



A Fellowship of Heroes: Unpacking Heroism in Tolkien's Epic

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Abstract: This research paper examines the mythological influence and depiction of heroism in J.R.R. Tolkien's epic trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, through a comprehensive analysis of key characters such as Aragorn, Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, Legolas, Boromir, Faramir, Theoden, and Éowyn. The study shows how Tolkien draws inspiration from ancient myths and legends to craft heroes who embody various qualities and archetypes. Each character represents different aspects of heroism; for instance, Aragorn's Journey reflects the archetype of a returning king, while Frodo's quest is a symbol of a sacrificial hero, burdened by the great task of destroying the One Ring. The research highlights different types of heroism, not only defined by their actions but also by their moral values, selflessness, and willingness to sacrifice their own lives for others. This comprehensive analysis of heroism in the narrative provides a deeper understanding of heroic ideas, which reveal insights into the timeless appeal of Tolkien's work and explore the human capacity for courage, friendship, and moral integrity in the face of materialistic modern life.

Keyword: Heroism, character analysis, *The Lord of the Rings*, mythology, Aragorn, Frodo, Gandalf

INTRODUCTION

In the entire history of literature, heroes have been shining as beacons of hope, reflecting social values and moral purity. Their stories are loved and inspire all of human culture. Through their actions and choices, they remind us of the capacity for greatness within all of us and the importance of standing by what is right, even in the face of adversity. Merriam Webster dictionary describes a hero as "a person who is admired for great or brave acts or fine qualities." From the great and holy religious icons like Jesus Christ and Lord Rama, who represent spiritual virtues and divine missions, to the powerful classical Greek heroes such as Hercules and Odysseus, with their tragic flaws, heroism has several faces. Traditional heroes like King Arthur and Robin Hood, who represent bravery, honor, and justice, and without any spiritual power, they are the most inspirational heroes in the form of ordinary human beings. On the other hand, true and ordinary heroes, such as Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings*, are distinguished by their extraordinary moral courage and selflessness. These diverse heroic stories not only reflect societal values and cultural traditions but also teach moral lessons, inspire readers, and explore the vast potential of the human spirit, making heroism an enduring and powerful theme in literature.

The epic fantasy trilogy *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King* by J.R.R. Tolkien has captivated readers' attention worldwide since its publication in the mid-20th century. The story of these novels is set in an imaginary world of Middle-earth where diverse groups of characters unite to destroy the One powerful Ring of Evil that was forged by Evil Lord Sauron. This story focuses on their perilous and adventurous journey.

The story begins in the Shire, a peaceful Hobbit home, where a young hobbit named Frodo Baggins lives and unwittingly inherits the One Ring of Evil from his uncle Bilbo Baggins. Gandalf, a wizard, informs Frodo of the Ring's dark power and the need to destroy it in the fire of Mount Doom, deep within the realm of the Dark Lord Sauron. Frodo embarks on this quest with his friends Samwise Gamgee, Merry, and Pippin, who are later joined by Aragorn, a ranger with an Elven Prince Legolas, Gimli, a Dwarf warrior, Boromir, a Gondor royal man, and Gandalf himself. This fellowship faces numerous difficulties and dangerous adventures along the way, and the fellowship is eventually broken. With Gollum as their guide, Frodo and Sam stay on course and make their way alone to Mount Doom. As Tolkien writes, "So Frodo and Sam set off on the last stage of the Quest together. Frodo paddled away from the shore, and the River bore them swiftly away, down the western arm, and past the frowning cliffs of Tol Brandir." (407). Conversely, Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, and Gandalf engage in combat with Sauron's army. The

themes of the story include friendship, bravery, sacrifice, and the never-ending conflict between good and evil, which reveals the true nature of heroes.

The Lord of the Rings is a masterpiece of fantasy literature, famous for its imaginary universe, complex plot, and highly developed characters. The novels explore the deep quality of heroism and the enduring battle between good and evil through the diverse members of the fellowship and their journeys. The concept of heroism in Tolkien's world is not limited to traditional archetype glorious deeds, but it is also found in ordinary characters such as Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin. The narrative explores the corrupting influence of the powerful Ring along with the strength of complex morality and the choices of choosing right over wrong that make it a timeless and a universal tale. This epic's impact is high on the fantasy genre that established new traditions for upcoming fantasy literature. Douglass Stott Parker argued, "Probably the most original and varied creation ever seen in the genre, and certainly the most self-consistent; yet it is tied up with and bridged to reality as is no other fantasy." (598).

Based on this present understanding, the primary objective of this research paper is to explore the complex concept of heroism in J.R.R. Tolkien's novel, The Lord of the Rings. This study will try to examine the significant scenes that highlight the heroic actions, character development, and thematic elements all that are related to heroism. Through literary analysis and character's studies. And the methodology that includes analyzing the structure and characters of narrative, focusing on morality, ethical values, and personal sacrifices that define the heroes of Tolkien. The aim of this study is to draw comprehensive conclusions about the nature of Tolkien's epic heroes. That will contribute to a broader understanding of heroic narrative in literature.

HEROISM IN TOLKIEN'S WORLD

In J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth, there are many different types of heroes, which are not only defined by their strength or powerful nature but also their noble qualities. Such as courage, loyalty, wisdom, selflessness, sacrifice, humanity, and hope. Every hero of this narrative represents a different type of virtue; for example, Frodo Baggins, a harmless hobbit, is an ordinary character who displays extraordinary courage and selflessness and sacrifices many things on his journey to destroy the One Ring. Aragorn, a skilled warrior and leader, stands for honor, loyalty, and bravery. He does not desire the throne but instead wants to save the people of Middle-earth from the dark Lord Sauron. Wisdom is another power that Tolkien gives one of his characters: the wizard Gandalf, who is wise and knows his power of wisdom and uses it wisely, guides the fellowship on their quest and gives them valuable councils. It indicates that true heroism may also lie in knowledge, wisdom, and guidance rather than just physical strength or bravery. Samwise Gamgee's loyalty and unshakable hope, even in the most difficult times, show that one should not need a sword and shield to be a hero, but hope in an impossible situation can serve as a beacon of light that makes things possible. And friendship is the strongest power that Tolkien focuses on in the story; without it, even the strongest hero can fall. It is the bond of friendship that ultimately overcomes the darkness and gives them victory over Sauron. These characters illustrate the immense moral landscape of Middle-earth, where true heroes lie in their virtues and the choices they make in their lives.

J.R.R. Tolkien's heroism in The Lord of the Rings is inspired by medieval and mythological traditions. Major characters and the epic quests draw inspiration from Norse, Celtic, Christian, and Anglo-Saxon mythology. For example, being an expert in heroic Anglo-Saxon culture and literature, Tolkien derived many aspects of The Lord of the Rings from the poem Beowulf. The character of Aragorn is inspired by the hero Beowulf, who represents courage, honor, and destiny. and the One Ring is a representation of the cursed treasure in the epic. (Shippey, 140) Tolkien's Elves are inspired by a blend of Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, and Norse literature, particularly Celtic fairies, Tuatha Dé Danann. (Rosebury, 204–220) He painted his elves as noble beings with magical qualities; for example, Legolas and Elrond display the valor and charm that are similar to the elves of Norse mythology. And the act of fellowship can be compared with the heroic quest found in medieval literature, such as King Arthur's Knights. Additionally, the sacrifice of Frodo Baggins indicates the theme of Christian mythology. These mythological inspirations give Tolkien's heroes timeless qualities and make them important in English literature.

A DIVERSE ASSEMBLY OF HEROES

J.R.R. Tolkien represents a rich collection of characters in The Lord of the Rings. Every single hero displays his or her unique quality of heroism. Although the story is packed with a number of figures, this research paper will focus only on the major heroes due to the limitations. By narrowing the study to main protagonists, this study explores their diverse qualities and provides a clear understanding of their roles and significance within the narrative.

ARAGORN: THE RETURNING KING

Aragorn, son of Arathorn, heir of Isildur, an ancient king of Arnor and Gondor, known by many names such as Strider, Isildur heir, Elessar, Elfstone, and Telcontar, embodies the archetype of the returning king in J.R.R. Tolkien's epic narrative. His suffering is not to obtain the throne or crown for himself; rather, it is for the sake of others, including his friends, his people, and humanity as a whole. Tolkien introduces him as a mysterious Ranger of the North. His initial appearance raises suspicion, prompting Sam to ask, "How do we know you are the strider that Gandalf talks about?" (Tolkien, 172) Despite this doubtful beginning, Aragorn's true nature unfolds gradually, revealing his constant dedication to justice and kindness. Paul Harold Kocher accepts that "Aragorn is rather more difficult to know truly than any other important person in the story." (122) Through remarkable transformation and dedication, Aragorn proves himself to be a great king of the throne of Gondor with the gift of healing (Book V, The Houses of Healing). He shows great leadership during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, and in the end he was crowned as King Elessar, a name given to him by Galadriel. He became the first High King of the Reunited Kingdom, who restores peace and order in Middle Earth.

FRODO BAGGINS: THE RELUCTANT HERO

Frodo Baggins is not a legendary hero who rides the horse, wields the sword, fights the villain, and wins the battle, but a very ordinary Hobbit who lives with his uncle. He loves shire and enjoys the comforts of home. He has qualities that other Hobbits do not. When Gandalf reveals that Frodo must bear the One Ring, he curses himself for finding the One Ring of Power. And asks, "I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?" (Tolkien, 61) Frodo wants to save his friends and shire, but he is filled with self-doubt and reluctance and says, "But this would mean exile, a flight from danger into danger, drawing it after me. And I suppose I must go alone, if I am to do that and save the Shire. But I feel very small, and very uprooted, and well – desperate. The Enemy is so strong and terrible." (Tolkien, 62) Although his strength and physical power are nothing as compared to humans and elves, his courage is higher than that of any other hero of the narrative. As Gandalf says, "My dear Frodo! Hobbits really are amazing creatures, as I have said before. You can learn all that there is to know about their ways in a month, and yet after a hundred years, they can still surprise you at a pinch." (Tolkien, 62) Frodo is a sacrificial character but not a larger-than-life hero who faces terrible suffering and danger on his journey that most of the hobbits would never want to endure. His bravery shines through in moments of immense sacrifice. In the council of Elrond, he becomes enthusiastically ready to bear the Ring again for the quest of destroying it and to face more terrible danger on the journey to Mount Doom. He says, "I will take the Ring, though I do not know the way." (Tolkien, 270) He shows great strength in surviving deadly wounds, first from the witch king's Morgul-knife's wound and second from the sting of Shelob. And in the end, he sacrifices his finger. By portraying such a hero, Tolkien indicates that true heroism may come from the most unexpected places too.

GANDALF: THE WISE GUIDE

Gandalf is one of the main figures. In *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* novels. He bears one of the three rings: the Ring of Fire, named Narya, and has great supernatural powers. He belongs to the Istari order: one of the Maiar and immortal Spirit from Valinor. He traveled much and possessed extraordinary wisdom. By his wisdom, he assists dwarves in their quest to regain the Lonely Mountain from Smaug the dragon. He assigns Frodo to bring the Ring to Rivendell, and in the council of Elrond, he counsels them to destroy the Ring on Mount Doom in order to defeat Sauron. Gandalf leads the Fellowship to the Misty Mountains, battles a Balrog, an evil spirit in the realm of Moria, and sacrifices himself for saving the lives of other members of the Fellowship. But he is sent back again as Gandalf the White to stand against Sauron and complete his mission. There, he guides Theoden in Rohan and aids in Gondor by leading the whole army against the Nazguls. In the end, with his guidance and wisdom, Frodo finally destroys the Ring, Sauron loses the war, and Aragorn becomes the King of Gondor.

Tolkien describes Gandalf as an angel incarnate, and the scholars linked him to the Norse god Odin, and his resurrection is portrayed as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Carpenter, 51) Gandalf is known by many names, such as Pilgrim, Olorin, Mithrandir among Elves, Tharkun among Dwarves, and in north Gandalf. Humphrey Carpenter, a renowned Tolkien biographer, describes Gandalf in J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography as a white-bearded man in a large hat and gray cloak seated among stones in a mountain forest (Carpenter, 51). Some other scholars also linked him to Merlin of Arthurian legend or archetype wise old man. (Lobdell, 33) Tolkien describes his appearance as "All that the unsuspecting Bilbo saw that morning was an old man with a staff. He had a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots." (5) By appearance, he looks like a wise old man, as he is in real life by his guidance and actions, indeed.

SAMWISE GAMGEE: THE LOYAL COMPANION

Samwise Gamgee is known for his loyalty and devotion to his master, Frodo, in *The Lord of the Rings*. He is a simple gardener; however, he makes his place notable among the members of fellowship. In starting, Tolkien describes his simplicity in an amusing way: When Sam was eavesdropping on Gandalf's conversation with Frodo, Frodo threatened him, saying, "If you even breathe a word of what you've heard here, then I hope Gandalf will turn you into a spotted toad and fill the garden full of grass snakes." Sam fell on his knees, trembling." (64) But later, amid the perilous journey to Crack of Doom, suffering makes him brave enough to fight with Shelob and Orks alone in order to save the life of his master, Frodo. When the fellowship breaks down at the Falls of Rauros, Sam is determined to go with Frodo; to get him to stop, he jumps into the river, even though he has never known swimming. Sam is physically strong as well as emotionally strong; he is a trustworthy companion for his team but does not trust others easily. For example, when he first meets Aragorn, he is doubtful for him and asks, "How do we know you are the strider that Gandalf talks about?" (Tolkien, 172) He does not believe in Gollum and watches over him all the time. "Anyway he meant to, and he means to, I'll warrant. Throttle us in our sleep, that's his plan." (Tolkien, 615) says Sam when they catch Gollum the first time. He was right about Gollum—that he is nothing but a deceiver. He proves his emotional strength once again when he willingly gave the one Ring back to Frodo, even after knowing its power. He has many good qualities, but he is an icon of friendship and loyalty for his friend and for his master. He helps Frodo emotionally and physically bear the weight of the Ring in their journey and also carries him on his shoulder to protect his master and complete the mission. He says, "I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you and it as well. So up you get! Come on, Mr. Frodo dear! Sam will give you a ride. Just tell him where to go, and he'll go." (Tolkien, 941)

Joseph Pearce and English writers write that Sam is parallel to Simon of Cyrene, who helps Jesus by carrying his cross to Golgotha; in a similar way, Sam helps Frodo by carrying the crushing weight of the Ring. (97). And in the end, he becomes mayor of shire as long as he wants, marries Rosie Cotton, and moves into Bag End with Frodo. Frodo gave Sam the Red Book of Westmarch, the estate of Bag End, and the hope that he would journey west to the Undying Land.

BOROMIR: THE TRAGIC HERO

Boromir, one of the complex characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, embodies the archetype of the tragic hero. As a valiant warrior, a man of great strength and son of the steward of Gondor, he has the exceptional abilities of leadership and patriotism. These qualities make him a strong member of the Fellowship. He demonstrates great heroism many times in the narrative, whether in defense of Osgiliath or fighting with Orks for

defending Fellowship. His deep love for his homeland and desire to defend his people drives him to seek power against the threat of Sauron. This sense of duty and blind desperation for power led him to his downfall. He wants the power of Ring for himself and says to Frodo:

And behold! in our need chance brings to light the Ring of Power. It is a gift, I say; a gift to the foes of Mordor. It is mad not to use it, to use the power of the Enemy against him. The fearless, the ruthless, these alone will achieve victory. What could not a warrior do in this hour, a great leader? What could not Aragorn do? Or if he refuses, why not Boromir? The Ring would give me power of Command. How I would drive the hosts of Mordor, and all men would flock to my banner!' (Tolkien, 398)

His ambitions make him attempt to take the Ring from Frodo. But despite this tragic flaw, Boromir realizes his grave mistake in final movements and sacrifices himself to protect hobbits from the Uruk-hai. He fights valiantly and dies as a warrior; the bodies of his enemies around him symbolize his heroism. As Aragorn remarks, "You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace!" (Tolkien, 414) Many heroes corrupt in their lives, but few get honor in the end, as Boromir earns; his story is a powerful reminder of heroism and redemption. Even after his tragic death, he makes a special place among Tolkien's epic's characters.

HEROISM BEYOND THE FELLOWSHIP

The concept of heroism in The Lord of the Rings is not limited to the Fellowship's members; Tolkien expands it beyond this central group. Characters like Eowyn, Faramir, Theoden, and Eomer demonstrate courage and honor on the battle field and prove their heroic virtues. Eowyn, a shieldmaiden of Rohan, disguises herself as a man in order to fight in battle and to protect her people. In the battle Fields of Pelennor, she faces the WitchKing of Angmar, the leader of the Nazgul; she slays him. Killing an unstoppable foe is an example of the unexpected nature of bravery. Moreover, Faramir is the younger brother of Boromir and the son of Denethor. Unlike his brother, he possesses wisdom enough to resist the temptation of the One Ring. His decision to allow Frodo to continue his quest, despite the glory and power that he could gain by simply taking the Ring from Frodo, which his father was always desperate to get, brings greater fortune for every single life of Middle-Earth and demonstrates a different kind of courage and selflessness over personal interest and ambition. By taking this decision, he determines the fate of Middle-earth. His actions show that heroism can be seen not only in battle fields or physical strength but also through the power of taking moral decisions

CONCLUSION

J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings explores a rich collection of heroism that is not limited; it is beyond traditional notions of valor and strength. Through a diverse range of characters, from the reluctant courage of Frodo Baggins to the noble Aragorn, the loyalty of Samwise Gamgee, and the transforming journey of Boromir. It illustrates the idea that anyone can be a hero only by taking the right path of truth. It is noticeable that Tolkien's concept of heroism is deeply rooted in the moral ground. Selflessness and sacrifices for the greater good. Furthermore, Tolkien's narrative is heavily inspired by mythological and medieval traditions, which create characters with timeless qualities. The heroes of Middle-earth, within or beyond the fellowship, teach us that heroism can be found even in the most unexpected and ordinary places. Such tales of heroism continue to inspire and offer timeless lessons on the enduring power of courage, friendship, and humanity.

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