

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS, NOT THE SHINY RINGS:  
LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP IN J. R. R. TOLKIEN'S *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

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## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to my late grandmother who shared, moreover encouraged my love for Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings as a child.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I acknowledge four main superheroes when it comes to the writing of my thesis. One major pillar of my success is Dr. Robert T. Tally Jr., without whom I would not have even thought of doing a thesis on Tolkien. I would not have gotten this far without his constant supervision, encouragement and support. Second, I would like to acknowledge my mother for not just providing support during my time of thesis stress, but through all of my difficult times. Despite being nearly two thousand miles away, she manages to make me feel closer and closer to her every day. Third, I would like to acknowledge Michael Sorter for not only being an honest and trustworthy person in my life, but for being supportive as a true friend and loving companion throughout this process. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the Honors College faculty for fully believing in me and encouraging me throughout this thesis journey

## ABSTRACT

While the name J.R.R. Tolkien is known worldwide, many do not know exactly what went into the making of such a name. The goal of this thesis is to reveal to the reader just how much thought Tolkien put into writing the story *The Lord of the Rings* by carefully combining aspects of reality with the imaginative fantasy. One of the many aspects of reality incorporated as a theme is love in its many forms. Just as love is such a widely and universally felt emotion, it is just as equally intricate and complicated to explain. By looking at the definitions of love by the famous theologian and author, C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Four Loves*, it becomes easier to understand and identify the realistic examples of love in Tolkien's books, which are; *apage*, *storge*, *eros* and *philia*. Taking a look at Tolkien's personal life and how these loves apply to him, further proves how the examples in the books demonstrates aspects of reality as well. By the end of this thesis, the reader should have a greater understanding of the role love plays as a powerful tool to overcome barriers of prejudice, external opposition, and corruption within *The Lord of the Rings*, and to understand that it is the little things not the shiny rings that mean the most.

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## I. TOLKIEN AND THE FOUR LOVES

It's the little things. That humble act of kindness and mercy when undeserved, the extra effort put into a date night, home-cooked meal, the random heartwarming hug from a child, the lady bug brought back outside so it can live, the charity shown toward a homeless person, the sandwich shared with a friend, the warm smile and the wave goodbye of a grandmother standing in her doorway after your visit: such small things as these are testaments to one of life's greatest virtues, love. Love is quite simple, but love is also an agent for change, as it leads to embracing new thought and accepting differences. Part of what makes J.R.R. Tolkien's stories so memorable are the careful details he places in them, one of which is the many wonders of love and its effects on humanity. Tolkien's close friend and partner in love for literature, C.S. Lewis, defines and places love in four different categories in his book *The Four Loves*. The creation of the different terms for love creates a platform to analyze both Tolkien's own personal life's testaments to love and examples of love in *The Lord of the Rings*, furthermore it provides reasoning as to why some characters can be changed and brought together by love and why others cannot.

Tolkien critic Marion Zimmer Bradley has written that "Love is the dominant emotion in *The Lord of the Rings*" (Bradley, 109). Love not only takes a humble and selfless form, it also is a powerful catalyst for change. Within *The Lord of The Rings*, Tolkien embeds many forms of love as defined by Lewis, namely *philia*, *storge*, *eros*, and *agape*, between the characters, but unless the characters had humility and openness to be

changed by it, their love had no power to overcome evil much less the cultural and social barriers between them.

Lewis's book reveals four different types of love, each based on the Greek word associated with it. *Philia* means friendship and is developed by a realization that both people are working side by side with similar goals, beliefs, or attitudes about something. In addition, it is the least jealous of the four loves (Lewis, 78). *Eros* is romantic love. Both people are face to face and absorbed in each other rather than side by side (Lewis, 84). Lewis describes eros love as the most mortal, and demands such sacrifices as forfeiting once conscious, "The spirit of Eros supersedes all laws...it seems to sanction all sorts of actions they would not otherwise have dared" (Lewis, 144). *Storge* is the humblest of loves, it sees the little things and loves them. Like the icing on a cake, the waves of the sea or the green of the trees, a dog or family itself. It is the love for the familiar. (Lewis, 41-72). Lastly *agape* is the most estranged from the four loves, because it does not rely on anything natural to fulfill the need for love, it just gives to the unlovable and loves unconditionally. This kind of love, also called charity, pertains often to Christian themes of loving God and being agents of Him who is endless love, assuming that God does not need anything. Therefore, by loving God and receiving His love one should not need anything in return from others if they truly experience that "Gift-love" as Lewis describes it (149-180).

Lewis's definitions can help us to identify and pinpoint examples of the four loves in *The Lord of the Rings*, but how or why loves like those were implemented in the first place can be explained by taking a glimpse at Tolkien's life and his logic on creating fantasy.

In Tolkien's younger years he took up a fascination with mythology, nature, maps and languages. His genuine love for all of these things as well as his loving relationships in his life explain the patterns and emphasis on the four loves in his books, *The Lord of the Rings*. In *Tolkien and the Great War*, John Garth describes Tolkien as someone in love with "the shadowy border where written historical records give way to the time of half-forgotten oral legends" (25). It makes sense then, that Tolkien would create a fine line within his books that closely mirrors the reality of love and connects it to the fairy-tale aspect that leaves the imagination running wild. Furthermore, Tolkien stressed that the concept of recovery, which is the regaining of a clear view or perspective, is an important component of his writings, which helped him to achieve that sweet spot between fantasy and reality. "In this life we may be endangered to boredom or anxiety to be original and may lead to distaste for art, color, etc. ... recovery is to look at green and be startled anew" (*On Fairy-Stories*, 154). By incorporating examples of the power of love in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien is able to achieve a sort of shared reality with the reader; a consubstantiality. After achieving this, the rest of the story no matter how outrageously fantasized is believable and felt deeply, regardless of whether it includes giants, dragons, or elves. Hobbits in particular are some of the best examples of recovery in *The Lord of the Rings*, as they share remarkable capability for love and resistance to evil. This idea leads to the topic of two Hobbits who are humble yet brave of heart, Samwise Gamgee and Frodo Baggins of the Shire.

## II. *PHILIA*: THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

Any discussion of friendship in *The Lord of the Rings* must surely begin with Frodo and Sam. Perhaps one of the most powerful messages that could be conveyed through the story of Frodo and Sam is friendship. Although Frodo and Sam had a bond long before the quest to destroy the Ring, theirs was really more of a master-servant or employer-employee relationship. Frodo was Sam's superior, in rank and wealth around the Shire, yet that did not make Sam any less loyal or faithful. As time went on and they journeyed into Mordor together, their more formal relationship evolved into that of a much closer and deeper bond of equality and respect.

This strength of this bond is demonstrated throughout the novel, but a memorable example can be found early on when the Hobbits are still in the Shire. Frodo warns Sam of the dangers they will likely face, and he offers Sam the chance to withdraw and return home. But Sam vehemently expresses his loyalty, recalling that the elves he had met encouraged him to stay with his friend. "*Don't you leave him!* they said to me. *Leave him!* I said. *I never mean to. I am going with him, if he climbs to the Moon, and if any of those Black Riders try to stop him, they'll have Sam Gamgee to reckon with,* I said" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 97). Whether it was literally carrying Frodo on his back to the fires of Mordor or giving up his portion of food for Frodo, Sam's sacrifices were infused with love and humility for his friend. Servants are tied to what their master commands them to do, and they are typically not informed of the plans of the master. Sam, however, knew what Frodo was going through. Sam shared the burdens, laughter, and sorrow that Frodo did on this journey. Sam graduated from being Frodo's servant to becoming his greatest

companion not merely by accompanying Frodo on his quest, but by making executive decisions in the best interest of Frodo, like forcing himself to swim after Frodo even when he didn't know how in order to be taken along with Frodo for the rest of the journey. As he then put it, "I must go at once. It's the only way. Of course it is answered Sam. But not alone. I'm coming too, or neither of us isn't going. I'll knock holes in all the boats first" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 457). More significantly, after Frodo falls victim to Shelob's poison in the tunnels beneath Cirith Ungol, Sam even decided to take up Frodo's burden, bearing the Ring himself and planning to complete the mission alone. But, notably, and alone among almost all who ever bore the Ring, Sam gave it back when he found Frodo with no hesitation. Frodo and Sam both weathered through a rough journey, and they did it side by side.

It is the little things that mean the most, and while Hobbits may themselves be small, they are not short of heart. Sam's humble sacrifices of love for his friend were what made him a hero of the story, and even gained him status and rank as governor of the Shire once he returned. The barrier that was once between Frodo and Sam dissipated as their friendship grew stronger. Sam and Frodo were not the only examples of an unlikely, loving friendship; in fact, the strangest and unlikeliest of friendships was between an elf and a dwarf. In depicting the love and friendship between Sam and Frodo, Tolkien demonstrates the ways that *philia* can overcome class divisions or social hierarchy among fellows, but in the narrative of Legolas's and Gimli's slowly developed but ultimately strong friendship, Tolkien showed that *philia* may even unite enemies.

Just as the world is filled with various races and cultures of different kinds, so too is Tolkien's Middle-earth, which maintains a very hierarchical system of races and within

racess. As Dimitra Fimi has observed in *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits*, Tolkien's mythology was always hierarchical where the different beings of his invented world were concerned" (141), with Elves standing above both Men and Dwarves, not to mention Orcs or other enemy races. "The Elves' supremacy over the other anthropomorphic Middle-earth beings is taken for granted" (142). Naturally, with different races and cultures, comes different attitudes, beliefs, and values, and it is not surprising that pride in one's own race and prejudice against others with respect to such differences would lead to conflict. Because Tolkien's world was so intricately written with histories and cultures dating back thousands of years, many of the characters experienced certain unfavorable attitudes towards each other, holding grudges that lasted centuries, for example. Legolas, a woodland Elf from Mirkwood, and Gimli, a Dwarf from the Lonely Mountain, were not only of two very different races, but races that have long held grudges against one another, in some cases based on events and perceived insults from long before these individual characters were even born. Whether or not it was Elves or Dwarves that started the offense in question, the hatred between the two was strong. Despite the tension however, both Legolas and Gimli had to work side by side to help in the quest to destroy the Ring, and in time that tension evolved into one of the strongest friendships ever seen in Tolkien's Middle-earth.

The Council of Elrond, one of the most memorable scenes in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, gathers together people from many different races, places, and walks of life. The threat of Sauron and the discovery of the One Ring make this meeting in Rivendell necessary, but all three races—four, counting Hobbits—are represented, for Elrond believes that all are in danger. Soon the discussion turned into heated arguments; one of

which was between Gimli's father and Legolas. It would have lasted longer if not for Gandalf interjecting, stating "If all the grievances that stand between Elves and Dwarves are to be brought up here, we may as well abandon this council" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 286). When it is ultimately decided that the Ring should be destroyed, representatives of each race are selected for the mission, and it is clear neither Legolas nor Gimli trusts the other.

The hostility did not end there. Later, while the companions of the Fellowship of the Ring traveled through woods, they encountered Elves of some of the highest order that would guide them to Lothlórien, where lady Galadriel resided. When the Elf Haldir heard from Legolas that there was a Dwarf in their company he said, "A Dwarf! That is not well. We have not had dealings with the Dwarves since the Dark Days, they are not permitted in our land. I cannot allow him to pass" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 385). After Frodo spoke up on Gimli's behalf, Haldir reluctantly gave in, but only on the conditions Gimli be blindfolded and escorted like a prisoner. Of course, this did not go over well with Gimli and he refused to be singled out. Even after Aragorn made the compromise that they all be blindfolded, Gimli said that he would be satisfied if just Legolas was the only other one blindfolded. Although the air was thick with tension between the two, a tension exacerbated by their racial differences and cultural prejudices, something happened soon thereafter that led Legolas and Gimli to grow strangely close, and not just for an Elf and a Dwarf. Arguably, these two become friends whose *philia* is every bit as strong or stronger than any depicted in *The Lord of the Rings*.

As if in foreshadowing, Lord Celeborn of Lothlórien welcomed Gimli and said; "Long indeed since we saw one of Durin's folk in Caras Galadhon. Today we have

broken our long law. May it be a sign that though the world is now dark better days are at hand, and that friendship shall be renewed between our peoples” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 399). Gimli not only bowed in response but when he looked at Lady Galadriel, he “looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding” (400). Gimli’s admiration for Galadriel helps to break the ice of his prejudice toward Elves, and his later experiences fighting alongside Legolas forge the lasting bond between them.

It was from this point on that something changed in the attitude of Legolas and Gimli, perhaps it was due to the different races uniting against a common Enemy, or the humility that was instilled in Gimli’s heart after the encounter with Galadriel that brought the two into the start of a close friendship. Before parting, everyone was given a gift from Lady Galadriel. When it came time for Gimli to ask for a gift he asked for nothing. This abnormal humility from a Dwarf both shocked and amazed the Elves. Legolas and Gimli once full of pride and hatred towards one another, were full of humility and respect. The two stuck together and grew in friendship as they both bravely fought side by side, sharpened and spurred on by healthy competition. Their friendship even revealed itself in a more playful way—or a more horrible way, depending upon your view of Orcs (see, e.g., Tally)—when they kept count of how many Orcs each of them were killing at the battle of Helm’s Deep. “Twenty-one! said Gimli. Good! said Legolas, But my count is now two dozen” (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 152). They keep up the “counting” game in later battles as well, and arguably this good-natured rivalry among fellow warriors helps to strengthen the friendship growing between them.



For ages Elves and Dwarves held animosity towards one another, but, as was evident with Legolas and Gimli, those prideful offenses can go before a fall with love and humility. In *The Return of the King*, after the War of the Ring had ended, the two left on a journey overseas together. “We have heard tell that Legolas took Gimli Gloin’s son with him because of their great friendship, greater than any that has been between Elf and Dwarf” (Tolkien, *Return* 399). It is hard to imagine what would have become of the fellowship if Gimli and Legolas had not overcome offenses and grown in love for each other. Unfortunately for the enemy, they made one formidable team because they forged an unbreakable friendship.

Despite the opposition Tolkien would have in making allegorical connections to his stories, it is important to note how the stories of Frodo, Sam, Legolas, and Gimli turned out to have an uncanny parallel to some of his own life experiences. The terrors of World War I and the warm company of honest and supportive friends were aspects of Tolkien’s reality that trickled into the inspiration for his work in *The Lord of the Rings*. The concept of *philia* to be found in these friendships within his great novel can also be understood better in the light of Tolkien’s own experience.

In Tolkien’s early years, before becoming an Oxford professor or even graduating college, he was enlisted to fight in the Great War as all other young chaps were expected to do. However, Tolkien at this point had already begun the journey in his mind to Middle-earth. During his time in the War, he was promoted to the rank of battalion signaling officer. He saw the extraordinary courage and resilience of soldiers from every rank, one of which was an army surgeon, Leonard Gamgee. Leonard Gamgee was a “relative of the famous Sampson Gamgee who had invented, and given his name to,

surgical *gamgee-tissue*, mentioned by Tolkien as the source of Sam Gamgee's surname (Garth 206). In the relationship between Frodo and Sam, Frodo was Sam's superior, just like the officers were to the soldiers in battle, but the battleground, fictional or not, was a common ground for people of all rank. Whether a foot soldier or a high-ranking officer, the two were fighting the same battle, brave was brave no matter who it came from. This common goal, a means to work side by side with someone in the same direction, not necessarily just on the surface but on a deeper level, is what Lewis identifies in *The Four Loves* as essential for developing a friendship (84).

Lewis had a key role to play in Tolkien's life. Not only were they both Oxford professors and scholars of English literature, but they became fierce apologists for the value of works of fantasy and mythology. Despite all they had in common, however, they had many differences as well. Although Tolkien was a Catholic, his work had "no overt theology or religion" (Fuller, 29), in his stories, but Lewis had plenty; such as the Lion, Aslan, as the allegorical archetype of Christ in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. As stated earlier, Tolkien preferred the fundamental truths about the human experience to speak louder in his writings and for the reader to draw their own conclusions rather than do that part for them. He was a devout Catholic, that is for certain, but he preferred to live a quiet life of faithfulness; whereas, Lewis, who converted to Christianity by being inspired by Tolkien, was more overt and loud about his faith. While they disagreed on many things, they were each other's most trusted critic and supporter. With other like-minded writers, they formed a group called the Inklings in 1933, consisting of friends that could "discuss various topics and could read aloud their own works in progress" (Markos, 106). Tolkien and Lewis, like Legolas and Gimli, were many times at odds with each other, but were

brought together by their love of writing and literature. They overcame that barrier and helped each other become better writers. It is almost a comical picture to think of Tolkien as Legolas, soft and eloquent, and Lewis as Gimli, loud and orotund.

In Lewis's book *The Four Loves*, he writes about the connection friendship and love have and its importance to humanity. "To the Ancients, Friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of all loves; the crown of life and school of virtue. The modern world, in comparison, ignores it" (Lewis, 73). He later goes on to say that friends are side by side, absorbed in some common interest, and the least jealous of all the loves. Friendship, or *philia* in Greek, is what got the Ring destroyed, the ultimate force of evil, and is what brought very diverse characters together in unity. Friendship, according to Lewis, naturally incorporates acts to be sure and prove itself to be "an ally when alliance becomes necessary; will lend or give when we are in need, nurse us in sickness, stand up for us among our enemies.." (88).

There are many faces of *philia*, as demonstrated in *The Lord of the Rings*: Sam's insistence on being by Frodo's side during the journey, Legolas sticking up for Gimli in the midst of the Riders of Rohan, and more examples between other characters, as well as in Tolkien's life. In a letter to Lewis, Tolkien wrote; "I fear you are attempting too much, for even if you have merely got 'flu' you are prob. tiring yourself into an easy victim. As a mere 'director' I shall hope v. much to persuade you to see off in travel (if poss.)" (see Carpenter, 69).

Lewis once noted that "in a good Friendship each member often feels humility towards the rest" (Lewis, 105). Sam never once thought of himself, and although he considered himself lower than Frodo at first, he quickly became the hero for his friend.

Legolas and Gimli also had humility towards one another after accepting they were both equally as invested in the journey to destroy the ring, they got passed their differences and actually grew from them as their love for each other grew. Tolkien too had similar experiences with Lewis in overcoming differences. In addition, Tolkien fought in World War I and witnessed firsthand how a battlefield begets brotherhood. On the topic of unity, when marriage comes into the equation, how much is shared and how much is lost is a matter for two when joined together, however, when joining a man and an elf much more is at stake.

### III. *EROS*: ROMANTIC LOVE

Although *The Lord of the Rings* has overt examples of friendship, its romantic aspects are less apparent. However, the events depicted in *The Lord of the Rings* represent just an excerpt of the long history of Middle-Earth. Tolkien created many other stories like the history of the Valar and elves in the *Silmarillion*, and the legendary love story between a man and an elf called *Beren and Luthien*. The love story of Beren and Luthien in particular holds some weight as it has historic ties to Aragorn and Arwen, as well as importance to Tolkien's personal romantic life. Although examples of romantic love are probably not as prominent as those of friendship in *The Lord of the Rings*, there are accounts of the power of this love and its triumph in the face of tremendous difficulty and opposition. And while there are some nice love stories involving characters within races, such as Sam's affection for Rosie Cotton or Faramir's falling love with Eowyn, Tolkien's greatest love stories involve the romance between a Man and an Elf.

Arwen, daughter of Elrond of Rivendell, fell in love with the rightful Heir of Isildur, Aragorn (and vice-versa). However, Arwen was immortal and Aragorn mortal. According to Tolkien, Elves cannot die a "natural death," so the ones who do die are slain in battle or somehow overcome with grief and despair. And even then, their spirits endure (in the Halls of Mandos) for as long as the world does, since they are "natural" beings. If Aragorn dies before Arwen, which by nature he would, she could "fade" soon after because of grief, but her spirit would never follow his into whatever afterlife is available to mortal men. In addition, if Arwen chose to marry Aragorn, she would be sacrificing the chance to sail to the land of Valinor, where Elves are permitted to rest after their time in

Middle-earth. This is a place her father had hoped she would join him in. “Tolkien indicates that true love is not without peril or loss, but it is worth all the sacrifice nonetheless” (Porter, 125). In a letter to Milton Walden, Tolkien describes the love story between Arwen and Aragorn as the “highest love-story” (see Carpenter, 178). Although not frequently talked about in the books, Arwen’s love was so true, that without it, the fate of Middle-earth would have been much different, thus making her a heroine.

Although not brought up much as a classic hero in the books, Arwen acted as the agent of motivation for Aragorn on his quest, giving him the Evenstar jeweled necklace that symbolizes her life force. Despite Aragorn’s bravery, which could at times be confused with an indifference to death, Arwen invigorates him to fight for love. In a meeting in the glades of Lorien, younger Aragorn and Arwen pledged themselves to each other. Arwen said that despite the Shadow of Darkness being so great, her heart rejoiced in Aragorn for she saw his valor would destroy it, Aragorn in response said, “Alas! I cannot foresee it, and how it may come to pass is hidden from me. Yet with your hope I will hope” (Tolkien, *Return* 375). Arwen may not have gone with the fellowship on the quest to destroy the Ring, her love was a constant inspiration and motivation for Aragorn, giving him strength and hope. Before this union could happen, Arwen’s father made conditions that Aragorn become king before receiving his blessing for their marriage, therefore highlighting the class difference that could be only mended by becoming king. This classic plot was almost a replica of *Beren and Luthien*, marking extreme resemblance in situation and outcome.

Luthien was actually a distant relative of Arwen (and Aragorn), and in her past she fell in love with the human Beren (Porter, 122-125 and 137). To prove his worthiness

to her father, who was a high born elf of the First Age, Beren had to attempt a mission to steal a Silmaril, one of the three legendary jewels, from the evil Morgoth's crown. This mission was practically suicidal and eventually led to his death, but Luthien gave up her immortality to Beren to revive him. Luthien in addition was not idly standing by like a damsel in distress, wailing and sobbing for Beren. She broke out of the prison her father put her in and literally was the savior for Beren on his quest by accompanying him and using her knowledge and power. Both Luthien and Arwen, had to face opposition from their fathers like the classic Romeo and Juliet tragedy. The sacrifices Luthien and Arwen made to be with the ones they love display the power of romantic love in their respective adventure stories.

The force of love between Beren and Luthien and Aragorn and Arwen was so strong even family could not ultimately stop it. Both Luthien and Arwen sacrificed their immortality to be with the ones they loved. Arwen happily married Aragorn as he fulfilled his terms with Elrond and became king, and Luthien was able to revive Beren by sacrificing her life force of immortality. In these examples, the force that interfered with their love was not internal, but external. The fathers in these stories represent the barrier, both Elrond and Luthien's father, Thingol, saw that their daughters outclassed the men socially and so took action to prevent the union. Also, Arwen and Luthien may not have been overtly apparent as the "heroes" in the stories, but obviously had their heroic parts to play that if not done would have changed the outcome and fate of everything. Eros, or romantic love, is a powerful force that not only can overcome differences, but is painted as no less than heroic in *The Lord of the Rings* as well as in Tolkien's life.

Inscribed on Tolkien's tombstone and his wife Edith's tombstone are the names Beren and Luthien. In a letter to his son, Christopher, Tolkien writes how he never called Edith Luthien, but how she was always his Luthien (duPlessis, 25). The reason Beren and Luthien are important to incorporate as a backstory is because it was the first love story Tolkien wrote about in the *Silmarillion*; thus influencing the later creation of his story of Aragorn and Arwen in *The Lord of the Rings*. In addition it paralleled his own love story with his wife Edith.

Tolkien met Edith when he was just sixteen and she was nineteen; like Arwen, who was many years older than Aragorn, Edith was older and perhaps wiser in her way. Just like Beren encountered Luthien dancing in the woods, and Aragorn met Arwen strolling through the woods, so too did Tolkien meet with Edith in a woodland grove (duPlessis, 25). This perhaps inspired those scenarios in his books; a sort of ethereal combination of forest enchantment and romantic love. Although their love grew increasingly over the years, it was quickly dissipated by a disapproving father figure. Tolkien's guardian, Father Francis of the Catholic church, was his caretaker after his mother died. Francis opposed to his relationship with Edith not only because she was a distraction to Tolkien and his studies, but was of protestant faith. Similarly, Arwen's father and Luthien's father opposed their love with Aragorn and Beren. In the end, Tolkien let Edith go for the sake of his god-father's wishes; it was hard and Tolkien did not seek another woman. In fact, years later he pursued Edith and wrote to her saying he longed for her and her alone. She was engaged at the time but Edith in a heartbeat left her fiancé to be with Tolkien (Duriez, 32-37). As Lewis indicates in *The Four Loves*, this kind of love is one powerful force to be reckoned with.



Lewis defines romantic love, or *eros*, as two people seeing each other face to face as opposed to being absorbed in a common interest side by side, which is what friendship is. Being absorbed in each other is a main feature of *eros*. Lewis describes that the first stage of being in love comes when the thoughts of that person will not leave, not a sexual desire, as Lewis says “A man in this state really hasn’t the leisure to think of sex. He is too busy thinking of a person. The fact that she is a woman is far less important than the fact that she is herself” (Lewis, 119). This is a similar diagnosis when Beren comes across Luthien in the woods or when Aragorn sees Arwen for the first time and mistakes her for the great and beautiful Luthien (Tolkien, *Return* 371). Lewis makes the clear distinction between mere sexual desire and *eros*. He says “sexual desire, without Eros, wants *it*, the *thing in itself*, Eros wants the Beloved” (121).

Not only does *eros* consist of thoughts of the other for simply being the person they are, but the romantic lover chooses to be with that person no matter the sacrifice. “Better to be miserable with her than happy without her,” as Lewis puts it (137). Sacrifices know no limits when it comes to true *eros* love, and any opposition just seems to add fuel to it. According to Lewis, “people in love cannot be moved by kindness, and opposition makes them feel like martyrs” (141). In both Arwen’s and Luthien’s cases, defying family wishes and giving up immortal life was what made them martyrs for their love. *Eros* not only rises above any opposition, but once fully conceived it is not influenced or constrained by factors that make the lovers different from one another, so matters of race, social status, age, religion, and the like are obstacles easily overcome by romantic love, as so many myths, legends, and stories reveal. *Eros* transcends all logical

or rational thought, in that sometimes the unlikeliest of people are love-matches, like an Elf and a Human, or a Protestant and a Catholic in Tolkien's case.

Edith was a pillar of inspiration for Tolkien's original Beren and Luthien story, and by inspiring this story, Tolkien was able to recreate it in *The Lord of the Rings* with Arwen and Aragorn. This love, *eros*, that Lewis explains as such a relentless force, may not have been stressed too much in *The Lord of the Rings*, but the romantic love was the silent force that worked in and through Aragorn to complete his quest, and through Tolkien to complete his.

#### IV. *AGAPE* AND *STORGE*: CHARITY AND CARE

While it is easy to identify the signs of romance and signs of friendship, there is another form of love that even those who are undeserving can receive it and be changed by it. This is a form of *agape*, the love associated with charity. Frodo and Sam grew closer in friendship as a result of mutual acts of love, however the love and pity Frodo exhibits towards Gollum was largely one-sided. What merits this unconditional love? And does it actually have the power to change someone who is “too far gone”? As the story will tell, Gollum starts to experience a sort of transformation as a result of Frodo’s stern but compassionate love, revealing that even in the most corrupt minds, there is a sliver of hope for love to find a way.

Frodo was not a natural conduit of this love to Gollum at first. Upon hearing of the pathetic creature’s existence, he tells Gandalf that it was a pity Bilbo did not kill him off when he had the chance. Frodo said; “He deserves death,” to which Gandalf replies,

“Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it.” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 65)

This passage indicates that at the onset Frodo is repulsed and judges Gollum before even meeting him. But Gollum’s backstory and experience render him a figure of pity for

Frodo in the end, and one might even argue that, were it not for Gollum, the quest to destroy the Ring would have certainly failed.

In trying to make Frodo understand how Bilbo could pity such a monstrous creature, Gandalf explains how Gollum was once named Smeagol, and he was of a Hobbit-like race, “akin to the fathers of the fathers of the Stoors” (*Fellowship*, 57), who were Hobbits that lived along rivers, loved boating, and knew how to swim. Gollum’s encounter with the Ring, and especially the manner by which he came to acquire it (i.e., by murdering his friend), led his weak character to be crushed and overcome by its power. He killed his friend for it and went on to call it his “precious” and his “love.” Gollum was consumed by both love and hate for the Ring, causing eternal torment as it drew closer to consuming him. Gollum was driven away from his own people, he no longer lived in the light of day, and he eventually rummaged deep in the heart of mountain caves, eating cold, raw fish, and slowly morphing into a slimy, crawling creature as a result of the Ring. That is, until the day Bilbo Baggins stumbled upon it in the caverns beneath the Misty Mountains, defeated Gollum in the riddle game, and escaped with it. Now left without his “precious,” Gollum wandered painfully out in the open world to find it again.

When Gollum encountered Sam and Frodo on their journey to Mordor, he attempted to attack and take the Ring, but he was unsuccessful. Sam wanted to kill him right then and there, but something moved in Frodo to have pity on him. Perhaps it was a result of the previous conversation with Gandalf, who had warned him, “be not too eager to deal out death in the name of justice, fearing for your own safety. Even the wise cannot see all ends” (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 246). Frodo was not blinded by the pity however; he

maintained a stern and powerful authority over Gollum that made him submissive and respectful to Frodo. In addition, Frodo would call Gollum Smeagol in order to draw out that side of him after Gollum tried to betray them and escape. The name “Gollum” symbolized the darkness in him that consumed his original identity as the Hobbit-like individual named Smeagol. Frodo made Smeagol promise to serve him, but Smeagol was swearing on the Ring which was problematic since the Ring was naturally deceptive and evil to its core. Frodo corrected him sternly saying; “No! Not on it, said Frodo, looking down at him with stern pity. All you wish is to see it and touch it, if you can, though you know it would drive you mad. Not on it. Swear by it, if you will. For you know where it is. Yes you know, Smeagol. It is before you” (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 249). Right after this dialogue, it suddenly seemed to Sam that Frodo had grown and Gollum had shrunk. It was at this stage that Smeagol began to experience a change in behavior as a result of Frodo’s kindness and sternness.

The journey into Mordor was long and arduous, but Smeagol continued to guide them safely, proving that both Sam and Frodo could sleep without one eye open on him. The love and pity Frodo first bestowed on Gollum, planted a seed of change in his dark and slimy heart. Tolkien critic Marion Zimmer Bradley described how Gandalf, when referring to Bilbo’s encounter with Gollum, had said that

Even Gollum was not wholly ruined. ... There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark. ... It was actually pleasant, I think, to hear a kindly voice again, bringing up memories of wind, and trees, and sun on the grass, and such forgotten things. But that of

course would only make the evil part of him angrier in the end-unless it could be conquered. Unless it could be cured. (Bradley, 119)

Gandalf points out too that Gollum loved and hated the Ring, much as he loved and hated himself, and in this fearful ambivalence, Gollum-like a terrible shadow of Frodo himself-comes to have dual love and hate for Frodo as well (see Bradley, 119). Gollum did experience a change throughout the journey with Sam and Frodo, at one point evident when Frodo and Sam were asleep and he “touches Frodo humbly, fleetingly, almost the touch was a caress,” but the change was at war with the evil still in his mind (Bradley, 120).

In the end, Gollum could not be saved. He plunged at Frodo to try and take the Ring when they were at the fires of Mount Doom; the only place the Ring could be destroyed. When that moment came for Frodo to throw the Ring into the fire, he could not bring himself to do it. He ultimately succumbed to its evil power, and the hope of the mission would have been lost if not for Gollum jumping for the Ring, biting it off his finger, and falling into the fire with it. Gollum knowingly destroyed his ‘precious’ because even though it was something he both loved and hated, he both loved and hated Frodo too. To put an end to his misery and Frodo’s, he takes the Ring to its destruction. Maybe the love Frodo exhibited towards Smeagol was not effective enough to make a long lasting effect, but it changed just enough to overcome the dark Ring and destroy it once and for all.

Lewis describes *philia*, *eros*, and *storge* as the natural loves or “Need-loves”, but *agape* is different and unnatural in that there is no expectation in return, no hunger for

fulfillment or someone to satisfy a need (see Lewis 149-180). Gift-loves (are natural images of Himself-God) and need-loves are opposite, but not like evil is to good. “Divine gift-love enables to love what is not naturally lovable; lepers, criminals, enemies, morons, the sulky, the superior, and the sneering” (Lewis, 164). Naturally gift-love is aimed at natural loves like *eros* and *philia*. Gift-love comes by Grace, and as such it should be called charity (165). Yet being loud about it is the wrong turn Christians often make, for true charity is something given with no expectation or reward or acclaim.

Tolkien never wanted his stories to be an allegory of his life; indeed, one of his most lived-by values was letting things speak for themselves. David Mosley said in his article about Tolkien’s simple spirit that although Tolkien himself was a devout Catholic, he chose to lead a quiet life of faithfulness (45-46). Inspired by Tolkien’s example, Mosley writes: “I have believed that we must get much smaller, we must pay just a little less attention to the global stage, a little less to the national, and much more to the city, the family, the self. But not in some selfish or self-centered way, but rather in that quiet life of faithfulness” (Mosely, 45). Tolkien’s own mother, Mabel Tolkien, was extremely loyal to the Catholic faith once his father died (Carpenter, 32). The Christian values taught to him since he was a young boy would naturally lead him to understand the principles of charity and ultimately be capable of implementing examples of *agape* love within *The Lord of the Rings*. When his mother passed away, Father Francis of the Catholic church took Tolkien and his brother under his wing, which further encouraged a devotion to the faith (Duriez, 32). While Father Francis was a religious figure in Tolkien’s life, he was also a loving father figure as well, as was Gandalf to the Hobbits of the Shire.

In a famous saying, Lord Acton asserted that “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (504), and Tolkien seems to take this notion to heart in *The Lord of the Rings*. There are many powerful wizards in Tolkien’s Middle-earth, but what sets some apart from others is the ability to withstand the corruption of power. Two wizards in particular from *The Lord of the Rings*, demonstrate this narrative quite plainly, Gandalf and Saruman. Although they are of the same “order,” these two characters contrast each other as clearly as darkness to light. What makes them so different is simple: love.

Wizards are stewards of wisdom, preserving and maintaining profound and copious amounts of knowledge. With that profound knowledge, however, is the temptation for abuse and disdain. Saruman, who served as the head of the White Council, a group of powerful and wise being gathered to fight Sauron, succumbed to the temptations of power. Frodo asks, “Who is he? ... I have never heard of him before,” and Gandalf answers, “Maybe not. ... Hobbits are, or were, no concern of his. Yet he is great among the Wise. He is the chief of my order and the head of the Council. His knowledge is deep, but his pride has grown with it, and he takes ill any meddling” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 52). Gandalf here was referring to Saruman, whom he already had concerns and suspicions about at this point. Saruman had long concerned himself with the lore of Rings of Power and he tried to discover the secret to their forging; even more so he had an interest in the dark lord Sauron and his creation of the one Ring to rule them all. Gandalf, on the other hand, had very different amusements and intrigues, something more along the lines of halflings not rings.



“Among the Wise I am the only one that goes in for the hobbit-lore: an obscure branch of knowledge, but full of surprises. Soft as butter they can be, and yet sometimes as tough as old tree-roots” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 53). Gandalf frequently visited the Shire, and became a sort of legend in the area. He would also often bring fireworks for all the Hobbits to enjoy. To many of them, especially Frodo and Bilbo, Gandalf was a sort of paternal figure. He kept an eye on the Shire and made efforts to protect it. This fatherly love, and love for the simple, little things, is what made Gandalf more resistant to the temptations of power. Gandalf had enough faith in the Hobbits and the strength of their peculiar humility, that he gave them the chance to embark on the quest to destroy the Ring. For a while it seemed Saruman had the upper hand in his plot to ally with the forces of evil, but it was Hobbits that destroyed him in the end. Hobbits that symbolized the power of little things, and the importance of admiring the simple things, like love, and not striving for power or “shiny rings.”

If Gandalf had not seen or cared to invest in one of the most overlooked inhabitants of Middle-earth, the fate of their world would have been in the hands of evil. Hobbits were underestimated, but because Gandalf loved them and believed in them, it paved a way for them to become the heroes of the story. Saruman may have had some of the most profound wisdom, knowledge and power, thus making one formidable foe, but he did not have the humbling love that allows for clear sight of the true nature of things. In contrast, Sam was able to see clearly even when he bore the Ring of power. “Sam, whose lower-class manners sometimes make him seem like a clod, studies and concentrates all of the time. He is the only member of the Fellowship who correctly guesses Frodo’s plan to venture off alone” (Kraus, 144). Furthermore, Sam when visiting

Galadriel in the forest of Lorien, looked into Galadriel's Mirror, which revealed mysterious images from the past or future, varying depending on who looked into it. For Sam, it depicted the horrifying destruction of the Shire, with trees felled, factories belching black smoke, and his father's home destroyed (see *Fellowship*, 407). Sam's love of his simple homeland and his worries of its welfare outweigh any desire for power. This explains his ability to give the Ring back to Frodo with almost no hesitation in the Tower of Cirith Ungol later. As Gandalf has understood better than any, it seems, Hobbits on the whole were like this, maybe some more than others, but that is why overall they became the perfect heroes for this quest. But in that same scene of the Mirror, Galadriel herself resists the temptation to take the One Ring, even as she admits "my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer" (*Fellowship*, 410). Thus she "passed the test," and avoided the corruption that would inevitably come with absolute power. Indeed, Sam even says that he wished she would take it so that she could set things right back in the Shire, noting "You'd make some folk pay for their dirty work." Galadriel responds, ominously and knowingly, "I would. . . . That is how it would begin. But it would not stop with that, alas!" (*Fellowship*, 411).

In *The Four Loves*, Lewis describes *storge*, which indicates caring or appreciative love, as mainly the love parents exhibit towards their children, but it also more generally includes a "warm comfortableness" that "takes on all sorts of objects" (Lewis, 42). It is the least discriminating of the four loves and the most humble (Lewis, 42 and 44). Dogs and cats can exhibit this towards each other in a home that both are raised together, animals feel this towards humans and vice versa, and humans may feel this way about nature or objects too, even though the love is not reciprocal. Put simply, it is the love of

the familiar. Tolkien's personal life can attest to many *storge* examples, just as *The Lord of the Rings* does. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien includes numerous examples of *storge*, from the general attitude of most Hobbits to the nature-loving protectors of the forests, the Ents or even Tom Bombadil, to the Elves themselves, especially Galadriel, who longs to preserve and care for things under her watch. But I think the wizards, Gandalf above all, represent the caring, almost parental love that is *storge*. Gandalf is there to protect, but also to nurture, and he become a loving caretaker of not only Frodo and the other Hobbits, but of Middle-earth itself. In a sense, then, Gandalf is like a Hobbit with Power, one who cannot be easily corrupted because he only used his power to protect others.

Tolkien himself represents another example of this, in his attitudes toward nature and culture in England. In many ways, Tolkien found himself to mirror a Hobbit; in lifestyle and behavior, quoting "I am in fact a hobbit" (Tolkien, *The Letters* 303). Hobbits are simple folk; they even resemble closeness to earth and nature by having homes in the ground, "a natural symbol of the depth of their earthiness" (Kreeft, 85). When Tolkien as just a young boy he took to drawing trees and landscapes. In addition, his mother taught him all about botany and it was said Tolkien was inseparable from trees, climbing them, sitting by them and even talking to them (Carpenter 30). When Tolkien was older, he would go on long walks with the Inklings group that would later gain him inspiration for his Middle-earth maps (Kreeft, 84). Not only did Tolkien exhibit love for nature and the little things, but he also was a very loving husband and father.

Tolkien and Edith had four children (three sons and a daughter), to whom Tolkien remained close throughout his lifetime. When they were younger, Tolkien would read to

them many stories, one of which started with the famous phrase, “in a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.” That line, as we now know, was the opening of what would become an entire fantasy world, with its ever expanding histories, languages, and cultures.

Although Tolkien had conceived some of that world even before he had children, as seen in the earliest visions of *The Silmarillion*, it is hard to imagine the Middle-earth so many fans have come to know and love, with Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam, along with Gandalf, Elrond, Aragorn, Arwen, and the rest, would have come into our own world without the *storge* or parental love Tolkien had for his family, his country, and for storytelling. This simple love, combined with the powerful forms of *philia*, *eros*, and *agape*, has made possible *The Lord of the Rings* as we know it. And as “shiny” as its rings are, the “little things” are what makes the epic novel so great.

## V. CONCLUSION

It's the little things, not the shiny rings that have the potential for invoking the most meaningful changes in life. Looking back, without the tireless effort Tolkien put into every last little detail in his stories, children and adults alike would not to this day still be enjoying his works. Although considered fantasy stories, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* teaches valuable lessons about life and the importance of love. Fantasy, or more generally the imagination, is "the power of giving ideal creations the inner consistency of reality', it is an art, and by doing so adds so much recovered 'color' to life, the color of love in its many forms," as Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson observe (Flieger and Anderson, in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories* 110-111). Love in its many forms is ultimately the main theme of *The Lord of the Rings*, as friendship, romance, care, and charity work together to defeat hopelessness and to aid in recovery. This love is also what makes Tolkien's writings so beloved by so many today.

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