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“Chosen Instruments”: Tolkien’s Hobbits and the Rhetoric of the Dispossessed

Samuel Bennett Watson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

“Chosen Instruments”: Tolkien’s Hobbits and the Rhetoric of the Dispossessed

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Tolkien’s hobbit characters are capable of a particular type of rhetorical persuasion, one which relies on their ability to leverage their status as outsiders among the other people of Middle-earth. The hobbits are uniquely suited to the task of bringing unity to Middle-earth’s people because of the simplicity of their rhetoric, which focuses on proving their own morality and presenting truths without elaboration. When compared with the text, the film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* also help highlight the importance that Tolkien placed on the simplicity of hobbit rhetoric. These abilities of the hobbits become clear through a narrative analysis of the stories from Tolkien’s world, including Bilbo’s speech patterns, the efforts of Merry and Pippin to convince the Ents to fight Isengard, and Frodo’s appeal for unity and aid as made to the Council of Elrond.

Keywords: John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, hobbits, outsiders, rhetoric, truth

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Introduction

“I was born in 1892,” wrote J. R. R. Tolkien, “and lived for my early years in ‘the Shire’ in a pre-mechanical age. ... I am in fact a *Hobbit* (in all but size)” (Tolkien, *Letters*, 288).

Tolkien’s affinity for his invented race of diminutive characters was not just because of their shared fondness for food, pipe smoking, and a quiet life. Like the principal hobbits who play a role in his stories, Tolkien was himself an outsider. While Tolkien’s migration to the U.K. happened early, when he was only 3 years of age, Tolkien was, like Frodo, destined to become a celebrated public figure in a nation that was not his birthplace. He also found himself often at odds with some of the trends of his time, preferring more “primitive” surroundings and expressing a disdain for the “industrial progress” that he saw spreading throughout Europe.

As a person and as an author, Tolkien therefore expressed a great deal of sympathy for outsiders and the dispossessed. In his works of fiction, J. R. R. Tolkien many times uses his characters to show the importance people and groups who are outsiders in the lands and cultures they visit. In the tale of Beren and Lúthien, told in *The Silmarillion*, the mortal man Beren wanders for years alone before he finally discovers the land where Lúthien and her elven kin are hidden. There he disturbs the uncaring complacency of the elves before he and his newly-found love depart again into exile, becoming outsiders once again as they work against dark forces (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 192–222). In *The Hobbit*, the dwarven refugees flee from a land destroyed by war, returning to defeat the evil that destroyed their home and thereby bring a new unity to the northlands. The elven “Wise” of Middle-Earth, the leaders of their communities, are themselves migrant outsiders from the land beyond the sea, immortal beings now living in a mortal world, able to bring their perspective and wisdom to bear as they advise other characters in Tolkien’s stories. And of course, Tolkien uses his protagonists, hobbits displaced from the

comfort of the Shire who must bring change and unity to a company of different races. Tolkien's characters demonstrate the value he places on those people who find themselves on the fringes of society, and their role in helping to create social cohesion and bring new perspective to those entrenched in their problems and traditions.

The hobbits are persuasive in the context of the novel because they are able to bring the perspective of outsider people to stagnant or deadlocked situations, and because they are able to prove their goodness and moral trustworthiness through their humility and truthfulness. They show the value of outsider people in Tolkien's writing, using this virtue to convince other characters to consider their perspective. Through the examples of his hobbit characters, Tolkien attempts to prove to his audience the potential which outsiders' voices have to bring unity and new perspective to situations in which they find themselves.

The value of the hobbits is affirmed by how adaptations of Tolkien's story have treated them as well; in particular, the film trilogy adaptation that began in 2001 is enlightening both for its consistencies and the changes that it makes to Tolkien's narrative and plot. A comparison of the adaptation with the original text will further illuminate the power that Tolkien ascribed to the virtuous outsider's voice in his work. In all these examinations, the rhetorical impact of Tolkien's characters will be the central consideration, and narrative criticism the guiding method.

Theoretical Background

Adaptation Studies: Continued Themes, Highlighted Differences

To augment my narrative analysis of Tolkien's writing, I will also make a comparative examination of the adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* to film. The rhetorical importance of the hobbits in Tolkien's work is further clarified through comparison of his original, novel version of

the story of *Lord of the Rings* with the more recent adaptation of the story into a film trilogy by Peter Jackson. When considering the film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*, this paper will examine them as artefacts of Tolkien's original themes and rhetorical moves, considering the films almost as if they were essays in their own right, created as an examination of Tolkien's work. Though it is primarily Tolkien's own use of the hobbits that concerns this examination, a comparison of his portrayal of some scenes with the way that those scenes are shown in the film adaptation sheds further light on the rhetorical significance of the hobbits for Tolkien.

The film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* are remarkable because of their quality and popularity. Some critics past and present have presented arguments regarding the implausibility of creating an aesthetically adequate film adaptation of a novel or written work—*any* written work (Elliott, 2003, 12; Balázs 259). This was particularly applied to Tolkien's work: "For decades, J.R.R. Tolkein's [sic] *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1937–1949) ... was considered unfilmable" (Elliott, "Unfilmable Books," 105). However, Elliott notes that following the film trilogy's release, this "prevailing" opinion on the adaptation of novels changed because of the great success that the movies saw, both in the form of industry awards and in the support of "even diehard Tolkien fans," who much enjoyed Peter Jackson's 2001–2003 trilogy and much preferred it to an earlier attempt at an animated adaptation of *Rings* (Elliott, "Unfilmable Books," 105).

The acceptance and respect given to the film trilogy, despite its many and frequent departures from the exact events of the original novels, shows that the director, Peter Jackson, has taken to heart that "the structure, language, and plot of a novel are all aspects that the screenwriter takes into account and not the story alone... when adapting works originally crafted in words to the screen" (Ramos 157). Jackson's film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* is

valuable to an examination of Tolkien's outsider characters precisely because the films have attempted to maintain the thematic components that make *Rings* what it is. Preserving the bare events of a story is not enough for an adaptation to be considered successful; Tolkien himself wrote of this when condemning the misplaced focus that he saw in a proposed film adaptation of his work:

Understand the irritation (and on occasion the resentment) of an author, who finds, increasingly as he proceeds, his work treated...carelessly in general,...and with no evident signs of any appreciation of what it is all about.... The failure of poor films is often precisely in exaggeration, and in the intrusion of unwanted matter owing to not perceiving where the core of the original lies. (Tolkien, *Letters*, 270)

Tolkien went on to complain that the proposed adaptation "cut the parts of the story upon which its characteristics and peculiar tone" depended, instead "showing a preference for fights," which Tolkien did not wish to be the basis of his story (*Letters* 271–273). Tolkien complained, in short, that the thematic components of his work were missing in this proposed adaptation, and this fact concerned him much more than the absence of one or two plot elements.

Therefore, even if the details of the story of *Rings* have occasionally been shifted to improve its "filmability" (Elliott, "Unfilmable Books," 105), Jackson's adaptation still provides a valid, alternative viewpoint for assessing the thematic core of the scenes in question. Even in cases where the details of the scenes at hand have been changed, there is also some insight to be gleaned from the changes that have been made, and how they highlight Tolkien's particular approach to an issue. The focus of the hobbits is on persuading those with whom they find themselves in contact, and Tolkien's focus in the way that the hobbits approach these fictional

issues is an attempt to prove the power which hobbit-style rhetoric can have: in short, the power of an outsider upon their new, foreign situation. The hobbits in Tolkien's writing are vehicles or symbols to portray this broader concept to Tolkien's audience, his modern readers.

Narrative Criticism and Tolkien: The Analytical Core

"Man is the symbol-using animal" (Booth 3), and fiction is full of these rhetorical symbols. However, not everything that occurs in a narrative is of equal value in a rhetorical examination. There is a difference between a narrative aspect that functions as a convenient plot device and one that "creates a pathway to the exploration of genuine human concerns" and motivations (Currie 68); analysis of fiction must be cautious not to overextend itself or focus too greatly on less-meaningful aspects of the text. In this case, as will be shown, Tolkien's characters are the most valuable symbol if one wishes to examine the rhetorical meaning of his writing. And of the characters in Tolkien's writing, his hobbit characters are the most important from a rhetorical point of view.

The rhetorical impact of its characters in Tolkien's work is not often considered. There are some exceptions, but these usually have focused on either the representative power that the characters have to help us understand Tolkien as a person (Sale) or on the technical importance of relatable, hobbit-like characters as a bridge for readers (Gasque)—not on the rhetorical moves used by the characters themselves, or on the reasons for their ability to persuade. This paper offers a more rhetorical approach to understand the work of Tolkien's dispossessed hobbits, suggesting that such a reading reveals more about a possible social agenda of this largely literary work.

Although Tolkien was primarily interested in creating what some theorists have called a “narrative” work, as opposed to an “expositive” one (Kane and Peters 3), the author did not say that there was nothing to be learned from his writing. Rather, he claimed that in the place of allegory, which he “cordially dislike[d],” he preferred “history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers” (*Rings*, xv). Because Tolkien’s writing is narrative, not allegorical, the words, thoughts, and actions of the characters, along with Tolkien’s own narration of them, will be the places where expressions of value are going to be found, and not in any direct authorial statement of values as we might find in a book with a more “dramatized author” (Booth, 196–200, 271).

This concept is well supported in the traditions of narrative criticism and the rhetoric of fiction. Characters are some of the most significant features that are examined in narrative criticism. In fiction where the author maintains an “authorial silence” and does not have a strong personality in the narration, the characters are the “central intelligence” of the story’s moral and message (Booth, 271, 274). Characters may have rhetorical significance based on their “physical and mental traits,” the actions that they undertake, and the way that they are presented by the narrator (Foss 312). The narrator is another significant feature in narrative criticism; examinations of the narrator may include how he or she presents the information of the narrative and the way that the narrator is or is not present in the text (Foss 312–313).

“Character [here meaning moral character] is manifest not merely in behavior, but in mental states such as desire and, especially, intention” (Currie 62). Currie further explains that a narrative that is significant for its use of moral character is not just basing its argument on the bare concept of character itself. Instead, the morality of characters is shown when such narratives show what the characters are doing:

Narratives we value for their psychological insights ... emphasize the details of specific occasions of choice, conflict, dilemma, and decision and provide, or allow us to reconstruct, a great deal concerning situation, motivation, temptation, and all those other things that make a crucial difference to the particulars of a case. (Currie 68)

This is a large part of the reason for the importance of characters as a feature in narrative criticism. Their actions contribute to the “psychological insights” within a narrative, showing us the author/narrator’s motivation as well as the morality of the characters themselves.

The Burkian concept of attitude is also relevant here. For Burke, attitude is seen as a part of agency; the driving force behind the act, leading to its completion in a similar way as the more physical aspects of agency (Burke 476). It is important to note that the attitude driving character actions is a great indicator of their moral character. This allows us and other characters in the narrative to see the importance in not just what the hobbits say, but how they are saying it. The importance of the narrator in narrative criticism is also once again central to this discussion, because of the way that the narrator can reveal character attitudes and morality through the surrounding text, “mental states such as desire and, especially, intention,” not just their words and actions (Currie 62).

Thus, both characters and the narrator’s presentation have an important impact on readers of a text, and therefore a great potential for rhetorical significance, especially in the interaction of narration and character. Booth further explains that “because we experience [a character’s] thoughts and feelings at first hand, we are forced to agree with the narrator’s assessment of her” (11). Because “we react to all narrators as persons,” the absence of a central author or

“intelligence” appearing to guide a story allows us to more closely examine the accounts given by characters within the text and close the emotional distance between readers and characters (273–275). Readers are able to draw conclusions about characters from their own thoughts and dialogue, as well as from the way that they are portrayed through the narration—this allows us to see another important feature of characters in narrative: their morality and their ability to prove it.

The importance of the rhetor’s morality in rhetorical movements is something that has been a part of rhetorical studies since the classical period. Ancient writers were likely to include morality or personal righteousness as a part of the traits that made a rhetor persuasive: “Aristotle believes that ‘truth and justice’ have a ‘natural’ superiority over their opposites....The rhetorical advantage of this superiority is that what is true and good is, other things being equal, more convincing and persuasive” (Halliwell 215, citing Aristotle I.I.12, 1355a20–23 and 37–38). If we accept the Aristotelian view of the importance of truth and personal values in rhetoric, it is also important to recognize that if a rhetor is able to show that their values align with those of their audience, the audience is much more likely to agree with them. “All three kinds of ‘artificial’ persuasion—by reasoning, character, and emotion—depend in part upon factors of value” (213) and those values are determined by the values that the audience holds—a “popular morality” based on the values of those present (Halliwell 213). The ability of a rhetor to prove their morality to their audience, to create an invented morality through their rhetorical decisions in much the same way that they might create an invented ethos, is critical if they wish to take advantage of the persuasive power of having moral values that their audience agrees with.

To further analyze the ways that a rhetor such as Frodo does this, we will need to examine not only his actions but the reasoning and symbolism behind them. Fortunately, “within

a narrative, we may expect to... [get] ourselves, within a space of hours, into the position of making confident evaluative judgements about a person's deepest motives" (Currie 63–64). "Narratives ... scaffold our inferential activities with strategically placed descriptions of Character that take us directly into motivational structure" (Currie 63). These descriptions may be of character actions, interior thoughts and motivations, or even the ways that the character is referred to by others either through word or deed. This focus on characters, morality, and narration will serve this analysis going forward and prove that the rhetorical actions and reactions of the hobbits are the core of Tolkien's messages about the power of dispossessed rhetoric. The characters and narrator/narration will be the focus in this narrative criticism of Tolkien's work, along with the idea of character (morality) in fiction.

Analysis

Defining Hobbit Rhetoric

"Hobbit rhetoric" is not a term that has been used in rhetorical or Tolkien studies, or at least never with any consistent definition. For this examination, it will be helpful to define what is meant by this term before any attempt is made to demonstrate its effectiveness and meaning in *Rings*. By "hobbit rhetoric," this paper means the manner that Tolkien uses his narration and the characters themselves to portray hobbit characters' effective persuasive abilities. In particular, the hobbits' rhetorical power is shown through their ability to leverage their status as outsiders by using simple appeals to truth (rather than complex arguments), including storytelling, and by using rhetorical strategies that prove their morality and good character to their audience.

Hobbit rhetoric is characterized by several distinct features. The first of these is the simplicity it requires. In a high fantasy genre novel like *Rings*, the Grand or High style of speech

is often preferred, because of the weight and consideration that it imparts to the speakers and the situations in which they find themselves. In deliberate contrast to this tendency, Tolkien has his hobbits speak in a much simpler manner, comparable to the Middle style, which Cicero described as having the purpose of “pleasing” the audience (Burton). This simplicity effectively signals the humility of the hobbits, who recognize that they are involved with things that are often far beyond their experience but nevertheless have something to offer.

Secondly and relatedly, hobbit rhetoric creates a particular ethos with its direct appeals to truth and morality. When speaking rhetorically, Tolkien’s hobbits are portrayed as not only speaking simply but speaking truthfully. The ethos of the hobbits is created through their humble attitudes (reflected in part in the simplicity already mentioned above) and through their ability to prove their good moral standing to their audience, which is shown through their use of truth and through their determination to do the right thing in spite of their inexperience and their status as outsiders. This humble and moral ethos is an important contrast to the complex and occasionally dishonest rhetoric which originated from non-hobbit characters in *Rings*, and Tolkien’s narrative makes it clear that the truthfulness of hobbit speech is significant not only because it is true and therefore morally correct, but also that it is, in fact, *more* persuasive than the untrue rhetoric that the hobbits may encounter.

Hobbit rhetoric, then, results when a character (in this case, a hobbit) speaks simply and humbly, relying on their perceived morality among their audience and their focus on the truth of their points. Tolkien shows that, when combined effectively, these features result in an argument or rhetorical strategy which is uniquely suited to the task which the hobbits have: creating a lasting impact on environments, peoples, and cultures to which they are outsiders.

To better understand hobbit rhetoric and its impact, I will first examine how Tolkien uses his narration and characters to prove that the hobbits are consistently outsiders, and then see how he shows their ability to make a rhetorical impact on their environment through the traits mentioned above.

The “Outsiderness” of Tolkien’s Hobbits

Both the narration and the characters themselves show us that the hobbits are almost constantly out of their element, surrounded by lands and people that are not their own. Even in the fantasy world of Middle-earth, the hobbits are out of place. One way that Tolkien shows us that the hobbits are outsiders is through their interactions with other characters (understood by Booth’s theories about character/author relations, as described above). Other characters’ responses to the hobbits consistently show how alien they are to the events and places where they are. When King Theoden first encounters Merry and Pippin, he admits that although he has heard of “halflings” before, his people “know no tales about hobbits” except for half-truths that are nearly fairy-tales:

All that is said among us is that far away, over many hills and rivers, live the Halfling folk that dwell in holes and sand-dunes. But there are no legends of their deeds, for it is said that they do little, and avoid the sight of men, being able to vanish in a twinkling; and they can change their voices to resemble the piping of birds. But it seems that more could be said. (*Rings* 544)

The hobbits are so remote from other races that even in a fantasy land, there are little more than fairy stories about the diminutive people. When travelling, they are constantly confronted with statements like Theoden’s, where their people are either unheard of or barely a rumor. Tolkien’s

narrative gives little to no knowledge of the hobbits even to characters like Treebeard the Ent, who believes he knows all the names of every living thing in the world (*Rings* 453–454). As Merry laments to Treebeard, hobbits “always seem to have got left out of the old lists, and the old stories” (454), and this unfamiliarity that others have with their culture, traditions, or even existence means that the hobbits are outsiders wherever they travel outside of the Shire.

The hobbits are also shown to be different through their use of dialogue and the way that they speak. In the Council of Elrond, for example, Tolkien’s other characters are distinguished from the hobbits by the way that they speak. Tolkien’s narration gives different discursive structures to each group in his story, and the simplest of these belong to the hobbits. Thoroughly anachronistic, the hobbits are wont to use phrases such as “Well, that’s that” (*Rings* 34), “Half a minute” (39), “Seven yards ... if it was an inch” (43), and other distinctly modern (and British) phrases. Tolkien even gives their dialogue occasional (and intentional) spelling or wording differences in their speech, such as the colloquial “Hullo” that Bilbo gives Gandalf (31) or even the distinctly hobbitish number that describes his age of 111, “eleventy-one” (29).

The casual speech of the hobbits is very much differentiated from the careful language used by the other characters of *Rings*, and this divide occurs not only between characters but between races, showing that the hobbits as a group are outsiders even in their own story. Elrond, representative of the “high” elves, typically the most educated and wise race, uses an elevated level of speech, what rhetorical scholars describe as “grand” style; the grand style of rhetoric is notable for being “high” or “elaborate” (“The High Style”), and for its rhetorical purpose of “moving” the audience (Burton). Speaking in his grand style, Elrond begins his Council by introducing Frodo as “the hobbit, Frodo son of Drogo” and saying that “few have ever come hither through greater peril or on an errand more urgent” (233). Shippey points out some

specifics of the unique speech patterns that Tolkien gives to Elrond, including his frequent subversion of expected “modern” word order and his use of archaisms such as the word “weregild” (Shippey 68–70). These archaisms are notable even when compared with the somewhat old-fashioned speech of some others who are present at the council. Elrond’s speech is also filled with references to ancient names and historical events from the world of Middle-earth, a tendency that he shares with Gandalf and the other elves present.

Other differences can also be found between the speech of the dwarves, men, and others present—each character’s origin and some of their personality is reflected in their speech (Shippey, 70–71). The language of characters reflects not only their place of origin, but also their worldviews or the paradigms with which they approach situations. To this point, Bakhtin writes that “worldviews” are “inseparable from their concrete linguistic and stylistic embodiment” (46) and that the languages used by different characters within a novel will not all represent the novel’s central themes, but will be “located at different distances from the unifying artistic and ideological center of the novel” (49). Thus, the many different styles of speech used by Tolkien’s characters are not all merely representations of authorial belief or ideology, but rather form a tangle of conflicting ideologies, histories, and opinions held to by the characters themselves. Even with their differences, however, all of the speech patterns of Tolkien’s other races share one consistency, especially in the Council of Elrond: their tendency towards elevated speech, and their grave and serious approach to the matters at hand. Even Gandalf, often one of the lighter-hearted characters, describes the intent of the council as not “to take thought only for a season, or for a few lives of Men, or for a passing age of the world.” Instead, their goal is to be a greater one: to “seek a final end to this menace, even if we do not hope to make one” (260).

Tolkien emphasizes the “otherness” of the hobbits by portraying their speech as much more mundane and simple, even in moments when it is concerned with important things. Bilbo’s above-mentioned outburst of “Well, that’s that” occurs right at the moment when he gives up the Ring of Power—an event that is unprecedented in the history of Middle-earth, as no one has ever had the strength of will to surrender the Ring of Power before this point. Yet Bilbo’s approach is one of “relief,” not pride (34); like the other hobbit characters about whom Tolkien centers his story, Bilbo is less concerned with great deeds and more interested in simple and “honest” things, glad to be “only quite a little fellow in a wide world” (*The Hobbit* 272). Indeed, Gandalf says that the casual speech habits of hobbits mean that they could “sit on the edge of ruin and discuss the pleasures of the table, or the small doings of the fathers...to the ninth degree, if you encourage them with undue patience” (*Rings* 545).

Tolkien emphasizes this through these differences in their speech, which at times even verge on the “vulgar” or rude; Tolkien once wrote that the hobbits often possessed “a vulgarity—by which I do not mean a mere ‘down-to-earthiness’— [but rather] a mental myopia” (*Letters*, 329) when contrasted with the grand dealings of others around them. Elrond, at his Council, gives a nearly-poetic first hand description of a long ago battle, “when Thangorodrim was broken, and the Elves deemed that evil was ended for ever, and it was not so.” Upon hearing this recitation, Frodo, “in his astonishment,” bursts out and interrupts the proceedings with a question:

“You remember?... But I thought,” he stammered as Elrond turned towards him,

“I thought that the fall of Gil-Galad was a long age ago.”

“So it was indeed,” answered Elrond gravely. (*Rings*, 236–237)

Frodo's interruption comes almost to his own surprise; he is said to be "speaking his thought aloud in his astonishment," unintentionally interrupting the careful, measured speech of Elrond with his own "stammer[ing]." Beginning at this point, we see that Frodo's uncertainty and almost uncouth manner at the Council starkly contrasts with the formal grimness of Elrond and the others gathered there. This pattern of behavior continues: Frodo later interrupts another poignant moment with an equally unmeasured outburst, crying out that the Ring belongs to Aragorn as soon as the latter's lineage is revealed to the council (240).

At times, Frodo and Bilbo hold whispered asides with one another, even as the council continues its discussion (241, 243). When Frodo is asked to officially step before the council and present the Ring to them, "he [is] shaken by a sudden shame and fear" as all the eyes present turn to him, and "he wished he was far away" (240–241). As he does elsewhere, Tolkien uses Frodo's relatively coarse discourse and his feelings as he hears the speeches from others present at the Council of Elrond to show us that the hobbit is out of his element. However, in the end, Frodo's inexperience and outsider-ness only serve to strengthen the impact of his own hobbit-style discourse upon the Council members—which will be examined in more detail later in this paper.

When Merry and Pippin interact with Treebeard, the leader of the Ents, and the one with whom they most frequently communicate, they learn that they have migrated so far from home and their original culture that their kind is not even known to the Ents. "You are in *my* country," Treebeard asserts as he addresses these outsiders, and then asks "What are *you*, I wonder? I cannot place you" (*Rings* 453). Though the Ents have a long list that they believe includes all living creatures, the hobbits are not a part of it; "We always seem to get left out of the old lists, and the old stories," Merry laments in response (454)—something that becomes clear to all of the

hobbit characters sooner or later once they leave the Shire. These characters are always outsiders, dispossessed of their people and comfortable circumstances.

How Hobbits Use Rhetorical Appeals as Outsiders

Being outsiders is not, in and of itself, a boon to rhetorical persuasiveness, and is often seen as a detriment (see Thorbjørnsrud and Figenschou). Tolkien's approach highlights the potential for good: rather than being hindered by it, hobbit rhetoric is persuasive in part *because* of the hobbits' long separation from the politics, policies, and "great deeds" of the world—they are "provincial," and "have little awareness of what the land beyond ... contains" (Gasque 5). Hobbits are able to bring new and valuable perspectives to the other people of Middle-earth. They see things from outside of the tired perspectives of those who are deeply entrenched in their ways on both sides of the wider conflict for Middle-earth (see Sale). This is the power of their position as outsiders, and the power of their speech lies in its ability to quiet the tumult and anger of the historical past, sincerely presenting new possibilities once again: new courses of action, new reasons to set aside conflicts and unite with friends who were once not so friendly. Freed from the same social expectations that weigh upon many other characters in *Rings*, the hobbits are able to take advantage of their outsider-ness instead of being only disadvantaged by it. As outsiders, they bring new perspective to the situations where they act, and can give new ideas and encouragement to previously-entrenched groups of people.

In particular, hobbit discourse gains its rhetorical power through the simplicity and truth of the way that the hobbits communicate and through the ways that they are able to prove their morality and attitude. Bilbo, the titular hobbit of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, is an excellent example of a character whose outsider position, truth, and proved morality is important for his rhetorical

moves. When Bilbo meets with the leaders of two of the armies gathered to fight his dwarven friends, he speaks with his characteristic hobbit simplicity, even to the king of the elves, and even when using “his best business voice”:

Really, you know...things are impossible. Personally I am tired of the whole affair. I wish I was back in the West in my own home, where folk are more reasonable. ... I am only too ready to consider all your claims carefully, and deduct what is right from the total. ...I see your point of view. At the same time winter is coming on fast. (*The Hobbit* 243)

Bilbo admits immediately that he is not enthusiastic about the impending conflict, or even about his own part in trying to deescalate it. His truthful approach is necessary when dealing with the heads of these armies, who are the most “suspicious folk” that Bilbo says he has ever dealt with (243). He cannot persuade them through complicated words, nor convince them to abandon their task, but focusses on turning their attention to the simple facts of the matter, chief among which is the oncoming winter and the difficulty that will ensue if the siege continues until then.

Bilbo further employs hobbit-style rhetorical moves when he offers these leaders the Arkenstone to use as collateral against the stubborn King Thorin. Having taken the stone from the hoard of treasure without Thorin’s knowledge, Bilbo feels that he must justify himself so as to prove he is not merely a thief:

“But how is it yours to give?” [Bard] asked at last with an effort.

“O well!” said the hobbit uncomfortably. “It isn’t exactly, but, well, I am willing to let it stand against my claim, don’t you know. I may be a burglar — or so they say: personally I never felt like one — but I am an honest one, I hope, more or less. Anyway I am going

back now, and the dwarves can do what they like to me. I hope you will find [the Arkenstone] useful.” (*The Hobbit* 244)

Although Bilbo has stolen the stone from Thorin, thereby acting against what could be called the “letter of the law,” he is able to prove his adherence to a higher moral goal: ending the conflict with as little pain as possible for those involved, even if it means that he has to give up his promised share of the Dwarven treasure, and even if it means that there is an “unpleasant time just in front of” him, as Gandalf warns soon after this meeting occurs (245). But despite his warnings, Gandalf is proud of Bilbo’s choice as well (244), and the Elvenking himself recognizes and is impressed by Bilbo’s moral standing: The narration mentions that the king looks at Bilbo “with a new wonder” and states that he is worthier of the Elven armor he wears “than many that have looked more comely in it” (244), even offering Bilbo asylum in case his Dwarven friends are angered at his attempt at peace. Bilbo’s appeal to these leaders did not come from his words alone, but also from the way he presented them in simple truth and with a concern for proving his own righteousness. Bilbo’s morality in the face of difficult situations and his willingness to sacrifice his own gain for the good of others impresses the suspicious leaders with whom he interacts, causing them to try for peace with the Dwarves instead of attacking outright or besieging them.

Tolkien thus argues that outsiders can influence stagnant and fractured communities in the times of difficulty that these communities face. Through hobbit discourse in these scenes, characterized by truthfulness and proof of speakers’ virtue, Tolkien illustrates an important catalyst for human behavior: an ethos and type of discourse designed not only to bring new perspective to problems, but also to remind others that they need not be confined to their old prejudices and conflicts as they approach current issues. In order to examine just how Tolkien

makes this point, the analysis in this paper will go into more detail in some chosen scenes from *Rings*, showing how Tolkien displays hobbit rhetoric and shows its power to change the minds of other, entrenched characters because of the hobbits status as outsiders. Each scene will also be contrasted with its film adaptation in order to further highlight the importance of the themes at play for the characters in that scene.

A Narrative Examination of Merry and Pippin's Hobbit Rhetoric

The narrative concepts of moral character (including attitude), and the examination of the narrator's portrayal of the hobbits give insight into how their particular brand of outsider rhetoric is effective in persuading others, and therefore why it was important to Tolkien's examination of the power of outsider voices. The power of hobbit-style rhetoric, with its emphasis on simplicity and truthfulness, is clearly shown in the story of Merry and Pippin's visit to—and discussions with—the Ents, a group of forest-bound creatures who are even entrenched in their ways and traditions, and who are doing little to address the problems currently assailing their world. Merry and Pippin use simple hobbit rhetoric to take advantage of their outsider status and perspective and convince the Ents to help their cause.

The two hobbits begin their interaction with Treebeard by explaining themselves and their people to him—something that is necessary because of how far from home they have come, and something that lays the basis for the simplicity of their persuasive rhetoric. “If you would like to hear more,” Merry begins, “we will tell you. But it will take some time” (455). Tolkien's narration continues, filling in the gaps where no direct dialogue is represented:

The hobbits began to tell [Treebeard] the story of their adventures ever since they left Hobbiton. They followed no clear order, for they interrupted one another continually....

Treebeard was...most interested of all in Saruman's doings. The hobbits regretted very much that they knew so little about them: only a rather vague report by Sam of what Gandalf had told the Council. But they were clear at any rate that Ugluk and his troop came from Isengard, and spoke of Saruman as their master. (*Rings* 461)

There is no attempt by the hobbits to elaborate on the truth of their story; they do not invent details where they do not know them, and they simply relate the truth. This is important in the decision of the Ents to move against Saruman; the society of the Ents is so deeply rooted in a preference for slow, tree-like thought and movement that the idea of changing their ways quickly or reacting to current threats is completely foreign to them: "We Ents do not like being roused," Treebeard tells the hobbits, "and we are never roused unless it is clear to us that our trees and our lives are in great danger" (474). Though they certainly know of the threats to freedom in Middle-earth, the Ents all seem to share Treebeard's feeling that "Mordor is a long way away" (*Rings*, 461), and there is no great need to intervene in the difficulties of their time just yet. The coming of the hobbits challenges this long-held, entrenched perspective, bringing as they do both outsider information and perspective. When Merry and Pippin bring news of the treachery of the wizard Saruman, given in the form of a story told of their journey up to that point, and how they had recently encountered orcs who were sworn to serve the wizard, this presentation of new knowledge alerts Treebeard and the other Ents to the fact that while Mordor might be a distant threat, "Saruman is a neighbour" (460–462).

The truthful story that the hobbits bring is enough almost immediately to shake Treebeard from his previous lethargy: "There are wastes of stump and bramble where once there were singing groves," Treebeard declares, voicing information that was already known to him but was not enough to rouse him to action until the hobbits clarified the cause of the destruction. The

hobbits did not even need explicitly to ask Treebeard for help in fighting Saruman. The power of their rhetoric is instead in the ability of the hobbits to speak swiftly and simply of the truths that they had witnessed. Because of the difference in hobbit and Ent culture as highlighted above, this sudden presentation of new knowledge shakes Treebeard from indecision and leads him to change. “I have been idle,” he realizes, after hearing the hobbits speak (*Rings*, 463).

Although some critics have called Tolkien’s frequent portrayal of simplistic hobbit storytelling in his writing a “trite” indulgence, “irritating” at best and “a betrayal of some pact an attentive reader thought he had made” at worst (Sale 48), it is the stories that Merry and Pippin tell Treebeard that finally convince him to take action (*Rings* 460–461). It is clear that to Tolkien, storytelling was not only a form of entertainment, but one of the most persuasive forms of rhetorical address. In his attempts to prove the efficacy of stories, Tolkien has gone so far as to suggest the similarity between the Christian gospels and a “fairystory” where “story has entered History” (Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*, 77–78). Farrer explained Tolkien’s view of the “myth” of Christianity by saying that “God has constructed a myth expressive of the living truths he intends to convey, and the stuff of the myth is facts” (Farrer 167).

For Tolkien, the effectiveness of truthful storytelling as a rhetorical approach was proved by the “Christian myth” (a “true myth”) and its own formulation as a kind of fairy story, intended to teach (see *On Fairy Stories* for a more in-depth examination of these concepts). In the case of Merry, Pippin, and Treebeard, the simple story of the hobbits’ adventures shows its own applicability as a tool of persuasion in the speed with which it convinces the Ents to support the cause of the free people of Middle-earth.

Opposing the simplicity of the hobbits’ rhetoric is Saruman, who at various points in the novel is noted for the strength of his rhetorical ability. This ability to speak persuasively is often

referred to as Saruman's capital—V “Voice,” and it is clearly shown as “Saruman's flashiest trait, the greatest danger which he is said to pose” (Wise 1; see also *Rings* 553, 563). The Ents themselves had been taken in by Saruman's persuasive words in the past, when he was “no trouble to his neighbours,” “polite,” and “eager to listen” to the long-winded Ents (462, 553).

Although the text could be read to say that Saruman's “Voice” had a magic to it, Tolkien claimed elsewhere that, the true persuasive power of his speech was in the words themselves and how he delivered them, not in any external enchantments that were enhancing his persuasiveness: “Saruman's voice was not hypnotic but persuasive,” he explained (*Letters* 277, Wise 9). Others who have analyzed Tolkien's work have clarified that “it is Saruman's rhetoric, rather than any magical powers, that makes him so dangerous” (Ruud 143). Saruman is intended to represent a powerful rhetor, a representation of dangers of amoral speech. This is representative of the popular, dichotomous view of rhetoric, which places it opposite philosophy (Wise 5) and says that rhetoric is only the amoral means to an end. Wise further points out that the way that Tolkien treats Saruman's Voice is representative of the author's point of view on the perceived divide between philosophy and rhetoric, where “truth” is discovered by philosophy while rhetoric might merely be an attempt to create truth from good speaking (Wise 5). In this division, Saruman represents amoral rhetoric presented in the Grand style, employed to achieve a goal and not to come closer to the truth; the hobbits Merry and Pippin, on the other hand, are representative of the type of rhetoric which Tolkien found less dangerous—a rhetoric that was based in morality, and in the truthfulness of its message, and not only created through clever usage of language.

Unlike the hobbits, Saruman is a thoroughly immoral rhetor, a dictator of the modern persuasion, a man who creates his own “truth” from clever words, a figure in whom it is not

difficult to see similarities to historical tyrants and corrupt politicians (see, for example, Forés, and Shippey 68–77). The wizard is skilled in speech and communication, and feared by his enemies for this power. His rhetoric is focused purely on the stylistic aspects of rhetoric, not the moral requirement that seems to be important to the Ents and to Tolkien (Wise 5). Gandalf cautions his companions, as they approach the captive Saruman in his tower, that they might not be wise enough to “detect all his counterfeits” (562). When Saruman himself begins speaking to those present, Tolkien says that his “tone was that of a kindly heart aggrieved by injuries undeserved” (564); Saruman feigns morality, attempting to gain the moral as well as the literal high ground from his tower as he speaks to the king of Rohan, asking him “why [he has] not come before, and as a friend?” (565) and attempting to class himself as a heroic figure:

Much have I desired to see you, mightiest king of western lands, and especially in these latter years, to save you from the unwise and evil counsels that beset you! Is it yet too late? Despite the injuries that have been done to me, in which the men of Rohan, alas! have had some part, still I would save you, and deliver you from the ruin that draws nigh....Indeed I alone can aid you now.... What have you to say, Theoden King? Will you have peace with me, and all the aid that my knowledge, founded in long years, can bring? Shall we make our counsels together against evil days, and repair our injuries with such good will that our estates shall both come to fairer flower than ever before? (*Rings* 565)

Saruman’s calculated speech is laden with appeals to the king’s vanity, to his desire to aid his people, to their past friendship and goodwill, and to the fears of the king and his people. His reference to “unwise and evil counsels” brings to mind the efforts of Saruman’s own lackey, Wormtongue, who for a time afflicted King Theoden with just such counsel; however, Saruman

mentions this in the same breath that he distances himself from the actions of his servant, portraying himself instead as the one who wanted to help the king and his people. Saruman's use of these and many other rhetorical strategies gives him much to say, and the effect on the listeners is quick and insidious. Even though the men of Rohan know that Saruman has been the force behind many of their current difficulties, some of them begin "murmuring with approval...[for] it seemed to them that Gandalf had never spoken so fair and fittingly to their lord.... Saruman stood beside a door of escape, holding it half open so that a ray of light came through. There was a heavy silence" (565). Saruman's Voice and rhetorical ability are forces to be reckoned with.

Fortunately for Middle-earth, the characters who have come to speak with Saruman are ultimately able to see through his attempts at deceptive rhetoric, recognizing that he does not speak truly. "The words of this wizard stand on their heads," Gimli says, speaking first after Saruman's initial argument. "In the language of Orthanc help means ruin, and saving means slaying, that is plain" (565). This comment is taken to heart by the others present, who counsel King Theoden to "remember" the "treachery and murder" that Saruman has been involved in—to remember the true story instead of the current twist that he is attempting to give it (566). Theoden then, "in a clear voice," gives a denouncement of Saruman's lies, relying on his memory of the wizard's true actions as proof of his deception and treachery:

You are a liar, Saruman, and a corrupter of men's hearts. ...Even if your war on me was just... what will you say of your torches in Westfold and the children that lie dead there? And they hewed Hama's body before the gates of the Hornburg, after he fell. ...I fear your voice has lost its charm. (566)

Because of their knowledge of Saruman's involvement in the events which have afflicted the land, Theoden and his people are able to remember the truth behind his words, no matter how fair they seem to them, and avoid being taken in further. The true accounts of the past, including the one that Merry and Pippin gave to the Ents, serve as the basis for resisting the persuasions of Saruman, causing his words to lose their "charm."

Thus, despite the power of Saruman's rhetoric, it is Merry and Pippin's simple truth in speaking and relaying what they know that is able to bring about the wizard's defeat, symbolically proving the superiority of their form of rhetorical persuasion. Merry and Pippin are able to use their truthful stories to prove their reliability, and their virtue (or, in the film version, have it confirmed by Gandalf), and thereby add to their persuasion of the Ents the "excellence of character" that Quintilian believed was the "the first essential" for a "perfect orator" (Quintilian 1.1.9). On the other hand, "Saruman, whose motives have come to include greed and power, intends by contrast to conceal the truth through his words, which in his case become a web of deceit glossed over by the appearance of truth" (Ruud 151). Saruman cannot rely on the actual facts of his situation as part of his argument (because they would incriminate him, as shown by Theoden's reaction), but the hobbits' approach is entirely based in truthful storytelling. It is precisely because of the unique simplicity and truthfulness of hobbit rhetoric that it is able to override the power of Saruman's "Voice." This becomes clear with a consideration of Merry and Pippin's interactions with the Ents, and even clearer when the film version of *The Two Towers* is compared with the original novel, highlighting the decisions that Tolkien made in his portrayal of hobbit rhetoric.

The Film Adaptation: Illuminating Tolkien's Motives

And here we come to an interesting difference in the depiction of the Ents' "conversion" to Merry and Pippin's way of thinking, a difference that highlights the strength of hobbit rhetoric in Tolkien's vision and underscores its intentionality for the author. The path to Isengard is not so simply paved in the film version of *The Two Towers*, where Merry and Pippin's first encounter with Treebeard is fraught with tension as he debates whether or not they are evil creatures. In this adaptation, the hobbits' status as outsiders is not an advantage because of the new approach it brings, but a hurdle they must overcome. The Ents' unfamiliarity with the hobbits makes them initially suspicious of these small interlopers. It takes intervention from Gandalf to convince Treebeard that the hobbits can be trusted, and even then it is not enough to make the Ents change their point of view about Saruman. After some (long-winded) debate, the Ents in this version decide *not* to help the hobbits in their cause, despite fervent protestations from Merry. It is only when Pippin, in a moment of insight, convinces Treebeard to take a different route when leaving the council of Ents that Treebeard sees for himself the destruction that Saruman's orcs have left behind—the ruined trees and burnt edges of the forest near Isengard. Upon this discovery, film Treebeard immediately sounds a battle call and gathers the Ents back to him, and they then march on the fortress as in the original novel.

Contrasting the film and text versions, it is clear that Tolkien's approach to this scene is not especially dramatic; for purposes of increasing tension, the film version maintains a better pace of action as it contrasts the Ent scenes with the battle at Helm's Deep, leading the audience and the hobbits in the film initially to believe that there is no help coming to the beleaguered defenders who are opposing Saruman. The film also presents an assessment of what might happen when an outsider voice actually attempts to speak out in their new environment (see

Burgess, Thorbjørnsrud and Figenschou), with Treebeard's caution and doubt highlighted in his initial interactions with the hobbits. This is a valid point when addressing the rhetoric of outsider voices. However, raising the dramatic or narrative stakes of the story was not Tolkien's goal in his writing of this interaction, as indeed it rarely was his goal to follow what might be called "conventional" storytelling. William Cater (quoted in Grotta-Kurska 65) went so far as to suggest that *The Lord of the Rings* was so unconventional a story that it "had all the earmarks of a publishing disaster." Instead of focusing on the tension of the scene or on the ways that it might be used to create drama, Tolkien approaches the interactions between Ents and hobbits with a different goal, a goal that becomes much clearer with the above comparison of adaptations: The interaction between the Ents and hobbits in Tolkien's version of the story highlights the power of simple hobbit rhetoric, the rhetoric of the outsider, when pitted against the complex and persuasive rhetoric employed by Saruman and his minions. This is the main message which Tolkien wished to impart to his audience: that although rhetoric came in different forms, and some were certainly of the dangerous and immoral sort against which many modern ideas rally (such as the concepts of "empty rhetoric" or "political rhetoric"), there are also ways in which rhetorical power can be created which are based in morality and simplicity—and, indeed, that these hobbit-like rhetorical moves are also preferable for their lasting persuasive power, when compared to the rhetoric of people like Saruman, who cannot rely on the truth.

While the film version of these events highlights the difficulty that outsider voices often can have in getting themselves heard and listened to, Tolkien is more interested in what happened when those voices *are* heeded, not in portraying the difficulties they might encounter. In essence, his focus is on the potential that the simple truth of hobbit rhetoric has to bring its perspective to entrenched peoples.

Thus, Tolkien's portrayal of the interaction that Merry and Pippin have with the Ents serves not only to show the power of truthful, dispossessed voices, but also to show how this perspective can be used to combat the effects of harmful rhetoric such as Saruman's and raise the reluctant to action. Merry and Pippin's quick convincing of Treebeard in the novel show just how effective Tolkien believed this approach could be. Their effectiveness is such that the narrative shows Saruman defeated fairly easily, "off-stage, so to speak," and with little fanfare or difficulty for the Ents once they take it upon themselves to attack him (Wise 8).

The righteousness or virtue of the hobbits being proved, the Ents are therefore convinced of the necessity of considering their perspective seriously. Without their ability to represent the truth through their storytelling, the hobbits would not have been able to contend against Saruman's rhetorical power. They could not out-think him, or contend directly against his wordplay and eloquence, with anything but simplicity and facts, presented without guile or pride. But when the hobbits did present the truth that they knew to Treebeard in the form of stories, Tolkien shows the immediate effect that they have as those stories allow the leader of the Ents to see past his previous experiences with Saruman and realize that the wizard is the source of their current troubles. This is enough to rouse the Ents to war, and all of Saruman's cleverness cannot stop what Merry and Pippin set into motion.

Merry and Pippin are able to use their truthful stories to prove their reliability, and prove their virtue (or, in the film version, have it confirmed by Gandalf), and thereby add to their persuasion of the Ents the "excellences of character" that Quintilian believed was the "the first essential" for a "perfect orator" (Quintillian 1.I.9). On the other hand, "Saruman, whose motives have come to include greed and power, intends by contrast to conceal the truth through his words, which in his case become a web of deceit glossed over by the appearance of truth" (Ruud

151). The contrast that Tolkien creates between the effectiveness of these two rhetorical approaches serves his argument that outsider voices are valuable and effective for solving problems, especially when they are able to work with hobbit-style rhetoric.

Frodo and the Use of Moral and Religious Rhetoric at the Council of Elrond

Truth is also important to Frodo's appeals to the Council of Elrond, where the hobbit's ability to reveal his character and morality through his rhetorical moves will be especially significant. This situation falls under that category that Halliwell mentioned when he said that "there are many rhetorical contexts [that] ... cannot but rest on appeals to values and emotions" (Halliwell 212, emphasis added). Fortunately for Frodo, Tolkien's portrayal of hobbit rhetoric has a strong basis in their ability to prove their own morality, as shown above with Merry and Pippin; for Frodo, this significance is even clearer.

The power of hobbit rhetoric as presented through Tolkien's narrative is most clearly demonstrated when there is a narrative problem that is only solvable by Tolkien's diminutive heroes. The Council of Elrond provides us with such a problem: the races of Middle-earth are divided, both by race and a history of conflict. Much like the people of Europe, the people of Middle-earth have for centuries waged war with each other, building and breaking alliances and friendships and growing ever more certain of their prejudices and traditional views.

As mentioned above in the discussion about how Tolkien's narration shows the outsider-ness of hobbits, this scene shows readers (and viewers of the film adaptation) that the races of Middle-earth are divided by both race and language, and eventually gives Frodo the opportunity to prove his own virtue through his hobbit-style discourse and thereby guide the Council to a united decision with his dispossessed perspective on their problem: what to do with the Ring of

Power that has come before them. The Ring's narrative importance is clear, but Tolkien scholars and interested parties have not always come to a clear conclusion about what the Ring might represent—or if it represents anything. Some discussion of this meaning will be helpful if we are to analyze Frodo's opposition to the Ring in the Council scene.

The Ring has had many meanings or assumed meanings in different theoretical examinations of Tolkien's work. When analyzing the symbolism of Tolkien's stories, and especially with an emphasis on Jungian theories, O'Neill came to the conclusion that "The Ring is the Self, the potential force that promises finally to make whole both hobbit and Middle-earth" (88). Tolkien himself said that in "an allegory of our own time," the Ring would represent "the inevitable fate that waits for all attempts to defeat evil power by power" (*Letters*, 121), and called the term *power* "an ominous and sinister word in all these tales, except as applied to the gods" or divinity (*Letters*, 152). Similarly, when viewing the Ring from the perspective of a dichotomy of natural and mechanical or modern forces (a common theme in Tolkien's work and writing), the Ring may be seen as the danger of industrial progress, the threat of change that begins to encroach upon the natural world that the hobbits and elves represent (Petty 94). In this sense, the Ring is not just part of a struggle between the moral forces of good and evil" but "a threat to living things" in a fight to be "natural" (Sale 40).

Some, approaching Tolkien's work as one might read a morality tale or Christian parable, have claimed that the Ring may also be viewed as temptation, an "appeal to the evil within, ...made sometimes directly to the baser desires" as with Gollum's descent into addiction, and "sometimes more subtly through perversion of the loftiest instincts" as when Gandalf and Galadriel are tempted to claim the Ring for themselves in order to protect the things they love (Kocher 21). This seems to be one of the most commonly-accepted interpretations of the Ring's

symbolism, and there is certainly evidence enough in the text to make a convincing argument for it without much effort spent. Gandalf himself, as played by Ian McKellan in the film version of the Council of Elrond scene, declares that the object “is altogether evil,” giving further credence to the idea of the Ring as either temptation or the dark half of some dichotomy of virtue and unrighteousness. However, while this appears to be the most likely meaning for the Ring within the personal stories of the characters of *Rings*, it is not the most specific meaning of the One Ring in the scene of Elrond’s Council.

In the Council of Elrond scene, the Ring most clearly represents disunity, the force directly opposing the unity that is the only hope of those who aspire to contend against evil (Kocher 17, Dickerson 46). Its purpose in this scene is not merely to highlight the perils of temptation or power, but to show the perils of trying to bring together many people to solve a problem when those people all bring their own prejudice to the table—a situation that Tolkien evidently thought uniquely approachable by the outsider voices of hobbits. Here the Ring is not only representative of disunity, but also the lethargic cultural inertia seen in most of the races of Middle-earth, a lethargy and disagreement that prevents most members of the Council from coming together to form a conclusion about what ought to be done, even when the fate of the world appears to be at stake. Frodo’s response shows the way that such divisive problems can be overcome through the influence of concerned and virtuous outsider voices.

Entrenched in their experience and the ways of their people with little to no consideration for other points of view, the members of the Council demonstrate the intractable nature of modern states who argue with little chance of consensus or even compromise. These differences in rhetorical practice between the races serve to underscore Tolkien’s concern that when differing groups try to negotiate social problems they will do so with different syntactic

structures and rhetorical approaches. The divisive words that Tolkien's characters initially exchange in this scene illustrates what happens when outsider voices are not present: there is an inability for productive disagreement between races and countries, a situation that quickly grows dangerous with the presence of the Ring of Power. However, because of Frodo's rhetoric as a virtuous outsider voice, the other Free People of Middle-earth are able to reconsider their long-instated policies, allowing them to stand together.

Attitude and Morality in Frodo's Response

Frodo's rhetorical power is shown through his humble, self-sacrificial approach to the problem of the Ring, an approach that proves his virtue and goodness as a rhetor and convinces the divided Council to support his proposal and come to a unified conclusion. When, finally, the Council comes to the decision that the wisest course of action is to attempt to destroy the ring, they are still unable to come to a further conclusion: who would be best to take it. In the original novel form, this indecision is represented as a long, brooding silence, where none dares to offer an opinion though they all sit "with downcast eyes, as if in great thought."

Frodo is the voice of reason who speaks to the undecided and offers a solution: "I will take the Ring...though I do not know the way" (264). This statement, given in a "small voice," without confidence or bravado (263), is somehow enough to bring the Council to a decision. Where nothing else was able to unite their opinions and overcome their concerns, this approach by Frodo accomplishes what might have been seen as impossible. Frodo is able to do this because of his hobbit-style rhetorical approach, an approach that uses humble sincerity and proof of his virtue to inspire action among those who would otherwise be entrenched in their ways.

Like Merry and Pippin, Frodo has no conventional abilities of speech and persuasion, especially when compared to the other speakers at the council. “Frodo [is] neither impressive nor powerful... [and] he has no credentials as a hero whatsoever. No one is suited for this perilous quest,” but least of all a hobbit (Sale 35). The strength of Frodo’s hobbit-style rhetoric here does not lie in his ability to recall important historic events to his audience, nor in measured speech or a knowledge of the current political situation. Instead, the strength of Frodo’s rhetoric lies in humble sincerity that allows him to prove his good character and thereby appeal to the Council. This sincerity is perhaps only available to an outsider such as he is: someone who is separated from their homeland and all they know, who brings an inexperienced but quietly determined perspective to a problem once they become aware a possible way to solve it.

In a broader sense, Frodo’s declaration is also a plea for unity among the Council. This is more easily seen in the film adaptation where he literally brings an end to their vocal disagreements when he stands to speak. When Frodo says that he does not know the way, he means that he cannot do this task alone—and neither could any of those present. His statement is a reminder of the need for cooperation if victory is to be achieved against the Council’s common enemy (Dickerson 45–46, *Rings* 372). Because of the context of his statement, this declaration and plea carries with it a great deal more power than the words themselves signify. Frodo’s statement to the Council of Elrond is self-sacrificial, and proves his character by his determination to do what is right in spite of the personal danger. This is a great part of what convinces the Council to consider Frodo’s new solution to their problem, and it also functions to give us and them insight into Frodo’s moral character, because, as stated above, narratives use “strategically placed descriptions” to illuminate the “motivational structure” of a character (Currie 63).

Prayer and Religious Rhetoric

Although Frodo does not worship Elrond or any others at the Council, his request also follows the rhetorical form of a prayer, as defined by Pernot. Typically, a prayer follows a pattern such as this: “(1) address or invocation; (2) arguments in support of the request; and (3) the request” (240). Frodo’s statement, “I will take the Ring...though I do not know the way,” is a condensed version of this form: because the Council is already underway, Frodo is able to skip the first portion of the prayer, the “address or invocation,” and then move to the purpose of his statement: to signal his willingness to take the Ring (“arguments in support of the request”) and to indirectly ask for aid in the task (the request) by indicating his need. His prayer or appeal is typically hobbit-like, not commanding them to help him or attempting any form of blackmail to obtain their help, but simply expressing the truth of the situation as he sees it: he is willing to attempt this task, but incapable of doing it alone. The phrase “though I do not know the way” is a gentle reminder of the help he will need; the offer, “I will take the Ring to Mordor,” is his justification for receiving such help. He thus fulfils the requirements of the “prayer” rhetorical structure, though the elements are presented in a slightly different order.

Frodo’s use of a “prayer” is religiously significant not just because of the symbolism of his sacrifice but also because of “the religious nature of rhetoric itself, ... [that] concerns the power of words, the effectiveness of speech, and the magic of persuasion” (Pernot 245). By presenting the bare fact of his inexperience and inability as a simple truth, Frodo makes a strong pathetic appeal to the council; Pernot mentions that such an appeal can “highlight the mentality of the speaker and the psychological means used to convey his message.” (240) By presenting a pathos-based appeal in his prayer, Frodo is attempting to appeal to the pity and experience of the

others in the Council, showing that he is willing to do the right thing in spite of his inadequacies. By proving his skill as a rhetor, Frodo takes advantage of an ancient view of holy men that Pernot discusses, where “the orator, as a model figure, is invested with religious powers” (246). This is the beginning of his rhetorical proof of his morality and strength of character, only further enhanced by the savior imagery of his offer.

Frodo’s invented or proved morality functions partially as follows: By taking the Ring upon himself, Frodo is symbolically offering to function as a scapegoat for the Council’s dilemma, “a goat upon whose head are symbolically placed the sins of the people” for the biblical Day of Atonement, the goat that “carried the sin of the people away with it, thereby cleansing Israel for another year” (“Scapegoat,” Merriam-Webster; see also Leviticus 16:21–22). When the scapegoat was given the sins of the people by the presiding priest, it was afterwards “sent into the wilderness” (“Scapegoat,” Merriam-Webster). Similarly, Frodo must take the sins or Ring from the Council and depart with them into the wilds of Middle-earth. The hobbit offers to be the one to take their Ring upon himself, acting at least in part as a Christ-figure, by offering himself up as a sacrifice: “I will take the Ring,” he says, and thereby echoes the Messianically-inspired words of Isaiah, who also saw a need that he was to fill and offered himself up to do it: “Here am I, send me” (Isaiah 6:8; see also 2 Nephi 16:8).

This proof of Frodo’s morality is not only intended to work on the characters who are present at the Council, but also on Tolkien’s own audience, his modern readers, and especially those interested in religion or morality. The unspoken comparison of Frodo’s scapegoat-esque offering of himself to the offering Christ makes of himself for the sins of the world (Titus 2:14; 1 Timothy 2:6) is itself a simple rhetorical move with powerful implications for such an audience—people like Tolkien himself. To someone like Tolkien, with a determinedly Catholic

worldview (*Letters*, 172), this symbolism of the Son of God would have special meaning. Just as there were strict requirements for the purity of a scapegoat sacrifice, and even stricter requirements for the innocence of the Savior of mankind, the Council of Elrond has unspoken requirements for virtue and goodness that Frodo is able to fulfil. By volunteering to act as a scapegoat for the problem of the Ring, Frodo proves to his audience that he is “without blemish” (Leviticus 3:1,6), or in other words, that he is pure enough to be used as a sacrifice. When combined with Frodo’s religious approach to the rhetorical situation, as described above, this symbolism of sacrifice does a great deal towards proving Frodo’s morality and good character.

As with the Ents’ reaction to Merry and Pippin in the novel’s text, there is little need for continued debate at the Council after Frodo has presented his argument. The others present are inspired to aid Frodo when they see his plainly-stated determination to do something that would not have been required of him, putting aside their own differences in an effort to support and follow the Ringbearer. Frodo volunteers, offering himself up willingly even though he had the power to save himself (Luke 23:35) simply by remaining quiet.

The power of such a rhetorical move, intended to signal the rhetor’s morality to the audience and therefore fulfil Quintillian’s requirement for a good rhetor to also possess an “excellent character” (Quintillian 1.I.9) is shown through Frodo’s use of this religious rhetoric as proof of his own righteousness. Frodo’s proof of his own good character works to persuade the audience that his point of view is valid, and Tolkien shows this largely through these religious connections (Currie 62). Tolkien also uses builds on the empathy of the audience through his proof of Frodo’s attitude (in the Burkeian sense); Frodo’s willingness is an important part of his rhetorical plea for aid and unity. If Frodo were forced to take the responsibility for the Ring, he

could potentially be a symbol for a cause, but he would not have the same power to inspire the other Council attendees with his hobbit-like humility and virtue.

Emphasis in Adaptation

Because Frodo was willing to take the Ring, his companions must be similarly free to choose, not merely commanded as they might have been otherwise. This important distinction is preserved in the film adaptation of this scene, further emphasizing the importance of the theme of Frodo's morality.

In the film version, the indecision and division of the Council members is represented more dramatically, with an outright shouting match that begins when Gimli shouts his refusal to let an elf be the Ringbearer. This adaptation takes a different approach to the scene, but it does preserve the core ideas at play for Tolkien: there is no consensus to be found in this diverse assortment of characters and backgrounds, each nearly as entrenched in their ways as the Ents were in their own before the arrival of the hobbits. And here, too, it is the voice of a hobbit that brings in the perspective needed to shake them awake.

Even Boromir, who in the film is the clearest ideological opposite of the characters who the audience is meant to trust (particularly Gandalf and Aragorn), declares his intention to follow "the will of the Council...[and] see it done," even though he earlier believed that it was impossible to take the Ring and destroy it. The "will of the Council" did not exist as a unified concept until Frodo stepped forward to embody the possibility that many of them were afraid to consider, taking a moral stance instead of a purely logical one by the way he presented his simple plea for help. The Council and Frodo's companions in the Fellowship use his perspective to decide to do what they *all* thought was impossible, and the results of Frodo's actions and

rhetorical approach are such that they “shake” the preconceptions and grudges held by the Council at Rivendell.

Frodo as Outsider

In the Council of Elrond chapter, we see a great deal of discourse from many different characters, including Frodo, Sam, and Bilbo. The stark contrast that is offered between the discourse of the hobbit and the discourse of the other speakers makes it clear that it is, in fact, the moral character and simplicity of Frodo’s approach that is so efficacious in this scene. Both his speech and actions work together to show us the value of his perspective as an outsider and outsider in this land, as well as the impact that he can have on the other races who have been locked in disagreement and indecision until Frodo’s offer to take the Ring.

Due to his status as a hobbit, an outsider separated from most of the world’s problems by virtue of his upbringing, Frodo’s concerns at the beginning of this chapter are much more mundane than these world-shifting discussions of the Council. When he awakes and finds Bilbo, Bilbo asks him if he is “ready for the great council.” Frodo replies that while he feels ready for anything, that “most of all [he] should like to go walking today and explore the valley” (233). Overcome with relief that he has survived his arduous journey to Rivendell, Frodo is ready to resume his previous, relatively carefree life. His response to Bilbo in the book shows much the same sentiment as a conversation that Frodo has with Sam in the film adaptation, where Frodo expresses his readiness to return home despite the wondrous things that they have seen. “The Ring will be safe in Rivendell.... I am ready to go home,” he tells Sam, confident that his own little part in the journey is over. As mentioned earlier in the discussion of Tolkien’s proof of hobbit outsider-ness, Frodo continues to remain a distinct voice from the rest of the Council as

he speaks out of turn and interrupts the other speakers. This separation from the “normal” solemnity and seriousness of the Council makes Frodo’s sacrificial offering of himself even more potent. When Frodo accepts this task as a clear outsider, someone whose participation even at this point would be optional if he chose to abandon his decision (*Rings* 268), he shows the Council that even someone who is uninformed and unprepared to contend with great deeds can participate in them bravely, inspiring them to work together for their mutual good.

Especially in the religious aspect of Frodo’s sacrifice, the power of hobbit rhetoric is clear: it is Frodo’s humility that allows him to admit his inadequacy, while at the same time his charity for others drives him to try the task anyway. This honest and determined approach is, ultimately, what brings Elrond to declare that “this is the hour of the Shire-folk, when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the Great” (264).

The consensus that Frodo’s sacrifice brings gives him his nine companions, who together serve as a Fellowship to oppose the Nine Riders of the enemy (268). This unity is symbolic of the larger unity that Frodo has brought to the Council with his humble sacrifice of self and will: the Fellowship will include members of all the “Free Peoples” of Middle-earth (268–269), working together but led and inspired by one who was thought to be the least among them. Indeed, “Who of all the Wise could have foreseen it” (264)? Perhaps none of the Wise, for it took a hobbit’s goodness and humble perspective to remind the other races of Middle-earth that they could work together and consider new solutions—the perspective of a tired, dispossessed outsider from a simple life and into great and terrible events, humble and good, though he was small both physically and emotionally, out of his element, and far from home. The virtuous voice of Frodo overcomes the division embedded in the history of the other races and helps them overcome their deeply-held misconceptions about what was and was not possible.

Conclusion

Tolkien uses the hobbits of his stories to show the impact that the dispossessed can have on other people. Through the narrative, he uses the smallest and seemingly the most inconsequential of the races of Middle Earth as the catalyst for much of the unity and good that comes about in his stories. Tolkien's belief in the efficacy of the hobbits as dispossessed voices is proven not only by the text itself, but also by the ways that the film adaptations of his story both maintain and change aspects of these scenes, proving further the importance of the way Tolkien has his hobbits interact with and eventually save the world. These adaptations help prove that his message was received and understood by his audience.

These examinations have further explored the way that outsider voices can bring unity, which is one of the important themes in Tolkien's writings (Dickerson 46): Unity against evil, and against the biases and misconceptions that characters have about each other and about the world at large. Tolkien's own life had been fraught with dangerous times and disunity (see Sale 27–29). He saw the value that virtuous outsider voices had in debates of this sort, the power to bring in support for new perspectives and unite those who had been only tenuous allies. The power of dispossessed voices in Middle-earth shows the potential that such voices have in real life situations where unity is also threatened. If the perspective is heeded, whether because of the truth of their words or because of the trust they are given based on their moral proofs, the dispossessed will be a powerful force for unity and innovative solutions. The hobbits are Tolkien's "chosen instruments" to present this value to his readers through the rhetoric of their character (*Letters* 413). Understanding how he uses these characters to show this gives us valuable insight into Tolkien's work as literature.

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