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The Heroic in Middle-earth

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Abstract

Gives examples of several types of heroism: the survival-hero, whose heroism is a reaction to a hostile environment; the destiny-hero, who has been chosen to fulfill a task beyond his normal capabilities; the honor-hero, motivated by a desire for reputation and fame; and the ethic-hero, whose self-respect demands he act when circumstances arise that require it. Describes the moral framework of Middle-earth as one that constantly presents opportunities for heroic action, which in turn influences and supports later heroic actions through providing examples to emulate, clues to effective action, or heirloom objects that assist later heroes. In this framework, all heroic actions against evil are valuable and have consequences.

Keywords

Hero, Theories of; Heroism in J.R.R. Tolkien

The HEROIC in MIDDLE-EARTH

Foster: The Heroic in Middle-earth

by Robert Foster

Most previous studies of the heroic in Lord of the Rings have mostly focused on Frodo Baggins as a quest hero. However, although Frodo's Quest was one of the most important acts of the Third Age of Middle-earth, this approach is too superficial to be able to explore in any great detail the heroic nature of Middle-earth. The Lord of the Rings contains rewritten excerpts of the story of "The Downfall of the Lord of the Rings and the Return of the King (as seen by the Little People, being the memoirs of Bilbo and Frodo of the Shire, supplemented by the accounts of their friends and the learning of the Wise). Together with extracts from Books of Lore translated by Bilbo in Rivendell." (III 380) Thus, although LotR focuses on the deeds of the Hobbits and people they knew, Bilbo and Frodo were, as a result of their adventures, insightful enough to realize that these deeds occurred in the context of a ten-thousand-year fight of almost-good against evil, which began with the downfall and flight of Morgoth. Although this history is not presented systematically in LotR (or its source, the Red Book of Westmarch), much of the information can be found in LotR, and it is not only more basic to Middle-earth than the elementary quest-story, it explains its origins and significance.

Although many heroic narratives unfold in a heroic society, Middle-earth, because it was created as such,² is more productively heroic. That is, although heroic opportunities are not lacking to many heroes, and indeed to be heroic is Aeneas' duty, only an artificial heroic society can be made to function so as to constantly present heroic opportunities without careful editing of the course of life in the society. Therefore, since there is maximal conditioning toward heroic action, there is at least as much heroism in any part of Middle-earth as there is in the most intense traditional epic or real-life tale. More important than actual deeds, each individual is constantly confronted with alternatives which clearly delineate the nature of his heroism.

At this point I should like to discuss the different possible types of heroes. Although obviously any number of categories could be named, I feel the three largest and most useful are the survival-hero, the destiny-hero and the honor-hero. The survival-hero is an individual whose heroism is the reaction to a hostile environment, and who does not seek by his actions anything more than he already has or manifestly deserves. Perhaps the greatest survival-hero epic is the Odyssey, which concerns itself with Odysseus' struggle to get to his native land and then to re-establish his home. Although he, too, does not seek out fame, the destiny-hero acts beyond his normal bounds because there is some task that he has been chosen by some outside (usually higher) force to perform. Aeneas is a hero of this type, and perhaps also Galahad, in Charles Williams' Arthurian poems. Whereas the survival-hero strives for what is--or has been--his own, the destiny-hero strives for what ought to be his own; both are motivated by a goal, and thus have few, if any, idealistic restraints on their actions; Aeneas, for example, behaves unheroically and perhaps ignobly in deserting Troy and Dido, actions which are condoned only because he has a greater obligation to Rome. Very unlike these is the honor-hero, who is chiefly motivated by a desire for reputation and fame, and often also for wealth and a relief to boredom. Achilles in the Iliad, Yvain in Chretien de Troyes' romance, all the heroes in Eddison's Zimiamvian books and a host of other great heroes including Beowulf are of this type, which usually receives the chief focus of any discussion of the heroic. There is also a fourth category which should be mentioned, which may be called that of the ethic-hero. The ethic-hero, like the Rangers of the North and (in our folklore) George Washington and the Founding Fathers, acts because he is placed in a certain position by circumstances and his self-respect demands that he act. Although he does not seek out adventures, he is unable to resist getting involved when adventures find him. This differs from honor-heroism in that there is no desire for glory, but from destiny-heroism and survival-heroism only in that there is no call from a superior being or Fate and there is little or no direct threat to the hero. Obviously, there is a good deal of overlapping of this last category with the other three, since even an honor-hero usually fights the Good Fight, but it is useful to separate ethical and moral

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motivation, which we will shortly see is of great importance in Middle-earth, from other motivations.

Since almost every situation in Middle-earth is heroic, these terms become less appropriate in describing the heroes of Middle-earth than they are in many other critical contexts. For example, Beren's flight through the Mountains of Terror was pure survival-heroism, but his later efforts against Morgoth and Sauron were at least honor-heroism, since the entire War of the Great Jewels was prompted by honor. However, the various heroism terms can still be profitably used to describe an individual's reaction to the heroic environment of Middle-earth. For example, Bandobras Took was content to live in the sheltered and peaceful Shire, doing nothing more daring than riding a horse, until the Shire was invaded by a band of Orcs. Bandobras, who was not the Thain, gathered together his friends and relations, jumped on his horse and thoroughly defeated the Orcs in the Battle of Greenfields, in which he distinguished himself by knocking off the Orc leader's head with a wooden club. Although Bandobras could have found countless similar adventures merely by travelling east for a few days, he probably never left the Shire during his life. This is survival heroism of the purest sort, for the Hobbits had consciously attempted to withdraw from the dangers (and, therefore, the heroic opportunities) of the heroic world in which they lived, and were aided in this by the compassion of the Rangers, the descendants of their former kings. It must be kept in mind that Bandobras was a great hero only to the Hobbits, who were very impressed by the victor of the first of the two battles ever fought in the Shire, but that Gandalf remembered this event, which proved that Hobbits, in addition to being of the Free Folk, and therefore good, could also be induced to act with great bravery inspired by their purity.

Before examining this relation between heroism and the environment further, it will be necessary to discuss the ethical and moral framework of Middle-earth. Only a cosmos containing religious influences can have absolute morality,³ and if this absolute morality does exist, only cultures where personal action is incorporated into the religious construct can be heroic. When there is no absolute morality, heroism is based solely on self-esteem and self-reliance, as in Owen Wister's The Virginian.⁴ Where there is no individualistic element in religion, there can be no heroism, as in ancient Egypt.⁵ Middle-earth has an absolute morality,⁶ and this morality encourages heroic ideals. The world was created by Eru, the One, who was aided in the making of its physical features, but not of its speaking races, by the Valar, angelic powers of great might and majesty. The Valar are ruled by a number of kings and queens, whose natures (but not temperaments) and specialized functions resemble those of the Greek gods; the greatest of these rulers are Manwe, the Elder King, and Varda, the Exalted, also called Elbereth Gilthoniel, Star-queen Star-kindler. Although the Valar, especially Elbereth, are worshipped by the Elves, and, to a lesser extent, by the Dunedain, there seems to be very little overt religious activity in Middle-earth. There does seem to be, at least among Men, Elves and Hobbits, an almost inherent sense of moral propriety, stemming it would seem from an absolute moral source; i.e., Eru, but not taking His wishes as a verbalized reason for proper behavior. An example of this feeling of moral fitness is that almost all peoples in Middle-earth, even the Orcs, are organized into a racial or political group ruled by a king or a strong individual. Even the Hobbits of the Shire set up a Thain after the fall of the King of Arthedain; this Thain did nothing but satisfy their sense of propriety. The Men and Hobbits of Bree were perhaps unique in Middle-earth in having no ruler at all after the fall of the King. This feeling of fitness and propriety even extended to esthetics, for the Elves delighted in the stars because they were beautiful, unchanging and created by Elbereth.

An examination of the history of Middle-earth from the time of the Great Journey of the Eldar will reveal that there is one aspect of this history that makes Middle-earth quite different from most other heroic societies with absolute moralities, except perhaps for that of The Faerie Queene. Although this may be due merely to the size of Tolkien's creation, I think it also reflects his Christianity⁷ and his awareness of the heroic mode. This aspect is the carefully

wrought causality or continuity that motivates most of the events in the history of Middle-earth. All of the great struggles of Middle-earth result from the rebellion of Morgoth and the disobedience of Feanor. Through the ages, the forces of Morgoth and his followers continue to battle the Eldar and their allies, the Edain, who are occasionally aided by the partisan but neutral Valar, and though each defeat weakens the evil side, the forces of good diminish in prowess, lineage and nobility, until at the end of the Third Age all of the original combatants have been slain or sail to the Undying Lands, leaving Middle-earth free but diminished, for the time of the Elves has passed and the Dominion of Men is at hand. Later heroes are able to use the power of the great heroes of the First Age, not just through the use of ancient weapons, but by devices of greater metaphysical consequence. For example, during the Quest of Mount Doom, Frodo is given the Phial by Galadriel, in which the light of the star Earendil is caught. In addition to heartening Frodo when the Ring seeks to control him, he and Sam use the light of the Phial, which is bright in proportion to the courage of its bearer, to drive away and blind Shelob. Beren, who recovered from Morgoth the Silmaril which later became the star Earendil, fought the great spiders, which were closely related to Shelob, as one of his major adventures. Thus the Hobbits' natural goodness and inherent heroism are reinforced by that of the great heroes whom they--often unwittingly--emulate,⁸ and by the intercession of the Valar, especially Elbereth, who placed Earendil in the sky, for the Phial does not burst into blinding light until Sam, sword in hand, has dealt Shelob the greatest wound of her life, and advances against her as a prayer to Elbereth bursts forth from his lips. There are numerous other examples of later heroes being aided by the deeds of earlier ones, or even, as with the Dead Men of Dunharrow, of aid, treacherously refused once, received an Age later in a more dire crisis. By all of this, the Valar maintain the balance between good and evil so that the outcome of the War of the Ring hangs on a thread, and everyone must use his full complement of nobility and prowess. Unlike the situation in many heroic narratives, the purpose of this is not to enable the hero to determine the extent of his prowess, but to see if the Free Peoples deserve Middle-earth. This makes the War of the Ring not so much a matter of destiny-heroism as of survival-heroism, with certain individuals almost serving as representatives of their races.

On a smaller scale, this causality is shown in the case of Gollum. Spared by Bilbo and Frodo out of pity, this pity is ultimately rewarded when Gollum becomes the agent of the completion of the Quest after the Ring finally arouses Frodo's pride and corrupts him.

To my knowledge, this type of heroism and causality is absent from almost all other heroic narratives. It is present to an extent in the Arthurian legend, but the fact that Mordred is the product of an incestuous union between Arthur and Morgause is just not on the same scale as the causal patterns in *LotR*. T. H. White's *Once and Future King* contains a better example, for it is Arthur's need for a friend (not to mention a powerful ally) like Lancelot which causes him to overlook Guinevere's adultery, and this eventually leads to Arthur's downfall. However, this is the doom-laden causality of Destiny and Inevitability (which can be logically predicted), whereas in Middle-earth Men and Elves are free; crises are permitted to develop by the Valar, but they are resolved without the least trace of predestination.⁹

Tolkien's conception of the heroic universe is thus one in which thinking beings are given the opportunity to use the utmost extent of their heroism in a meaningful and real struggle for survival against evil, and where every person's effort affects the overall situation. This is by no means a unique conception, and aspects at least of it appear in many heroic works, but Tolkien's great accomplishment lies in having clearly perceived this ideal and then devising a self-contained world in which both the depth of individual heroism and the breadth of the struggle are maximized without lessening each other; indeed, he manages to make them complement and amplify each other, as they should. There is nowhere in *LotR* the artificiality and lack of real importance that surround so many of the adventures in Chretien's *Erec*, for example the wasteful Joy of the Court, or motivate the customs of Arthur's court; there is nowhere the toying with human affairs which frequently interferes with the completion of heroic interactions in the *Iliad*; there is nowhere¹⁰ the avoidance of heroic action to be found, for example, at the court of Hroth-

All of this is on what can be called the historical level; i.e., from the viewpoint of the chronicles of Middle-earth, and as such gives an accurate idea of Tolkien's conception of the nature of a heroic cosmos. There are three further conceptions which should be examined. The first, the nature of a heroic society, is rather obvious if one postulates a heroic world; the difference between Tolkien's heroic society and the artificial heroism of the medieval court is that one is motivated principally by survival and the other by honor heroism, although I would suspect that Gondor in the days of its power and luxury had its share of jousts, proud courtiers and honor heroes, since there were periods with no major threats to the kingdom. The other two conceptions are more important; they are the nature of the heroic narrative and of the hero.

Although there is a great deal of poetry in *LotR*, there is only one poem that can properly be called an heroic narrative. This is the 124-line poem about Earendil written by Bilbo in a meter usually used for Hobbitish nonsense-poetry, and in general it is a somewhat puzzling poem. The *Red Book* certainly should have been an heroic narrative, but there are too few passages directly from it to tell much about its style and orientation, while *The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen* is characterized chiefly by the sadness of a man describing beauty, glory and wisdom such as he can yearn for but not understand. It can be determined from other references that the function of heroic narrative in Middle-earth was to inspire and to teach moral values and history, which in Middle-earth, as in any heroic society, are inseparable.

Although the information about Middle-earth heroic narratives is not very illuminating, Tolkien's writing of *LotR* as an heroic narrative deserves discussion. Most heroic narratives are either first-person accounts (like *The Virginian*) or are told by a narrator who assumes himself, his audience and the protagonist to be part of societies similar enough to enable clear comprehension of the ideals and morality involved. This assumption is given a negative proof by *Don Quixote*, which would not be funny were it not for the fact that Quixote is confusing two very different societies.¹¹ There is an obvious difficulty here, since none of us can be expected to understand Middle-earth before reading *LotR*. Tolkien, working in a tradition which had been dealing with this problem for many years, manages to solve the problem very skillfully by presenting the story from the point of view of Hobbits, who are akin to us in their relative ignorance of the heroic and of history.¹² This, of course, means that the history has to wait until the Appendices, but Tolkien is such a good writer (and scholar) that enough hints and heroic motifs are placed in the narrative, without violence to the smoothness or credibility of the text, to make us aware on some level of what is going on. Tolkien also has the skill to make almost no references to our world,¹³ and the confidence (and unkindness) to leave many points unexplained. This approach has one pleasing side-benefit: it makes the heroes in a sense larger than life, since we look at Middle-earth through the eyes of four-foot-tall a-heroic Hobbits, and truly impressive. Also, the reader is slowly drawn into Middle-earth, for the action begins in the narrow setting of the Shire, and then expands as Frodo's Quest carries him and his friends across Middle-earth and into contact with the great people and cultures of the last days of the Third Age.

Finally, we come to the last topic: Tolkien's conception of the hero. Tolkien is familiar with the nature of the heroic, and, although he does have one ideal conception of heroism, he does not confine himself to one type of hero. All that the heroes of Middle-earth have in common is that they recognize by various means the difference between good and evil and are willing to exert themselves in the defense of the former; in an heroic world this is enough. The Hobbits are perhaps the best example of this type of heroism. Small and naturally peaceful, they want nothing more of the world than the opportunity to earn six meals a day for themselves and their families and to be left untroubled by the outside world. The Rangers have realized that this is what is right for the Hobbits, and so protect the Shire from the terrors of the rise of Sauron, while the Hobbits grow so provincial that they even forget the meaning of the guards on their borders. However, Gandalf realizes that the Hobbits have a great strength resulting from their simplicity and lack of ambition and heroism, and he finally decides that he will need such strength to defeat Sauron. The fact that Bilbo comes to possess the Ring by accident may indicate that the Valar felt this way also. In any case, Gandalf

chooses the two most abnormal (i.e., most interested in outside matters) Hobbits he can find. Bilbo and Frodo amply repay his trust, the former keeping the Ring for sixty years without falling under its spell and the latter using his Hobbitish stubbornness and purity to overcome the dreadful torment of the Ring and almost complete a Quest whose physical and mental horrors would have destroyed anyone of a greater prowess and pride. Frodo is a true hero, because, as a result of the teaching of Bilbo and Gandalf and the burden of the Ring, he gains insight into the nature of his actions. Bilbo is less of a hero because, although he performs great deeds, he does so irregularly and during the course of an adventure without direct historical consequence (from his viewpoint), and thus is more of an adventurer than a hero.¹⁴ Although Bilbo shows heroic virtues such as pity and bravery many times, his most heroic moment comes when he betrays his companions to prevent a battle between the dwarves and Thranduill and Bard. A few pages later, however, he puts on the Ring to avoid danger in the Battle of Five Armies.

The other Hobbits with large roles in *LotR* show this peculiar combination of traits (simple loyalty, timidity, curiosity and last-ditch bravery) even more clearly. When Merry and Pippin insist on accompanying Frodo on the Quest, Gandalf supports them, saying, "It is true that if these hobbits understood the danger, they would not dare to go. But they would still wish to go, or wish that they dared, and be shamed and unhappy. I think, Elrond, that in this matter it would be well to trust rather to their friendship than to great wisdom." (I 361) Merry has already shown his nature by spying on a Nazgul in Bree, of which action Aragorn says, "You have a stout heart, but it was foolish." (I 235) Later, knowing more about the powers of evil beings, Merry and Pippin go around completely terrified until they have to do something, when they suddenly begin to act with amazing courage, their love and loyalty overcoming their immense inclination to avoid danger. Sam is the best example of this double nature, for, inspired by his great love for Frodo, he performs deeds as great as those of any warrior, but every time he has a chance to catch his breath he begins to voice his desire to be back in his beloved Shire. Sam is in many ways a survival hero, but his Hobbit virtues, especially his love for Frodo, have caused him to develop a wider and deeper notion of survival than *Bandobras Took*. As a result, although he never glories in the Quest, and probably doesn't really understand it, he accepts that it must be accomplished.

Men are more straightforward in their approach to heroic activity. Although some of them are cowardly or run-of-the-mill, others, especially the descendants of the Edain, are noble and heroic, delighting in feats of arms but warring only when necessary. The Rohirrim exemplify this simple heroism best, and although they can be misled by their emotions (especially pride and fear), their character can be seen in one of their favorite beliefs, which is that a man who does not lie cannot be tricked by a liar. The most interesting Men, however, are the Dunedain, whose natural virtues were enhanced by the long years of contact with the Eldar in Numenor and by a small number of intermarriages with the Elves, until they became the noblest, most skillful, most discerning of Men. Boromir and Faramir, the sons of the Steward of Gondor at the time of the War of the Ring, exemplify the two directions that this enhanced virtue can take. Boromir, the elder, is the greatest captain Gondor has seen in many generations, a proud, magnificent man mighty in arms, a great leader filled with scorn and loathing for Sauron and his works, the kind of person movie ads say "strides across the pages of history". Faramir is always overshadowed by his brother in glory and his father's affection; he is smaller and gentler, and, although he is an excellent soldier of strong will and is much loved by his men, he cares more for lore and music than battle, and fights only because Gondor is threatened. Yet in the end, Faramir is greater than his brother, for the latter becomes jealous of Aragorn, the heir of Isildur, and also falls under the spell of the Ring in his pride. Faramir, however, refuses the temptation of the Ring, at least in part because he had indirectly sworn not to covet it, and during the War he is a noble protector of his men and comforter of the despairing; discerning Aragorn's worth, he welcomes him with no thought for his own Stewardship. His, therefore, is (for Tolkien) the true heroism, for he puts his duties and his morals before his safety and his reputation (even claiming that he would not snare an Orc with a falsehood, which may be a bit extreme), and within that framework performs great deeds.

However, the greatest hero¹⁵ and the greatest Dunadan of the end of the Third Age is Aragorn. He is the ideal hero, the Beren of the Third Age, somewhat grim because of his long struggles and countless hardships, but kind, penetrating, brave and so exemplarily noble that I am not going to bother describing him further. Although at first Aragorn appears to be the Archetypal Stereotyped Strong Silent Hero, he is actually a fully-developed character, and his heroism is his personal response to the challenge of his heroic world; he becomes the greatest hero of the Third Age because the times and his lineage allow and require it, because he accepts the choice, and, not least, because it is the only way he can win Arwen.

The Dwarves are not heroic. Although they can be faithful and generous, they are greedy for wealth and driven by an extreme sense of honor and pride.¹⁶ However, the Dwarves are unheroic not so much because of this as because they are somehow not a part of the whole scheme of Middle-earth: "the Dwarves are a race apart." (III 512)

Last come the Elves, who are different from Men in that they are gentler, wiser, more interested in beauty, song, the spirit and nature,¹⁷ --and do not die unless slain. For this reason, the question of Elvish heroism has to take into account the fact that the hero is usually "a mortal who acts as if he cannot die". Tolkien has seen this problem, and the Elves' psyche fits their open-ended existence. If you are going to live for seven or eight thousand years, a life devoted to prowess, or even to government will soon become boring; only a life-style in harmony with the eternal forces of nature can be satisfying. Thus the Elves love trees, the Sun and Moon, water and, above all, the unchanging stars. They are, not surprisingly, fierce warriors, but they do not take great joy in feats of arms. The Elvish psyche is thus not heroic, although Elvish songs celebrate the deeds of heroes. Elves often act heroically and the Elves regard the Edain and their descendants as admirable because of their unselfish and steadfast defense of the good.

This leads to a suspicion that perhaps Middle-earth is not a heroic cosmos in the sense that I have been using the term up to this point. However, it is certain that there is an important heroic factor integral to Middle-earth, although perhaps it applies mostly to Men. That it must be combined with the gentler Elvish virtues to achieve lasting success is shown by Beren and Luthien, Earendil, the seduction of the Elven-smiths and the enslavement of the Nazgul, Aragorn and Arwen, Faramir and Boromir and the Dunedain in general. This makes sense, for mortals to be remembered and honored must prove their worth, while immortals need not depend upon a handful of exploits for their fame. And, in the final struggle in the Third Age, both the Mannish and the Elvish ways needed to be combined with the non-heroic, practical kvetching courage of the Hobbits. This suggests that Tolkien's conception of the true hero (as opposed to the mere doer of deeds) is that of a "heroic" nature (such as that of the great Edain, Dunedain and Rohirrim, and also such Dwarves as Thrain and Thorin Oakenshield) coupled with a "poetic" one (such as that of the Eldar) so that the hero can both defend his life and enjoy it.¹⁸ This is in a way a splitting of the psyches of the survival-hero, the destiny-hero and the ethical-hero, who must be physically able and psychologically prepared to battle his foes and at the same time have the will (which is sparked in Odysseus by thoughts of Penelope and Ithaca, in Aeneas of his destiny and in Aragorn of Arwen and his heritage) to do so and the wisdom to realize the meaning of his actions; the former quality is the ethos of Men, while the latter is embodied by the Elves.¹⁹ The Hobbits, however, serve to embody the universal warning that a hero of any type must never forget to guard against pride and its many temptations.

1. This paper is a greatly revised version of one written for a course in the Heroic Narrative given at Columbia University in the fall of 1969. I am indebted to Prof. Robert Hanning and the other members of the class for their part in our discussions of the various types of heroes and heroism. All page references are to the Ballantine *LotR*.
2. By this I mean that the society is not based on present or past society, but is either an imaginative construct or is carefully based on a very detached idealization of the heroic societies of the past. Middle-earth is an example of the latter, while E. R. Eddison's *Zimiamvia*, where Venus creates worlds and adventures for the delight of Her Lover (and Herself) is an example of the former.

3. I am here using "religion" in the sense of a set of beliefs imposed by human institutions or superior beings on an entire culture; although this statement is therefore almost a tautology, it has value when comparing literary cultures. For example, the world of the *Iliad* has no absolute morality, and its religion is mere favor-seeking; the gods are petty and egocentric.
4. Religion is an important factor in *The Virginian*, but the only religion that Wyoming takes seriously is an institution which offers moral interpretations in an advisory capacity; the ultimate decision rests with the individual. This is also true in large part of Middle-earth, but there is an element of moral causality which is absent in Wyoming, and also a closer interaction between the supernatural and the natural.
5. The literary parallels that come to mind are the sensuously corrupt and decadent southern realms in Robert Howard's *Conan* series.
6. In one of the few explicit metaphysical statements in *LotR*, Aragorn says, "Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them." (II 50)
7. The similarities between Morgoth's fall and Feanor's rebellion and the downfall of Satan and original sin are inescapable.
8. As Sam points out, "Beren ... was in a worse place and a blacker danger than ours ... Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still." (II 408)
9. Sauron is without question more powerful, even without the Ring, than the Free Peoples at the time of the WR, and thus the aid given by the Valar is necessary to make the War meaningful as a struggle of good against evil and as a heroic exercise. The aid given by the Valar is indirect and, more important, inherent to the patterns of Middle-earth, and so does not in any way lessen the Free Peoples' heroism in the mind of the reader. Eru is only mentioned twice in passing in *LotR*, and these references, like the history of the Wizards (who, although Valar, fit into Middle-earth perfectly) and other matters of lore, are confined to the Appendices. Thus, the narrative of *LotR* contains no explicit statements of divine intervention except to increase an individual's prowess so that it equals his courage or (except for Sam's realization) of the continuity I am discussing, but Tolkien's use of the traditional archetypes is so skillful that even in a first reading one gets a strong sense of a meaningful past and accepts the principles of the cosmos, even without consciously knowing what they are.
10. Except in the Shire, where the decision to be unheroic was intentional and carried out completely; there was no pride in military prowess in the Shire, or indeed of almost any kind of prowess except perhaps eating.
11. This is not to imply that medieval society was actually like that of romances, but that the chivalric ideals were held in common by author and audience, even if as no more than ideals. It occurs to me that Wolfram's surliness in *Parzifal* may result from his not appreciating--or not accepting--the necessary difference between ideal and reality.
12. One thinks of William Morris, E. R. Eddison, C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams. Eddison, for example, undertakes to explain his universe by metaphysical debates between his characters; only his unique style carries it off. Only *The Worm Ouroboros*, and perhaps *Mistress of Mistresses*, can be considered heroic narratives, and the concept of the heroic in the former is much more simplistic than that of Eddison's other books. Charles Williams uses a similar approach to Tolkien's frequently, as with Nancy in *The Greater Trumps* or all the good characters except Prester John in *War in Heaven*.
13. Outside of a few unfortunate examples of writing-down in *The Hobbit*.
14. This is probably because *The Hobbit* is more limited in scope than *LotR*. In any case, this makes Bilbo more of an honor hero than anyone in *LotR*, even Boromir. There is pure honor hero who comes to mind, Earnur, the childless King of Gondor, who accepts a challenge to a duel with the Lord of the Nazgul which he knows is a trap because he is taunted with what only an honor hero could consider an act of cowardice. Being childless, his selfish heroism ends the Line of Anarion.
15. This may depend on one's point of view. Hobbits find it difficult to imagine themselves as heroes, but the Elves may well have considered Frodo an equally great hero.
16. Professor Hanning has pointed out to me that this also describes the Greeks in the *Aeneid*. However, although the Greeks are somewhat contemptible, the Dwarves have despite their shortcomings, a certain nobility, perhaps stemming from the fact that they were created this way, and they do not lack in courage.
17. Those of the Dunedain who are interested in such things acquired the interest from the Eldar or from their own Elvish blood. Similarly, the Took's relative love of adventure is explained in the Shire as a result of their alleged Elvish blood.
18. Enjoying the fruits of one's heroism is frequently a problem for heroes, as may be seen by Chretien's Yvain.
19. This is the old *proz-sage* distinction expressed in the *Song of Roland*: "Roland's a hero, and Oliver is wise; Both are so brave men marvel at their deeds." (1.1092-4, tr. Patricia Terry, Library of Liberal Arts, 1965) Tolkien says that both qualities are necessary, although he probably subjectively values the latter somewhat more.

TRANSCENDING THE IMAGES (continued from P.5)

pardonable but inevitable. We can no longer dismiss the change of Models as a simple progress from error to truth. No Model is a catalogue of ultimate realities, and none is a mere fantasy. Each is a serious attempt to get in all the phenomena known at a given period, and each succeeds in getting in a great many. But also, no less surely, each reflects the prevalent psychology of an age almost as much as it reflects the state of that age's knowledge. Hardly any battery of new facts could have persuaded a Greek that the universe had an attribute so repugnant to him as infinity; hardly any such battery could persuade a modern that it is hierarchical. 12

That's the issue. We have our modern explanations for everything and we idolize them as the truth. But they are only images. I think Lewis is a very avant-garde, forward looking thinker. He has gone beyond the idolizing of the image of modern times, but yet does not advocate a return to the Medieval model. He is saying that we should see the image but let it remain transparent. See beyond the image to the truth that it implies. To see in this way, and to accurately explain it is beyond human language.

I would hope that we in the Society could be aware of the models and how they work, both our own Modern and the Medieval models, and that we might have an open-mindedness and a tolerance. It is interesting that Lewis is talking about how the spirit of the age, the intellectual life of a culture, influences the scientific discoveries that the culture produces to bolster its world view.

I think we are seeing a change in the idolized truths of the 20th Century. Our culture is radically different, in many ways, from what it was 10 years ago. We are seeing the changes become more stabilized and institutionalized and given the blessings of

the Establishment. It seems that we are seeing a great undercurrent of change in philosophy, religion, psychology, etc., and in the way we understand how things are; in fact a new cultural model. I hope that the Mythopoetic Society can participate in this. Although we are far too small to influence our culture directly, we can, by being open to the images directly and transcending them at the same time, get away from the narrow-mindedness of thought in our culture. That is my hope.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1) *The Theology of Romantic Love: a study in the writings of Charles Williams* by Mary McDermott Shideler Eerdmans, 1966. pp. 24-27.
- 2) *Psychological Reflections* by C.G. Jung Harper and Row, 1961. P. 38
- 3) *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* by C.G. Jung, Meridian Books, 1970. pp. 76, 79-80.
- 4) *Surprised by Joy* by C.S. Lewis, Fontana Books, 1959, p. 174.
- 5) *Ibid.* pp. 176-177
- 6) *Perelandra* by C.S. Lewis, Collier Books, 1962, p. 219
- 7) *Arthurian Torso* Oxford UP, 1948, p. 197
- 8) *Ibid.* p. 145
- 9) *They Asked For a Paper: Papers and Addresses* by C.S. Lewis, Geoffrey Bles, 1962. pp. 24-25
- 10) *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* by C.S. Lewis, Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1964. p. 52
- 11) Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, p. 172
- 12) *The Discarded Image* by C.S. Lewis Cambridge UP, 1964. p. 222