

“beyond the confines of the world”

An Analysis of Mortal and Immortal Nature  
in the World of J.R.R. Tolkien

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Allison Fischbach

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Advisor: Dr. Corey Olsen

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Honor Code Statement:

I pledge my word of honor that I have abided by the Washington College Honor Code while completing this assignment.

Allison Fischbach

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## Introduction

When we take that first tentative step into the works of J.R.R. Tolkien we are left with vast and overarching impressions; the darkness of the east and the inhospitable Mordor, the comfort of the Shire and the homeliness of a hobbit-hole, and the mystery and beauty of immortals.

In order to understand Tolkien's world we must understand his unique definitions of immortality and mortality. Both words elicit certain ideas given the larger context of philosophy and literature, but there are subtle distinctions that need to be recognized in Tolkien's application. Immortality in Tolkien's world is not existence without a bodily or spiritual end, nor is it eternity in the sense of existence outside of time. Elves are born and they die, but their immortality is confined to the earth on a spiritual level.<sup>1</sup> Tolkien himself defines it as "longevity co-extensive with the life of Arda" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 285). While elvish bodies do not age or fall ill they can be killed by violent action or the burden of grief. But even in these instances their spirit is not annihilated or removed from the world. Elvish spirits stay within what is commonly called "the Circles of the World." This immortality is not contingent on the bodily form, but on the spirit, whose existence is not indefinite, but connected to the existence of the very world.

Men are a race subject to death from wounds, weariness, disease and age. Death from bodily decrepitude is especially intriguing, and is singular to Men among the Children of Ilúvatar as evidence of their limited lifespan. Where their spirits go after bodily death is unknown, but within *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien continues to state and insinuate that,

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien makes a distinction between the elvish idea of 'spirit' and 'body,' calling them *fëa* and *hröa* respectively. For the purposes of my analysis I will use the more familiar terms, but it should be noted there is a slight differentiation of definition in Tolkien's world (*Morgoth's Ring* 209).

unlike the elves, when Men die their spirits are not confined to the world Arda. Spiritual escape from the world defines Tolkien's mortality.

These simultaneously familiar and alien concepts operate in a world that is itself familiar and alien, prompting an analysis of what it means to write about concepts as well known as mortality and immortality in a setting where their natures are contrasted in such close proximity. Tolkien uses this contrast to display the relation between the two divergent fates. The doom of Men, like the doom of the immortals, is not a result of their nature, but perhaps the very definition of it. Their reaction to and acceptance of nature is a continued point of contention from the developmental tales of the *Silmarillion* to his most famous *Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien says of his story *The Lord of the Rings*:

“The real theme for me is something much more permanent and difficult: Death and Immortality: the mystery of the love of the world in the hearts of a race ‘doomed’ to leave and seemingly lose it; the anguish in the hearts of a race ‘doomed’ not to leave it until the whole evil-arousing story is complete” (*Letters* 246).

His works reach beyond simple notions of life and death; they encompass the nature of the mortality and present the various choices and actions of individuals based on their fate. The unique love and anguish of each race is distinctive and influences how actions are perceived in Tolkien's world as either morally correct or morally incorrect.

If the nature of death and immortality as defined by Tolkien is without choice his races are subject to their doom at the will of Ilúvatar, their creator. In this world of benevolent creation can either fate be established as better than the other? If not, then what is the meaning of rare episodes of transcendence in which immortals are able to achieve mortality? Why does the race granted with indefinite worldly existence feel the need at times to accept division from them

world they love? Tolkien makes these examples of transcendence both rare and exceptional, a commentary on the relation of both natures. There are merits to the acceptance of mortality in Tolkien's world that he uses immortals to highlight, and in turn perhaps bring us to view our own world in a new light.

## Chapter One

### The Creation of Fate

The key to understanding Tolkien's construction of immortality is to recognize that Elves can experience death. Tolkien's use of the term immortal and his structuring of elvish natures are defined so that both death and immortality function in the same sphere. In his own definition Tolkien states that Elves retain life in one form or another as long as Arda is in existence, eventually giving up their physical forms and retiring their spirit to the Halls of Mandos in Valinor. This departure from Middle-earth is often called 'death,' but it is elvish death, and the spirit is still within the world. Explained in *Morgoth's Ring*, the tenth volume of Tolkien's *Legendarium*, distinction lies in the idea that "though the [spirit] cannot be broken or disintegrated by any violence from without, the [body] can be hurt and may be utterly destroyed" (218). The elvish body is finite, but the spirit is not. Yet the spirit's fate is known to the Elves who recognize they are granted rest in Valinor, and that their spirit stays in Arda even without a corresponding physical form.

For some, like critic Grant Sterling, the immortality of the Elves is the standard rather than the anomaly. Between the Valar, the Maiar, and the Elves "the difference...large though it seems, is really one of magnitude and not kind," for like the Elder Race of Ilúvatar,<sup>2</sup> the higher powers of Valar and Maiar are also confined to Arda until the end of the world (Sterling 16). As told to them by Ilúvatar "their power should thenceforward be contained and bounded in the World" in a manner very like that of the Elves (*The Silmarillion* 20). The spirits of these higher entities, like the spirits of the Elves, are limited. It is Men rather than Elves that break from the standard of existence in Tolkien's world.

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<sup>2</sup> A term for the Elves, who are the first race Ilúvatar creates in Arda.

Life in Arda ends for mortals with the destruction of the physical form. Tolkien recognizes Men as possessing a spirit as the Elves do, but that spirit's fate is not confined to the world, and in the end its doom is speculative. Tolkien presents his history of Middle-earth from *The Silmarillion's* elvish viewpoint,<sup>3</sup> even before the introduction of Men, so that when Men do appear Elves do not at first comprehend the idea of mortality. They have never before been exposed to a death in which age is a factor, and they lack the background to understand that Men's spirits leave Middle-earth, for as Sterling says, this has never happened before in Arda. The mortal "short lifespan having no relation to the life of Arda," means that Men's spiritual existence is not partnered with the existence of the world (*Letters* 285). We find this to be a normal death, but in Tolkien's world mortality is the far more mystical and unknown existence, an unexpected and unparalleled fate that Tolkien creates perhaps as the reverse of our own world.

#### The 'Afterlife'

In the Halls of Mandos in Valinor elvish spirits are given reprieve from the wear of physical existence. Tolkien explains these halls as a place where the Elves are "corrected, instructed, strengthened, or comforted," (*Morgoth* 222). The Halls operate as sort of afterlife where healing from the burden of Middle-earth occurs. While Tolkien's Elves are still alive they are unable to affect events in Middle-earth. Instead their focus is inward in a type of purgatory where they will spend an undetermined amount of time ruminating on the memory of their physical existence (*Silmarillion* 88). The time spent in Mandos is not entirely restful or restorative given the spiritual drain of that memory, which proves to be one of the most sorrowful themes surrounding the Elves and their life in Arda. The Elves' time in Middle-earth

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<sup>3</sup> In Tolkien's world it is from the experiences and legends of the elves that the tales of *The Silmarillion* are compiled.

exposes them to a realm subject to change from malicious forces, while they themselves live through these changes of ruination and loss. The discrepancy between what is ideal and its eventual demise brings sorrow to the immortal race that not even Mandos can heal at times.

It is Morgoth's occupation of Middle-earth that makes it an imperfect world and a dangerous place for the Quendi.<sup>4</sup> The peace of Arda is physically "marred" by uncertainty, stemming from the negative influences of the rebellious Valar. Morgoth sends "shadows and evil spirits to spy upon [the Elves] and waylay them" in order to spread distrust shadow, a fear of darkness (49). It is the Valar's bond of common nature and love for the Elves that causes them to summon the race to Valinor. The Blessed Realm acts as a haven, apart from the marred Middle-earth and it is a place established early in the collection as "home," where the Elves' nature as immortal is not in conflict with the mortality of the land, and where they can live without lament for the ages that are gone.

The Valar debate the Summons despite its evident merits, saying above all that it would deprive Middle-earth of elvish presence, but Tolkien treats the motion against Summons as a negative impulse. He alludes to this improper choice not only in the final published version of *The Silmarillion*, but also in earlier printed versions of the narrative. The narrator expressly says "...those who hold that the Valar erred, thinking rather of the bliss of Valinor than of the Earth, and seeking to wrest the will of Ilúvatar to their own pleasure, speak with the tongues [read tongue] of Melkor,"<sup>5</sup> (*Morgoth* 162). Even in the early drafts of his work Tolkien makes it known that the Summons to Valinor is not issued from the Valar's selfish desire to keep the Quendi. It is good for the Elves to be called because it is for the benefit of both races; the Elves

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<sup>4</sup> Tolkien's term for the elvish race as a whole.

<sup>5</sup> Melkor is the title for the Valar later called Morgoth.

who are exposed to Valinor's power and Men who will be exposed to the heightened power of the Elves.

Tolkien discourages the thought that the Summons is an act of self-glorification on the part of the Valar.<sup>6</sup> Manwë's ultimate decision to issue the Summons comes not from him but "from the council of Ilúvatar in [his] heart" (*Silmarillion* 50). It is not the Valar's will alone, but that of Ilúvatar that guides them, and this decision is good in the scheme of Tolkien's world. In Valinor the elder race is able to experience the light and wisdom that the Valar maintain, and from this their stature is raised. They are then able, once returning to Middle-earth, to perform their glorifying arts to peaks unimagined before their exposure to the knowledge of Valinor.<sup>7</sup>

The distinction between good and bad moral action is an important part of the Valar's Summons. The Valar's deed is good not simply because it serves to rescue the Quendi, but because it also ultimately benefits the younger race of Men, and even Arda itself. This highlights the basic distinction between good and bad: focus on the community or focus on the self.

In early revisions of the *Ainulindalë* Tolkien writes that the Quendi are to remain within the world "until the end of days, and their loves of the earth and all the world is more single and more poignant, therefore, and as the years lengthen ever more sorrowful. Memory is [their] burden," (*Morgoth* 36-37). The immortality of the Elves is a manifestation of their connection to Arda. Their spirit is inextricable from the Circles of the World and in that connection is the intimate relationship between Elves and the earth, which is the motivation behind their ability to enhance it. The accumulation of memory that results from an undefined lifetime and an intrinsic fellowship with an ever-changing world creates a gap between what was perhaps beautiful or

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<sup>6</sup> Self-glorification is itself a reoccurring problem for the Quendi who later seek to own artifacts that satisfy their desires rather than for a universal good.

<sup>7</sup>The building of Gondolin, Lothlórien, and Rivendell are a few exemplary feats that result in part from this knowledge.

ideal in the past, and what is now gone or changed. A sense of loss and desire for the past results and memory becomes painful when we realize that past will never be manifest again. While the accumulated memory of the Elves is good for the history of Middle-earth and a tool for the younger race, it is also the seed of elvish sorrow that increases as the ages progress.

The negative aspects of the Elves' continued existence is heightened by Men's own gift of mortality. In contrast to the long memory of the elves, Tolkien openly establishes that the younger race is "released from the Circles of the World," (*Letters* 286). Both Men and Elves call this release the Gift of Death, treating mortality in a wholly positive light. Unlike the enduring existence of the Elves who must continue to live with their memories, Men are able to escape from the burden of memory in a way no long-lived elf can mirror.

Tolkien calls the death of Men in addition to a gift, an "ultimate blessing...A higher if unrevealed destiny than a longeval one," (286). This comparison presents the unique features of both races' fates without partiality. Men must die and disappear from Arda to a fate mysterious in Tolkien's works, while Elves last throughout the existence of the world. But Tolkien's comparison in quotes shows a preference for the death of Men, calling it a "blessing" and speaking of their "higher destiny." It is evident that Men have a fate perhaps more privileged than that of the Quendi. Continued life in Middle-earth does not appear to be the ideal existence. Although Men's fate is not certain to those living in Arda, this does not negate the fact that Tolkien expresses a positive draw to mortality.

Bill Davis underlines positive mortality by stating that in Tolkien's view "existence isn't always better than non-existence," but Tolkien does not state that Men's spirits are annihilated by bodily demise (126). Men do not enter into non-existence when they die, and it is not non-existence that Tolkien treats as positive, rather the positive thing is death itself. Non-existence

might very well be negative in Tolkien's view, but the escape afforded by mortal death does not mean annihilation. Death as an escape from the world suggests that Men continue to exist, but free from bodily or spiritual restraint. For the Elves who cannot experience mortality, endless time with memory becomes treated as a burden worse than death, highlighting Tolkien's underlying belief that knowledge of a definite end to worldly existence can provide solace on a level that cannot be achieved in Arda. Tolkien alludes that of the two fates mortality is the more envious, incorporating optimistic language into its definition.

#### Reflections of Mortality in the Physical World

The waking of Men in Middle-earth draws unavoidable parallels to the waking of the Elves, but both events deserve to be treated individually in order to understand the unique traits of both races. Tolkien writes of the waking of the Elves first in *The Silmarillion*, keeping with Manwë's prophecy "the Firstborn...shall look first upon the stars" (48) So it is that the Elves wake at a time when Middle-earth is lit only by Varda's stars. The stars are a part of Arda, not immortal, and created by the Valar before the creation of any other light source, preceding even the first Lamps of Middle-earth (39). The stars come into existence even before the count of time, which begins with the Two Trees of Valinor who illuminate the Blessed Realm, and are a sign of a timeless world before any constant rotation of light. While the Trees are still standing when Elves wake, their light does not reach Middle-earth, and it is only the light of stars that greet the Elder Race. As with the Elves themselves, the stars are a part of Arda and appear to the inhabitants of the world to be immortal, above the swift changes of light that accompanies time. Yet they are part of Arda and exist within the life of the world. It comes to evidence that the stars are celestial reflections of the race that reveres them, both appearing to exist beyond the bounds of time, but also being trapped in the existence of the world.

In a like manner Tolkien writes of Men waking at the rising of the Sun and Moon, marking celestially the beginning of a new age not only of the races of Middle-earth, but in the measurement of time. Tolkien assigns “the Sun ...as a sign for the Awakening of Men,” linking the beacon of light with the first awareness of Men’s existence (99). The rhythmic rise and set of the Sun signifies the continued measurement of time, a notion without signal since the death of the Two Trees. The concept of day is important for a mortal race concerned with the span of their lives. Without a steady method of measurement Men would be unable to judge the span of their mortal years in a consistent fashion.

Time under the stars proves nebulous without this mortal perspective. There are days and years, but creating an environment without day and night allows Tolkien to reflect the nature of the elvish race onto the environment; a race without the need to measure the time span of a mortal life. When Men wake it is to the relatively quick method of time measurement focused on the rotation of sun and moon, which is a more apt existence in Middle-earth than the lengthy twilight of the Elves sole habitation.

With this daily rotation of light the atmosphere of Middle-earth becomes “heavy with the burden of growth and mortality” (103). The effect of the sun on the natural landscape is very similar to the properties of Men’s mortal being. The growth reflected in the burgeoning of natural flora is also exemplified in the growth of the younger race’s rising. The new life gifted to Men allows them as individuals and as people to flourish under the Sun. Meanwhile mortality finds itself intertwined with the air of Middle-earth in a reflection of Men’s doom. The life inherit in growth is counteracted by the death inherit in mortality. The two forces are closely related and cause the “changing and aging of all things [to be] hastened exceedingly” (103). The quick rotation of Sun and Moon introduce the concept of mortality to Arda and the realization of

life's brevity. Time does not move quicker at the rising of the Sun, but a change in the awareness of time occurs, making all things shorter lived and quicker to die, giving the effect of faster movement to the new mortal age.

So it is that time does not speed up at the rising of the Sun, but there is the feeling that the count of time is going faster. Mortals place importance on the count of time since it serves to measure precious physical existence, and the mortality that rises in the air as the sun rises signifies the coming of Men. Like the lives of Men that rise and set in relatively short spans, so do the Sun and Moon. Meanwhile Elves continue to reflect the stars; always present if sometimes invisible. Both races wander over Middle-earth as counterparts to the celestial bodies overhead, living and dying continually in the space of each day on their trek towards the illuminated West.

#### Movement West

After Arda's initial realization of mortality the Sun propels the world into movement. For Middle-earth this animation is made manifest in the growth of flora and fauna, while for Men it consists of migration from the far-eastern reaches of Middle-earth, called Hildórien, into the West where they first encounter Elves (*Silmarillion* 103). Bëor explains this movement as a result of threatening darkness, which "we have turned our backs upon...and we do not desire to return hither even in thought. Westwards our hearts have been turned, and we believe that there we shall find Light" (141). West is the direction from which the Sun first rises and the direction continues to carry the promise of illumination, which draws Men from the place of their first physical awakening towards a second illumination of knowledge. This they receive upon meeting the elder race. Bëor proclaims, "we shall find Light," as both an illumination of eyesight and an ideal. Capitalized Light is significant of a principle more than an object, meaning illumination of mental darkness and realization of wisdom and truth. Rather than the shadows of

the east where lies and uncertainty threaten, Men find knowledge of the world in the West. They crave sunlight for the benefit of their physical lives and for the revelation of wisdom concerning the world they inhabit.

Mortals escape from darkness in the east to the light of the West in a manner strikingly similar to the elvish movement to Valinor. Both races are propelled West out of a desire to escape darkness and seek both a physical and intellectual light. The analogous stories of Men following the western Sun and Elves following Oromë to Valinor center on a common theme of metaphorical awakening. Men experience this arousal through the Elves, whose knowledge of art and the nature of Middle-earth draws the younger race from the shadow of their doubt. Meanwhile the Elves find illumination from the Valar, who in Valinor share with them arts of song and craft that are brought back to Middle-earth. The thematic trend for fellowship with races of greater stature allows both Men and Elves to receive intellection illumination as perhaps prophesied by their discovery of physical light.

#### Physical and Spiritual Sustenance

Men are temporary beings, and the parallels between their waking and the rising sun turns Middle-earth into a realm that reflects that mortality. Men adapt the land to fit their own needs by actively hunting, pursuing agriculture, “the sowing of seed and the grinding of grain” (*Silmarillion* 263). Tolkien establishes the necessity for food production in a mortal society, making Men physically dependent on the life of the world around them. This type of need for physical nourishment is a product of the mortal body, which would die without the support of the physical world around it.

When analyzing the life of the Quendi it is rare to find discussion of sustaining habits such as agriculture, hunting, and herding that are so prevalent among Men. They are referenced

but not dwelt on, exemplified by Finrod's hunt. He soon "wearied of the chase" and departed, his lack of interest in hunting leading to the discovery of Men (140). This display of nonchalance towards catching or loosing prey indicates that Elves are not as physically dependent as Men on the food from hunts, and are able to pursue these actions as pastimes for amusement rather than from necessity.

The same casual regard for food is evident when Frodo first encounters the Elves on the verge of the Shire. Food is alluded to in the mention of "pouring drink" and "heaped plates and dishes," proving that Elves do eat, but there is a lack of the specialized description found in other meals (*The Fellowship of the Ring* 80). From Tom Bombadil's table to Bree, where there is "blackberry tart, new loaves, slabs of butter, and half a ripe cheese," each meal prior to the elvish encounter includes a lengthy description of the dishes served (151). Food does not appear to be the emphasis in elvish meals, but rather there is another element to these gatherings that satisfy the elvish need.

Sam sheds light on this trend when he says of his meal in with the Shire-elves "it was the singing that went to my heart," (81). It is the art of the Elves that is emphasized rather than the food, and this observance is repeated. During Bilbo's visit to Rivendell in *The Hobbit* there is a rare mention of a specific type of elvish food, "*bannocks*," or oat cakes, in the party's welcome song, but as with the meal Sam experiences, food is not the main focus of the tune. The song by nature represents the elvish propensity for art and seeks in its function to persuade the party to rest in Rivendell and eat, but also "*listen and hark...to our tune*" (46). Song is what the Elves wish their guests to appreciate and participate in as an act of fellowship, supported by the meal rather than focused on it.

The same is true of the elvish feast Frodo attends in Rivendell. Throughout the duration of the meal there is no mention of foodstuffs, only allusion to the act of eating. The scene that follows of “merrymaking” appears more suited to elvish tastes. Here outside the feast hall Bilbo is introduced with the only description of food in the chapter, simply a “drinking cup and some bread,” a scant meal for a hobbit (*Fellowship* 224). In the modest food and his recited verse Bilbo appears to be attempting to adopt elvish mannerisms, but admits to Frodo that he will never find the “elvish appetite for music and poetry and tales. They seem to like it as much as food, or more” (231). Tolkien does not use the word “appetite” lightly, and Bilbo’s association with food is apt. Rather than desire physical nourishment derived from food, Elves desire spiritual nourishment derived from art.

Yet elvish food, when mentioned as it is in the notable case of lembas, is treated as superior to mortal food. The lembas cakes are “more strengthening than any food made by men,” as boasted by the elves of Lórien (360). But its spiritual and physical support for Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli in their arduous pursuit of the orc kidnappers of Pippin and Merry in *The Two Towers* displays lembas’ ability to satisfy spiritual and physical strength far beyond that of normal rations. It is indeed a food to “serve you when all else fails” (361).

The distinction between the mortal need for physical sustenance and the elvish need for spiritual sustenance evidenced by food is a reflection of Men’s temporary existence. The Elves of Ossiriand complain about Men’s tendency to consume the physical world upon their first interaction. To Felagund they say that “these folk are hewers of trees and hunters of beasts; therefore they are our unfriends” (142). For the fragile race of Men to thrive they must consume and alter Middle-earth using the physical and cultural resources provided by the Elves’ art. A part of mortality is dependence on the consumption of those resources, making the Elves’ art a

sustaining force for Men and an educational tool on the importance of spiritual nourishment. The men who are called ‘unfriends’ lack the knowledge of spiritual fulfillment they would gain from partnership with the elder race, and so their destruction of the environment is an attempt to satisfy physical need without understanding its spiritual counter. This misunderstanding makes the uneducated Men encountered by Felagund not enemies, but ‘unfriends’ and at odds with the purpose of the Elves in their desire to cultivate Middle-earth.

The honor Elves show for meals and physical resources are examples for emulation by Men. While for Men the meal is not fulfilled until food is consumed, so it is not fulfilled for Elves until the song is sung, and in the merging of these two actions Men are raised to a greater level of understanding and respect that is accorded by the Elder Children of Ilúvatar. Men are taught by the Elves to honor Middle-earth through the care of the physical by way of acknowledging the spiritual, and in doing so prepare for the future stewardship of it.

#### Mortal Life Through Lineage

As meals exemplify, many of Men’s traditional actions would go almost unquestioned without the foil of Quendi culture to highlight the impact of mortality. In the span of mortal development from darkened infancy to the height of Númenor to the realms of Gondor and Rohan there is strong desire for the accomplishment of memorable deeds. Húrin displays this mortal desire in his plea to Turgon for passage from Gondolin. Elves who “may endure for long years awaiting battle with their enemies in some long distant day: but for us time is short, and our hope and strength soon wither” (*Silmarillion* 158). Húrin pleads to return to his people in part to fight for their lives, as the immediacy of his existence is realized. He must fight for his people *now*, because his life will soon be over and his chance for deeds of goodness and renown will be lost. The desire to perform these actions is partially for the good of his people, but also a

manifestation of the desire for immortality. In memorable deeds he has the potential to attain a type of life dependent neither on body nor spirit.

Men have an important affinity for their children as another manifest symbols of life, for the child is a product of the parent, bearing the family name even after the parent has died. Continued existence in Arda, even beyond a spiritual or physical form, is a powerful desire behind the procreative force. A child is at once a material part of the parent and a symbolic bearer of name. The race of Men in Tolkien's works tend to have more children than the Quendi in relation to their lifetime. Typically elvish families such as Elrond's have no more than perhaps four<sup>8</sup> children. For Elrond this is Elladan, Elrohir and Arwen, while for Thingol and Melian there is only Lúthien. The Quendi's procreative force is curbed first by the fact that their death does not remove them from Arda, and their desire to be kept alive in memory less therefore. They know their doom, and in that knowledge realize they will live out the world, and so have little need for it to remember them.

The Quendi also have less concern for children given the enormous energy needed to bear a child, greater energy than for mortal parents. Fëanor's mother never again gives birth, "for strength that would have nourished the life of many has gone forth into Fëanor" (63). Míriel is an extreme instance of the force behind elvish creation, and eventually her body dies due to the effort of one birth. Granted the anomalous extreme of the case, Fëanor's birth still shows the extreme power of elvish procreation, and why elvish families have but one or two children.

But Men, whose lifetimes are but a fraction of the Quendi's, appear to have more children in relation to their shorter life spans. Húrin and Morwen have three children: Túrin, Niënor and the short-lived **Lalaith**, matching the number of Elrond's children. Most other mortal

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<sup>8</sup> Notable exceptions are the seven sons of Fëanor and the five children of Finarfein and Earwen.

families have at least one other sibling, as do Huor and Húrin, Boromir and Faramir, and Eomer and Eowyn. For Men less creative force is needed to bear a child, evidenced by the quick rate of birth without dire instances of death due to spiritual strain. Men have necessarily less potent spirits, for they do not need to last the existence of the world, and so the capturing of those spirits in a bodily form takes less spiritual or physical energy.

Tolkien displays this form of creation as a fulfillment of the desire to continue living through offspring. The Quendi do not view death as a threat to their existence in Arda, but Men do, as the tragic case of Théoden and Théodred evidences. After Théodred's death Théoden still has a living relation in his nephew Eomer, but his own son is dead. No one will bear the title "son of Théoden" and carry with it the weight of his existence (*The Two Towers* 511). In similar manner Denathor gives the same type of lament, "my life is broken," when he believes Faramir to be dead (*The Return of the King* 807). Denathor's experience is surrounded by the direct threat of Sauron, but concern for death of the self, arising from the death of his last child, is the same as Théoden's. As both kings deal with the death of their sons they are faced with personal death and permanent departure from the world they know, an experience no elf can fully understand.

With mortal children remembrance is continually exhibited through the tradition of addressing Men in relation to their forefathers. When Elrond announces the identity of Aragorn to the Council of Rivendell he uses the title "Aragorn son of Arathorn," naming him in relation to his father (*Fellowship* 240). Quendi names may be similar to denote lineage but each individual is referred to by their own name or in relation to a spouse, as is often the case with Thingol husband of Melian. The difference between a spouse and a father is the difference of choice. A spouse is freely chosen relation reflecting the merits of the individual, while bloodline relation is not freely chosen and suggests the extended history of a lineage.

By way of elvish perspective, Aragorn is identified in relation to his lineage in the history of Middle-earth rather than recognized for his own deeds. This does not negate the importance of Aragorn as a leader, but alludes to his Númenórean heritage and strengthens his leadership role. The use of lineage titles strength Men's ties to the past and bring an air of life to the deceased by associating the dead with the living. Still Aragorn is "but the heir of Isildur, not Isildur himself" confirming that while he is related genealogically to these monoliths of Men, his is an individual in the mind of mortals (241).

### Túrin Turambar

The tale of Túrin Turambar is an exceptional example of the connotations of mortality in Tolkien's world. Túrin's fate is influenced largely by the curse Morgoth places on his father, Húrin, and the poor ending of Túrin is in part a result of his own pride, but foremost a result of his father's punishment.

Morgoth's curse on Húrin is directed not at Húrin himself, but at Húrin's children, "saying: 'Behold! The shadows of my thought shall lie upon them wherever they go and my hate shall pursue them to the end of the world'" (*The Children of Húrin* 63). Morgoth does not harm Húrin through personal corporeal punishment, but strikes a much deeper and more precious area; his family. Given Húrin's mortality, his children act as the continuation of his own life on Arda, hence the importance of Men's genealogies. By affecting Húrin's lineage Morgoth is not only inflicting Húrin with the pain of witnessing those he loves be cursed, but also witnessing the horrific end of his own life.

But Morgoth's implication in saying "to the end of the world" assumes Húrin's children, Túrin and Niënor, are confined to Arda as is Morgoth himself. By virtue of being mortal Húrin and his family cannot be trapped forever by Morgoth's schemes. Their confrontation indicates

Húrin is apt to refuse the truth of Morgoth's threats, denying the corrupted Ainur by acknowledging, "Beyond the Circles of the World you shall not pursue those who refuse you," (65). Húrin's adamant denial of Morgoth's power is a point of fury for the Ainur. Because of Men's gift of death they are able to escape the Circles of the World, making them enviable even to the Valar. The Valar's opposition and the very words of Ilúvatar confine Morgoth to Arda until the world's end.

The Gift of Death, escape from Arda, is a process Morgoth cannot fully understand or control. His response is to associate fear with this gift, in part by perpetuating lies including his response to Húrin, "Beyond the Circles of the World there is Nothing. But within them they shall not escape me until they enter into Nothing" (65). This is certainly a lie that Morgoth perpetuates to taint the connection between mortals and Ilúvatar through the implication of cosmic neglect. The inference of neglect is found in the idea that Nothing exists outside of the world, as argued by Davis. But to state this idea as a fact is to oppose the Being that is Ilúvatar, insinuating that existence on Arda is the only existence and Ilúvatar is but a being of the imagination. By spreading doubt through lies Morgoth seeks to attain supremacy over mortality. His desire to master death is not based on immortality but on the fact that death is a means of escape for his victims and a union with Ilúvatar. It is a gift against which he can never compete for power. Unable to conquer the escape that death provides mortals, Morgoth instead taints the gift with fear to manipulate Men's perception. Sauron uses the same tactic in the later history of Númenor, but neither is able to completely deny death's positive nature, which all mortal eventually realize.

Morgoth is unable to taint death for Húrin and infuriated, curses him and his family, saying, "upon all whom you love my thought shall weigh as a cloud of Doom, and it shall bring them down into darkness and despair" (64). Morgoth's curse is not pleasant, but it is lacking the

threat of death. Death would be sorrowful to Húrin, but to his family it would be an escape from Morgoth's rule, retreating to the safety of a place where his persecution cannot follow. The threat of "darkness and despair" can last only as long as Húrin's family lives, meaning the doom of Húrin's children will find them, but only while their bodies breathe.

This truth is enforced at the end of Húrin's tale, as each of his loved ones die. In *The Silmarillion* there is an added passage depicting Húrin's discovery of Morwen as she dies, noting "the lines of grief and cruel hardship were smoothed away. 'She was not conquered'" (299). Morwen endures the grief of losing her children to unknown fates, but when she dies the loss of her children no longer bears the weight of Morgoth's doom. The loss of her children and her children's deeds are no less lamentable, but that "she was not conquered" implies Morgoth's doom is unable to control her spirit. Even after the despair and sorrow Morgoth causes, he does not succeed in destroying Morwen, for she is still able to escape the world. In death she triumphs over Morgoth by accepting Ilúvatar's Gift and her essence is at peace.

The same reasoning is in effect when Barandir find Túrin's body and assumes him dead. He calls the death of both Glaurung and Túrin "good tidings: yes, both are good indeed" (*Húrin* 246). Barandir's association between Glaurung and Túrin's deaths is not an insult since both incidents are a triumph over the reign of Morgoth. In Glaurung's case it is the dragon himself that acts as a tool for Morgoth's curse, and his death marks the end of his tyranny. But for Túrin death is a triumph over the fear and pain of living under a curse. Barandir's intention as a character may have been only to dismiss the ill fortune of Túrin and its affect on his people, but Tolkien as an author uses the comparison to form a relation between death and freedom from tyranny.

In a life spent almost entirely under the doom of Morgoth, Túrin struggles to control the consequences of his actions in an attempt to evade his doom. But Túrin is ultimately unsuccessful when he comes to the full realization of his actions. Equally bitter is his reconciliation with Niënor, in which she remembers herself and recognized Túrin. Frequent changes of name do not avail him as Niënor states “*A Túrin Turambar turun ambartanen; master of doom by doom mastered! O happy to be dead!*” (243-244). Túrin, who in his very name seeks to control his fate, has choice only in death. While Niënor sees the full picture of Morgoth’s doom as Barandir does not, she displays a thematic agreement with him by calling death a good path for Túrin and even herself and their unborn child, signifying the final demise of Húrin's cursed lineage.

But during both Barandir and Niënor’s realization that death is Túrin’s best escape, Túrin himself is not yet dead. He does not die until he too comes to the full understanding of the path of his doom. At this point, while crouched along the river Cabed-an-Aras, Túrin is a mirror for Húrin himself being witness to his entire family’s doom, which taints the joy of his entire life. For Túrin the past is more poignant since the truth of his sister-wife’s history renders all happiness derived from her tainted by virtue of her true name. Húrin is able to secure and cherish some memories of joy while living, but for Túrin the final turn of the curse is the worse, affecting both his future and his past.

But in death none of Túrin’s deeds can haunt him. Túrin asks for death from his sword as a source of final respite from the weight of memory, an act of justice for the killing of its master, Beleg. Túrin does not desire rest to recover from his sorrowful life as the Elves do. Given the weight of his unfortunate deeds the hurt may be irreparable. Morgoth has completed his doom, but fails at the final step to crush Túrin with ill memory, for Túrin now accepts his Gift. His

suicide is a positive action and the only route by which to foil the power of Morgoth. In death he escapes the burden of his actions and finds reconciliation with Ilúvatar. Death is hope in Túrin's story, hope for escape from the doom of Arda and the Circles of the World.

Morgoth's wrathful intentions cannot change the intrinsic nature of Men; the race is still mortal. The Gift of Death is still an act of benevolence towards the younger race, and Morgoth cannot fight it. Ilúvatar displays his compassion by bestowing a necessary and good doom. Men are given the chance to recognize their impudence and embrace the gift of their nature.

## Chapter Two

### Moral Right and Mortality

Men and Elves have distinct personal reactions to their death or immortality. The fate of each race has a deep influence on individual action and desire, with the potential to lead to an ultimate embrace of fate based on the understanding of what is morally good. However refusal to understand the nature of their being can cause Men and Elves to participate in a moral fall, neglecting to accept that their doom is for the good of the world as a whole.

Moral correctness in Tolkien's world is dependent on selfless action and understanding of purpose. Good moral actions are categorized by the recognition and understanding of fate as given by Ilúvatar. Both mortality and immortality are benevolent gifts, acceptance of which leads to positive action, which is ultimately selfless action. What this often means is that personal desire should not be put before the good of the community. To focus on personal ownership, most commonly of the things one has created, is to place importance on the object as owned individually rather than the object sans relation to the self. An appreciation of the object without ideas of personal benefit acknowledges the thing outside the self as important in its own right. This sentiment is applicable to the separate races as well; in appreciating that which is different from the self and living in appreciative harmony with it rather than manipulating it for personal gain.

The spread of benevolence, knowledge, goodwill, a sense of community and fellowship mark what is good in Tolkien's world from the start of the Music of the Ainur. Ilúvatar instructs the Ainur to "make in harmony together a Great Music" and produce a vision of creation (*The Silmarillion* 15). It is in communal harmony, the mingling of each sound and the "comprehension of each" part that produces the final vision. Through cooperative action and

understanding of individuals roles goodness is achieved. It is from solitude that the first negative rift in this universe arises. Melkor desires to “increase the power and glory of the parts assigned to himself,” with selfish thought and the desire to challenge Ilúvatar’s control. Discord in the harmony arises, bringing turbulence to the music, which disrupts Ilúvatar’s original theme, signaling the first objectionable event in Tolkien’s world (16). Tolkien’s later stories rely heavily on the precedent set here, where unity is the ultimate positive moral action, while selfish division results in negative consequences.

### Accepting Mortality

The distinction between community and solitude plays an important role in the stories of Tolkien’s Men, beginning with the Bëor. Bëor’s important death signifies the first instance of mortality encountered by the Elves, and Tolkien places emphasis on the fact that Bëor “relinquished his life willingly and passed in peace” (149). This instance of death serves as an introduction to the nobility of mortality. Bëor’s life is not shortened by his death, nor is he disgraced by decrepitude, and while he appears aged he retains the full capabilities of his being and recognizes the necessity of death. Bëor becomes an exemplum of the honorable and content nature of Tolkien’s mortality. Men’s have the ability to relinquish their lives when they feel it time, returning of the life that was given, as a sign of respect towards Ilúvatar. In exchange for their willingness to relinquish this gift, Men are able to retain esteem without illness and in the height of their glory.

Bëor is the first example of this proper action, and Aragorn recalls it in his own death. Aragorn exhibits a complete understanding that he has been given “the grace to go at my will, and give back the gift,” (*Return* 1037). Aragorn, like Bëor, does not fight death, but acknowledges that his role in Arda is fulfilled. His purpose in restoring Gondor and a visage of

Númenórean rule is complete and the time that Ilúvatar has given is over. He does not refuse death to later be consumed by illness, but recognizes that death is the counterpart to life. He will escape the bonds of Arda by accepting an irrefutable fate that given by the grace of Ilúvatar. This deep understanding of life and the willingness to forfeit it makes Aragorn's death, as with Bëor's, sad but not tragic. They are accepting and fulfilling their fate as mortals in the proper manner.

We can imagine Aragorn near death, talking as if seeing beyond Arda, voicing his final revelation and compelling us to "Behold! we are not bound forever in the circle of the world, and beyond them is more than memory" (1038). Aragorn's interpretation of mortality is perhaps the most content in Tolkien's work. Escape from the confines of the world and transcendence of the memory that plagues immortals is the utmost desire of the Elves. "More than memory" does not mean an *escape* from memory, but the discovery of a state higher than only remembering the past. A "higher if unrevealed destiny" awaits Men, and they should embrace it willingly and peacefully.

The link death creates between Men and Ilúvatar is undermined by the fear Morgoth institutes in mortals, this being arguably his greatest action against the Younger Children of Ilúvatar. The first evidence of this taint is rumored to occur when Morgoth abandons Angband to influence the new race to the east. Here "a darkness lay upon the hearts of Men" that continues to grow throughout the tales of *The Silmarillion*, culminating in the fall of the Númenóreans (141). Morgoth has a tradition of causing fear by using darkness to corrupt the ultimate gift of Ilúvatar, a dark that is significant of ignorant uncertainty. By turning death, which is designed to be the highest positive aspect of mortality, into something to be feared Morgoth creates a rift between Ilúvatar and Men. The mortal race no longer openly embraces the gift inherent in their nature and

this causes a division between the giver and the receiver. Morgoth's actions amplify the immorality of separation, leading to increasingly corrupt action. Throughout the ages that follow Men continue to be plagued by their mortality, punctuated rarely by the depth of understanding exemplified by Bëor and Aragorn.

#### Positive Preservation

The Quendi's tendency towards preservation is instilled as a positive trait in conjunction with their immorality, initially resulting in the retention of lore and vision for the good of Middle-earth. Like mortal death, elvish preservation is a positive trait later corrupted by misunderstanding and fear. The creation of the "hidden realm" of Gondolin by Turgon is one early example of preserved memory for the good of the World. Gondolin serves as a stronghold against the threat of Morgoth, being an image of Tirion upon Túna in Valinor. Turgon designs Gondolin to pay homage to Tirion, making it in essence a piece of the blessed realm brought to Middle-earth for the elevation of the Noldor. It is a land preserved for the good of the elvish race as a whole, away from the malice and destruction of Morgoth that plagues the surrounding kingdoms. Turgon does not build or protect Gondolin simply out of his own desire to experience again some visage of the West, but rather he seeks to bring a part of the West to Middle-earth for the benefit of all. This is what makes Turgon's preservation morally corrects and beneficial to the world as a whole.

A similar theme of positive preservation surrounds later elvish realms such as Rivendell and Lothlórien, but these places differ from Gondolin in one key aspect, the Rings of Power that preserve them. Tolkien admits that "The chief power of (all the rings alike) was the preservation or slowing of *decay* (i.e 'change' viewed as a regrettable thing), the preservation of what is desired or loved, or its semblance- this is more or less an Elvish motive" (*Letters* 152). The

Rings of Power seek to stall change, to hold in stasis the elvish realms of Middle-earth, but unlike Gondolin, a realm of purely good meaning, in these realms there also lies a core power whose influence holds the potential for selfish retention over the greater good.

### Rivendell

What develops thanks to the Rings are pockets of elvish memory that remain almost static even after the time of their creation has faded from the remainder of Middle-earth. Rivendell, or Imladris, is the first of these realms encountered in Tolkien's work, and it is the abode of Elrond often referred to as "The Last Homely House." (CITE) In his *Letters* Tolkien explains the meaning behind this title, for "Elrond symbolizes throughout [the novels] the ancient wisdom, and his House represents Lore- the preservation in reverent memory of all tradition concerning the good, wise, and beautiful. It is not a scene of *action* but *reflection*," (153). Preservation captures Rivendell as a vault in which the past continues to be accessible to the present. It is to Rivendell that many of Tolkien's quests<sup>9</sup> go not as a goal, but as a point for cautious consideration and preparation before further action. Static reflection makes accessible the lore and wisdom of elvish memory that aids the later journey.

For Bilbo in *The Hobbit* it is Elrond's revelation of moon-letters and their meaning, written on the dwarves' map of the Lonely Mountain, that reveals the fortuitous air of Rivendell. Gandalf and Thorin seem "vexed perhaps that even Elrond should have found [the runes] first, thought really there had not been a chance before" (49-51). It is not that Elrond alone and his wisdom can read the runes, but rather that in Rivendell time coincides with the correct moon. The unexpected timing in Rivendell allows for the discovery of a revelation, without which the entire quest would have failed, leaving the party with no way into the mountain and no upper

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<sup>9</sup> The quests include that of Bilbo and the dwarves on their journey to the Lonely Mountain in *The Hobbit* and the quest of Frodo and company in *The Lord of the Rings*.

hand in the defeat of the dragon. Without the preparatory knowledge and the fortunate chance occurrence in Rivendell it is probable the journey would have been disastrous.

Rivendell shows its merits again in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when Frodo's party flees to the realm as a safe haven from the threat of the Nazgûl. Escaping from the current threat of Sauron's messengers, the hobbits are brought into a world almost untouched by the horrors that pervade the outside, and this haven-like quality is not recognized only by the hobbits. The Council of Elrond reveals that all the free races of Middle-earth regard Rivendell as a place to seek answers. Men, Dwarves and Elves arrive without summons at the same time to find guidance. Like the revelation of the moon-runes, the arrival of these guests corresponds with acute timing. Fortunate events occur with proper timing in Rivendell, a tendency that Elrond attributes to an external force akin to fate.<sup>10</sup> It is evident that within the realm of Rivendell a benevolent power works to shield and aid all the people of Middle-earth.

Each race recognizes this power and it is through the communion of the Council that the malicious intent of the One Ring is discovered and the collective Fellowship is formed. The communal good will of Rivendell teaches Frodo the path of his ultimate quest and the importance of his burden. Without the accumulated preserved wisdom Rivendell holds as a seat of a Ring of Power, and without the benevolent force therein, none of the parties involved would have sufficient information to succeed in their tasks.

But the accumulation of wisdom and the wide scale recognition of Rivendell as a place of thought and reflection is a product of its time with the Ring of Power. It is this Ring that prompts Bilbo to observe "Time does not seem to pass here: it just is" (*Fellowship* 225). The appearance

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<sup>10</sup> Commonly this would be called Ilúvatar, but within *The Lord of the Rings*, Ilúvatar is treated without name or attribute, only alluded to as a larger force that "chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so" (*Fellowship* 236).

of time existing without passing hints at the presence of time without change or a discernable mode of measurement. In order to keep the tradition of elvish knowledge in Middle-earth it is necessary for that knowledge to be placed in a realm where time will not diminish its memory. This is a positive manifestation of the elvish purpose of glorification and stewardship. By retaining wisdom for the good of all the races of Middle-earth the Elves of Rivendell, as Turgon of Gondolin, are acting in a manner intended by Ilúvatar.

### Lothlórien

In Lothlórien another of the Three Rings of Power provides protection for elvish wisdom and lore of the past, used by Tolkien to preserve the past in vision as well as memory. During the fellowships' stay in Lórien Sam notes both the different stars in the sky<sup>11</sup> and the discrepancy of time's apparent passing within Lórien and outside of it. "Anyone would think time did not count in there!" he observes with a certain amount of incredulity (379). Sam's observation highlights the stasis that seems to exist within elvish realms, but we must realize that time only *seems* to be static. As with Bilbo's observation in Rivendell, the power of the Three seems to negate the movement of time, but does not actually halt it. Frodo's observation that "In that land, maybe, we were in a time that has elsewhere long gone by," does not mean that time has stopped, but that while elsewhere change is potent, in Lórien change has been prevented, resulting in the illusion of a past age based on the preservation of memory and vision that the Three produce (379). Rather than stopping time the Rings are able to prevent change while the world outside both Rivendell and Lórien continues to age at a more rapid pace. Observances in Lórien such as the moon over Caras Galadhon<sup>12</sup> show a powerful desire to return to a time before the sun,

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<sup>11</sup> These stars are often thought to be a reflection of Varda's stars, which shown at the waking of the Elves.

<sup>12</sup> Caras Galadhon is the pinnacle grove of Lórien and home of Galadriel and Celeborn.

existing instead in a previous age under the stars of Varda (379). But the sun still rises in Lórien, so time continues to pass even with the Rings of Power, a power that is “[wearing] to an end at last” (379).

It is the nature of the Rings to assist in “preserving the memory of the beauty of old, maintaining enchanted enclaves of peace where Time seems to stand still and decay is restrained, a semblance of the Bliss of the True West” (*Letters* 157). The purpose of the rings coincides with the purpose of the elves, and is a primary tool for preserving memory. But memory is all that is preserved. Time continues to flow outside of the elvish realms. The Elves desire to retain a true image of the West, but their attachment to Middle-earth is such that the Elves of both realms refuse the summons of all Quendi to the True West. Tolkien writes of the Elves as desiring “the peace and bliss of perfect memory of ‘The West,’ and yet to remain on the ordinary earth where their prestige as the highest people...was greater than the bottom of the hierarchy in Valinor” (151). They seek a part of both worlds; the perfection of Valinor and the power of hierarchy in Middle-earth, but their attempts to recall the West in lands meant for mortals results in an increased disappointment due to the gap between the mortality of Middle-earth and the perfection of Valinor.

The purpose of the preserved realms of Rivendell and Lórien, as with Gondolin, begin wholesomely. They are places of wisdom and safety in the rough seas that are Middle-earth, they provide the varied races with aid and knowledge, elevating them from their darkness and aiding in the struggle against malicious forces. But even these tendencies can be perverted into selfish retention, the desire to remain in a realm that has passed its time, and in doing so neglect to serve the whole of Middle-earth. The Quendi begin to forget their purpose and refuse to acknowledge the fact that the time they are trying to preserve is past. Elves are meant to act as a link between

Valar and Men, the immortal Valinor and the mortal Middle-earth, but they begin to focus on the hopeless preservation of that which is inevitably subject to time rather than on the good of Men, and in doing so linger too long in Middle-earth, abandoning their partnership with mortals and placing themselves before the good of the larger world.

The downfall of both races is allied with the rejection of fate. For Men death becomes perceived as a curse, while for the Quendi immortality in a changing world is undesirable. To escape doom each race falls victim to corruptive influence and the apparent granting of desire, failing to understand the gift of their doom and partnership with other races as a whole.

### Rejecting Mortality

The lack of understanding concerning mortality reaches its zenith in the fall of Númenor, as Sauron takes up exploitation of the same fearful ignorance that Morgoth helped establish. Adopting the place of king's advisor, Sauron is able to further exploit fear among the people of Númenor who have been blessed with residence near Valinor (*Silmarillion* 271). As Grant Sterling explains, the fear brought about by Morgoth "still lingered in lesser men, and so [Sauron] is able to seduce them to his aid by offering immortality" (17). Morgoth provides the seed of fear, which in time grows until it becomes easy for Sauron to once again manipulate. A popular example of Sauron's corruption of mortality is the Nazgûl, who are convinced by Sauron to accept rings of power under fear of mortal death (*Silmarillion* 289). The rings are accepted as a tool against death, but provide a life that while long lasting, is also a bitter and unhappy existence. Sauron does not establish fear, but due in part to his exploitation of this deep-seeded dread in all mortals a general apprehension flourishes. Rather than being treated as a natural and blessed fate, death loses its dignity, becoming categorized as an affliction among the Númenóreans.

General fear shifts towards obsession and corruption as the Númenóreans develop the tradition of preserving “incorrupt the dead flesh of Men” (266). They even begin to engage in practices of necromancy, displaying a desire for life to return even after it has been spent. Embalming and necromancy is evidence of a growing focus on the material, including the physical form. Preservation of the body itself burgeons into a Númenórean preoccupation with tombs and “houses of the dead.” This is a singularly mortal practice of bodily preservation, differing from Tolkien’s references to Middle-earth mound burials. The Númenóreans instead remove the body from the soil, preventing restitution of the form. Entombment itself becomes a form of embalming by protecting the body to prevent the natural acceptance of decay that occurs to all mortal forms. Postmortem the form is useless for all practical purposes, but like the wealth and arts Ar-Pharazôn and his successors begin to hoard, preservation of the body is a vain attempt to hold onto what cannot be kept and is ultimately unimportant. The body becomes the focus of life, and retention of the body signifies an unwillingness to accept death and a hunger for power over a fate that has already been chosen.

As the internment of bodies becomes more intricate there is an increase in the practice of tomb worship, detracting further from the respect that should be shown to Ilúvatar. As the practice of “offering the first fruits to Eru [is] neglected” and Meneltarma<sup>13</sup> abandoned, the Númenóreans are simultaneously constructing progressively more elaborate tombs (266). Rather than giving their attention and energy to acknowledgement of Ilúvatar, the Númenóreans turn to focus on their own forms as a rejection of Ilúvatar’s gift. Concern for the material remains manifest in the later Gondorian people “whose only hallows were their tombs,” (*Letters* 197). Worship of the entombed form is the ultimate rejection of Ilúvatar, simultaneously refusing to

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<sup>13</sup> The mountain in Númenor upon which is the Hallow of Ilúvatar.

acknowledge the positive nature of death and focus concern on the deceased form rather than the fate of the spirit. The true gift of death is the spirit's escape from Arda, but Númenor's turn towards embellishment of the physical neglects the very merits of death, refusing to acknowledge the freedom of the spirit, fearing instead the disintegration of the physical form.

This ideological change is also manifest in the Númenórean turn to revelry and bodily pleasure, including a preoccupation with earthly riches. The desire for material wealth causes the Númenóreans to begin raiding and terrorizing the shores of Middle-earth rather than expressing benevolence through sharing knowledge (*Silmarillion* 266). The turn from aid and charity to aggressive greed is alarming, and the unchecked desire for ownership and power over objects places an emphasis on the immediacy of possession. The emphasis on positive spiritual growth then declines and the focus of Númenórean power turning towards selfish immortality and the collecting of physical objects that focus importance on personal lives. These actions spring from the fear of death's transportation to a foreign place when contrasted with the immediate world, and this leads to the struggle against mortality and the desire to stay among the tangible world.

But throughout the Númenórean's struggle it is obvious they are inept to fight against their own mortality. The mortal nature of Men is part of Ilúvatar's order for Arda and only direct intervention on the part of Ilúvatar can change it, but Ilúvatar's intercession into Arda does not retract the Gift of Death for all Men, but does so only for the transgressors of Númenor. When Ar-Pharazôn forces are drowned after setting foot on Túna, they are taken to "lie imprisoned...until the Last Battle and the Day of Doom" (279). In one sense Ilúvatar has granted the Númenórean's wish for immortality, but it is not a favorable gift. Like the Quendi they must wait in Arda until its ultimate end, unable to escape from the prison of earth. The fulfillment of

Men's wish is also their punishment, serving to demonstrate that mortality is a positive fate that they will come to appreciate when it has been taken from them.

### The Struggle with Immortality

Fëanor's experience is comparable to that of the Númenóreans, and is one of the most powerful lessons the Quendi learn. The main struggle emanates from Fëanor's selfish reluctance to sacrifice himself for the larger benefit of Arda. His unwillingness to relinquish the light of the Silmarils in the aftermath of Ungoliant's destruction is exemplary of the ownership he feels over them. It is true that he forges them, but the light within them is not his own. It is in partnership with the Valar and the light of Yavanna that the Silmarils come into being, and they exist in their own right beyond ownership or creation (*Silmarillion* 78). Fëanor sees them only in terms of his own "greedy love" and fails to recognize their beauty as objects with independent existence, being in the world not only by his design (69).

He laments, "If I must break them, I shall break my heart, and I shall be slain," heightening the melodrama of the situation (78). Fëanor admits that to break the jewels would result in his bodily death, but exaggerates to the point that he announces he will be "slain," implying murder by malicious intent. There is no malicious intent inherent in the breaking of the Silmarils, but rather a desire to re-illuminate the Trees for the overall good of Arda. Fëanor is evidently exaggerating the effects of destroying the Silmarils in order to justify his denial of a selfless act. He seeks to retain an object of physical importance and deny an act of spiritual importance, echoing the actions of the Númenóreans as they follow their decent from grandeur.

The same selfish desire results in the unfortunate Oath of Fëanor taken by him and his sons. The goal of this oath is to keep the Silmarils from all other hands, benevolent or malicious, because they are viewed as Fëanor's own personal property and the rightful inheritance of his

sons. What follows is a break in the solidarity of the Elves when Fëanor attacks the Teleri in the lamentable Kinslaying. In response to the horror of the Kinslaying Mandos sets on them a doom, pronouncing “those that endure and come not to Mandos shall grow weary of the world as with a great burden, and shall wane, and become as shadows of regret before the younger race that cometh after” (88). Because this doom of fading is pronounced only after the Kinslaying, and as a punishment for it, it becomes evident that before this point the Elves were not subject to ‘fading’ as they evidently are come the later ages of Arda. As Fëanor creates division between the Valar and the Noldor by refusing to relinquish the Silmarils, he creates yet another division within the elvish race out of the same desire to retain material objects he feel possessive of, but are not created by him alone. Fëanor’s continued pride ultimately results in a doom that haunts the Noldor throughout the first age.

But this is a doom that applies solely to the Noldor, leaving the Vanyar and Teleri unaffected. The Noldor have not only committed atrocities against their own race that warrant their punishment, they have also willingly and with negative intent removed themselves from the Blessed Realm. Because the Noldor are eager to leave Valinor, sundering their relation with the Valar, their punishment is life Middle-earth although in time it will leave them behind. The sentence for the Noldor’s actions fit their crimes in the same manner as the Númenórean’s. What is desired is also granted, but found to fall short of the ideal. For the Númenóreans their lengthy existence in Arda is unhappiness, while for the Noldor the realm of Middle-earth becomes a prison where they will grow tired and lose the majesty they found in Valinor. In the presence of the younger race of Men diminished in their capabilities, their grandeur fading with the ages.

The themes in Fëanor’s tale bear striking resemblance to that of the Númenóreans, including the desire for self-preservation, which overrides the morally correct choice to benefit

the community. Fëanor's desire to keep himself alive and retain his own creations rather than give up his creations for the betterment of Middle-earth is against his purpose as a Quendi. His outright refusal to better Middle-earth for the coming of Men shows disdain for a race not yet woken and alludes to the negative relationships that will form between the Children of Ilúvatar. Likewise the Númenóreans selfishly guard their own physical existence against the blessing of death, refusing the gift of their creator. Their banishment from the glory of the West is the only result for such extreme selfish behavior, and both Fëanor and the Númenóreans are exiled for their acts. What results is division between groups within races, the races themselves, and even between Ilúvatar.

### The One Ring

Perhaps the most overtly insidious manifestation of the elvish desire for preservation is the One Ring itself. According to Sterling "The natural span of human life could be artificially lengthened by the rings of power, but it did not bring joy to its long-lived recipient." (Sterling 18). All the Rings of Power, the Three and the One alike, share in the ability to preserve elvish realms in much the manner they do for Rivendell and Lothlórien, but when used on Men human lives become longer yet without more substance. There is no enjoyment in the lengthening of life and fatigue develops into a fall. The Nazgûl are one example of Rings<sup>14</sup> giving life, yet it being a life without goodness or joy. Tolkien creates a distinction between lifespan, measured by time, and the substance of life. Mortals only have a certain amount of substance; a spirit-like quality that allows for fullness and enjoyment of living. While the Rings may increase the lifespan of the wearer, they lack Ilúvatar's sole ability to increase spiritual substance.

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<sup>14</sup> These rings are not the Three or the One, but they are rings like all in Tolkien's world that provide extended existence.

This discrepancy between prolonging life and increasing life manifests itself through the lack of joy cited by Sterling. A “stretching” of the spirit occurs, exhibited most famously in the ringbearers: Bilbo, Frodo, and Gollum (*Fellowship* 46). Gandalf observes that Gollum does “not die, but he does not grow old or obtain more life, he merely continues until at last every minute is a weariness” (46). Gollum’s time with the Ring prolongs his lifespan centuries without increasing his quality of life. He has no more spirit for owning the Ring, but rather his time with it has reduced his life to a contemptible state. The Rings are a perversion in the sense that they elongate life in creatures whose mortal nature dooms them to die, preserving what should instead be allowed to decay with time.

Elrond’s support of the One Ring’s destruction results in the diminishing of his own power. He acknowledges that should the One be destroyed “the Three will fail, and many fair things will fade and be forgotten” (262). The destruction of the Three is not necessarily a bad thing, although it may appear so from Elrond’s lament. The Three preserve elvish realms, keeping intact their knowledge and radiance, but in a manner akin to Gollum’s existence. It extends them beyond their life force until they live in a world past their time. The destruction of the Three allows Middle-earth to move on into the age of mortals, while also motivating the Elves to mend their rift with Valinor and leave Middle-earth to Men.

The Rings are both an elvish and a mortal snare, and in their possession lay the potential to refuse the positive gift of existence that Ilúvatar establishes in each race. The desire to retain for personal reasons that which is not one’s own is a theme reflected in retention of the body and of the elvish realms and echoed on a larger scale in the very lives of the Children of Ilúvatar. Each attempt at possession fails due to the fact that the lives of the races of Middle-earth are not their own. They come from and return to Ilúvatar, and the selfless offering of mortal life is a sign

of the ultimate understanding that in Arda nothing is created alone, nor can it be possessed alone. Tolkien thoroughly underscores that partnership creates goodness and from this realization comes joy in living and the fulfillment of both mortal and immortal purpose.

## Chapter Three

### Union of the Races

Tolkien's creation of mortal and immortal race is explored in depth through a number of tales in which the boundaries of life and death are pushed, even changed. The fate of Beren and Lúthien, Idril and Tuor, Eärendil and Elwing, and Aragorn and Arwen are underlined by the half-elves. These individuals of mixed lineage are granted the choice to decide their mortal or immortal fate, which at its core is a decision between the draw of mortality or accepting an immortal doom.

#### Beren and Lúthien

The crux of the Beren and Lúthien tale lies in Lúthien's choice to relinquish her elvish fate in favor of mortality. She is the first elf<sup>15</sup> granted the choice to transcend the boundaries created by Ilúvatar, which dictate mortal and immortal fates. It is her relationship with Beren, a rare partnership of elf and man, which leads to this choice. The strangeness of their bond is reflected in the sentiment of Thingol, who debases Beren's mortality by scorning him as a "baseborn mortal," denying his right to love an elf-woman by virtue of his race (*Silmarillion* 167). Beren is anything but "baseborn," being son of kings such as Barahir, but because he is mortal Thingol treats him as of a lower class. (LUTHIEN QUOTE) Despite the fact that Beren's father has bestowed upon him the ring of Felagund as a token of partnership with the Quendi, it means little to Thingol. By denying the worth of Beren's token he strives to undermine the importance of the individual man and the Men before him.

To Thingol, mortals will never be able to achieve deeds high enough to earn the hand of his daughter. Tolkien causes him to use the language of contest against Beren, scorning him

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<sup>15</sup> She is also one of only two elves to ever be granted mortality.

repeatedly with the statement, “a father’s deeds...avail not to win the daughter of Thingol and Melian” (167). Thingol treats Lúthien as a prize and undermines Beren’s worth as contender for that prize because of his mortality. He fails to recognize the partnership that Beren and Lúthien seek to embrace, instead refusing to acknowledge mortal abilities, labeling them as unworthy petitioners for a jewel.

Thingol’s contempt towards the individual man is a sign of contempt for the race of “baseborn” mortals as a whole, manifest especially in the tendency to call on the deeds of their fathers to heighten their own renown. Thingol operates under the standard that men should depend on their own deeds and not those of their family, almost in the manner of an elf. But this is not completely fair, for as Húrin says to Turgon, men have shorter lives in which to achieve great things (158). In his disparaging attitude Thingol is holding Beren to the standard of an elf instead of recognizing his merits as a man. Beren is anything but baseborn, being in the same position as Thingol himself who marries a Maiar, of a race spiritually grander than his own. The slander he directs towards Beren highlights Thingol’s strangely disparaging intolerance towards a man he should feel communion with.

The hypocrisy of this treatment invites parallels to Beren’s relationship with Lúthien. The narrative similarities between the manner in which Thingol is stunned into paralysis by Melian, and Beren’s sighting of Lúthien are hard to ignore. It is the nightingale’s song that draws Thingol into his trance, and this association with Melian is echoed in her daughter’s name Tinúviel, meaning “Nightingale, daughter of twilight,” (*Silmarillion* 165). Lúthien’s beauty as both Maiar and elf places her in the role daughter of twilight, the very twilight of the elvish race, and in her relationship with Beren she carries the whole of her race into a partnership with Men. Her embrace of mortality for Beren’s company, for the chance to spend a lifetime with him, is a

reflection of Melian's choice to leave her place in Valinor and dwell with Thingol in Middle-earth (187, 65). Melian understands Lúthien's love and is able to sympathize due to her own experience loving someone of a younger race. She accepts her daughter's choice to love a mortal man and to forge a partnership between races based on grace and love.

Lúthien's choice is not contingent on Thingol's blessing or Beren's deeds, but the charity of her love alone. There is no deed that Beren can accomplish to win her love, but she bestows it on him regardless. Thingol's judgment, which is dependent on Beren's accomplishments, is a foil for Lúthien's love, which is not contingent on deeds of valor. Thingol does not understand the importance of his daughter's choice and the greater acknowledgement of Men's strength. Following the example of Lúthien, the Quendi must come to love Men without judging them based on their deeds or lineage, but on their place as Children of Ilúvatar and inheritors of Middle-earth. Lúthien's love is a manifestation of the ideal love all Quendi should feel towards Men.

Lúthien's affection becomes manifest in some of the greatest deeds of any of the Children of Ilúvatar, and this partnership is the key to defeating the powers of Morgoth. Lúthien is often given a majority of the credit for the joint retrieval of the Silmaril, for it is she who rescues Beren from imprisonment and lulls Morgoth with her song, but it is Beren who accepts the quest and it is his hand that clasps the jewel. Without both elf and man the deed would not have been accomplished, emphasizing that in the simplest terms the union of elf and man is the key to defeating the malicious powers of Middle-earth. Beren and Lúthien's love reaches the ideal of union needed to preserve Middle-earth. It is exemplary.

Love is the key element that Tolkien focuses on in all three of his relationships between man and elf, and the result is the remarkable fate of Lúthien. Her shift from immortal to mortal is

one of only three cases in Tolkien's world. As explored in the previous two chapters, Elves are fated to immortality in an equally positive and negative way, just as Men are to death. But the negative merits of the separate dooms causes each race to desire the fate of the other, an achievement first granted to Lúthien.

Huan is one of the primary characters to realize this shift, and acknowledges it in the second of his prophetic moments of speech, revealing to Beren "From the shadow of death you can no longer save Lúthien, for by her love she is now subject to it" (179). This revelation is the first evidence we have that the love and grace of Lúthien is powerful enough to change her fate. Shadow and death appear to signal not that Lúthien is now fully mortal, but that in loving Beren she is no longer free from the full pain of mortality. While an elf can die in body, there is always the knowledge of spiritual life and the possibility of reunion in the West. For Men there is the comfort of an end for themselves and their loved ones, making parting tragic, but hopeful since death is a universal fate. For Lúthien the pain of permanent separation is now coupled with her own continued spiritual existence, leading to a rift far deeper than any elf before her has felt.

In the first relationship between man and elf we encounter a special kind of loss. Even the analogous relationship of Thingol and Melian is not so tragic, since the fate of Maiar and elf are very much the same. Between the elf and the man, however, fate is sundered. The "shadow of death" is foreboding of the sorrow Lúthien feels as the first elf to ever love a mortal, while simultaneously predicting her own future mortality.

Beren and Lúthien is a unique pair in Tolkien's world, and the power they hold is used to construct later tales. Even Thingol eventually sees that "the love of Lúthien [is] a things new and strange; and he perceived that their doom might not be withstood by any power of the world" (184). Alluding to Lúthien's petition, Thingol can see from his perspective as a partner in the

first relationship to cross races that the love of two people can lead to an exception in the rule of fate. This exception does not change the nature of mortality for the entirety of Arda, but is enacted by Ilúvatar expressly for Lúthien. The power behind her love leads Ilúvatar to hear their case and allow the pair, as an exception, to decide their own doom, even if it is counter to the established rules of the world. It is Lúthien's selfless love for Beren, regardless of his mortality, that moves Ilúvatar to grant this choice. Beren and Lúthien are exemplars of union, the greatest desire for partnership with another, and her willingness to embrace mortality as a manifestation of that desire leads Ilúvatar to grant the choice. Should she have chosen immortality without Beren, her love would not have warranted the choice being offered.

Thingol's eventual realization of mortal merit is larger than simply calling Beren a Man "unlike all other mortal Men, and among the great in Arda" (184). His compliment, in conjunction with his realization of the strength of Lúthien's love, applies to the race of Men at large. By acknowledging that Beren is "among the great" not only in Middle-earth, but in all of Arda, he is acknowledging that Men, whom he previously thought of as but an ignorant and short-lived people, have the potential to achieve deeds on par with the Quendi or even the Valar.

Thingol's recognition of Beren's potential is a sign of the Quendi's burgeoning awareness of the potential for the whole of the race of Men. Lúthien's love is the supreme recognition of this potential, realized through their union. In Beren and Lúthien is the meeting of all three races of Middle-earth, being Valar, Quendi and Man. It is a blessing to the race of Men to combine their line with that of both Valar and Quendi, elevating them not only through friendship, but also through love as to an equal. Their union brings immortality to Men and displays the power of partnership, strong enough to convince Ilúvatar to, even in one case, bend the rules of immortality and death.

Lúthien faces an important end when she is granted a reprieve from immortality. Lúthien's petition against the inevitable separation from Beren is first a plea for him to wait "beyond the Western sea;" in the halls of Mandos (186). Beren's spirit is granted housing here as he waits to depart the world. Unlike the Elves whose spirits also go to Mandos, Beren is there only by Lúthien's petition, for Men's spirits do not go to Mandos upon death, and there is but speculation that they are housed in a different hall. Beren, however, is not called to wait in Mandos indefinitely as the Elves are, but rather to wait for Lúthien's coming. Beren is not granted immortality in these halls, but a temporary reprieve until Lúthien is reunited with him, for not even Mandos has the ability to curb the fate of Men.

The second and most important of Lúthien's petitions, this time to Manwë, is her song of separation from Beren. The truth of the song and the purity of her love lead her to present the Valar with two themes, "the sorrow of the Eldar and the grief of Men" (187). These themes are sentiments experienced by each race in the face of death. For the Quendi sorrow is pervasive in their existence, witness to a world passing and unable to retain it. In death sorrow is felt for the departure from Middle-earth, but this feeling is not the grief of ultimate loss. Sorrow and passing is encapsulated in the experience of Beren and Lúthien, as she is subject to witnessing the man she loves pass in mortal death. Her sorrow is also the sorrow of her race for the immortality they must endure within a world that is constantly changing.

The nuances inherent in the word "sorrow" reflect the resigned inevitability of time among the Quendi, while grief is more explicit when regarding the fate of Men. In her second theme Lúthien addresses the fate of Men in terms of this grief. The sentiment is a more poignant form of the Quendi's sorrow, a product of their permanent separation from the world. Where the Quendi may have perpetual sorrow for the movement of time in Middle-earth, they are never

separated from it as Men are. Sorrow is a melancholy emotion for the Quendi, but grief is a much more active and poignant feeling of loss.

Lúthien combines these sentiments in her petition, which is symbolic of the partnership between herself and Beren. The shadow of death is indeed over her, making her sorrow also her grief, for she is still immortal and will live to see the world change, but like a Man she is experiencing the permanence of separation from the one she loves. While Lúthien's body has already died from grief at the time of her song, since her spirit is in Valinor she is able to petition to the Valar. Her song is not to Ilúvatar directly, but to Manwë who then implores Ilúvatar on Lúthien's behalf. The link between Arda and the presence of Ilúvatar is the intermediary of the Valar Manwë whose compassion allows Lúthien's plea to be heard. It is partnership that moves Ilúvatar to grant Lúthien a choice between the fate of the Quendi and the fate of Men,<sup>16</sup> the first of its kind in Middle-earth.

Transition between fates is offered for the first time, a choice between dwelling “until the world's end among the Valar, forgetting all the griefs that her life had known,” or achieving a mortal life with Beren in Middle-earth, but “without certitude of life or joy” (187). Lúthien may choose the fate of her race; an existence of joy in Valinor which her death has already led her to, in time distracting from the sorrow of her song. Or she can choose a mortal life of uncertainty, which is far less appealing from a mortal standpoint, where death is fearful and immortality ideal, so why does Lúthien choose this path over a life of immortal joy?

“For Beren,” is her answer. Life as an immortal in the joy of Valinor would be to forget “all the griefs that her life had known,” including her love of Beren (*Silmarillion* 187). But

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<sup>16</sup> In his *Letters* Tolkien explains in depth the use of “miracle,” or Ilúvatar's direct intervention into Arda. This is one such case of miracle; changing the fate of an elf, which even the Valar cannot do.

Lúthien is unwilling to give her love to a mortal, only to forget him in death and symbolically destroy his memory. This would be an even greater tragedy. Instead Lúthien opts to take on all parts of mortality, being the first of the Quendi to perceive life from the standpoint of a mortal, and she does it gladly. Her willingness to share in Beren's fate is the culmination of her love and the partnership of elf and man that transcends immortality.

Interestingly, Ilúvatar is unwilling to grant Beren immortality, letting the decision of fate rest solely on Lúthien's life. The underlying rule of mortality is still in place, even as Lúthien is granted the Gift of Death. Ilúvatar is unwilling to revoke the gift to the race of Men, but he will allow an elf to choose it. Her acceptance illuminates their partnership, and her mortality secures the knowledge that while they live in Arda they will not be parted to suffer the sorrow and grief of eternal bereavement.

#### Idril and Tuor

Beren and Lúthien's union is the start of the half-elven line, a familial strain that granted the choice between mortality and immortality. While Dior, their son, lives as a mortal, since Lúthien has chosen her fate at the time of his birth, he later begets Elwing who weds Eärendil, son of Idril and Tuor, another notable coupling of elf and man. Idril and Tuor's story provides an interesting mirror when analyzed in reference to Beren and Lúthien's relationship.

Like Beren, Tuor is a man granted with the friendship of the Quendi and the love of an elf-woman. It is Idril, daughter of Turgon, King of Gondolin, who gives Tuor her favor. While both elvish fathers rule a hidden realm where the elvish race is protected, unlike Beren and Lúthien, Idril and Tuor's union is supported and celebrated by the people of Gondolin, and especially Idril's father. It is this general public support that leads to a life more fulfilling than

Beren and Lúthien's, unhindered by disagreements and death and, although still plagued by the forces of Morgoth, not to the extent of the first elf and mortal couple.

Tuor's life is an interesting example in itself. His role as messenger of Ulmo, his fatherly relationship with Turgon, his life in Gondolin, and his union with Idril make Tuor appear to be one of the Quendi rather than a mortal man. He is exemplary of the elevated status Men achieve through fellowship with the Quendi, since his deeds are on par with the Elves, a role Thingol would have scorned. While Beren's noble actions are dismissed as "baseborn," Tuor is accepted as great even among the Quendi and his nature as mortal is of little consequence. His resemblance to one of the Quendi and his marriage serve to make his eventual fate somewhat less surprising.

Tuor's desire for the sea is a result of his role as a messenger of Ulmo,<sup>17</sup> "the instrument of his designs," says *The Silmarillion*, adapting Tuor as a tool instead of as a partner, but still blessing him with the purpose of the Valar (*Silmarillion* 328, *Letters* 193). It is unsurprising when in his old age Tuor experiences "a longing for the deeps of the Sea... in his heart" (*Silmarillion* 144-45). A latent desire for the sea is planted in Tuor when Ulmo chooses him, and lies dormant to reawaken when he hears the song of the sea. Tuor feels a longing to sail West as the Elves feel drawn to Valinor, but his longing in elf-like manner is met with his very mortal acknowledgement of age and eventual death. Like Bëor and Aragorn's acceptance, Tuor's

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<sup>17</sup> Ulmo is closely related to the Quendi by means of the sea. The propensity for the Quendi to feel drawn to bodies of water, rivers, streams and lakes is a product of the echo of the Valar's song of creation in the waters, for "it is said by the Eldar that in the water there lives yet the echo of the Music of the Ainur...and many of the Children of Ilúvatar hearken still unsated to the voices of the sea" (*Silmarillion* 19). The sound of Ulmo's horns, the Ulumuri, affect those who hear it with a desire "ever after in their hearts, and longing for the sea never leaves them again" (27). Ulmo's music draws the Quendi to the veins of the world where the song of creation is echoed and the Quendi acknowledge a connection with the Valar as they exist across the widest body of water- the Western Sea.

voyage to the West is not achieved out of anger or fear, but as a result of realizing and accepting mortality. Tuor's voyage is precluded by his privilege in living a very elvish life along with the realization of his mortality. He does not set sail to avoid death; he does so to accept it.

Taking Idril on his voyage makes the journey exemplary of Lúthien's two themes; Men's grief and Quendi's sorrow, for like Beren and Lúthien, Idril and Tuor soon face their separation. Idril's journey is the end of her life in Middle-earth and the reception of joy in Valinor, while Tuor's journey contains the admission of his looming mortal death mixed with the blessing of seeing Valinor before he dies. Eventually the couple will be separated by a gap wider than the Western Sea; escape from Arda will divide them.

But what is Tuor's actual fate? His departure to Valinor leads to speculation concerning whether he achieves the immortality of the Quendi or succumbs to the death of Men. From *The Silmarillion's* point of view Tolkien writes "in after days it was sung that Tuor alone of mortal Men was numbered among the Eldar race...and his fate is sundered from that of Men" (245). This passage seems to make explicit that Tuor is graced with immortality, and we can extrapolate from the pattern of Tuor's life in Middle-earth that gift makes sense. But the fact that Tuor's fate is 'sung' adds a hint of doubt to the certainty of his doom. The element of lore alluded to by the act of song adds an element of uncertainty to fact, for it is only in tales that Tuor achieves immortality and the objective truth may differ, but the distance from Valinor to Middle-earth makes the truth unknown.

In his *Letters* Tolkien makes more explicit mention of Tuor's fate, outlining that "'it is supposed' (not stated) that he as a unique exception receives the Elvish limited 'immortality': an exception either way" (193, emphasis mine). Tolkien states explicitly that in Middle-earth no one truly knows the fate of Tuor, but moreover that it does not appear to matter. Tuor's ability to sail

to Valinor at all is an exception to the restriction on Men. Even if he has not been granted the fate of an elf, he has been given the grace of seeing the Blessed Realm. Idril's presence may well be the reason for this exception, for as an elf she has the right to reach Valinor and her relationship with Tuor is a means of personal elevation for the mortal. She willingly departs from her home in Middle-earth to enter the Blessed Realm for the sake of Tuor, whose time has come to resign his life. Like Lúthien the nature of her love and unwillingness to part with Tuor make her part in the journey one of grace. She need not come with him, but she does.

Whether the pair actually reaches at all Valinor is speculative, but the Tuor's call partnered with Idril's elvish nature indicates that landing in the Blessed Realm is probably their fate. Meanwhile, Tuor's supposed immortality is still in question. By reaching Valinor he is not automatically granted immortality, for it is not the nature of the Valinor to make one immortal, rather is it simply that the immortal dwell there. Postulating from the pattern established in the tale of Beren and Lúthien it would seem highly counterintuitive of Ilúvatar to grant the option of immortality to Tuor when he would not to Beren. Ilúvatar's refusal to grant the choice of immortality to mortals begs the question whether the elvish doom is really the benefit mortals perceive it as.

Tuor's fate may be more akin to that of Frodo and Bilbo at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, which is to say that he is given time in the Blessed Realm among the immortals, but is still mortal. Because mortality includes the Gift of Death Ilúvatar would be revoking a blessing should he grant immortality, even to those as elf-like as Tuor. While Tolkien's purpose is never definitively stated, and we remain uncertain if Tuor is an exception to the fate of Men, reading the themes of mortality and immortality lead to the conclusion that in the lore of Middle-earth

Tuor's fate is opposed to Beren's, when in truth their themes of mortality and acceptance are very much the same.

Tuor is a legend in Middle-earth of possible a break from death, a positive partnership with an immortal that grants a man immortality without the hubris of those such as the Númenóreans. As a story this is the logical reverse of Beren and Lúthien, showing a mirrored image of a human who benefits with a different fate, when the reality of Tuor's fate outside of Middle-earth's viewpoint is probability very similar to Beren's. Yet Tolkien places influence not on the certainty of fate, but the fact that fate is faced in partnership. Together Idril and Tuor brave the waters of the Western Sea and together they disappear out of all knowledge of Middle-earth.

#### Of the Half-Elven

The union of Eärendil and Elwing<sup>18</sup> produces the line of the Half-elven, individuals who are of both races granted with the gift of Lúthien, the choice to decide their fate. The tale of Eärendil the Mariner creates certain parallels to the story of Idril and Tuor as they set sail into the West, but Eärendil's voyage is not an acknowledgement of age. Concern for the whole of Middle-earth propels him to perform his "errand of the Two Kindreds" (*Silmarillion* 249). Eärendil's elvish (Idril) mother and mortal father (Tuor) make him a product of both races and his dual lineage labels him as the ideal representative of both the Elves and Men in Middle-earth. It is he who performs the task of both races, asking for protection from the Valar and intervention into Middle-earth. There are echoes of Lúthien's plea in Eärendil as he asks "pity for [the Noldor's] great sorrows, and mercy upon Men and Elves and succor in their great need" (249). Pity for the sorrow inherit in the Noldor's exile, succor for the grief of Men, and mercy for

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<sup>18</sup> The union of the son of Idril and Tuor and the granddaughter of Beren and Lúthien.

both of their transgressions reflect the sorrow and grief of Lúthien's words and the failure of both races to achieve perfect fellowship. His acknowledgement of the burden both dooms possess and his equal plea, in which no race is given precedent over the other, move the Valar to action just as Lúthien moves Manwë to petition Ilúvatar on her behalf. The purity of heart and the personal fellowship in both petitioners is exemplary of what all members of both races should feel, and the recognition of this belief is what grants blessing.

Nor does Eärendil ask to be delivered from a mortal fate. He expects death from his voyage, as so many men before him have found when sailing West. Selfless in this respect, Eärendil is blessed beyond his expectations with his position in Valinor as the bearer of the Silmaril. At this time he is also blessed with the choice of the Half-elven, the personal decision to embrace the doom of Quendi or of Men. Elwing's decision on this matter is intriguing, for she chooses immortality "because of Lúthien" (249). Among the Eldar the loss of Lúthien is one they continue to suffer until the end of Middle-earth.<sup>19</sup> The race as a whole feels this one bereavement and Elwing, as if in an attempt to prevent inflicting the same bereavement, chooses immortality for the sake of the lost Lúthien.

Eärendil follows Elwing's path, not wanting to be separated, but it is clear that "his heart was rather with the kindred of Men" (251). It is world-weariness that prompts him to allow Elwing the choice, and his sailing of the heavens is a hint that Eärendil is not content with immortality. He has been offered and accepted life within Arda, but spends his time traversing the sky "beyond the confines of the world" (252). Eärendil's travels through the "cold and pathless voids" indicate that he is not content in Arda and seeks to understand what lies beyond it

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<sup>19</sup> The loss of Lúthien is more than death; it is the eternal loss of one of the most beautiful of the Quendi. Elves are not accustomed to permanent separation or the notion that they will never again perceive an individual within Arda. Her death is the loss of another kind of 'jewel,' a pinnacle of elvish beauty forever gone from the world for the benefit of Men.

(252). On his voyages Eärendil appears to be pining for knowledge of the fate of mortals who escape Arda, whether he is explicitly searching for them or not. He longs to understand the fate of Men, from whom he has chosen a different path and is therefore unable to comprehend the fate of his race resting beyond the circles of the world.

It is the selfless plea of Eärendil and Elwing that provides them with the choice of the Half-elven, for they have a claim to both races of the Children of Ilúvatar, and like Beren and Lúthien their partnership benefits the entirety of both races. Their choice is an unprecedented product of the mixture of elvish and human races and the selfless actions that result. What their decisions comes down to is which doom is more desirable a reward.

Like Lúthien who chooses mortality and Tuor, who supposedly choose immortality, Eärendil's dissatisfaction with immortality paints a trend in the choice of the Half-elven. Arwen secures this trend when she chooses mortality for the sake of a mortal Man in a manner so reminiscent of Beren and Lúthien that she is often described as an image of the lost elf-maiden (*Return* 1033). It seems in most cases mortality is favored by the Half-elven for the sake of a loved one. As with Beren and Aragorn, the mortal man is not offered immortality, but it is the elf that must decide either death or separation. Division of these important couples would underline the inherent distinction between Elves and Men so often highlighted by death, but when an elf freely crosses that line in order to retain union they are giving up a part of their essence in order to create a partnership of races.

The third union of Elf and Men is perhaps the most famous, that of Arwen,<sup>20</sup> granddaughter of Eärendil and Elwing, and the man Aragorn.<sup>21</sup> This story begins with Aragorn

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<sup>20</sup> Arwen is a culmination of all the lines of the half-elven, as great great granddaughter to Beren and Lúthien and great-granddaughter of Idril and Tuor. Her family includes Eärendil and Elwing and her father and uncles, Elrond and Elros, were granted the choice of the half-elven.

wandering in the trees when he sees the elf-maiden, just one of many parallels to the story of Beren and Lúthien. In Tolkien's narrative found in the appendices of *The Return of the King* Aragorn is singing the Lay of Lúthien, calling out to Arwen with the name of her great-great-grandmother "Tinúviel!" (1033). When Arwen asks why he called her by Lúthien's name, he answers, "Because I believed you indeed to be Lúthien" (1033). Early in their story are the parallels between the first marriage of Men and Elf established, and Arwen's mortal choice is almost expected in the end.

Arwen's loss is even more troubling to the Elves, given their continued sorrow for the loss of Lúthien and her role as heir to the Half-elven strain. Arwen has, like her father, has an "(irrevocable) choice, which may be delayed but not permanently, which kin's fate they will share" (*Letters* 193). Arwen delays her choice, but it is still hers to make while for the line of Elros<sup>22</sup> there is no choice. Aragorn as a mortal descendent of Elros has no choice between immortality and the fate he was born to. Ilúvatar may be willing to change the fate of the elvish line, but not the fate of those who chose the mortal gift. Beren's lack of choice and the final mortality of Elros' line are evidence of a preference for mortality on behalf of Ilúvatar himself.

There are also allusions to the relationship between Lúthien and Thingol mirrored in Arwen and Elrond. Aragorn questions whether Arwen has been kept "locked in [Elrond's] hoard?" (*Return* 1033). Possessiveness comes into question, provoking allusion to Thingol's comparison between Lúthien and the material Silmarils. This comparison is not lost on Aragorn, as he calls Arwen "no less dear than the treasure of Thingol that Beren once desired" (340). Arwen is compared to Lúthien as a possession of Thingol's that must be won by the mortal

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<sup>21</sup> Aragorn himself is descended of Elrond's brother, Elros who choose mortality as half-even.

<sup>22</sup> Elros is the brother of Elrond, who chose mortality.

Beren. Aragorn pictures himself in the same position, insinuating that like Thingol, Elrond has been jealous in keeping her away from notice.

But can we blame Elrond who evidently fears that Aragorn will separate him from his daughter eternally? It is a well-founded apprehension, since when Aragorn admits to Elrond his love, the father warns should his daughter reciprocate “I should still be grieved because of the doom that is laid on us” (340). This first realization of Arwen’s choice is elaborated in Elrond’s fear that if Arwen loves Aragorn it will result in “a bitter parting beyond the end of the world” (340). Immortality is at stake, and an elf subject to mortality means the finite sundering of all relationships, even the bond between father and daughter.

Like the sundering of Thingol and Lúthien by Beren, Aragorn’s challenge to Elrond for the hand of his daughter is a great achievement for the relationship of Elves and Men, but is a bitter separation for Elrond. Man and Elf are struggling over the same bitter end, but it is a fate for the benefit of both races. The marriage of Aragorn and Arwen reinforces the unity first expressed in Beren and Lúthien’s partnership.

All comparisons between the tales are apt in this respect. In his *Letters* Tolkien explains Lúthien’s relationship with Beren as part of a larger plan for the Quendi’s preparation of Middle-earth for Men. “The entering into Men of the Elvish-strain,” he explains, “is indeed represented as part of the Divine plan for the ennoblement of the Human Race, from the beginning destined to replace the Elves” (194). Combining the bloodlines of both races instills the presence of the Quendi in Men, elevating them in a way much like fellowship, but at a more fundamental level. Nowhere is this better expressed than in the power of Aragorn, as Legolas observes “nobler is his spirit than the understanding of Sauron; for is he not of the children of Lúthien? Never shall that line fail, though the years may lengthen beyond count” (*Return* 858). Aragorn, king of Men, is

the embodiment of the nobility bestowed upon the Younger Children of Ilúvatar by the initial union of Men and Elves. With the inevitable movement of the Quendi to the West and their disappearance from Middle-earth, the combination of bloodlines allows part of the elvish strain to remain in Middle-earth. Granting Elves a mortal fate allows them to grace the lineage of Men with a strain of elvish grandeur, artistic and spiritual goodness, and a lasting memory of their partnership, living in an ‘immortal’ manner, never to fail until the end of the world. It is the culminating gift of union and a blessing.

### Sailing West

Outside of the elvish and mortal patterns of existence there is an interesting trend concerning certain mortals who transcend life in Middle-earth and are granted passage to the West, even after it has been removed from the accessible world. Tuor and Eärendil are of this category, as are the most famous cases of Frodo, Bilbo and Sam. These three Ringbearers are given the honor of voyaging West because of the suffering they have endured and the unhealing wounds of the One Ring in their mind. Frodo understands this well when he tells Sam “you must be healed. You were meant to be solid and whole, and you will be” (*Return* 1003). Frodo understands that for himself, and even Sam whose possession of the Ring was quite short, the only healing they can obtain to oppose the wounds suffered at the hands of Sauron is among the greater goodness in the West. To be “solid and whole” is necessary, and it is obvious that Frodo and Bilbo have suffered wounds too great to bear in Middle-earth any longer. They are sailing to their death and like Tuor they are fully aware of this, having done what they can in Middle-earth.

Sam departs when, again like Tuor, he is aged and has lived his mortal life to fulfillment. The sound of the waves as he sits watching Frodo and Bilbo sail “sank deep in his heart” (1007). The call of the waters, the call of Ulmo felt by Tuor, applies to Sam as well, and he heeds it in

the end. But Sam does not become immortal, nor does Frodo or Bilbo. They are blessed and granted healing, but like Túrin the only reprieve for their wounds is mortality. To revoke this mortality would be painful for the Ringbearers, as the goal of the Ring itself is to extend life beyond its means. Immortal life would be a curse rather than a gift.

By taking the journey to Valinor mortals are not being granted elvish immortality. This journey confirms, “They cannot abide for ever, and through they cannot return to mortal earth, they can and will ‘die’ – of free will and leave the world” (*Letters* 189-199). The journey West is not synonymous with immortality, but with reprieve. Taking into account the Half-elven preference for mortality and the unwillingness of Ilúvatar to rescind it, we realize that the voyage into the West would be insufficient were it to equal immortality. Instead of offering a reprieve before the ultimate release of Death, Valinor would be akin to a hospice in which rest helps, but never completely heals.

The sorrow of the Elves is living with memory that is never erased. This is what burdens Lúthien in her days after Beren’s death and becomes manifest in her song to Manwë. The pain of living eternally without Beren would heal in time if she rests in Valinor, but what would be lost is the relationship with and understanding of the other race. Whether immortally, or as is more often the case, mortally, the fates of both partners in these crosses between races always match. Together Beren and Lúthien face mortality, and together Tuor and Idril sail to Valinor, together Eärendil and Elwing stay within the word, together Aragorn and Arwen accept death. Whatever the fate, it is faced as one.

Tolkien’s preference for mortality in these relationships appears to signify that the immortal race benefits from a personal understanding of mortality. While those left in Middle-earth suffer from a pain all the more poignant for their immortality, the connection between the

Children of Ilúvatar is strengthened for it. It is not so much that immortality is negative and mortality obviously a better fate, but that each race has been given an opportunity to experience the doom of the other, and the mutual pain and benefit.

## Conclusion

In all his writing on the mythology and history of Arda, Tolkien uses the themes of community and selflessness surrounding mortals and immortals to portray a moral system where partnership results in harmony and deference in understanding. Death is good and immortality is good because both natures are created by Ilúvatar, and both have the capacity to bring the race into closer harmony with their creator through death's journey beyond the world and life's strong connection to the world. These themes influence almost every aspect of the stories Tolkien writes and have extreme bearing in the nature of every mortal or elvish character created.

Mortality in Tolkien's world is largely inconsistent with the fate of every other race;<sup>23</sup> Valar, Maiar, Elf and even Dwarf, whose spirits exist in Arda indefinitely. But mortality is more than an atypical fate, for while Men's differentiation appears unfortunate, understanding the innate goodness of mortality allows mortals to see the purpose in their fate and the appropriateness of their escape.

Tolkien does not choose between the benefits mortality and immortality, nor does he say that one is a reward while the other is a punishment, for Ilúvatar intends to give "gifts" as plural the races he creates (*Silmarillion* 18). Given the differing nature of mortals and immortals these gifts are given according to the race's function. The purpose of the Elves is to prepare Middle-earth for the coming of Men, and "their love of the Earth...is more single and more poignant therefore," (42). The deep understanding and necessary spiritual link between the Elves and Arda results in the beauty of art and lore<sup>24</sup> that exist as a benefit the younger race.

Men are not gifted with the intricate and essential link to the world that Elves are, so they must utilize fellowship with the elder race, which becomes a path to a greater understanding of

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<sup>23</sup> The exception here is hobbits who are also mortal.

<sup>24</sup> Realms such as Lórien and Rivendell exemplify this statement.

the world. The gift of death, which is a spiritual departure from Arda, means that at its core mortal nature is separate from the world. Without this link Men suffer from a lack of awareness concerning the world they inhabit, and depend on elvish knowledge to fill this gap.

The grandeur associated with understanding the earth is manifest in the Valar, the shapers of the world who are Arda's "life and it is theirs" (20). The Valar, who like the Elves "die not until the World dies," share an intrinsic link with the Arda and cannot leave (42). Their beings, wholly spiritual, are not dependent on a physical form at any point. Instead they come from before Arda and help build it. They are its life force. The Elves, as beings with both body and spirit, but whose spirit is dependent on Arda, function as the link between Men and Valar. Mortal beings cannot handle the powers that shape the World, for their physical forms are fragile and their spirit independent of the world. Elves are in a position of service towards Men, providing knowledge from one race for the good of the other. They aid the younger mortals in achieving heights of grace and glory otherwise impossible.

There is selflessness in the action of the Elves, and love for Men. In Tolkien's world selflessness is the seed of partnership and a sign of morality, and the recurring theme of community is echoed in the purpose of the Elves. When they convey knowledge not for their own glory, but for the glory of Arda and the instruction of mortals, it good and their purpose is fulfilled.

The ultimate purpose of the Elves is ultimately exemplified in the rare but important unions of Men and Elf. These instances are counter to the sometimes individualistic and selfish actions of both races. The Noldor and the Númenóreans both refuse partnership with of the Valar in a struggle to elevate themselves from their natural state, yet this only creates a wider rift between what is wrongfully desired (immortality) and what is already granted (escape from the

world.) When both races accept their fate and realize they are not in control, selflessness emerges. Power over life and death is not in individual hands, but intrinsic in the overarching nature of the entire world.

Tolkien's tendency to prefer mortality to immortality is evident in Ilúvatar's reluctance to allow Men immortal existence. Elves granted mortality, like Lúthien and Arwen, are given an early end to their time in Arda. Escape from the world is not against the nature of their spirits completely, for while Elves hold a strong bond with Arda they hold it only until the world ends. Death at the end of the world is like mortal death at last, for their spirits still exist without being in Arda. There is no non-existence in Tolkien's world and with a release from the world the spirit of the Elves, which burned all throughout the earth's existence, is freed.

But "Ilúvatar has not revealed what he purposes for the Elves after the World's end" (42). Outside of the world the Elves' meaning is unknown since their life is built around an intrinsic link to the earth, but Tolkien does not hint or state that annihilation is their fate. The Elves are free without a known purpose, very much like mortals. When they are granted mortality in Arda's history they are able to achieve a state higher than existence in the world before its end. In essence they are granted an early reward, for eventually even immortals will escape the world.

Therefore the granting of mortality to Elves is not against their nature, but it is a preemptive reward and closes the gap between Men and Elves through the experience of death. With the loss of Lúthien the entire elvish race experiences for the first time the complete death of one of their own, allowing for greater sympathy with Men who realize everyone they know, and they themselves, will be taken beyond the circles of the tangible world.

In the simplest terms, Tolkien designs mortality to be a gift. It is good and benevolent; it provides escape from fear, hunger, pain and memory. It eliminates the need to sustain one's

body, to be at odds with the world, and more than anything else it is the ultimate acknowledgement of power. Death reveals the fact that Men, like Elves, did not create and cannot control all things in their existence, and they are not the source of all power. Willing deference to Ilúvatar and communion with all free races of Tolkien's world defines a man who understands the creation of his nature and lives a more fulfilling life because of it.

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