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Translating Tolkien's Epic: Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*

The major cinematic event of the past three years has been the release of Peter Jackson's adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*. The films drew huge audiences worldwide and accumulated rave reviews and industry awards, incidentally putting Tolkien back onto the best-seller lists. I think Tolkien would be pleased. His "prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them" (Preface, xvi).[1] Peter Jackson's films accomplish this exceptionally well.

Having said this, however, how well do the films really capture Tolkien's epic? To what extent do they translate its themes? And what, in fact, are the epic's "messages"? Many scholars have mined Tolkien's "auxiliary" writings to answer the last question. Comparison between Tolkien's text and Jackson's films provides another method of analysis. My aim in doing so is *not* simply to note deviations, but to identify what Tolkien hoped would "deeply move" his readers, i.e. what he wanted them to apply "to the[ir] thought and experience" (xvii). Some changes between book and film were inevitable. Entire episodes could be, and were, omitted without altering the meaning, while the visual medium necessarily suggested an increase in "action." Jackson also interweaves story lines to provide a more unified narrative. Even one of his most drastic alterations—Arwen, ageless elven princess, becomes a hip action figure—is not ultimately significant and probably makes the epic more accessible to contemporary audiences.

In considering how Jackson translated *The Lord of the Rings*, then, I hope to elucidate the epic's meanings. For reasons of space, I can address only a few central themes. Some of these, Jackson's translation makes as or even more powerful for the audience: the world of Middle-earth, nature and industrialization, fellowship and community, the role of the individual, and the centrality of mercy. Others highlight divergences between book and film, particularly the elimination of pre-modern values in favor of modern "sensibilities": the toning down of majesty, the appearance of angst, the elimination of higher powers, and the downplaying of ambivalence about victory. Overall, Jackson captures the natural and human element of Tolkien's work

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almost to perfection, but is less successful in conveying Tolkien's more fundamental moral and philosophical concerns.

Jackson's "Successes"

Arguably the films' greatest strength is their remarkable realization of an imaginary world, Middle-earth. Jackson's choice of locales in his own beautiful country (New Zealand) and his fabrication of dwellings and fortresses bring Tolkien's word-pictures to life: the verdant Shire, polluted Isengard, watery Rivendell, brooding Moria, ethereal Lórien, broad Rohan, wild Ithilien, fantastical Minas Tirith, bleak Mordor, terrifying Barad-dûr. Jackson's Middle-earth, like Tolkien's, is magical as well as natural. Particularly impressive "special effects" are the portrayals of the Balrog, Gollum, and the Ring's effect on Bilbo and Galadriel. Some of the films' most moving scenes have no words, like the grieving for Gandalf after Moria. And Jackson's pictures occasionally make real what Tolkien's words cannot quite: we understand that Saruman has committed a "black evil" by engaging in genetic engineering (462), but in the reading we do not experience the visceral impact provided by watching the "birth" of the Uruk-hai on film.

Jackson also captures eloquently one central theme of *The Lord of the Rings*: the beauty of nature and the threat posed by industrialization. Tolkien and Jackson both love hobbits, and their works linger over the opening scenes in the Shire, which represents the beauty of simple things: tilling the soil, eating, drinking, pipe smoking, fireworks, hospitality, neighborliness. Hobbits "do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom"; they have "a close friendship with the earth" (1). The evil that threatens their agrarian idyll is modernization, as appears in the Mirror of Galadriel and the damage done to the Shire (the latter only in the book).

The anti-industrialization message is also conveyed by showing what Saruman, who has a "mind of metal and wheels" (554), does to Isengard. The vale "had once been green and fair, [but] was now filled with pits and forges" and "dark smoke" (254, 540-541). Jackson underscores this by showing Saruman ordering trees cut down and polluting his vale with machines, not once but twice: early in "The Fellowship of the Ring" and again in "The Two Towers." The end-result of industrialization is Mordor itself, portrayed in the films as desolate and described in the book as an abandoned industrial site: "gasping pools choked with ash and mud, high mounds of crushed and powdered rock, great cones of earth fire-blasted and poison-stained" (617). Jackson omits the damage wrought by Saruman's minions in the Shire, but he does have Merry point out that if Saruman is not stopped, "all that is green and good in the world will be gone." The evil of industrialization is indeed the only "message" that Tolkien admitted, describing how "the country in which I lived in childhood was being shabbily destroyed before I was ten" (xvii). It is a message Jackson's films eloquently deliver.

The films also highlight the importance of friendship and community in the epic. Both characterize life in the Shire, but most importantly, it is fellowship that enables the defeat of Sauron. Frodo's quest to de-

stroy the Ring depends heavily on friendship: that of Gandalf, Merry and Pippin ("You can trust us to stick to you through thick and thin.... But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone.... We are your friends" [103]), Aragorn, and above all, Sam. Sam's devotion provides some of the most touching scenes in both book and films, and Frodo repeatedly tells Sam he is glad he's with him (e.g. 397, 610, 698, 879, 926). The bond between Merry and Pippin and the unlikely friendship of Gimli and Legolas provide running comfort and amusement throughout book and films, as Jackson brings to life in a wonderful exchange at the Black Gate:

> Gimli: "Who would have thought I'd die fighting side by side with an elf?"
> Legolas: "What about side by side with a friend?"
> Gimli: "Aye, I can do that."

Beyond the Fellowship itself, the broader community (represented by Galadriel, Eomer, Treebeard, and Faramir) provides aid and hope in dark hours. As Frodo tells Faramir, Elrond said they "should find friendship upon the way secret and unlooked for.... To have found it turns evil to great good" (679). Saruman and Sauron are defeated by joint action—of hobbits, men, elves, dwarves, and a wizard—based not in realpolitik but on commitment to community. In the book, this is highlighted in the age-old alliance between Gondor and Rohan: "even if Rohan itself felt no peril, still we should come to [Denethor's] aid" (782), and "never has any league of peoples been more blessed, so that neither has ever failed the other, nor shall fail" (948). Jackson weakens this alliance somewhat, but authentically translates Tolkien's message by recalling in "The Two Towers" a still older alliance, one between races, not just kingdoms. After Theoden despairs of outside help at Helm's Deep, Haldir of Lórien unexpectedly arrives with an elven company, declaring that they came to honor the alliance which had once existed between elves and men, having vowed to fight alongside men once more. The depth of their commitment to community is vividly illustrated in Haldir's death, when, as an elf, he could have lived forever.

At the same time, *The Lord of the Rings* emphasizes the power of individuals to make history. When Frodo tells Gandalf he wishes Sauron had not come back in his time, Gandalf responds, "So do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us" (50). A hobbit, of all people, has the chief responsibility: "This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong.... Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must" (Elrond, 262); "Even the smallest person can change the course of the future" (Galadriel, "The Fellowship"). And despite confusion, pain, and hardship, Frodo embraces his role. When the council at Rivendell deadlocks (in Tolkien's book, silently perplexed, in Jackson's "Fellowship," loudly arguing), it is Frodo's tentative voice that restarts the quest: "I will take the Ring...though I do not know the way" (263-264). Frodo's sense of responsibility and determination is continually bolstered by Sam, who, in another key speech, paraphrased in "The Two Towers," tells him, "By rights we shouldn't even be here, but we are.... [Folks in the great stories] had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't" (696). Ironically, of course, because of the Ring's power, Frodo is unable at the last to destroy it. Nonetheless, his acceptance of his burden gets him (with Sam's help) to the Cracks of Doom, even if it is Gollum who ultimately destroys the Ring.

That Gollum has a role, one that even the

wise cannot see, also demonstrates that the most unlikely individuals make literally earth-shattering contributions. Moreover, it highlights the value that Tolkien (and Jackson) place on mercy. Again, at Bag End (58, Moria in "The Fellowship"), when Frodo, not having met Gollum, declares it a pity that Bilbo did not kill him, Gandalf, the embodiment of wisdom, rebukes him: "Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand." Frodo insists that Gollum deserves death, but Gandalf responds, "Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement.... The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many." It is ultimately Frodo's pity (spurred not by Gandalf's words but Gollum's misery) that enables the quest's success.

One of the films' greatest achievements is making the audience feel that pity as well. Jackson movingly elaborates Tolkien's portrayal of Gollum as wretched, not evil. He places center-stage the once-hobbit's split personality, torn between his original nature (Smeagol, who understands loyalty and predominates under Frodo's kind treatment), and his corrupted one (Gollum, who is controlled by desire for the Ring and predominates under Sam's suspicion). The scenes of Smeagol/Gollum arguing with himself are utterly compelling. Even though Jackson alters the narrative to have Frodo (briefly) trust Smeagol over Sam—which undercuts Tolkien's portrayal of perfect friendship—the characterization of Smeagol/Gollum and the insistence on mercy is a highlight of the films. Because of Frodo's mercy to Smeagol, Gollum is at the Cracks of Doom to fulfill (however unintentionally) the quest. *The Lord of the Rings*, original epic and cinematic translation both, tells us that no one is irrelevant or unworthy of compassion.

Tolkien vs. Jackson

Despite the magnitude of Jackson's achievement, his films (especially "The Two Towers") diverge significantly from Tolkien's epic. Jackson, brought up in an age where hierarchy is suspect, truth relative, higher powers dismissed, and progress unquestioned, either disagreed with or missed Tolkien's underlying world-view, shaped by an Edwardian Catholic upbringing and the study of medieval literature. In fact, Jackson eliminates the more elevated but less "accessible" elements which, I suspect, Tolkien most hoped would move his readers.

Jackson's work is certainly "epic" cinema, a big-screen, battle-filled struggle between good and evil. But it lacks an essential quality of the Western literary epic: a sense of *majesty*. He repeatedly cuts ancient heroes down to modern size, yielding characters perhaps more sympathetic but less worthy of emulation. Gandalf loses confidence despite his "rebirth"; Frodo doubts Sam; Merry, Pippin, and Gimli serve as comic relief; Legolas provides the appeal merely of some version of extreme sports. Virtually the only untouched character is Galadriel—so otherwordly that even Jackson could not make her "human."

Most altered is Aragorn. Jackson re-imagines him as a reluctant hero, who, Elrond tells Gandalf, "turned from that path [as Elendil's heir] long ago, and chose exile." Fearing he has inherited Isildur's weakness, he leaves Narsil, Elendil's Sword that was Broken, at Rivendell and sends Arwen away, telling her their romance was "a dream and nothing more." Not until after Lórien does he begin to accept his lineage and destined role, promising Boromir that he will not let "our people" (Gondor) fall. Even though he leads the Rohirrim at Helm's Deep, he does not do so as Elendil's heir, and his dalliance with Eowyn is that of an ordinary

man. Only in the final film does he, as rightful heir of Gondor, wield Narsil, summon the dead, direct the war against Sauron, and rouse the Men of the West. Yet still, at his coronation, he seems rather ordinary, especially when planting a "movie kiss" on Arwen.

Jackson provides an interesting psychological portrayal, reflective of the contemporary difficulty with inherited rule. His Aragorn is not, however, Tolkien's, an epic hero who embraces his destiny. Already at Bree, in Tolkien's text, Aragorn draws the Sword that was Broken "and seemed suddenly to grow taller. In his eyes gleamed a light, keen and commanding" (168). At Rivendell, he is hailed publicly as Isildur's heir, chief of the Dunedain who guard the North (239, 241, 242). Early on Narsil is reforged, so that, like all epic heroes, Aragorn wields a named weapon, Anduril, Flame of the West, the power of which proves critical in Moria and Helm's Deep, as well as Minas Tirith (343, 521, 845). As a gift from Arwen, via Galadriel, he wears an elfstone as token of the name foretold for him as king, Elessar. Although old by human standards and generally nondescript, his true self is revealed at various epiphanies: young, tall, kingly, a legend come to life (343, 384, 423, 489, 527). The most majestic scene in the epic involves his arrival in the black ships of the Corsairs, where, instead of entering battle single-handed like a modern action hero (as in "The Return"), he announces his advent by unfurling a royal standard, wrought by Arwen of gems, mithril, and gold, the sight of which turns despair to laughter and trumpets (829-830). At his coronation, he stands "tall as the sea-kings of old…ancient of days yet in the flower of manhood," wisdom on his brow, strength and healing in his hands, a light about him (947). Throughout, Tolkien's Aragorn is a figure of majesty.

Scene from Lord of the Rings.

Although (or because?) he had witnessed his generation die in the trenches of France, Tolkien's epic, like others of the traditional genre, portrays battle as potentially glorious and necessary to defeat evil. Jackson's films are more ambivalent, more influenced by postmodern angst. Both his Theoden and his Treebeard initially attempt to "stay out of it" to protect their own people. Theoden tells Gandalf, "I know what you want of me, but I will not bring further death to my people," while Treebeard insists that this is not the Ents' war. Both eventually decide to fight, but only after a personal experience of danger and destruction. It is as if Jackson feels he must present a more postmodern view of war as, at best, a "last resort."

In contrast, Tolkien clearly argues that one cannot temporize with evil. As Eowyn puts it, "It needs but one foe to breed a war, not two…and those who have not swords can still die upon them" (936). Moreover, because the likelihood of success in battle is irrelevant to its undertaking, defeat can be as glorious as victory. Thus, Theoden and Treebeard act quickly in Tolkien's text, untroubled by doubt. As soon as Gandalf breaks Theoden's spell, "Suddenly he lifted the blade and swung it shimmering…. Then he gave a great cry…a call to arms…. Forth Eorlingas!" (506). Theoden refuses to hide, either in Dunharrow ("I myself will go to war, to fall in the front of battle, if it must

be" [507]) or in Helm's Deep (he will not end "like a badger in a trap.... Maybe we shall cleave a road, or make such an end as will be worth a song" [527]). Treebeard similarly gets angry immediately, castigating himself for past complacence (463). The Ents decide at their moot to go to war. "At least the last march of the Ents may be worth a song. Aye...we may help the other peoples before we pass away" (475).

Tolkien also believed in absolute right and wrong, as is most vividly illustrated in Frodo and Faramir's encounter in Ithilien. Unfortunately, Jackson's reinterpretation of this scene misses the point entirely. Faramir is Tolkien's most eloquent spokesman for the conviction that the ends not only *do* not but *can*not justify the means (a point also made by Gandalf and Galadriel). He is a foil to Boromir, who wants to use the Ring to save Gondor and attain glory—and also to Saruman, who argues that alliance with Sauron, though entailing deplorable evils, will achieve "the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Right, Order" (253).

Faramir knows better. Even before he is sure what Frodo carries, he tells him: "I would not take this thing, if it lay by the highway. Not were Minas Tirith falling in ruin, and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory" (656). Tolkien does give the reader a brief scare when Sam reveals it is "the Enemy's Ring": Faramir stands up forebodingly, declaring "A pretty stroke of fortune! A chance for Faramir, Captain of Gondor, to show his quality!" But he immediately shows that quality by sitting down and reiterating, "*Not if I found it on the highway would I take it*, I said," denying any desire for the Ring, and humbly disclaiming Sam's resultant praise (665-667). What a contrast with Jackson's Faramir, who uses the same words initially, but does the opposite. Driven by personal considerations rather than conviction, he decides to send the Ring to his father as "a mighty gift, a weapon to change our fortunes." Only after an added (and implausible) encounter with the Nazgul at Osgiliath does he recognize the likely outcome and let Frodo go. Instead of "one of the Kings of Men born into a later time, but touched with the wisdom and sadness of the Elder Race" (791), Jackson gives us an ordinary man, concerned for Gondor's well-being and his father's opinion, willing to use an evil object as a means for good, unable to make the right judgment until he personally witnesses the perils involved.

Tolkien's Faramir and his men are also aware that there are eternal and *supernatural* (not merely *magical*) forces inhabiting the hidden West (646, 661). Throughout Tolkien's epic, there are suggestions of a divine order, one described briefly in Appendix A (and outlined explicitly in *The Silmarillion*). It is rooted in the Blessed Realm (Valinor), where the Valar, ruled by Elbereth, guard Middle Earth on behalf of "the One" (208, 216, 658, 661, 1005, 1007; visions of Frodo, 106, 132; Appendix A, 1011, 1013). The Valar do not intervene directly, but they do influence the events of Middle-earth. Gandalf long ago came from Valinor ("Olorin I was in my youth in the West that is forgotten" [658]), and the perceptive reader can deduce that "his task" to aid the defeat of Sauron, to which he is "sent back" after falling with the Balrog (490, 974), was set for him by the Valar. On Mount Doom, Sam and Frodo suddenly are impelled to act: "It was almost as if [they] had been called" (921). The name of Elbereth is powerful against evil (191, 209, 704, 894), as is the light of the star of Eärendil, captured in Galadriel's phial and originally set as "a sign of hope to the dwellers of Middle-earth oppressed by the Great Enemy or his servants" (704-705, 882, 894; Appendix A, 1010).

So few references to this higher order remain in Jackson's films that a viewer who has not read Tolkien's books would not understand them. Unlike Tolkien's characters, Jackson's do not break out into poetic or lyric recital about Elbereth and Valinor. Elrond tries to send Arwen to the West, and the last ship sails there at the end, but the viewer is unsure what "the West" is. Frodo has no visions of Valinor. Jackson does suggest the existence of an afterlife, Gandalf describing death as "the grey rain curtain of this world rolls back and all turns to silver glass and then you see it…white shores, and beyond, a far green country and a swift sunrise" ("The Return"). This paraphrases Tolkien's descriptions of Valinor (132, 1007), but Valinor is a hidden part of Middle-earth; it is not "heaven." In fact, the fate of men (and presumably hobbits) after death is unknown, other than that they depart Middle-earth. Jackson's abridgements also blunt the sense of guarding powers. Elrond summons the council of Rivendell himself. Denethor declares, "We will burn like the heathen kings of old," but omits "before ever a ship sailed hither from the West" (805), so that what defines "heathen" in Middle-earth is unclear. Gandalf crowns Aragorn, stating, "Now come the days of the king, and may they be blessed," but omitting "while the thrones of the Valar endure" (945). We do not hear of the origins of Gandalf or the star of Eärendil. Only Arwen prays, and to whom is unclear. In Jackson's "translation," the audience is led to believe that victory is accomplished by the efforts of the ordinary inhabitants of Middle-earth, without the aid of higher powers. For all its magic, Jackson's is a strangely secularized world.

Ironically, given their respective attitudes towards war, Tolkien is in the end much more ambiguous about victory than is Jackson. For Tolkien, times of trouble can produce good ("though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater" [339]), but even good endings are bittersweet. Aragorn warns his friends (and us): "Do not look for mirth at the ending" (756). Although "a great Shadow has departed" (930), Sauron's defeat entails the loss of power and passing into the West of the most beautiful race in Middle-earth, the elves. This they have long foreseen (262, 340, 356-357). Others also are conscious of impending loss. Theoden asks, "For however the fortune of war shall go, may it not so end that much that was fair and wonderful shall pass forever out of Middle-earth?" (537); Gandalf tells the hobbits that much was saved by their victory, but much must now also pass away (959).

The Fourth Age will be the dominion of Men, which is not, Tolkien implies, necessarily a good thing, i.e., it is not an age of bliss, as in many Western conceptions. The age of bliss, as know the oldest inhabitants of Middle-earth (Tom Bombadill, Treebeard, and Galadriel), lies far in the future, after a radical (presumably divine) reshaping: when "the world is mended" (139), "when we have…lost all that we now have" (465-466), when "the lands that lie under the wave are lifted up again" (959). Thus, victory over Sauron and the advent of the Fourth Age is not an endorsement of *progress*. As with the divine order, however, Jackson downplays this. Except for Frodo himself, there is little sense of loss in the films' conclusion. The hobbits feel a little out of place in the Shire, which, Frodo says, "has been saved, but not for me" (1006, "The Return"). Gandalf and the elves do leave. Elrond tells Aragorn "I have given hope to men, I have kept none for myself." Galadriel points out that the power of the rings has ended while that of men begins. But there is much less emphasis on loss, since "the sea calls us home" ("The Return").

Tolkien also suggests that victory, at least in this world, is never complete. "The evil of Sauron cannot be wholly cured, nor made as if it had not been" (537), and "other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary" (861). This is most evident in "The Scouring of the Shire," which Jackson chose not to film. What happens to the Shire *after* Sauron's fall shows that although a great force for evil has been defeated, evil still exists in Middle-earth. Frodo "can't go back," as Jackson puts it ("The Return"), not only because he has changed, but because his home has changed. The Shire has been transformed from pre-modern rural paradise into modern urban hell, complete with deforestation, water pollution, the stripping of resources, industrialization, ugly architecture, bureaucracy, and intimidation. The inns are closed, Bywater is a subdivision, the Old Mill a factory, Bagshot Row a quarry. Minimalist hobbit self-government has been replaced with redundant sheriffs, ever-present notices, and Lockholes for dissenters. All this was perpetrated by Saruman's *men*, not by Saruman's wizardry. Hence, Gandalf's refusal to intervene: ordinary evil must be dealt with by the ordinary inhabitants of Middle-earth.

But how? Frodo wants to avoid battle and offer mercy, since "It is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will heal nothing" (995). Philosophically, of course, he is right, and his pardon of Saruman robs the latter's revenge of its sweetness. Nonetheless, as Farmer Cotton puts it, "There's going to be some fighting before this is settled, Mr. Frodo" (991). Merry and Pippin raise the Shire, and nineteen hobbits die. Even then, Sam points out, "I shan't call it the end, 'til we've cleaned up the mess.... And that'll take a lot of time and work" (997), as indeed it does. Through lack of interest or lack of time (a result of overly long battle scenes), Jackson omits "The Scouring," leaving his translation of the epic, with its ambivalence about this-worldly victory, fundamentally incomplete.

Tolkien and Modernity

From a comparison between Tolkien's book and Jackson's films, what can we conclude about what Tolkien's epic is trying to "say"? In particular, what is its place in the continuing debate over modernity? Tolkien's world-view, I would argue, was essentially pre-modern, which helps explain his decision to write in a genre dead to the modern West: the epic. Tolkien did not so much critique modernity in his epic as celebrate an alternative, pre-modern way of life. Hence his emphases on the simple rural life, on friendship and community, on the responsibilities of the individual, on the importance of mercy, on the beauty of majesty, on the absolute nature of right and wrong, and on the existence of a divine order which informs all of this. His work is particularly powerful because it is neither sectarian (there is nothing that any non-Christian could object to)[2] nor preachy. The primary purpose of his "history" (as he viewed it) was to move readers, regardless of their faith or facility for philosophical argumentation.

For Tolkien believed that *all* men know right and wrong in their hearts. The primacy of natural law is a subtle theme in *The Lord of the Rings*, one that only became clear to me when comparing the book to the films. Jackson's changes almost all serve to increase "dramatic tension," with drama defined as psychological, tension stemming from how characters weigh what is "right." Tolkien's characters weigh *paths*, but never what is *right*, which they know instinctively. His beloved hobbits live by their own (few) laws: "they attributed to the king of old all their essential laws, and usually they kept the laws of free will, because they were The

Rules (as they said), both ancient and just" (9). When Eomer asks, "How shall a man judge what to do in such times?" Aragorn answers, "As he ever has judged.... Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them" (427-428). Gandalf dismisses Pippin's attempt to reason away his taking of the palantir: "You knew you were behaving wrongly and foolishly, and you told yourself so, though you did not listen" (584). Repeatedly in Tolkien's text, when deciding whether to follow man-made or natural law, good men choose the latter. Eomer: "I do not doubt you, nor the deed which my heart would do" (428). Hama: "Yet in doubt a man of worth will trust to his own wisdom" (500). Faramir: "So be it," to his father's hint that he may face death for freeing Frodo (794). Right is individually *discerned*, based on eternal and inherent knowledge, not individually *determined*, based on personal preferences or desired outcomes. The Ring's evil, in contrast, tempts men to rationalize the will to power as right intention (e.g. the fantasies of Boromir and Sam, 389, 881).

In his work, Tolkien is not explicitly anti-modern so much as implicitly unsympathetic to modernity's central assumptions. Having witnessed the worst horrors of the twentieth century in the trenches of France and the devastation of Nazi Europe, Tolkien wrote an epic which dismisses the myths of post-Enlightenment moral relativism and of might making right, as well as the myths of the autonomous individual and of historical progress. In their place, he offered faith in man's potential for good and his ability to live simply in accordance with the divine plan: simple truths about man which seem to have required, late in the modern age, the form of an epic fantasy to be told.

Like all classics, *The Lord of the Rings* portrays truth, goodness, and beauty together with the power of evil and the imperfection of this world. Its ending is particularly powerful, since, atypically for the genre, it suggests that war is not glorious *for its own sake*. In the tradition, instead, of medieval English romances like "Fulk fitz Warenne" and "Havelok the Dane," the heroes end up established in their lands, settling down to normal life. As Faramir puts it, "War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness" (656). In the end, he attains his dream to dwell in Ithilien, "and there make a garden," along with Eowyn, who turns from shieldmaiden to healer, intending to "love all things that grow and are not barren" (943). The final vision, in book and film, is of Sam the gardener returning to his house, wife, and children: "Well, I'm back" (1008). Dangerous quests are heroic, Tolkien suggests, because they secure the beauty and graces of everyday life.

1. Here, and hereafter, quotations are taken from the one-volume edition of J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002). Film titles are used in references to Jackson's films, as distinct from Tolkien's book.

2. The only "explicitly" Christian reference is that the fall of Sauron, and thus the first day of the first year of the Fourth Age (i.e. the new "New Year's Day"), occurs on March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation (the medieval New Year).