weave her magic. Lúthien’s inherent physical beauty impedes her progress: as the most lovely of all Ilúvatar’s creations, she would have been too easily recognizable in her escape attempt. The

robe she weaves from her hair “[wraps] her beauty like a shadow,” effectively hiding one of Lúthien’s most notable characteristics.

Lúthien’s particular method of escape is also symbolic of her larger attempt to escape the restrictive and possessive nature of her father’s authority. Thingol refuses to allow Lúthien to accompany Beren on his quest because of her dual status as his daughter and princess of Doriath. Lúthien’s birthright, the very source of her heroic capability, renders her unable to participate in Beren’s quest. As Lúthien hides within her magical cloak, she also hides from the gendered expectations of her society. Lúthien’s shape-shifting abilities will become a recurring motif in this story; at several points, Lúthien’s ability to hide or alter someone’s appearance becomes crucial to the quest. In this way, appearance again becomes connected to social and gendered expectations: the ability to change one’s appearance equates to freedom from constraints.

Lúthien’s attempt to rescue Beren is an interestingly subversive moment in the tale. After learning that Beren and Finrod have been captured by Sauron, Lúthien escapes from her captivity at the hands of the sons of Fëanor with the help of Huan. In Chapter 1, I discussed how Celegorm and Curufin conflate possession of the Silmarils with possession of Lúthien: the brothers seek to use Lúthien as a bargaining chip in order to “advance their power, and become the mightiest of the princes of the Noldor” (173). Lúthien is able to escape from this blatantly possessive use of masculine power; assisted by Huan, Lúthien is able to sidestep that masculine power, similarly to her earlier escape from Doriath. Celegorm and Curufin expect Lúthien to be a submissive means to an end. Lúthien violates their expectations as she escapes from their clutches.

Freed from her first captivity at the hands of the sons of Fëanor, Lúthien is again able to demonstrate her heroic ability. After arriving at Sauron’s fortress Tol-in-Gaurhoth with the objective of rescuing Beren, Huan and Lúthien do battle with Sauron. After Sauron takes the form of a werewolf, Lúthien uses some of her magic to stun Sauron, allowing Huan to wrestle Sauron into submission. Lúthien threatens to destroy Sauron’s physical form and send his ghost “quaking back to Morgoth”; in response, “Sauron yielded himself, and Lúthien took the mastery of the isle and all that was there” (175).

Although we aren't told how exactly Lúthien would destroy Sauron's physical form, her victory in this battle suggests she would be able to do so. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron supplants Morgoth as Dark Lord; at this point in Middle-earth history, Sauron is even more powerful than he was during the War of the Ring. With the assistance of Huan, Lúthien has defeated one of the greatest evil powers of the world.

Lúthien's victory over Sauron has considerable and wide-ranging consequences. After Lúthien reclaims the fortress from Sauron, several Elves are freed from captivity. These former captives return home, telling the tale of the fall of Finrod and the victory of Lúthien over Sauron. Lúthien's victory causes tumult among the Elves of Nargothrond:

They lamented bitterly the fall of Felagund their king, saying that a maiden had dared that which the sons of Fëanor had not dared to do; but many perceived that it was treachery rather than fear that had guided Celegorm and Curufin. (176)

This quotation is important for two main reasons. First, this uproar leads the Elves of Nargothrond to expel Celegorm and Curufin. The sons of Fëanor established control in Nargothrond before Finrod abdicated the throne by playing off the fears and anxieties of the Noldor. It takes two great events, the death of Finrod and Lúthien's defeat of Sauron, to show the people of Nargothrond the true nature of Celegorm and Curufin.

Secondly, it wasn't just any Elf who overthrew Sauron and freed the captive Elves: it was a maiden. This specific mention of gender magnifies the embarrassment that Curufin and Celegorm experience and adds insult to political injury. We gain some insight into the gender expectations of the Elves of Nargothrond here: the sons of Fëanor, as male characters and Noldor royalty, should be concerned with the wellbeing of their kinsmen. The incarceration of the Elves should be a perverse injustice in the minds of all those who hear of it, but the sons of Fëanor decide to focus on their own machinations instead. As a "maiden", Lúthien is expected to be meek and mild, as evidenced by the way that many characters seek to keep her from the action. Hearing that it was indeed Lúthien who defeated Sauron and freed the Elves is a disruption of gender expectations.

Magical power doesn't make Lúthien invincible, however. One problematic aspect of Lúthien's character is that even though Lúthien is *magically* capable in a way that outmatches characters as powerful and dangerous as Sauron, she is still *physically* vulnerable, as demonstrated when she is twice taken captive by Celegorm and Curufin. This physical vulnerability seems to necessitate a male hero: Beren's true usefulness as a hero comes from his steadfast nature and his martial ability. Just as Beren cannot succeed in his quest without Lúthien, Lúthien's own role in the quest would have ended quite early without Beren. Even though Lúthien and Beren are great individually, they are even stronger together.

Lúthien's second captivity at the hands of Curufin and Celegorm is one moment that necessitates Beren's presence as a masculine hero. This is a moment that I covered in depth in Chapter 1, so I won't retread the issues here in great depth. As I mentioned, Celegorm and Curufin possess a simmering hatred of Lúthien and Beren after being foiled by the couple again and again. Returning to Lynn Whitaker's article "Corrupting Beauty" again, we can see that this scene is quite possibly one of the most sexually violent moments in the tale. Whitaker also claims that Lúthien's confrontations with Sauron and Morgoth are both scenes of potential sexual violence, but I would disagree. As divine beings, Sauron and Morgoth do not vie for Lúthien's attentions in the same way that Celegorm and Beren do. It would seem that Sauron and Morgoth want Lúthien because of her divine nature. They want her in order to corrupt or extinguish her divine light.

However, Whitaker presents an astute reading of the sexual violence in the showdown between Lúthien, Beren, and the brothers. Whitaker argues that we can read "the escape of Lúthien as a doubly humiliating failure for Celegorm – he has lost his prisoner and his potential 'wife'" (63). This provides the motivation for Celegorm and Curufin's second attempt at capturing Lúthien. The brothers seek to salvage their earlier plan to force Lúthien to marry Celegorm. As Whitaker says, "we can only assume that Curufin seizes Lúthien (as opposed to attempting to kill her) with a malicious intent that relates to the scheme to 'force' Lúthien's hand in marriage"; Whitaker goes on to argue that this means Curufin has seized her "either for himself or his brother to rape" (64). One could argue that the lack of the brothers' clearly stated sexual interest in Lúthien precludes the possibility of rape, but Whitaker has expanded the

definition of “rape narrative”: “A rape narrative need not . . . contain actual rape, but will have at least a threat or implication of coercive or non-consensual sex as a driving element” (51). Under this broader definition, we can see that this tale qualifies as a rape narrative. Whether or not Celegorm and Curufin explicitly state their intentions, we have to imagine that they are capable of that heinous deed.

And truly, it is that threat against Lúthien that necessitates Beren’s presence as a masculine hero. As I said before, Beren’s heroism stems from his brave nature and his skill as a warrior. These exact characteristics allow Beren to defeat the brothers once and for all. The nature of the confrontation between Beren and the brothers puts Beren’s martial abilities to the test: a physical confrontation requires a physical response. But while this moment highlights Beren’s fighting prowess and his brave spirit, it also serves as another opportunity for Lúthien to showcase her heroic nature. As I noted in Chapter 1, we cannot ignore the fact that Lúthien herself forbids Beren to kill either Celegorm or Curufin. This is an astoundingly heroic gesture; after all that she has endured, Lúthien still argues for mercy.

As Lúthien, Beren, and Huan approach Morgoth’s fortress Angband, Lúthien uses her magical powers in order to hide their identities; with this particular usage of her magical powers, Lúthien is able to overcome the obstacles of physical appearance, similar to her magical escape from Doriath earlier in the tale. Lúthien’s powers allow her to change the outward appearance of others. As she escaped from Doriath, Lúthien’s unique appearance would have made her instantly recognizable to anyone who saw her escape attempt; as Lúthien and Beren approach Angband, their outward appearance would have caused them to stick out like the proverbial sore thumb. This magical shape-shifting is the first of many episodes where Lúthien’s magical powers allow Beren to continue on his quest. Beren accepts that he cannot convince Lúthien to allow him to continue the quest alone; he “perceived that Lúthien could not be divided from the doom that lay upon them both, and he sought no longer to dissuade her” (179). By accepting Lúthien’s presence, Beren accepts and validates her role in the quest.

After trying (and failing) repeatedly to send Lúthien home to protect her from the dangers of Angband, Beren finally accepts that Lúthien cannot be swayed. Lúthien cloaks herself and Beren in magical disguises:

By the counsel of Huan and the arts of Lúthien [Beren] was arrayed now in the hame of Draugluin, and she in the winged fell of Thuringwethil. Beren became in all things like a werewolf to look upon, save that in his eyes there shone a spirit grim indeed but clean; and horror was in his glance as he saw upon his flank a bat-like creature clinging with creased wings. (179)

As Lúthien escaped from Doriath, it became necessary for her to hide her appearance, which would betray her identity; as our heroes approach Morgoth's keep, Lúthien is able to give them physical appearances which provide them safe passage to the gates of Angband. Lúthien's powers erase or mask their outward characteristics, but while their appearances change, their heroic natures do not. We can see how Beren's innate "goodness" is still visible, despite his altered form. Beren's eyes reveal his "grim ... but clean" spirit even while he appears to be a gruesome werewolf. When physical appearance threatens to overshadow heroic fortitude, Lúthien's powers enable her to remove the obstacle of appearances from their path.

As Lúthien and Beren come before the throne of Morgoth, Lúthien's disguise cannot withstand Morgoth's scrutiny. Lúthien is "stripped of her disguise by the will of Morgoth, and he bent his gaze upon her" (180). Lúthien again demonstrates her heroic nature. Rather than fleeing in terror or trying to deceive Morgoth, Lúthien responds boldly: "She was not daunted by his eyes; and she named her own name, and offered her service to sing before him, after the manner of a minstrel" (180). As the greatest evil in Middle-earth, Morgoth is perhaps the best example of possessive masculine in *The Silmarillion*. Morgoth, once called Melkor and counted among the great Powers of the World, begins his attempts to dominate and impose his will on others before the creation of the physical world. Lúthien is able to use Morgoth's greed against him: Morgoth "was beguiled by his own malice" as Lúthien "began a song of such surpassing loveliness, and of such blinding power, that he listened perforce" (180). With her song, Lúthien puts Morgoth and his entourage into a deep, magical sleep.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the enormity of this event cannot be overstated: Lúthien's magical and divine nature enables her to contend with the Valar, the god-like deities of the world. Lúthien will

again interact directly with one of the Valar later in this tale when she pleads with Mandos on Beren's behalf. Lúthien's confrontation with Morgoth is one of the clearest examples of how absolutely vital she is to the success of this quest: Beren is counted as one of the greatest heroes of Middle-earth, and he certainly proves his valor all throughout this tale, but his mortal nature would have left him completely unable to contend with Morgoth on his own. Beren clearly benefits from the company of Lúthien in such a way that it is almost impossible to imagine him without her; in a very practical sense, in terms of the confrontation which takes place in Angband, it is easy to see that Beren could not have succeeded alone.

The tale of Beren and Lúthien comes to a close as Beren is finally overcome by his wounds. Carcharoth, the guard-wolf of Morgoth, has been rampaging through Doriath with a Silmaril in its belly. Beren and Thingol leave to hunt Carcharoth, along with the hound Huan and several Elves. Carcharoth is killed and the Silmaril is recovered, but Beren and Huan both die in the process. This sets the stage for what is perhaps Lúthien's greatest divine accomplishment. A little background information helps to highlight the significance of Lúthien's journey into the underworld to retrieve Beren.

Mandos, one of the Valar, serves a dual role as deific judge and guardian of the afterlife. He is "the keeper of the Houses of the Dead, and the summoner of the spirits of the slain. He forgets nothing; and he knows all things that shall be, save only those that lie still in the freedom of Ilúvatar" (28). Rather than a Grim Reaper-esque spirit of death or some Hades-like king of the underworld, Mandos is something approaching law personified. Mandos is "the Doomsman of the Valar; but he pronounces his dooms and his judgments only at the bidding of Manwë," king of the Valar (28). Here, Tolkien uses the term "doom" in a sense which is archaic, yet more nuanced than the modern version.

For Tolkien, "doom" carries a meaning closer to "fate" or "judgment." In the article "The Music and the Task," Verlyn Flieger discusses the tension between fate and free will in Tolkien's works; Mandos becomes pertinent to this discussion because he delivers fates as determined by Ilúvatar and Manwë, his divine superiors. As Flieger notes, Tolkien intentionally used the word "doom" not in its modern, negative sense, but in the Anglo-Saxon sense "[meaning] simply 'judgment, judicial sentence, decree'" (156). Despite the fact that this system of divine determination plays an integral role in all of the

stories from *The Silmarillion*, Flieger argues, Tolkien never mentions “such conceptually significant proper nouns as *God, Heaven, Grace, Paradise, Providence, Salvation, Damnation*”; instead, we can see more of a focus on “fate as either a general concept (uncapitalized) or a proper noun/personification (capitalized)” (155). Mandos is that personification of the concept of fate. Characters are given the agency to fulfill various roles in Tolkien’s works, but Mandos functions as the judicial avatar of Ilúvatar. Flieger goes into more detail about the seeming contradiction between fate and free will in Tolkien’s works, but that is a discussion for another paper.

Mandos serves an almost bureaucratic role in Middle-earth as gatekeeper to the afterlife. Lúthien’s spirit leaves her earthly body and travels to Mandos’ halls, the dimly-understood eternal resting place of the spirits of Elves and Men, and her appeal takes the form of “the song most fair that ever in words was woven” (186). As Lúthien weaves together “two themes of words, of the sorrow of the Eldar and the grief of Men . . . Mandos was moved to pity, who never before was so moved, nor has been since” (186-87). By moving Mandos to pity, Lúthien bypasses the ‘red tape’ in the business of souls, so to speak. Mandos then moves up the chain to Manwë, who consults with Ilúvatar. Lúthien is then given a choice:

These were the choices that he gave to Lúthien. Because of her labours and her sorrow, she should be released from Mandos, and go to Valimar, there to dwell until the world’s end among the Valar, forgetting all griefs that her life had known. Thither Beren could not come. For it was not permitted to the Valar to withhold Death from him, which is the gift of Ilúvatar to Men. But the other choice was this: that she might return to Middle-earth, and take with her Beren, there to dwell again, but without certitude of life or joy. Then she would become mortal, and subject to a second death, even as he; and ere long she would leave the world for ever, and her beauty become only a memory in song. (187).

Eternal life or a finite and mortally-fragile life with Beren. Lúthien alone is able to retrieve Beren from the halls of Mandos, but in order to do so, she must forsake immortality, one element of her birthright. She is given the opportunity to save Beren’s life at the cost of drastically shortening her own. However

difficult it may have been, Lúthien frees Beren from a system of restrictive, possessive male authority through this choice.

Lúthien chooses Beren and Middle-earth, which allows the couple to enjoy some semblance of a ‘happily ever after,’ but as she returns to Doriath one final time to bid farewell to her parents, the impact of Lúthien’s choice becomes clear. Melian, perceptive as ever, grieves as she “looked in [Lúthien’s] eyes and read the doom that was written there, and turned away; for she knew that a parting beyond the end of the world had come between them” (188). Lúthien and Beren themselves are rewarded for Lúthien’s difficult choice as they finally arrive in a remote area of Beleriand, where they live “until all tidings of them ceased . . . none saw Beren or Lúthien leave the world, or marked where at last their bodies lay” (189). Lúthien’s choice to become mortal and remain in Middle-earth will resonate throughout the rest of the history of Middle-earth. Her choice mirrors Thingol’s choice long ago: both Lúthien and Thingol forsake Valinor for love. We can see echoes of Lúthien’s choice in the tale of Eärendil the Mariner, whose family is given the choice of being counted among the Men or among the Elves; Elrond chooses his Elvish heritage while Elros chooses mortality, but both brothers become very important characters in the rest of Tolkien’s works.

Lúthien is able to side-step the established order of things during the quest, first by rebelling against Thingol, contending against the sons of Fëanor and Morgoth, and finally by advocating for Beren in the afterlife, but there is a hint of sadness or wistfulness at the thought of what Lúthien gives up. Lúthien rejects her divine kinsmen and a chance to live within the eternal peace of Valinor in order to live a mortal life with Beren. Lúthien’s devotion to Beren and their subsequent retreat to the wilds of Beleriand deprive Middle-earth of two much-needed heroic figures. At the same time, however, the marriage of Lúthien and Beren is a marriage which unites “the Two Kindreds” of Elves and Men. Lúthien and Beren are the beginning of a series of interethnic marriages which will produce many other legendary figures in Middle-earth, such as Dior, the last king of Doriath. Lúthien’s choice has a hint of sadness to it, but “in her choice the Two Kindreds have been joined; and she is the forerunner of many in whom the Eldar see yet, though all the world is changed, the likeness of Lúthien the beloved, whom they have lost”

(Tolkien 187). Though Lúthien is gone, traces of her still linger in Middle-earth. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the other important interethnic marriages in *The Silmarillion*, and their heroic consequences for all of Middle-earth.

Chapter 3 - The Two Kindreds: Interethnic marriage and heroism

The legendarium of J.R.R. Tolkien is full of tales that seem to argue for a blending or syncretic approach to nearly everything. In these tales, no one succeeds alone; triumph only comes through a spirit of assistance and cooperation. In Chapter 1, I discussed how Beren, a Man, attempts to enact his heroic destiny with the help of his beloved Lúthien. Beren rejects the models of possessive masculine authority practiced by Thingol and the sons of Fëanor. In Chapter 2, I discussed how Lúthien's determination and unique heritage allow her to transcend her status as 'damsel in distress' and become a heroic figure in her own right. My first two chapters focus on "Of Beren and Lúthien" in such detail because their story is the first appearance of what becomes an important motif in both *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*: interethnic marriage.

Several times throughout *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, marriages between Elves and Men produce some of the greatest heroes in Middle-earth; these interethnic marriages include Beren and Lúthien,⁶ Tuor and Idril, and Eärendil and Elwing. Aragorn and Arwen are another example of the mingling of the Two Kindreds, with their lineage becoming the rulers of the restored and reunited kingdom of Men; Arwen and Aragorn also represent a reunion of the ancient bloodlines, as they are each descended from the sons of Eärendil and Elwing. It is also interesting to note that in all these cases, it is a female Elf and a male Man intermarrying, never the other way around. In this chapter, I will examine each pairing of Man and Elf and demonstrate the repeated motif of interethnic marriages that produce great heroes. I will argue that Tolkien is again arguing for a sense of togetherness that triumphs over the divisiveness and evil of Middle-earth by presenting many different iterations of this motif. No one person in Tolkien's tales can succeed alone; similarly, no one race in Middle-earth can succeed alone. Everyone prospers when the Two Kindreds cooperate, and doubly so when they intermingle.

The Silmarillion also features an example, in the form of Túrin and Finduilas, of what happens when the Two Kindreds *do not* intermingle. "Of Túrin Turambar" is one of the longest chapters in *The*

⁶ Lúthien herself is the product of intermarriage between an Elf and one of the divine beings of the world.

Silmarillion, and I don't wish to dilute the focus of this chapter too greatly, so I will only cover certain aspects of that story. However, this story is germane to the topic at hand because Túrin serves as a counterpart to the tale of Beren and Lúthien, albeit a much more tragic version.

These interethnic marriages take on a mythic status because of their place in the celebrated histories of Middle-earth, but I believe it is important to retain a focus on the characters involved in these pairings. To use Lúthien and Beren as an example, there is an element of predestination in the tale, suggesting that Beren and Lúthien were fated to meet and fall in love. Melian is aware that Beren passes the obstacles that protect the border into Doriath, "even as she had foretold; for a great doom lay upon him" (Tolkien 165). Doom is used here, again, in the sense meaning fate, judgment, or decree. If Melian foretold that Beren would arrive in Doriath, then we can speculate that she might have known or suspected what would transpire between Beren and Lúthien. At any rate, Melian's foretelling demonstrates that fate plays a role in the events of *The Silmarillion*, to at least some extent.

But while we can accept the presence of fate in Tolkien's works, we shouldn't ignore the role of individual agency when we examine the actions of any character, especially when it pertains to these important character pairings. Beren and Lúthien might both have grand fates in store for them, but that doesn't make them puppets of fate, predestination, Ilúvatar, or any other omnipotent force. Tolkien presents characters that feel as if they are imbued with the agency to do practically anything.

One of the appeals of Tolkien's heroes is that they *decide* to be heroes; characters might find themselves in vastly unexpected situations, but they never simply stumble into heroic roles. In the article "Gazing Upon Sauron: Hobbits, Elves, and the Queering of the Postcolonial Optic," Jes Battis examines specific character interactions on an individual basis (one character to another) and on a national/ethnic basis (interactions between hobbits and Elves, for example). According to Battis, studying character interactions is valuable because these interactions take place among "a wide array of characters—each one, often at unexpected moments, capable of intense personal revelation" that propels and shapes the plot of Tolkien's stories; through dialogue, characters reveal the "history and diegetic complexity of Middle-earth" as well as aspects of their own character (909). Battis uses this idea as the basis of a study

of race in *The Lord of the Rings*, but I intend to use the same idea as a lens or frame of my examination of interethnic marriage in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*: it is those “personal revelation[s]” at “unexpected moments” that form the very nature of heroic action. Historical events in Middle-earth shape and color the events that follow them and influence the protagonists of these tales. Heroes, in Tolkien’s works, are those characters who persevere against all odds, triumphing for themselves and for the greater good.

Interethnic marriages in *The Silmarillion* are worth studying; the motif always appears at moments of great need in Middle-earth. Many of the greatest heroes in Middle-earth are the product of interethnic marriages. When Beren meets Lúthien and Tuor meets Idril, the race of Man is in dire straits, and the Elves are not faring much better. At this, the darkest hour in Middle-earth, the two bloodlines⁷ merge; Eärendil and Elwing are able to emerge as the saviors of Middle-earth in part because of their ancestors’ interethnic marriages and heroic acts. Tolkien argues for a sense of ethnic cooperation by presenting a series of interethnic marriages that result in perhaps the greatest heroic family in Middle-earth: Eärendil, Elwing, and their family are the end product of a series of interethnic marriages beginning with Lúthien and Beren.

Lúthien and Beren

In my first two chapters, I discussed the heroic arcs of Lúthien and Beren in which the pairing of Man and Elf is undoubtedly beneficial to both Beren and Lúthien as well as to Middle-earth in general. Beren’s quest to win Lúthien’s hand in marriage becomes conflated with Thingol’s desire to possess a Silmaril. Their original quest, to retrieve a Silmaril from the crown of Morgoth, obscures their true quest: achieving a union between Man and Elf. At the end of their trials, Lúthien and Beren are rewarded not just with a Silmaril, but with a family.

Having successfully completed their quest, Lúthien and Beren get to live out the remainder of their lives in a remote portion of Beleriand afterwards known as Dor Firn-i-Guinar, or “the Land of the

⁷ Elwing is the granddaughter of Lúthien and Beren. Eärendil is the son of Tuor and Idril.

Dead that Live”; they also have a son, “Dior Aranel the beautiful, who was after known as Dior Eluchíl, which is Thingol’s Heir” (Tolkien 188). As Thingol’s heir, Dior will be the last king of Doriath before its fall. Having given birth to Dior, who will eventually come to be very important in Middle-earth, Beren and Lúthien are able to fade into the background of *The Silmarillion*. Since the tales of Beren and Lúthien are so well-known in Middle-earth, and no story is told of their deaths, we have to assume that their last days were peaceful and uneventful.

The marriage of Lúthien and Beren is important in part because of its primacy. The marriage of Thingol and Melian comes chronologically earlier in *The Silmarillion*, and it certainly counts as an interethnic marriage since Thingol is an Elf and Melian is a Maia, although it doesn’t quite fit the motif I’m exploring here; this motif is specifically the marriage between a human Man and a female Elf, so Beren and Lúthien become the actual first iteration of this theme. However, Thingol and Melian’s marriage is still pertinent to a discussion of Lúthien and Beren’s marriage because Lúthien’s heritage introduces a strain of the divine into the equation. As the daughter of a powerful Elvish king and an angelic Maia, Lúthien herself is a unique “creation” just like the Silmarils.

The consequences and implications of Lúthien and Beren’s marriage echo throughout the rest of Tolkien’s works. For example, in Appendix A of *The Return of the King*, Tolkien recounts the story of Aragorn and Arwen’s first meeting, which takes place at Rivendell years before *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien draws direct parallels between the two stories in this scene:

.Aragorn had been singing a part of the Lay of Lúthien which tells of the meeting of Lúthien and Beren in the forest of Neldoreth. And behold! there Lúthien walked before his eyes in Rivendell, clad in a mantle of silver and blue, fair as the twilight in Elven-home; her dark hair strayed in a sudden wind, and her brows were bound with gems like stars.

‘For a moment Aragorn gazed in silence, but fearing that she would pass away and never be seen again, he called to her crying, *Tinúviel, Tinúviel!* even as Beren had in the Elder Days long ago. (1033)

Compared to this passage from “Of Beren and Lúthien” in *The Silmarillion*:

But she vanished from [Beren’s] sight; and he became dumb, as one that is bound under a spell, and he strayed long in the woods, wild and wary as a beast, seeking for her. In his heart he called her Tinúviel, that signifies Nightingale, daughter of twilight, in the Grey-elven tongue, for he knew no other name for her. (165)

Here, we can see a clear connection between First Age and Third Age tales. Aragorn is bewitched. Stricken by Arwen’s beauty and resemblance to Lúthien, he envisions himself as Beren and Arwen as Lúthien. Aragorn’s response echoes Beren’s from so long ago. It might not be a coincidence that Arwen is clad in clothing reminiscent of Lúthien; the rest of this tale proves that Arwen knows the story of Lúthien and Beren, so it is possible that Tolkien has Arwen intentionally model herself after her great-great-grandmother. At any rate, the parallel between the two tales shows the long-lasting impact of Beren and Lúthien’s quest.

Túrin and Finduilas

The tale of Túrin Turambar is, in many ways, the sort of shadow or darker version of the tale of Beren and Lúthien. There is even a specific reference to Beren at the beginning of Chapter 21 of *The Silmarillion*, “Of Túrin Turambar.” We learn that Túrin was born “in the year that Beren Erchamion⁸ came upon Lúthien in the Forest of Neldoreth” (198). By situating Túrin’s birth in terms of Beren’s heroic journey, Tolkien invites readers to compare and contrast the two Men. Beren and Lúthien succeed in their quest because they’re able to transcend the political and social norms of Doriath, as represented by Thingol; their quest ultimately succeeds because of the spirit of interethnic cooperation as represented by Beren and Lúthien, which inspires Thingol to relax his authority.

Túrin, on the other hand, never seems to fully integrate himself into any of the societies in which he lives. Túrin fails where Beren succeeds because Túrin maintains a narrowed focus, valuing himself, his immediate family, and his small groups of companions instead of a larger, more integrated goal. As Hope

⁸ Erchamion means “one-handed” and is an appellation Beren receives after losing his hand at the end of “Of Beren and Lúthien.”

Rogers discusses in the article “No Triumph without Loss: Problems of Intercultural Marriage in Tolkien’s Works,” some critics argue that Túrin’s misfortunes can be blamed on the curse laid upon his family by Morgoth, but Rogers argues that Túrin himself should shoulder some of the blame here. According to Rogers, “Túrin’s tragedy begins with his failure to adapt to and learn from the other cultures with which he comes into contact”; for differing amounts of time, Túrin lives with two different tribes of Elves, as well as different groups of Men (71). In other words, Túrin might be cursed, but he does himself no favors by constantly holding himself separate from (and, frequently, superior to) those around him. In Tolkien’s works, togetherness and cooperation are the only methods for success; Túrin’s tale becomes tragic in part because he cannot connect with others.

At one point in the tale, Túrin comes to live among the Elves of Nargothrond. He becomes so beloved in Nargothrond that he earns the nickname Adanedhel, or “Elf-Man”; Túrin also unwittingly earns the love of Finduilas, a Noldor princess (Tolkien 210). As I’ve mentioned before, Tolkien bestows new names or nicknames upon characters and places in order to convey some change in status; therefore, when Túrin earns the nickname “Elf-Man,” we should take this as a sign of how close Túrin comes to becoming a full-fledged member of Nargothrond society. What’s more, Túrin is the only Man to earn this honor. Elves are, at times, prejudiced against Men; this goes double for the people of Nargothrond, who are notoriously secretive. Túrin earns this honor, but he does not fully accept it; his pride causes him to keep himself separate.

When the evil forces of Morgoth declare war on Nargothrond, Túrin’s pride leads him to make several grave mistakes. Ulmo, one of the Valar, sends a message to Nargothrond advising them to destroy the bridge leading to the main gate of the city; Túrin ignores this command “for he was become proud and stern, and would order all things as he wished” (212). Ulmo, one of the god-like beings of Middle-earth, offers advice that Túrin is too arrogant to accept.

Túrin also ignores the advice given to him by Gwindor, one of the Noldorin Elves of Nargothrond. Morgoth’s armies attack Nargothrond, led by the dragon Glaurung. Gwindor is fatally wounded, and offers Túrin one last piece of advice: “Haste thee to Nargothrond, and save Finduilas. And

this last I say to thee: she alone stands between thee and thy doom. If thou fail her, it shall not fail to find thee” (Tolkien 213). As Nargothrond falls, we can see the consequences of Túrin ignoring these two important pieces of advice. Since the bridge was not destroyed, Morgoth’s armies pass easily into Nargothrond (213). Glaurung and Túrin meet face to face, and the dragon taunts Túrin by mentioning his long-lost mother and sister. Glaurung offers Túrin a choice: go save Finduilas, or head to the remote northern reaches of Beleriand to save his family; when Glaurung sees Túrin head northward, “Glaurung laughed once more, for he had accomplished the errand of his master” (214). Somehow, Morgoth, Glaurung, and Gwindor are all aware of how important Túrin’s actions are at this moment. Although all three characters are working toward different purposes, they all understand that saving Finduilas and the rest of the people of Nargothrond is the “right” choice for Túrin to make.

Túrin falls under the mind-controlling magic of Glaurung, but the dragon’s words and magic only serve to fuel the fire that was already raging within Túrin’s heart. Túrin is faced with an impossibly hard choice: should he save his adopted family, the Elves of Nargothrond, or should he risk everything for the possibility of being reunited with his blood kin? As I have discussed in the previous chapters, evil in Middle-earth often functions by corrupting good and beautiful things. Túrin’s confrontation with Glaurung illustrates this theme perfectly. By taunting Túrin with the prospect of being reunited with his family, Glaurung twists a perfectly honorable intention (defense of and reconciliation with one’s family) to suit darker motives.

This is the greatest turning point in Túrin’s tale. His choice to head northward is perhaps the last nail in his coffin, so to speak. Túrin’s choice is the wrong one for a variety of reasons. First, Glaurung deceives Túrin. His family is not in remote Dor-lórmin, as Glaurung claims, and the search that ensues will cost Túrin and his sister their lives. Secondly, Túrin operates under a faulty sense of what “family” means. While Túrin is related by blood to his mother and sister, he has forged a much greater bond with the people of Nargothrond; Tolkien doesn’t give us exact dates, but since Túrin was separated from his family at a very young age (we know he has never seen his sister before), it is entirely possible that Túrin

has spent more time with the Elves of Nargothrond than with the Men of Dor-lómin. Túrin abandons the survivors of Nargothrond for a family he barely knows.

The third reason is closely related to the second reason: by choosing a smaller group of people (specifically his mother and sister) over a larger group (the remaining survivors of Nargothrond plus Finduilas), Túrin acts out of a selfish and narrowed desire, not the common good. ‘Goodness’ and heroism in Tolkien’s works means striving for the greatest good for the greatest number of people. It would be a complete overstatement and simplification to say that Túrin fails as a hero because he doesn’t marry an Elf; however, by rejecting Finduilas, Túrin rejects the possibility of Nargothrond’s continued survival or reconstruction through cooperation and ethnic intermingling. Túrin faces a difficult choice, and we can hardly fault him for attempting to save his family, but making the selfish, personal choice means that Túrin fails as a hero.

Idril and Tuor

Idril and Tuor are the next example of successful interethnic marriages in *The Silmarillion*. Tuor’s tale has many similarities to Túrin’s tale: both Men are separated from their families at a young age, and both Men are fostered by Elves. However, Tuor succeeds where Túrin fails for a number of reasons. First, while Túrin rejects a possible interethnic mingling by choosing his mother and sister over Finduilas, Tuor and Idril’s successful interethnic blending, however, gives way to Eärendil, who will later become the savior of Middle-earth. Secondly and relatedly, Túrin never fully integrates himself into Sindar or Noldor society; Tuor, on the other hand, enjoys a prominent place in Gondolin and even may literally become one of the Noldor by the end of his life.

In Middle-earth, heroes are called to action in response to the strife of their time. The story of Tuor is an excellent example: Tuor is called into service directly by Ulmo, one of the Valar, the god-like Powers of the World. Tuor seems to be aware of his heroic destiny, and he is clearly working in line with Ulmo’s plan. Tuor’s story also reemphasizes the theme of free will versus predestination, but the elements of fate in his tale do not make him the puppet of the Valar. While Tuor does follow a path laid out for him by Ulmo, Tuor is heroic because of his decision to follow that path and become a hero. As a result, Tuor’s

marriage with Idril brings Eärendil into the world. Eärendil, along with his wife Elwing (granddaughter of Beren and Lúthien), will later save all of Middle-earth at the most dire moment in history.

Tuor's journey toward heroism begins as he escapes from the Easterlings, evil Men in service of Morgoth. After his escape, and like Beren and Túrin before him, he lives in solitude for a time, until "Ulmo set it in his heart to depart from the land of his fathers, for he had chosen Tuor as the instrument of his designs" (Tolkien 238). Tuor eventually comes to the region of Nevrast, where he sees the ocean for the first time. Tuor is bewitched by the ocean, much in the same way that Thingol was bewitched by Melian, or Beren by Lúthien: "looking upon Belegaer the Great Sea he was enamoured of it, and the sound of it and the longing for it were ever in his heart and ear" (238). Tuor stays in Nevrast for a while, "but when the autumn came he saw seven great swans flying south, and he knew them for a sign that he had tarried overlong, and he followed their flight along the shores of the sea" (238). Tuor heads to Vinyamar, an abandoned Noldor settlement, where he finds "the shield and hauberk, and the sword and helm, that Turgon had left there by the command of Ulmo long before" (238-39). This section is the clearest evidence that Tuor is working within Ulmo's plans. In addition to his love of the sea, Tuor proves himself to be receptive to signs and portents, a result of his divine alignment.

Ulmo's interference here would be more sinister if Ulmo were less committed to the wellbeing of the Two Kindreds. The Valar (except Morgoth) are tasked with protecting Middle-earth and those who live there, but Ulmo is one of the most directly active players among the Valar in Middle-earth. Ulmo gives his directives and suggestions because he is a divine being who legitimately cares for the "lesser" beings of Middle-earth. Ulmo's meddling could be seen to reduce the heroism of the people he interacts with, but it's important to point out a key difference between Morgoth and Ulmo: Morgoth does not hesitate to bend the wills of those he deems "lesser." Ulmo understands that domination, even domination with a good intent, is still evil. Ulmo's plans leave Tuor and Turgon the option of not following the plans. In other words, even though predestination plays a role in this tale, it is still up to characters to enact their agency in ways that they see fit. Ulmo guides and influences Tuor's heroism without forcing him to comply.

With the guidance of Ulmo, Tuor eventually makes his way to Gondolin; also called the Hidden Kingdom, Gondolin is the home of Turgon, High King of the Noldor. Tuor carries a warning for Turgon from Ulmo: abandon Gondolin, head south, and prepare to make the journey back to Valinor. Turgon ignores this warning as “[he] was become proud, and Gondolin as beautiful as a memory of Elven Tirion, and he trusted still in its secret and impregnable strength, though even a Vala should gainsay it” (240). The situation in Middle-earth is bad, and Ulmo warns Turgon that things are about to get even worse. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, single-minded pursuit of anything is always a sign of trouble in Tolkien’s works; here, Turgon’s only desire is to keep Gondolin safe and secure. A noble goal, to be sure, but Turgon, like many other characters, will later pay the price for his pridefully narrowed focus.

Tuor’s arrival in Elvish society allows us to draw a parallel between Tuor and Túrin. Tuor decides to stay in Gondolin, and Turgon allows Tuor to marry his daughter, Idril, for two main reasons. First, like Túrin, Tuor earns such regard among the Noldor that he is accepted as one of their own. Second, Turgon acknowledges the importance of Tuor: “though he would not heed the bidding of Ulmo, he perceived that the fate of the Noldor was wound with the one whom Ulmo had sent” (241). Both Túrin and Tuor have some important fate laid upon them, and both Túrin and Tuor gain some manner of acceptance into secretive Noldor societies, a very rare accomplishment indeed. However, Tuor fully accepts both his fate and his adopted Noldor status in a way that Túrin never does, which could explain why Tuor’s tale has a much happier ending than Túrin’s.

Idril soon gives birth to a boy, whom they name Eärendil. The description of Eärendil after his birth aligns him with the divine forces of the world, as he is born with clearly divine traits: “Of surpassing beauty was Eärendil, for a light was in his face as the light of heaven, and he had the beauty and the wisdom of the Eldar and the strength and hardihood of the Men of old” (241). Characters who are either aligned with the Valar or fresh from Valinor are often described as having “a light in” their faces; this becomes a physical manifestation of a moral/religious alignment. In a way, Eärendil is Tuor and Idril’s ‘reward’ for blending their two cultures. Eärendil himself is the offspring of a Man and an Elf, and his

family results in a further blending. As is the case with Lúthien and her divine heritage, it takes a combined lineage to produce magically capable heroes.

While Turgon is content to remain in Gondolin, sheltering behind the mountains and the walls of the city, this solitude is a demonstration of his pride. Gondolin, the Hidden Kingdom, functions as both a protective barrier and a prison for those who live within its mountains; Gondolin remains safe and secure for hundreds of years because of its remote location within a circle of mountains, and because the passage through the mountains is well-hidden. Other than his love for Gondolin, Turgon never exhibits the kind of possessive authority that Thingol does, but Turgon's rule of Gondolin does verge on becoming oppressive. This enclosure is reminiscent of Melian's protective barrier around Doriath, and Turgon's insistence on the impenetrability of Gondolin echoes Thingol's attempts to keep Doriath safe. Both Turgon and Thingol ignore the wise counsel of others: Thingol often disregards the advice of his wife, Melian, and Turgon disregards the prophecies of Ulmo. Both kings eventually pay the price for ignoring the advice of the wise.

While Turgon believes that Gondolin can withstand anything, his daughter Idril correctly recognizes that this is not a sustainable strategy. Although "the days of Gondolin were yet full of joy and peace . . . Idril Celebrindal was wise and far-seeing, and her heart misgave her, and foreboding crept upon her spirit as a cloud" (241). Because of those misgivings, Idril designs and implements a secret escape tunnel leading out of the city. Idril's forethought puts her in the ranks of such wise female counselors as Melian and Galadriel; when Gondolin soon falls, this tunnel will be the only means of escape from the city.

The fall of Gondolin is set in motion by the actions of another greedy male character. Maeglin, nephew of Turgon, periodically ventures beyond the mountains of Gondolin in defiance of his uncle's decree. Morgoth takes Maeglin captive and uses his greed against him. Under threat of torture and death, Maeglin reveals the location of and entrances to Gondolin; Morgoth promises to reward Maeglin with "the lordship of Gondolin as his vassal, and the possession of Idril Celebrindal, when the city should be taken; and indeed desire for Idril and hatred for Tuor led Maeglin the easier to his treachery" (242).

Tolkien is clear here: if Maeglin had not coveted Idril, and if he had not hated Tuor, Maeglin would not have betrayed Gondolin. Maeglin's rancor toward Tuor is partially because Tuor is a Man and not an Elf; Maeglin rejects the possibility of Man/Elf intermingling, and Gondolin pays the price. The last great kingdom of Elves in Middle-earth falls because of the hatred and the desires of Maeglin.

As Tuor, Idril, Eärendil, and the survivors of Gondolin make their way southward along the river Sirion, Ulmo's divine influence can again be seen; although Turgon ignored the warning Ulmo sent via Tuor, Ulmo's contingency plan helps ensure the survival of the remaining Elves. The survivors of Gondolin eventually arrive in an area where "the power of Ulmo yet ran in the great river, and it was about them" (243). The survivors mourn their dead and celebrate their escape, and in time, the remaining Elves of Doriath and Gondolin establish a new settlement by the sea, "under the shadow of Ulmo's hand" (244). Ulmo rewards Tuor and the surviving Elves for their faithful service. Ulmo also attempts to intervene on their behalf with the other Valar, asking Manwë to come to the aid of the Two Kindreds. Manwë refuses:

But Manwë moved not; and of the counsels of his heart what tale shall tell? The wise have said that the hour was not yet come, and that only one speaking in person for the cause of both Elves and Men, pleading for pardon on their misdeeds and pity on their woes, might move the counsels of the Powers. (244)

Ulmo's love of Middle-earth and its peoples puts him at odds with the King of the Valar.

It is that love of Middle-earth that leads Ulmo to choose Tuor as the instrument of his designs. With Ulmo's grooming, Tuor becomes a hero who is capable of saving at least a remnant of the people of Gondolin. It's unclear if Idril and Tuor's interethnic marriage was a part of Ulmo's plan, but it is certainly portrayed as a very positive turn of events. Without Tuor's devotion to Ulmo, his heroic spirit, and Idril's foresight, it is likely that all of Gondolin would have perished. As a result, Tuor and Idril are rewarded. They are given their son, Eärendil, the clearest Christ-analogue in Tolkien's works, and they are allowed to start a new life not once, but twice. After Tuor grows old in his new home by the sea, he and Idril sail westward, presumably toward Valinor, and "in after days it was sung that Tuor alone of mortal Men was

numbered among the elder race, and was joined with the Noldor, whom he loved; and his fate is sundered from the fate of Men” (245). Tuor is rewarded for integrating himself into Noldor society by *actually being made* one of the Noldor.

Elwing and Eärendil

In Elwing and Eärendil, we can see the culmination of the two previous interethnic marriages: Eärendil, the son of Idril and Tuor, marries Elwing, the granddaughter of Beren and Lúthien. Though Eärendil himself is half-Elven, he doesn’t exhibit any sort of magical powers; other than his bravery and his skill as a mariner, he appears to take more after the mortal side of the family. Elwing, however, takes on supernatural abilities beyond that of other Elves due to the divine influence of Ulmo. Together, Elwing and Eärendil undertake a quest that will prove to be the saving grace of Middle-earth by appealing to the Valar in person to beg for aid in the war against Morgoth. At the end of Chapter 23, “Of Tuor and the Fall of Gondolin,” Ulmo asks Manwë, king of the Valar, to intercede on behalf of the Two Kindreds; Manwë declines to help until the Two Kindreds themselves ask for help. This sets the stage for Elwing and Eärendil’s quest. Rather than acting in the same prideful way as others before them, Elwing and Eärendil become ambassadors for the Two Kindreds and secure salvation for Middle-earth.

Like his father, Eärendil is filled with a great love for the sea, which leads him to undertake many voyages, attempting to find his parents or the shore of Valinor. While Eärendil is away on one of his journeys, the remaining sons of Fëanor learn that Elwing has one of the Silmarils in her possession, an heirloom from her father Dior. The sons of Fëanor again act in accordance with their vengeful Oath as they attempt to seize their perceived birthright. In the battle that ensues, many of the remaining Elves on each side of the conflict are killed, including two of the sons of Fëanor; Elwing’s own sons—Elrond and Elros, the ancestors of Arwen and Aragorn, respectively-- go missing in the aftermath, and Elwing throws herself and the Silmaril into the ocean. Ulmo, steadfast friend of the family of Tuor, “bore Elwing out of the waves, and he gave her the likeness of a great white bird, and upon her breast there shone as a star the Silmaril,” which enables her to search the sea for Eärendil (247). Thus reunited and seeing no possibility of peace in Middle-earth, the two set sail for Valinor.

Just as Lúthien refused to allow Beren to continue his quest alone, Elwing refuses to be parted with Eärendil as he journeys westward. On the beaches of Valinor, Eärendil attempts to part ways with Elwing and his crew, “lest [they] fall under the wrath of the Valar. But that peril I will take on myself alone, for the sake of the Two Kindreds” (248). Elwing’s response echoes Lúthien’s from so long ago and she pledges her commitment to Eärendil: “Then would our paths be sundered for ever; but all thy perils I will take on myself also” (248). The Valar grant Eärendil and Elwing’s request, but Manwë gives our heroes a difficult choice: “to Eärendil and to Elwing, and to their sons, shall be given leave each to choose freely to which kindred their fates shall be joined, and under which kindred they shall be judged”; Elwing chooses to be counted among the Elves, and Eärendil “for her sake” chooses the same (249).

Having chosen to be counted among the Elves, Elwing and Eärendil earn themselves a peaceful eternity in Valinor, but the boon they earned for Middle-earth might be greater still. In Tolkien’s cosmology, the vastness of space is likened to an ocean; Eärendil becomes a different kind of mariner as the Valar grant him the ability to journey through “the oceans of heaven,” also called the “cold and pathless voids” (250). With the Silmaril on his brow, Eärendil reappears in the skies above Middle-earth, where those who see him call him “Gil-Estel, the Star of High Hope” (250). In this way, Eärendil becomes an inspiration and a sign of hope for the beleaguered denizens of Middle-earth.

However, Eärendil doesn’t simply secure a moral victory. In response to Eärendil and Elwing’s request for help, the Valar marshal their forces, and a great army of Elves leaves Valinor for Middle-earth. In the ensuing battles, the armies of the Valar defeat Morgoth’s hordes and Eärendil himself defeats “Ancalagon the Black, the mightiest of the dragon-host” (252). The First Age of Middle-earth comes to a close as Morgoth is exiled from the world, the two remaining Silmarils are lost, and most of the Elves decide to forever leave “the lands of weeping and of war” (254). Although nothing could undo the years of war, strife, and torment endured by the people of Middle-earth during the First Age, Elwing and Eärendil set in motion a chain of events that ends with the exile of Morgoth.

Tolkien argues for cooperation between the Two Kindreds by portraying a series of interethnic marriages that greatly benefit the entire world in addition to those directly involved. In the tales of

Lúthien and Beren, Idril and Tuor, and Elwing and Eärendil, each of the characters in these married couples greatly benefit from the presence of the other, but the benefits extend much further than that. Idril and Tuor, for example, were instrumental in the escape from Gondolin; Elwing and Eärendil secure salvation for all of Middle-earth. With all the tales of mistrust and deceit, and with these clear examples of togetherness and cooperation winning the day, Tolkien's point is clear: survival, to say nothing of prosperity, only comes through cooperation.

Conclusion

The performance of heroism and the construction of gender in Middle-earth are both much more nuanced than some readers and critics would admit. There is no one exclusive way to be a hero in J.R.R. Tolkien's tales. Frodo is not heroic in the same way as Aragorn; likewise, Lúthien is not heroic in the same way as Éowyn. Idril's forethought and wise counsel, for example, are just as valuable to the people of Gondolin as Tuor's skill as a warrior. Tolkien offers a multitude of different modes of heroic performances for both masculine and feminine characters without ascribing gendered roles for those heroes.

In fact, Tolkien's protagonists often behave heroically in ways that run counter to the gender roles of their societies. Lúthien's heroic acts defy the wishes of her father, the patriarch of the kingdom of Doriath; Lúthien's unique heroic acts also inspire the Elves of Nargothrond to cast out Celegorm and Curufin, the treacherous sons of Fëanor. Beren attempts to behave in accordance with the masculine standards of Thingol before rejecting masculine authority altogether; Beren further rejects the possessive masculinity of the sons of Fëanor by defeating them in combat in order to save Lúthien.

Tolkien also presents another confluence of gender and heroism by presenting several examples of interethnic marriage. Beginning with Lúthien and Beren, and ending two Ages later with Arwen and Aragorn, both descendents of Elwing and Eärendil, these marriages represent a syncretic approach to life. At Middle-earth's darkest moments, salvation can only be achieved through a spirit of mutual cooperation; these interethnic marriages are one manifestation of that cooperation. On the other hand, evil characters (such as Celegorm, Curufin, Morgoth, and Sauron) all operate by attempting to corrupt and dominate others. The villains of Middle-earth seek to divide people and inspire mistrust in the hearts of otherwise noble characters; the heroes of Middle-earth seek to inspire courage and a sense of fellowship in those around them.

That is the essence of heroism in Tolkien's works. Through brave action and selfless acts, Tolkien's heroes work to secure the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Regardless of danger or consequence, heroes are made or destroyed by their intentions. Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord*

of the Rings nicely captures the importance of heroic agency. In this interpretation of Tolkien's works, Aragorn delivers a speech at the climax of the film adaptation of *The Return of the King*; the combined forces of Rivendell, Gondor, and Rohan stand before the Black Gate, preparing to engage in a suicidal charge in order to distract Sauron from Frodo's approach, and Aragorn seeks to inspire courage in his forces:

Sons of Gondor, of Rohan, my brothers! I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me. A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends, and break all bonds of fellowship; but it is not this day! An hour of wolves, and shattered shields, when the Age of Men comes crashing down; but it is not this day!

The forces of good strive to ensure that that day never comes.

Works Cited

- Abrahamson, Megan. "Forging Greed, Hope, and the One Great Work in Middle-earth." *The Grey Book* 3 (2007): 1-4. Web. 4 September 2013.
- Battis, Jes. "Gazing Upon Sauron: Hobbits, Elves, and the Queering of the Postcolonial Optic." *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.4 (Winter 2004): 908-26. Web. 30 October 2013.
- Burns, Marjorie. "J.R.R. Tolkien: The British and the Norse in Tension." *Pacific Coast Philology*. 25.1/2 (Nov. 1990): 49-59. Web. 1 March 2015.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Flieger, Verlyn. "The Music and the Task: Fate and Free Will in Middle-earth." *Tolkien Studies* 6 (2009): 151-181. Web. 29 October 2013.
- Gallant, Richard Z. "Original Sin in Heorot and Valinor." *Tolkien Studies* 11 (2014): 109-129. Web. 6 January 2015.
- Hatcher, Melissa McCrory. "Finding Woman's Role in *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore* 25.3/4 (Spring/Summer 2007): 43-54. Web. 14 March 2015.
- Jackson, Peter, dir. *The Return of the King*. Perf. Viggo Mortenson. New Line Cinema, 2003. DVD.
- Ladd, Roger A. "Divine Contagion: On the Nature of Power in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*." In *Light beyond All Shadow: Religious Experience in Tolkien's Work*, edited by Kerry, Paul E, Miesel, Sandra, 33-45. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2011. Web. 6 September 2013.
- McGregor, Jamie. "Tolkien's Devices: The Heraldry of Middle-earth." *Mythlore* 32.1 (Fall/Winter 2013):93-110. Web. 20 June 2014.
- Padley, Jonathan and Kenneth Padley. "From Mirrored Truth the Likeness of the True: J.R.R. Tolkien and Reflections of Jesus Christ in Middle-earth." *English* 59.224 (2010): 70-92. Web. 13 Nov 2013.
- Rogers, Hope. "No Triumph without Loss: Problems of Intercultural Marriage in Tolkien's Works." *Tolkien Studies* 10 (2013): 69-87. Web. 9 June 2014.

Shippey, T.A. "Light-elves, Dark-elves, and Others: Tolkien's Elvish Problem." *Tolkien Studies* 1 (2004): 1-15. Web. 4 September 2013.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Return of the King*. New York: Mariner/Houghton Mifflin, 2012. Print.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Silmarillion*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999. Print.

Whetter, K.S. and R. Andrew McDonald. "'In the Hilt is Fame': Resonances of Medieval Swords and Sword-lore in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*." *Mythlore* 25:1/2 (Fall/Winter 2006):5-28. Web. 20 June 2014.

Whitaker, Lynn. "Corrupting Beauty: Rape Narrative in *The Silmarillion*." *Mythlore* 29:1/2 (Fall/Winter 2010): 51-68. Web. 30 September 2013.