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“Nine Companions: Exploring Loyalty Beyond Logic in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*”

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World War I tore nations apart and plunged the entire world into war resulting in literature that reflected the instability that people felt in their lives after such a horrific ordeal. Modernist writers felt that there were no universal truths and that the war had resulted in a fracturing of everything people had once known: as William Butler Yeats' famous poem "The Second Coming" states: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold..." However, J.R.R. Tolkien believed, despite what he had witnessed in the war, that there were still universal truths like friendship and loyalty that were strong enough to overcome evil in the world. Tolkien had just as much reason to resent the world after the war: he had fought in the trenches and lost many close friends, but Tolkien looked back to the style of ancient epics for his writing and used themes of loyalty throughout. An excellent example of this is Tolkien's first novel in The Lord of the Rings trilogy *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954).

The Lord of the Rings is, in essence, a story about an average person thrust into a situation where he must rely upon courage and loyalty to complete a task. *The Fellowship of the Ring* takes place in the land of Middle-earth where hobbit Frodo Baggins lives a peaceful life in the Shire. However, he comes into possession of a ring and finds out from the wizard Gandalf that this is the One Ring of power forged long ago by Sauron and that the dark lord is searching for his Ring so that he may control Middle-earth. The only way to destroy the Ring is in the fires of Mount Doom in Mordor where the Ring was created. Frodo makes the decision to carry the Ring out of a sense of loyalty and finds the necessary courage despite near-fatal injuries and being hunted by Sauron's servants. *The Fellowship of the Ring* is a unique work because J.R.R. Tolkien chose to draw upon ancient traditions and themes in spite of what he experienced during the war. Through the characters in his novels Tolkien is able to weave together a tale of loyalty,

courage, and friendship in the midst of overwhelming evil. To fully understand why this is so extraordinary it is important to look at WWI and how the war affected Tolkien's life.

J.R.R. Tolkien lived in an era of upheaval and hardship as Europe found itself at war. Tolkien, after finishing his degree, enlisted and fought in the trenches during the Battle of the Somme. Biographer John Garth recounts Tolkien's time in the War in his book *Tolkien and the Great War: the Threshold of Middle-earth*; in this work he chronicles Tolkien's time in the trenches, the horrors he witnessed, and the close friends he lost. Tolkien was loyal to his country, no matter what, and actually spoke to defend nationalism at a debate in the fall of 1914 even though Europe's alliances were plunging the continent into war (51). An example of nationalism can be seen in the character Boromir, who will be discussed later in this thesis, but his example is one fraught with problems because Boromir lets his national loyalty become more important than his personal loyalty, something that Tolkien never seemed to do in his life. Tolkien was loyal to his friends and family and was devastated at losing several close friends during the War. One reason he turned to writing was because it was a way to cope as well as something he could do to honor his friends. Before his death one of Tolkien's close friends, G.B. Smith, wrote Tolkien a letter:

The survivors, Smith believed, those who walked away from the war alive and whole, must represent all of them...to say what the dead had been stopped from saying, to create, to produce something of which they all would have been proud. This letter affected Tolkien profoundly, and when Smith died it added greater poignancy to his words.

(White 83)

Losing friends and fighting in such a terrible war had a profound effect on Tolkien, particularly the way he portrays loyalty.

Tolkien's writing is a reflection of his experiences during the War and this makes these works of fantasy realistic and relatable. Tom Shippey states: "...European societies learned the hard way that while victory was by no means inevitable, the price you paid was" (71). There may be victory in the end but it never comes without great sacrifice and Tolkien's works reflect this theme. C.S. Lewis said that the war in *The Lord of the Rings* is very much like the war his generation was a part of; Tolkien focuses on the movements of individual characters as opposed to the larger scale, allowing the reader to know that the fate of Middle-earth depends not on large armies but a few key characters and their journeys (13-14). Tolkien fought in the trenches and was part of a small movement within a larger war; he was focused on what was going on at his level as opposed to the war as a whole and this lends more realism and relatability to Tolkien's work. W.H. Auden also points out recognizable aspects of WWI in Tolkien's writing, particularly his portrayal of evil:

One of Tolkien's most impressive achievements is that he convinces the reader that the mistakes which Sauron makes to his undoing are the kind of mistakes which Evil, however powerful, cannot help making just because it is Evil. (57)

Tolkien's works remain very different than his modernist contemporaries that also experienced the horrors of World War I. He took his terrible experiences in the trenches and used myth to help express them, thus creating the unique world of Middle-earth and its stories.

Tolkien's writing differs in part because of his education and his love of medieval classics like *Beowulf*. Biographer John Garth states:

...for Tolkien the medieval and the mythological were urgently alive. Their narrative structures and symbolic languages were simply the tools most apt to the hand of this most dissident of twentieth-century writers. Unlike many others shocked by the explosion of

1914-18, he did not discard the old ways of writing... In his hands, these traditions were reinvigorated so that they remain powerfully alive for readers today. (39-40)

Tolkien experienced horror and chaos and yet chose to respond by writing about love and loyalty strong enough to overcome the greatest evil. Garth also says of Tolkien that he avoided modern influences in many areas of his life whether it be personal things like friendship or his writing (39). To understand why Tolkien's writing is so unique it is important to look at what exactly modernism is.

According to *Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* modernism is defined as: ...a chiefly European movement of the early-to-mid-20th century that represented a self-conscious break with traditional forms and subject matter and a search for a distinctly contemporary mode of expression...The outbreak of World War I had a sobering effect, however, and postwar modernism...reflected the prevailing sense of fragmentation and disillusion.

This was the era Tolkien was writing in and yet his works focus on absolutes instead of fragmentation: Tolkien shows that loyalty, courage, and love are absolutes that can overcome any evil, which is surprising considering the horrors Tolkien witnessed in the War. However, Tolkien loved classics like *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* so maybe it is not too surprising that Tolkien chose to write in a way that is closer to these works he loved than the new style of modernism.

Tolkien constructed *The Lord of the Rings* in a way that is closer to a medieval romance than a modernist piece of literature: "Instead he [Tolkien] turned to Romance, the quest's native mode, in which motivation is either self-evident (love, ambition, greed) or supernatural" (Garth 47). Tolkien's writing is a sprawling epic that features adventures, romance, war, supernatural

creatures, and brave heroes. It is very easy to compare *The Lord of the Rings* to works like *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, both of which Tolkien has published translations of. In his article “The Lord of the Rings: The Novel as Traditional Romance” scholar George H. Thomson looks at Tolkien’s writing and shows the key elements that make it comparable to a romance: “Such a story could have been a straightforward narrative of Frodo’s trials in fulfilling his quest. Instead, Tolkien chose to write a far more elaborate kind of story...” (44-45). Thomson goes on to explore the six phases, or themes, in a romance and how *The Lord of the Rings* has all of these elements. One of the phases of a romance is the quest, which W.H. Auden explores in his essay “The Quest Hero”. Auden states that “The Quest is one of the oldest, hardest, and most popular of all literary genres...the persistent appeal of the Quest as a literary form is due, I believe, to its validity as a symbolic description of our subjective personal experience of existence as historical” (42). Loyalty is one of the themes that Tolkien draws upon from works like *Beowulf*.

In the medieval epic poem *Beowulf* soldiers pledge fealty, or loyalty, to their lords until death and many die fighting by their lord’s side. Marie Nelson explores these themes of loyalty in her article “*Beowulf*’s Boast Words” and starts out by defining the two types of boasts present in the epic:

The first type [of boast] to be considered is the act of speaking we commonly associate with bragging, while the second, more important kind of boast, functions as a promise that the speaker will perform specific acts of courage. (1)

Nelson then goes on to state that “Tolkien may have been critical of the speech [made by *Beowulf*]...but there can be little doubt that his heroes spoke with the same sense of commitment that characterizes the boast word speeches of *Beowulf* and *Wiglaf*” (308). Tolkien not only

draws ideas of loyalty from the epic poem, but he also follows in the tradition of having characters regularly boast or state their loyalty out loud for all to hear. And, as noted in the article “Tolkien, *Beowulf*, and the Barrow-Wights” by Patrick J. Callahan, Tolkien takes parts of the plot of the poem and incorporates them into his story while making them completely his own. An example is in the beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring* when Frodo and his companions encounter the Barrow-Wights, which draws on an episode near the end of *Beowulf*:

...similarity to the concluding action of *Beowulf*: the king’s fight with the barrow-dragon.

In both episodes, treasure is captured which was hidden in an ancient funeral barrow, in both the victory requires the breaking of an ancient curse on the treasure, and in both the curse is broken by a courage which expresses itself in a spirit of sacrifice. (5)

Callahan goes on to explain how Tolkien’s Barrow-Wights differ greatly from the Barrow Dragon, thus demonstrating that Tolkien was able to draw on medieval tradition while still using his imagination to create something totally his own. This is an early example of loyalty and one of Frodo’s early trials: he has a chance to escape and leave his friends but he chooses to stay and try to save them at his own risk. Tolkien is a skilled writer and very well educated. He used traditional epics like *Beowulf* as inspiration for his own writing which helped to make his works unique. However, Tolkien’s use of tradition has drawn some criticism over the years.

There is not a lot of Tolkien criticism but the negative criticism in existence usually focuses on either Tolkien’s style, his popularity, or his morality. Neil D. Isaacs looks at the realm of Tolkien criticism and addresses the fact that “...one must broaden not only one’s horizons but also one’s definitions” when looking at Tolkien’s works (11). One of the reasons that there is a lack of criticism, according to Isaacs throughout his essay, is that *The Lord of the Rings* is popular and many believe that that means it is not intellectual enough to write criticism about.

Isaacs posits that “Tolkien mass popularity was not fostered by the mass media...there never was a critical bandwagon either” (1).

However, this has not stopped major literary critics like C.S. Lewis and W.H. Auden from delving into Tolkien’s writing and examining his works as an important pieces of literature. Isaacs notes that “The first reviewers were full of praise and awe but also full of contradictions and questions, particularly about genre and ultimate significance” which is something that is still present in contemporary Tolkien criticism (1-2). Despite such strong supporters some critics, like Burton Raffel, believe that Tolkien’s writing is not “real” literature: “My position is this: *The Lord of the Rings* is a magnificent performance, full of charm, excitement, and affection, but it is not- at least as I am here using the term- literature” (218). Scholars like Raffel believe that because Tolkien’s writing is so popular it cannot be considered as academic literature. Another claim, addressed in an essay by C.S. Lewis, is that Tolkien’s morality is too simplistic:

There is, however, one piece of false criticism which had better be answered: the complaint that the characters are all either black or white...I think that some readers, seeing (and disliking) this rigid demarcation of black and white, imagine that they have seen a rigid demarcation between black and white people. (12)

Lewis goes on to demonstrate that Tolkien’s morals are simple, there are clear distinctions between right and wrong, but his characters and their morality are very complicated; the characters constantly struggle to follow the correct path and do what is morally right. And, of course, in Tolkien’s morality loyalty is one of the important traits that one must have. Such a rigid morality is a response to what Tolkien witnessed in the War and the undying loyalty he felt to his friends and fellow soldiers, but his complicated and deep characters are a testament to his imagination and skill as a writer.

Tolkien's works are popular and meaningful because of his characters. A key theme that all of his characters share is their commitment to loyalty, and four prominent examples are Aragorn, Boromir, Sam, and Frodo. These main characters are all members of the Fellowship and have taken the task to destroy the Ring upon themselves. To really understand Tolkien's depictions of loyalty it is important to take a deeper look at these four characters, as well as the actual Fellowship.

Aragorn eventually finds himself having to make an impossible choice about his loyalty: the Fellowship is separated and he must choose whether to follow Frodo to Mordor to destroy the Ring or rescue two captured members of the Fellowship. Aragorn is the heir to the throne of Gondor and is from a long line of kings but when Frodo and company meet him he introduces himself as a ranger named Strider. Aragorn eventually becomes the group's unofficial leader after Gandalf sacrifices himself to save them. However, the Fellowship breaks apart and Aragorn finds himself in a dilemma. Frodo and Sam leave to take the Ring to Mordor and Merry and Pippin are abducted by a group of orcs who believe they have the Ring. Aragorn must choose whether to go after Frodo and Sam to help them destroy the Ring or save Merry and Pippin from certain death. He has pledged to both destroy the Ring and protect the members of the Fellowship therefore Aragorn knows he has a hard choice to make regarding his loyalty. Gimli argues that they should go after the orcs that took Merry and Pippin and Aragorn vents his frustration and confusion: "But we do not know whether the Ring-bearer is with them or not," said Aragorn. "Are we to abandon him? Must we not seek him first? An evil choice is now before us!" (405). Tolkien shows that loyalty is not always clear; there are conflicts, and sometimes one must make the best choice possible and hope that it works out.

Aragorn chooses to go after Merry and Pippin because he knows that they will die if no one tries to save them. He also knows his family lineage: his ancestor Isildur failed to destroy the Ring and was the reason that it was still in existence. Aragorn knows that he must have faith in Frodo and that the Ring is too dangerous for man to handle but he still struggles with this and laments to Gimli and Legolas: ““This is a bitter end. Now the Company is all in ruin. It is I that have failed. Vain was Gandalf’s trust in me. What shall I do now?...”” (404). In the end Aragorn made the right decision: the Ring is destroyed by Frodo and Sam, Merry and Pippin are saved, and their quest is successful. However, this shows one important aspect of loyalty that Tolkien believed: it is not easy and it is not always clear. Aragorn is not the only member of the Fellowship to struggle with divided loyalties.

Boromir experiences internal conflict due to public versus personal loyalty because he is fiercely loyal to his home, Gondor but he has also pledged loyalty to the Fellowship. Part of him, despite the warning of others, believes that the Ring could be used as a weapon to protect his city and this belief causes him to be unable to fully commit to the Fellowship’s mission of destroying the Ring. Boromir is the favorite son of Denethor, the steward of the kingdom of Gondor. Boromir is extremely loyal to Gondor and his city of Minas Tirith; he is very proud of its accomplishments, of which he boasts to the council:

He [Elrond] ceased but at once Boromir stood up, tall and proud, before them. ‘Give me leave, Master Elrond,’ said he, ‘first to say more of Gondor, for verily from the land of Gondor I am come...Believe not that in the land of Gondor the blood of Númenor is spent, nor all its pride and dignity forgotten. By our valour the wild folk of the East are still restrained, and the terror of Morgul kept at bay... (239)

Boromir clashes with Aragorn when he finds out his identity as the true heir to the throne and the fact that the Ring technically belongs to Aragorn. However, Aragorn tells Frodo, in front of the council, that “It does not belong to either of us...” (240). Boromir believes that they should use the Ring as a weapon against Sauron instead of destroying it despite Gandalf, Elrond, and Aragorn reminding him that the Ring is evil and can only be used for evil purposes, no matter the intent of the one wielding it. Boromir struggles with the thought of destroying the Ring because he sees it as a wasted opportunity. C.S. Lewis states that “Motives, even on the right side, are mixed. Those who are now traitors usually began with comparatively innocent intentions” and this is certainly the case with Boromir: he wants to help his country but ends up betraying the Fellowship by trying to take the Ring (4).

Boromir’s example clearly shows that loyalty to the state should never come before personal loyalty: he is forced to choose between loyalty to his homeland and loyalty to the members of the Fellowship. Boromir does not want the Ring for himself and is not a selfish person but he is blinded by his love for his city and is the one of the main reasons that Frodo decides to leave the Fellowship: Frodo departs because he sees the power the Ring has over his companions and decides that it is better if he goes alone. Boromir states at one point: “The Ring! Is it not a strange fate that we should suffer so much fear and doubt for so small a thing?,” which is an indication of the difficult situation he is put in regarding loyalty and the Ring (388-389). During WWI Tolkien knew that he needed to make the decision between nationalism and personal loyalty. While one could be loyal to his own country, personal loyalty was more important, especially fighting in the trenches.

Boromir’s decision is the catalyst for the Fellowship breaking apart. Frodo flees after Boromir attacks him and Boromir is distraught when he realizes what he has done: “He rose and

pressed his hand over his eyes, dashing away the tears. ‘What have I said?’ he cried. ‘What have I done? Frodo, Frodo!’ he called. ‘Come back! A madness took me, but it has passed. Come back!’” (390). He knows that he has broken the oath he made to the Fellowship and has done great damage. However, he later fights to protect Merry and Pippin; Boromir sacrifices his life in an attempt to save members of the Fellowship and for this he is redeemed. Aragorn finds him as he is dying:

‘Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed.’

‘No!’ said Aragorn, taking his hand and kissing his brow. ‘You have conquered.

Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace! Minas Tirith shall not fall!’

Boromir smiled. (404)

Boromir is not a villain or a traitor, but is merely confused about where his loyalties should lie; he proves himself in the end by giving his life in an attempt to save members of the Fellowship.

One character who has no question about where to place his loyalty is Sam because he is completely loyal to his master Frodo. Scholar Charles Nelson explores Sam’s loyalty in depth: “While his origins are humble (the son of a gardener) he, without doubt, has a good and reliable character” (56). Sam fails to leave Frodo’s side throughout the journey even though at times, like he states at Galadriel’s mirror, he despairs and admits really does not want to be there:

Sam sat on the ground with his head in his hands. ‘I wish I had never come here, and I don’t want to see no more magic,’ he said and fell silent. After a moment he spoke again thickly, as if struggling with tears. ‘No, I’ll go home by the long road with Mr. Frodo, or not at all,’ he said.” (354)

Sam shows complete dedication and loyalty, much like a squire to a knight, and refuses to leave Frodo’s side throughout the entire novel and the rest of the trilogy as well. Sam is willing to

stick with Frodo in spite of the strong feelings of homesickness and the thoughts of regret that occasionally appear about going on the journey in the first place. Sam knows the danger and yet he chooses to follow Frodo and is the only one to join him when he departs the Fellowship to head towards Mordor. Sam is with Frodo until the very end and Frodo later tells him that he couldn't have done it without him. Sam is a reminder of the camaraderie and service that Tolkien saw in the trenches like the loyalty of the soldiers to their commanding officers and Charles Nelson points out that Sam is like a squire serving a knight in many ways:

Combined with courage was often the virtue of self-sacrifice: the willingness to place oneself in danger to assure the safety of others. This noble attitude has often been trivialized and made almost into a cliché in some fiction, but its origins in heroic literature are much more serious as numerous squires die protecting their knights. (58)

Although Sam is not a warrior he shows undying devotion to his master as he follows him into danger and refuses to leave him.

Sam is an obvious example of loyalty because he follows Frodo into immense danger and refuses to leave his side: Nelson points out that “It is this same loyalty which keeps Sam going and transforms him from the rather comic gardener's son hauled unceremoniously through the window by Gandalf into the seasoned warrior...” (59). Sam is a very interesting example of loyalty because he is completely devoted and expects absolutely nothing in return. While Boromir and Aragorn are examples of loyalty that is divided or confused, Sam is a clear example of what pure and intense loyalty looks like.

Sam may be the comic relief at times but all of the characters, and the readers, know that there is no way Frodo would have been able to destroy the Ring without his help. Even early in their journey in *The Fellowship of the Ring* Sam gives Frodo the courage and support that he

needs to keep going and the hope to believe that what he is attempting is possible. As Charles Nelson states: “It is this loyalty on Sam’s part which leads to the trust and comradeship which exists between Frodo and his companion and gives them the will and determination to carry on” (60). Sam’s loyalty allows Frodo to find the strength he needs to become a hero.

As Auden posits in the title of his essay “The Quest Hero”, Frodo establishes himself as the hero of the quest who is able to complete his task not by strength but loyalty. He is a normal person with no particular set of strengths or skills; he is not a warrior, king, or wizard like some of the other members of the Fellowship, but he is completely committed to destroying the Ring no matter what the personal cost. This unwavering commitment and loyalty allows him to be able to complete his task. W.H. Auden explores this type of hero in his essay:

Again, there are two types of Quest Hero, One resembles the hero of the Epic; his superior *arete* is manifest to all...The other type, so common in fairy tales, is the hero whose *arete* is concealed. The youngest son, the weakest, the least clever, the one whom everybody would judge as least likely to succeed, turns out to be the hero when his manifest betters have failed. (46)

Frodo has no prior training as a warrior and has never been far from his home, but he is the one to accept the difficult and seemingly impossible quest of destroying the Ring. Present at The Council of Elrond is a wizard, a king, a prince, and great warriors descended from long lines of heroes and yet an unassuming hobbit is the one to take on this burden.

Frodo’s humbleness as well as his unwavering commitment and loyalty are what allow him to be successful. Scholar Roger Sale states that Frodo “is saved from the worst ravages of the Ring because he binds himself to others rather than to love of power, and that is his heroism” (287). All of the other members present at the council are powerful, and the Ring is an object of

evil that feeds on power: the more powerful the one is holding the Ring, the more in danger the person is because of its evil. Gandalf refuses to even touch the Ring because, as he tells Frodo, ““With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly”” (60). Frodo’s lack of power, as well as his lack of desire for power, is why he is able to resist the control of the Ring because “Only through courage and selflessness can evil be destroyed...” (Callahan 9). However, Frodo’s courage and commitment does not mean that he is impervious to harm. He soon realizes that he must be willing to take risks and make sacrifices in order to complete his task.

In Tolkien’s writing a hero must not only be brave but he must be willing to make sacrifices. In the trenches Tolkien was surrounded by men willing to make the ultimate sacrifice (and many did). Frodo experiences great hardship throughout his journey, even early on in the *Fellowship of the Ring*. In the first novel Frodo is attacked several times by servants of Sauron and other evil creatures, but in the most serious encounter he is stabbed by a Morgul blade, a weapon of ultimate darkness, and nearly dies. As Auden states: “Even Frodo, the Quest Hero, has to pay for his success,” reflecting the sacrifices Tolkien encountered serving in WWI (61). Tolkien lost several close friends and chose to carry on and do something great in their memory. Tolkien also became very ill from what was called “trench fever” and almost died. Like Tolkien, Frodo pushes on despite pain and mortal danger. Frodo is a hero because he is willing to keep going and is willing to make great sacrifices.

It is important to note that Frodo is not forced to carry the Ring but chooses to take the task upon himself despite not wanting to.

All the Council sat with downcast eyes, as if in deep thought. A great dread fell on him, as if he was awaiting the pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and

vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other was using his small voice.

'I will take the Ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way...' (263-264)

Frodo, in many instances, considers running from danger and abandoning his quest for the safety of home. He is not a weak character because of his longings for safety and home, but exactly the opposite; Frodo has strong urges to abandon the burden of the Ring but is able to overcome them. This takes a great deal of strength and Frodo is able to admit these moments to himself, which not only makes him more relatable to the reader but also keeps him aware of his own feelings so that he is not in danger of unknowingly abandoning his commitment and the quest. Writer and translator Ross Smith posits that "...Tolkien wished to get certain messages across, particularly the concept of 'hope (or faith) without guarantees', which imbues the quest to destroy the ring, and 'no victory without sacrifice', which leads to Frodo's demise" (49). Frodo sacrifices everything to destroy the Ring and in the end finds himself so broken, physically and mentally, that he departs Middle-earth. Frodo is an example of extreme loyalty because he is willing to give his life to complete a task that he volunteered for; he is the first to join the Fellowship, which is a major part of the story and demonstrates themes of loyalty. He is an unlikely individual who is able to complete a great task, much like the rest of the Fellowship.

The Fellowship is not a draft of the most brave and worthy candidates in Middle-earth but is instead a mix of nine companions who are all willing to commit to the quest at hand. Among the members of the Fellowship are four hobbits, one wizard, two men, a dwarf, and an elf, which makes for a very unlikely alliance. When Elrond warns Gandalf against letting hobbits Merry and Pippin join, Gandalf replies:

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 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.
(269)

Tolkien demonstrates the importance of loyalty to the Fellowship through this passage; it is valued above logic and wisdom.

The logical idea would be to get the most experienced and valuable people available to be part of the Fellowship, but Gandalf knows that the commitment to the task is more important than any skills. This is reminiscent of Frodo as the quest hero; he succeeds because of commitment and not because of skills or strength. According to scholar Colleen Donnelly, "...Tolkien definitively chooses to portray a...society, where the needs of the 'common good' of the whole society and one's contribution to it far exceed the significance of an individual's needs and accomplishments" (18). During WWI there was a spirit of "doing your part" for the cause and instead of waiting to be drafted Tolkien willingly enlisted upon graduation. He and his friends wrote letters of encouragement and support to one another throughout the war. The Fellowship is important because Frodo may be the one carrying the Ring, but he needs help and support. Tolkien could have simply written about Frodo journeying on his own to destroy the Ring but instead shows how each individual plays an important role that impacts all of society. By the loyalty and commitment of every individual society is saved. This is a reflection of Tolkien's time during WWI and the feeling that prevailed about doing one's part to assist in the war effort in whatever way possible. Every person has an important part to play no matter how great or small he appears.

Sam plays an important role in the Fellowship because of his support to Frodo and is the first person to volunteer after Frodo offers to take the Ring. Elrond consents to Sam joining, saying, ““You [Sam] at least shall go with him. It is hardly possible to separate you from him, even when he is summoned to a secret council and you are not”” (264). Merry and Pippin soon also volunteer and this is when Gandalf makes his statement about loyalty being more important than wisdom in this case. Two more members, Legolas and Gimli, are able to put aside their differences; the elves and the dwarves have a long history of not getting along and their fathers, Thranduil and Glóin, have had some conflict in the past as revealed in *The Hobbit* (1937). Bilbo, whose adventures are recounted in *The Hobbit*, still shows loyalty in his old age.

Bilbo, despite being over one-hundred-and-eleven years old, volunteers to take the Ring to Mordor because he feels like he started the whole ordeal. It is highly unlikely that someone Bilbo’s age would be able to make it to Mordor, yet no one laughs at his offer because they know he really means it. Boromir is about to laugh, but is surprised when he sees that “...all the others regarded the old hobbit with grave respect” (263). Even in his old age Bilbo feels a strong sense of responsibility that overcomes logic; it is not reasonable for him to volunteer to take the Ring, but he does so anyway out of a sense of loyalty. However, not everyone is capable of such great loyalty and commitment.

Tolkien uses the council to show what happens when reason overcomes loyalty through the example of Saruman’s betrayal. Saruman sees that Sauron is gaining power and believes that he is on the losing side, and instead of remaining loyal Saruman takes the route he sees as the most logical and joins the side with the most power. “On the other side, Saruman the good wizard who turned bad is malignant but also charming and intelligent...,” and this is why Saruman is able to get by with his deception for so long; he is able to convince Gandalf and

others that he is still loyal them (Smith 45). Saruman the White is the most powerful wizard of the order, even more so than Gandalf, and is trusted for his counsel. However, he meddled with dark forces for too long and eventually turned against everyone. He imprisons Gandalf and tells him: “‘For I am Saruman the Wise, Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colours!’ I [Gandalf] looked and saw that his robes, which had seemed white, were not so, but were woven of all colours...” (252). Tolkien purposefully adds in the detail of Saruman’s robes appearing white but being of many colors; it is like his light has fractured into multiple colors but appears white until inspected closely, symbolizing corruption and brokenness. This fracturing may be a reflection of the modernist’s feeling about truths being broken and Tolkien’s rejection of this way of thinking.

While all acknowledge that Saruman is a traitor, some characters are more sympathetic than others toward him. Boromir is the only one to come close to sympathizing with Saruman because he feels that Saruman has a valid point about using the Ring as a weapon: “‘...Saruman is a traitor, but did he not have a glimpse of wisdom? Why do you speak ever of hiding and destroying? Why should we not think that the Great Ring has come into our hands to serve us in the very hour of need?’” (260). Saruman is a traitor because he uses logic and wisdom over loyalty, and Boromir comes close to following this path; he is so loyal to his home that he tries to use reason to rationalize his public loyalty being more important than his personal loyalty. He is so committed to the kingdom of Gondor, an idea, that he is willing to betray members of the Fellowship.

Gandalf is not the only one shocked by Saruman’s betrayal. Elrond expresses his shock too by stating that “It is perilous to study too deeply the arts of the Enemy, for good or for ill. But such falls and betrayals, alas, have happened before” (258). While loyalty is an important

trait among the Fellowship and leaders they are not naive enough to believe that everyone else also values loyalty to such a high degree; they know that it is a rare trait that must be treasured and nurtured. Loyalty, while being important, is complicated in Tolkien's writing and this is demonstrated at the end of the novel with the breaking of the Fellowship.

The Fellowship breaks apart not because of a mutual lack of loyalty, but because each member is loyal enough to follow the right path for his own destiny, even if this means parting ways. The four characters mentioned earlier- Aragorn, Boromir, Sam, and Frodo- have to make important and difficult decisions in order to stay loyal to the quest and the Fellowship. Donnelly explains that "The fracturing of the Fellowship and dispersion of the company is not only about deferring Frodo's story for suspense...it is also about drawing our attention to the part that each individual must play in the salvation of Middle-earth" (18). The characters must make their decisions regarding loyalty and these decisions seal not only their fates but also the fate of Middle-earth. Boromir's decision to try to steal the Ring forces Frodo to make his choice about whether to stay with the Fellowship or go on his own. Frodo's decision to leave then forces Sam to choose to follow Frodo- despite the fact that Frodo does not want anyone with him. When Sam asks Frodo why he tried to leave him behind Frodo states: "It would be the death of you to come with me Sam...and I could not have borne that" (397). Because Frodo and Sam choose to leave and Merry and Pippin are captured despite Boromir's efforts to save them, Aragorn must make his decision and choose which way to go. As Connelly stated, Tolkien wrote the breaking of the Fellowship with a purpose, not simply to cause suspense but to show that with loyalty each person has a part to play. Each member knows what he must do and knows that this means they must all part ways. Despite the breaking of the Fellowship initially feeling like a failure everyone eventually knows that they are doing the right thing and are following the right paths.

Tolkien wrote from the medieval tradition in a time of modernism following a devastating war and this made him unique, but what does this have to do with his works today? Current readers are very far removed from the events of WWI and the events have become, for many, distant and lost in history; yet Tolkien's works are as popular as ever. There have been six successful films based on *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy and *The Hobbit* and Tolkien's books have seen renewed interest. Also, due to his son Christopher, more of Tolkien's works are being published posthumously like his translation of *Beowulf* (2014). However, there is still a lack of serious Tolkien scholarship compared to other writers of his era, and the scholarship that does exist is not stating anything new. This thesis posits that there needs to be more modern scholarship about the relationship Tolkien has with popular fantasy writers like George R.R. Martin, who has been called "Tolkien for the 21st Century" and "the American Tolkien" (Irvine 38). While there are similarities between the two, loyalty is one topic that varies greatly. In Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series loyalty is seen as a trait that limits one's ability to rise to power or in the worst case will result in death. One of the characters, Ned Stark, is killed in the first novel of the series because of his strong sense of loyalty and honor. However, Martin is writing in a post-modern era and has not experienced war on the scale Tolkien has, so it makes sense that his portrayal of loyalty should differ so greatly. Even though his novels are much darker and loyalty is seen as a liability, Martin still weaves together stories of characters able to overcome evil and find their strength, thus creating a sense of hope.

Tolkien created works that helped to shape modern fantasy, but many authors have found ways to write with influence from Tolkien while staying true to their own style; Martin's works to be influenced by Tolkien but are something very unique. It is arguable that most people

do not realize the depths of Tolkien's genius and do not have an appreciation for what he accomplished. J.R.R. Tolkien was more than just a writer; he was a creator of worlds.

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