

WATKINS, SHANA, M.A. *Embracing the Took: Kinship Between Middle Earth and Sixties Youth*. (2007)  
Directed by Dr. Hephzibah Roskelly. 75 pp.

The purpose of this thesis is to quash the reading of J.R.R. Tolkien's works as allegory, especially as allegory for the events of the turbulent 1960s, i.e. the Vietnam War, 1967's Summer of Love, the women's liberation movement, etc. By addressing each of the Sixties' infamous political and social movements, tragedies, victories, and controversies, this paper proves that the members of the Baby Boomer generation were inspired by the events described in Tolkien's primary works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Middle Earth's events in the novels resounded throughout the Sixties, but were not actually about the Sixties, nor were they allegories of any previous decade, as some critics claim. Being a time of social unrest and demand for government and social revamping, the Sixties provided a particularly enthralled audience for the fantasy genre because it provided an alternative to mainstream literature. Sixties youth – part of which came to be known as the counterculture – demanded alternatives in nearly every facet of the American lifestyle, from the young rock-and-roll music genre to rebellious young celebrity idols like James Dean who contrasted Sixties parents' idea of glamorous and wholesome movie stars whose film and television characters strove to acquire the materialistic American dream.

This thesis discusses themes that Tolkien's works and the Sixties had in common: namely, generational inheritance and rebellion; authority and isolation; social awakening; distrust and cynicism; reluctant and unlikely heroes; gender issues; activism; and hippie-ism. I also discuss how some critics misread Tolkien and how some contemporary critics fallaciously linked the Vietnam War with the battles of Middle Earth, concluding that Tolkien's works – and most fantasy literature – condone violence and offer simplistic good-versus-evil story lines with little character development. This paper proves that nothing could be further from the truth than these two erred accusations.

My research concludes that Tolkien's works are universally relevant to all eras and locales in the western world.

EMBRACING THE TOOK: KINSHIP BETWEEN  
MIDDLE EARTH AND SIXTIES YOUTH

by

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A Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Greensboro  
2007

Approved by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Nothing offends a Tolkien scholar more than referencing the author's works as allegory or excusing them as mere 'hippies' handbooks to the counterculture of the 1960s. The misconception that John Ronald Reul Tolkien directly referred to any actual historical event is due to *The Lord of the Rings's* and *The Hobbit's* thematic universality; one could very easily draw parallels between the conflicts in Middle Earth and those America engages in presently, just as in the Sixties, critics of the Vietnam War saw their struggles reflected in those of Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* and his heir Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*. But the themes of social awakening and unlikely heroism made Tolkien's works especially inspiring to 1960s youth, who became enamored with Tolkien's imagined world, Middle Earth. Tolkien's works became a phenomenon that built significant momentum on America's college campuses in the Sixties, where the novels became "a campus religion, outselling the Bible in 1967 and 1968" (Helms 7). The American counterculture of the decade embraced the "rediscovery of a fine and decent place, a world [...] with complacent, underachieving heroes" like Bilbo, who, like his 1960s readers, conquered obstacles of social conventions to achieve self-actualization free from societal constraints.

The American counterculture of the 1960s rapidly divided into the active and the inactive. Though I am sure Tolkien would have delighted in his masterpieces inspiring war protestation – having experienced war firsthand twice in his lifetime, he very adamantly opposed it except as an absolute last resort – he was disgusted at the idea that his writing became distorted by socially stagnant hippies, who claimed *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* as a kind of “psychedelic manual” (Ratliff & Finn 144). Indeed, Ratliff and Finn note that the counterculture held that reading “passages from [Tolkien] before or during an LSD ‘trip,’ [...] may greatly stimulate the individual’s mind and make his ‘trip’ seem much more meaningful.” The cultural association between Middle Earth and psychedelic experience was evident on contemporary “splashy book covers of the Ballantine edition of the trilogy [...] somewhat reminiscent of one possible LSD-influenced version of the story.” Professor Tolkien reviled such artwork, calling it “absolutely foul.”

Some critics mistakenly believe Tolkien’s work was only appealing to the baby boomer generation because most contemporary fans were drugged-out hippies looking for a way to further enhance psychedelic experimentation. This is a shameful oversimplification of the works’ cultural significance, as well as of the decade itself. Inspired by Tolkien, Ean C. M. Begg wrote in 1975, “If one wishes to understand something of the spirit of an age that is past, one of the best ways of doing so is to read the imaginative literature of the period, which made the greatest impression on contemporaries” (Begg 6). A clear understanding of those who came of age between

1955 and 1975, as well as those years' social fervor, provides an answer to why so many of the youth of the era turned to Tolkien's works with such passion. This paper aims to elucidate the parallels between the era and the themes prevalent in Tolkien's primary works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

*The Hobbit* was first published in 1937, and became quite a successful children's book, so many teenagers and young adults in the 1960s had been exposed to *The Hobbit* as children. Tolkien's long awaited trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, was published in the mid-1950s, though it "was not widely distributed and popularly available until the paperback editions appeared in the 1960s" (Helms 15). The works were obviously embraced by a variety of groups in the 1960s, but toward the end of the decade "the new wave of fans was comprised largely of students and young people drawn primarily from college campuses" (7). By 1968, "three million copies of *The Lord of the Rings* had been sold", its elements gaining cult status as hobbit and wizard "badges, T-shirts, and graffiti" appeared (Rosebury 142) and clubs like Middle Earth on King Street opened in London while a Stockholm head shop called itself Gandalf the White Wizard (Miles 292). Fans in the Sixties were drawn to the works' themes which so clearly mirrored their own struggles for identity, maturation, and, most importantly, social consciousness.

The works' themes of generational inheritance, cynicism about authority, geographical and societal isolation, social awakening and awareness, gender issues, and activism struck a chord with their young readers in the Sixties. The generation not only responded to rebelliousness but demanded it as youth culture and cultural icons began to

push harder and harder at society's envelope of convention. The world could not ignore the impact of hip-gyrating Elvis Presley, the mop-topped Beatles, and the convictions of determined folk music artists. The folk music movement of the early Sixties challenged social convention and championed victims of injustice. Songs like Bob Dylan's "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" (1963), a response to the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, "With God on Our Side" (1964) which pointed out the hypocrisy of religious conservatism, and "Maggie's Farm" (1965) which took on mass capitalism's exploitation of the working person, were explosively successful with Sixties youth who were becoming ever more socially aware and active.

Youth culture was more important in the Sixties than ever before. They found the courage to speak out against mainstream so-called *values*, and they sought out alternatives to their parents' music, art, and literature. Tolkien's works center on the exotic adventures of hobbits, bucolic creatures who are the fictitious products of Tolkien's unrivaled vivid imagination. The hobbits manage to break free from the restraints of isolated society to become the most significant race in Middle Earth and eventually bring peace to their world in spite of their historical insignificance. The theme of revolution in the hands of Middle Earth's most unlikely heroes reverberated throughout the Sixties youth culture. Hence, Tolkien's characters supplied the perfect mascots for Sixties youth who sought to make a difference in their own increasingly violent world.

## CHAPTER II

### INHERITANCE AND REBELLION

Bilbo Baggins, the *Hobbit* himself, and his Sixties youth counterparts faced a strikingly similar turning point at the onset of the novel and decade, respectively. The baby boomers, as they are now called, had a decision to make: they could continue on in their parents' footsteps, accept inherited jobs in corporate America, and settle safely into the suburbs of the country's urban centers, or they could branch out into an exploration of human potential. Likewise, Bilbo is faced with the decision to leave his inherited estate, built by his father and called Bag End (indeed, the name is appropriate because it signifies the potential *end* of Bilbo's worldly knowledge), or he could venture out of his comfort zone, to pursue what might be a personally fulfilling journey of self-discovery. The youth of the Sixties chose to depart from the middle class ranch-style homes of their parents and embrace a newfound power to rebel, re-imagine, and transform their culture. Likewise, Bilbo allows himself to be whisked away on a journey of personal transformation.

Generational inheritance was an issue for baby boomers as much as it is for the characters of Tolkien's fiction. *The Hobbit's* introduction depicts Bilbo settled comfortably inside his womb-like, cozily furnished (and cluttered) Bag End, a winding tunnel of "bedrooms, bathrooms, cellars, pantries (he had lots of these), wardrobes (he

had whole rooms devoted to clothes), kitchens, dining rooms” (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 9). Bilbo is a well-to-do hobbit. He is a descendant from a family who “had lived in the neighborhood of The Hill for time out of mind, and people considered them very respectable, not only because most of them were rich, but also because they never had any adventure or did anything unexpected” (8-9). Hobbits characteristically celebrate conformity and delight in security and the accumulation of *things* just as America’s post-World War II young parents did. *Lord’s* prologue explains that at the onset of the story Middle Earth is celebrating its end of “the Days of Dearth (1158-60 in “Shire reckoning”) and “the Hobbits had again become accustomed to plenty” (Tolkien *Fellowship* 5). The Hobbits’ economic situation mimics the mid-century western world which was emerging from wartime scarcity.

Just as Bilbo inherited a life of comfort, so did Americans born following the end of the Second World War. At that time the nation was economically strong; neighborhoods of rows and rows of uniform houses provided a general feeling of security and abundance. In fact, “by 1960, 63 percent of American families owned their own homes, in contrast to 43 percent in 1940” (Coontz 24). The decade’s “architecture [was the] embodiment of [the] new ideal, [a ‘focus on fun and recreation’].” The popular ranch-style house “discarded the older privacy of the kitchen, den, and sewing room...and introduced new privacy and luxury into the master bedroom.” Family life for the future ‘hippie generation’ was immersed in “an unprecedented ‘glorification of self-

indulgence” (28). Furthermore, the era’s discarding of formality “in favor of livability,’ ‘comfort,’ and ‘convenience” certainly could be described as hobbit-like.

Growing up in an era preoccupied with accruing, maintaining, and protecting the nation’s wealth significantly influenced the minds of future reformers. They had seen their parents, terrified of nuclear annihilation, build (hobbit-like) holes, “stocked underground survival shelters...even armed...to keep out less-prepared neighbors when the Bomb fell” (Miller 8). Eventually, future peaceniks would reject this Machiavellian mode of survival in favor of awareness and activism, and peace and community Tolkien’s works stressed. Likewise, throughout his adventure in *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, Frodo Baggins moves further and further away from the hobbit-like “tendency” to collect possessions, and closer and closer to a property-free existence (*Fellowship* 37); indeed, Frodo’s path to Mount Doom where he will destroy the ultimate symbol of material avoirdupois, the ring itself, is littered with his discarded belongings.<sup>1</sup>

Tolkien’s hobbits are rebels. Their willingness to throw off the oppression that accompanied a life that fit within the social norms at the time of their adventures appealed to Sixties youth. In the Sixties rebellion was everywhere. Even in literature the most popular books dealt with rebellion: Holden Caulfield finds it impossible to “adjust to society’s rigid norms and [...] retreats into his imagination” in J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* (Miller 35), and “Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) mocks the ‘square’

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<sup>1</sup> Frodo eventually receives back the mail (*mithril*) shirt and the short sword Sting he inherited from Bilbo, but these are symbols of activism whereas the ring is a symbol of material burden.

world of corporate jobs and mindless consumption” (34). *On the Road* particularly “departs almost entirely from middle class mores [rejecting] Eisenhower’s America [and reveling] in release and joy” (43). Tolkien’s masterpiece trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* burst upon the burgeoning scene of rebellion against conformity in the mid-1950s, and provided the themes of activism and altruism America’s youth were beginning to embrace. American youth found Middle Earth to be an inviting escape from the materialistic world of their parents, and *The Lord of the Rings* predecessor, *The Hobbit*, began to be read more than it had ever been since its 1937 publication because the book exemplifies the “release and joy” *On the Road*’s audience was looking for.

Young Americans of the Sixties demanded the same overhaul in government as they did in art and literature. John F. Kennedy’s “altruistic rhetoric, his appeals to idealism, his enunciation of personal and national destiny and mission had fired the imaginations and energies of millions, especially the young [,and] by the time of his death (1963), the forces of social criticism and activism alike were rising” (91). This idealism’s coupling with the influence of the Beats (like Kerouac) of the late 1950s, whose “depict[ion] of an underground subculture...challenged mainstream America’s most basic beliefs,” led to America’s college student population’s indignation at their parents’ generation’s conservative politics, which, in turn, soon led to a countercultural movement. The counterculture embraced Tolkien’s works wholeheartedly. Just as Bilbo, who, by the conclusion of *The Hobbit*, “has become a complete person separate from his benighted community” (Green 42), members of the counterculture, having

rejected mainstream values, felt stronger as they banded together to try to make a difference in that which they viewed as unjust.

Tolkien readers who came of age in the 1960s also related to non-hobbit characters. The plight of Faramir, son of Denethor, spoke to them as the most educated generation who eventually became disillusioned with what they felt was the ineffectuality of their parents' conventions. A 1971 Harper's Magazine study describes "the Relevant Teen-ager" as the "chief beneficiary of and heir to the successful American Dream" (Chickering 63). The study tells that "the Relevant Teenager...comes from a suburban household where his father can more or less afford to pay for his highest possible education." Faramir's situation is comparable to Harper's "Relevant Teenager." He is heir to the stewardship of Gondor but prefers books over battle.

Faramir's wants are similar to those of the counterculture of the sixties. Like war protestors of the sixties and early seventies, he dreams of peace in a time of war, hypothesizing that he "would not take [the] ring, if it lay by the highway" (*Two Towers* 656). Faramir claims, "Not were Minas Tirith [Gondor's capital city] falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory. No, I do not wish for such triumphs." Instead, Faramir envisions more peaceful solutions:

'I would see the White Tree in flower again in the courts of the kings, and the Silver Crown return, and Minas Tirith in peace: Minas Anor as of old, full of light, high and fair, beautiful as a queen among other queens: not a mistress of many slaves, nay, not even a mistress of willing slaves. War

must be...but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love...the City of the Numenor; and I would have her loved for her memory, her ancience, her beauty, and her present wisdom. Not feared, save as men may fear the dignity of a man, old and wise.'

Faramir values wisdom above military glory, and he is the most learned human hero the trilogy provides. But the young man's love of knowledge and dreams of peace disappoint and displease Denethor, the steward of Gondor. Denethor scathingly names Faramir a "wizard's pupil," and grieves that his more pliable and valiant son, Boromir, has been killed while his rebellious son survives. Faramir's disregard for his father's wishes and authority reminds Denethor of his own increasing ineffectuality. Gandalf the wise wizard reminds the disgruntled Denethor of the present turn of the tides, saying, "There are other men and other lives, and time still to be" (*Return* 795).

Faramir's level of education is like that of the 1960s' and 70s' "relevant teenager." He "can read" the "diverse characters" in the "books and tablets writ on withered parchments...and on stone" that are housed in Minas Tirith (*Towers* 655). He says he has "had teaching" and insinuates that he was indeed at one time Gandalf's pupil. Faramir supports "that a warrior should have more skills and knowledge than only the craft of weapons and slaying" (663). The young man suffers from disillusionment in his nation's leaders just as the baby boomers became disenchanted with "traditional notions of America's innocence, invincibility, benevolence, and moral superiority" especially as over 58,000 of the country's young men fought and died in the Vietnam War (Miller

148), a conflict the counterculture of the Sixties viewed as nothing but the sanctimonious west's fight against their biggest threat - Communism.

In Faramir Tolkien gives a shining example of wisdom in the form of a gentle, educated young man that disproves some critics' accusation that Tolkien condoned violence and war. Through Faramir the author illustrates the value of knowledge over battlefield valor, and that war, unavoidable as it is, should only be used as a last resort. Faramir has pored over Middle Earth's history, heeded its follies and successes; he has 'done his homework,' so to speak. And Tolkien certainly applauds that by allowing him to survive the entirety of the trilogy, and giving him a happy ending full of love and peace.

Faramir represents an important thematic thread within Tolkien's works – education. Each of Tolkien's protagonists learn the importance of erudition. And just like the Sixties generation, the hobbits' education is not a concept confined to a classroom or library. Many sixties counterculture leaders agreed with Tolkien that to become educated means to become socially aware. The counterculture deconstructed the convention of education just as they did many others, Mayday magazine claiming, "A new generation is finally getting an education, though the college may have to be destroyed in the process" (Miles 16). The generation and its chosen mascots looked to transcend their previous understanding of traditional erudition. Sixties youth turned to literature with unconventional characters, plots, and settings to help them interrogate the system of education preceding generations had built and supported. Fantastic literature like *The*

*Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* encouraged readers to move beyond the sometimes stifling nature of traditional education. Likewise Frodo and the Hobbits learn about *others* – other races, other creatures, etc. “We don’t know much about Men in the Shire,” says Frodo near the onset of the hobbits’ journey (*Fellowship* 214). Yet he learns of their effect on hobbit culture through interacting with them, especially Aragorn, who claims, “If simple folk are free from care and fear, simple they will be, and we must be secret to keep them so” (242). Much later in the tale Aragorn’s kinsman Halbarad leaves Merry feeling quite small when he says, “A little people...are the Shire-folk...Little do they know of our long labor for the safekeeping of their borders and yet I grudge it not” (*Return* 762).

Hence, it becomes clear to the adventuresome hobbits that their race is known throughout Middle Earth (in places where they are known at all) for being virtually deedless. Theoden tells Merry and Pippin, “All that is said among us is that far away...live the Halfling folk that dwell in sand-dunes. But there are no legends of their deeds, for it is said they do little” (*Towers* 544). But Tolkien remains sympathetic toward the itinerant hobbits, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin; propelled by love for their precious Shire and for one another they muster the courage to depart from their haven of safety and take action. Their journey is one of self-discovery as much as geographical and anthropological exploration. Pippin begins to seek knowledge whereas before he cared nothing about looking at maps and history tomes. “What...do you want know?” Gandalf asks him as they set out for Minas Tirith; “The names of all the stars, and of all

the living things, and the whole history of Middle-earth and Over-heavens and of the Sundering Seas. Of course!” Pippin replies. Pippin is a Tolkien hero because he has traversed far from his comfort zone and seeking the thrills of erudition.

### CHAPTER III

#### AUTHORITY AND ISOLATION

The tension between two generations represented by father and son, Denethor and Faramir, is further agitated by the inevitable change in leadership that will occur in Gondor, Middle Earth's greatest city of men, with the return of Aragorn, heir to the throne of Gondor. As steward of Gondor, Denethor's duty is to watch over the realm in the king's absence, but with Aragorn's advent he is obligated to relinquish his power to the rightful heir. In the Sixties, this theme of revolution resonated with the increasingly challenging, suspicious, and at times downright cynical baby boomers.

It is a small wonder that young people became skeptical of their leaders in the sixties the same way Faramir and Gandalf become disillusioned and distrustful of Middle Earth's leaders. Even John F. Kennedy, whose zealous supporters believed he "took a country that was fat on its back, fat and purposeless, lifted it up, gave it momentum, direction, purpose, and a sense of its own strength and possibility," was eventually criticized for his "militancy abroad and excessive cautiousness at home" (Miller 91). In retrospect, "for most of his tenure, his courageous talk of charting a New Frontier was more rhetoric than reality." Likewise, several leaders in Middle Earth are either forced to wake up from their impotence or they are simply destroyed.

What John F. Kennedy's presence, optimism, and charisma *did* accomplish was the "firing up of the imaginations and energies of millions, especially the young," so that "by the time of his death, the forces of social criticism and activism alike were rising." And just like Middle Earth in *The Lord of the Rings*, America's involvement in a controversial war provided a platform for the nation's youth's rebellion. Though neither Kennedy, nor his successor Lyndon Johnson are comparable to Denethor or Aragorn, the legacy they forced upon their nation's youth was the same as that which is forced upon the citizens of Middle Earth. America's youth inherited the Vietnam War and Middle Earth's peoples inherited the war on Sauron.

The Vietnam War forced Americans to wake up from their complacency just as the ensuing spread of Sauron's evil forces the Shire's hobbits to become active and relevant in Middle Earth's matters, whereas before Shire-folk had always been synonymous with geographical and political isolation. Just as Tolkien's hobbits demonstrate a shameful ignorance for anyone or anything outside the Shire, at the time the Vietnam War was beginning to gain momentum in 1963, "most Americans had no idea where Vietnam was, let alone that the U.S. had sent some sixteen thousand military advisors there" (Miller 147). In the aftermath of World War II, Americans trusted their leaders unquestioningly and quickly became accustomed to post-war abundance and luxury. Consequentially, too many Americans had let themselves grow shamefully self-satisfied.

In the early Sixties, C. Wright Mills commented from the Intellectual Left “the sickness of complacency has prevailed” (Miller 50). Novelist Norman Mailer elucidated Mills’s lamentation with criticism of President Eisenhower who, as far as Mailer was concerned, had only stood “as a hero for that large number of Americans who were most proud of their lack of imagination.” Furthermore, Mailer claimed, “Eisenhower embodied [only] half the needs of the nation; the needs of the timid, the petrified, the sanctimonious, and the sluggish” (65). These contemporary comments illustrate the increasing disgust up-and-coming voices-of-their-generation harbored for the era’s policy-makers. The time was right and many people were craving a political and social awakening to jolt America out of its repugnant complacency. For Americans, fresh and youthful President John F. Kennedy, Jr. promised hope for a revamped government; for Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*, Gandalf the wizard materializes with the intent to yank the childlike hobbit from his comfortable hobbit hole and disrupt him from blissful ignorance of the world outside The Shire. Gandalf succeeded in doing for Bilbo what Mailer hoped Kennedy would accomplish for America: “help throw off the slough of materialism and conformity and [] push the century to reach uncharted depths” (66).

Bilbo is initially unreceptive to Gandalf’s proposal that he attempt an “adventure”; the text explains that Bilbo “wanted [Gandalf] to go away [] but the old man did not move” (*The Hobbit* 13). Here Bilbo embodies the complacent American, unpleasantly confronted with the possibility of change and his/her own stasis. Both the

complacent early-1960s American and contented Bilbo Baggins are faced with the challenge of self-development.

Just as Bilbo is faced with a broader knowledge of the world outside his comfortable hobbit hole, Americans would soon be faced with an unpleasant violence invading their consciousnesses. With their social consciousness newly awakened, Americans of the 1960s eventually came to come to terms with the shortcomings of their government. Just as Bilbo Baggins is forced to confront the existence of evil in Middle Earth on his journey to The Lonely Mountain, Americans of the sixties were faced with the uncomfortable knowledge that corruption permeated policy-making. Due to disappointed hopes in leaders such as John F. Kennedy and the fiasco that was the Vietnam War, the youth of America came to distrust their government. Like Gandalf's apparent death on the Bridge of Khazad-dum affected Frodo and his companions, the assassination of President Kennedy poignantly represented the death of trust America had once enjoyed in its leaders. But Gandalf returns to Middle Earth even more powerful than before. And though *The Lord of the Rings's* politically-minded Sixties audience knew reincarnation was not possible for Kennedy, Gandalf's re-emergence was inspirational to their hopes that their government would reinvent itself as a more conscientious force. The leaders of the Sixties counterculture hoped that such a reinvention would act as a catalyst that would awaken the Eisenhower generation from its complacency and ignorance of the world outside of strictly first world countries.

The hobbits on which *The Lord of the Rings* mainly centers experience just such an awakening, partly due to Bilbo Baggins's infamous adventures. By the beginning of Frodo's adventure in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first installment of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Bilbo has become, among Shire-folk, somewhat of an enigmatic figure – a hobbit unlike any other hobbit because of his willingness to travel beyond the Shire's borders. At the beginning of the trilogy, Bilbo is the only hobbit who understands how big the world is outside the Shire. Generally Shire-folk are childlike in their isolation, happily maintaining a fair amount of ignorance of the world around them. The narrative tells that typical hobbits find Gandalf the Wizard a curious figure, and admire his fireworks and parlor tricks, though "his real business was far more difficult and dangerous, but the Shire-folk knew nothing about it" (*Fellowship* 25). The Shire-folk will eventually be confronted with the evil they try to ignore exists. As Gildor the elf warns Frodo, "The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but cannot for ever fence it out" (82).

Frodo desires to awaken the complacent Shire-folk the same way C. Wright Mills and Norman Mailer wanted to arouse America from their luxurious abodes to recognize what was wrong with the world of which they were a part. Frodo claims, "I should like to save the Shire, if I could – though there have been times when I thought the inhabitants too stupid and dull for words, and have felt that an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them" (61). Gandalf then observes, "Bilbo made no mistake in choosing his heir," recognizing Frodo as capable of achieving great change.

Hobbits are content to shut out encroaching evil and ignore or avoid “rumors of strange things happening in the world outside” (42). Though elves and dwarves are uncommonly roaming the Shire, the Dark Tower of Mordor has been rebuilt, orcs are “multiplying again in the mountains,” and trolls have become “cunning and armed with dreadful weapons, [...] little of this ever reached the ears of ordinary hobbits” (43). Hobbit Ted Sandyman sums up the general attitude of typical hobbits and of the complacent Americans of the 1950s and early Sixties with, “I don’t see what that matters to me or you” (44). The majority of the Shire-folk choose to ignore ensuing evil and corruption in hopes that it will remedy itself or that *someone else* will cure it just as many Americans initially hoped Vietnam would take care of itself without demanding much energy from them.

Certainly, the majority of the Shire’s citizens are figuratively in the dark when it comes to matters that do not directly seem to affect them. Tolkien illustrates the adverse effects of the hobbits’ isolation with the trilogy’s early chapter “A Journey in the Dark” which takes place under the intimidating mountain, Caradhras, in the long-abandoned dwarf mines of Moria. The Company – made up of Gimli the Dwarf, Legolas the Elf, men of Gondor Aragorn and Boromir, Frodo, Sam, and two other hobbits Merry and Pippin – looks to its leader, Gandalf, for illumination. Only the wise wizard is capable of navigating the tunneling, pitch-black mines and gauging the length of the days and nights that pass while the fellowship traverses underground. Gandalf raises his staff which

glows and illuminates the ancient dwarf city the sheltered hobbits especially had no fore-knowledge of.

While the company “huddles close together” for warmth under Moria’s looming “mighty pillars hewn of stone, . . . its black walls, polished and smooth as glass,” the hobbits cannot help but inwardly confess that “the wildest imaginings that dark rumor had ever suggested . . . fell short of the actual dread and wonder of Moria” (307). They simply cannot be but changed, even at this early point of their journey. Their exposure to Moria, the ancient dwarf architectural brilliance, reminds them that they are merely a tiny component in a huge world. They will each overcome their sense of insignificance in order to make a difference, an imprint, on the world around them, far away from their comfortable homes in the Shire.

Alice Echols posits that sixties youth turned to LSD (acid) and electrified music “to combat the adventure shortage” (Echols 23) by making this fascinating observation:

Growing up in the fifties starved for stimulation, connection, and meaning, activists and hippies turned their backs on the cautious lives of their parents. Nothing defines the generation that came of age in the sixties better than its determination to live outside the parameters of reasonable behavior, which, after all, seemed at the very root of the problem, the cause of America’s terrible adventure shortage. (48-49)

Bilbo and his successors (Frodo and company) have the same reaction, though they do not turn to mind-altering drugs as a form of escape from a dull existence. Adventure,

though abhorred by the World War II generation – they had had enough ‘adventure’ in World War II and the Korean War to last them a lifetime! – makes awareness possible for both the hobbits and their Sixties counterparts.

## CHAPTER IV

### AWAKENING AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Hobbits are by no means the only race of Middle Earth that is forced out of complacency. The “dim and stuffy” atmosphere of Fangorn forest, home to Ents, reminds Pippin and Merry of “the old room in the Great Place of the Tooks away back in the Smials at Tuckborough: a huge place where the furniture has never been moved or changed for generations, ... where the Old Took lived...year after year, while he and the room got older and shabbier together” (Tolkien *Towers* 450). Just like the Old Took Fangorn has let itself fall asleep and become unconcerned with dealings outside of its own borders. The character Treebeard is the embodiment of Fangorn, the forest’s spirit and its voice. While the hobbits’ small stature tempts them to feel insignificant, Treebeard stands fourteen feet high, and has naught but denial to excuse his lackadaisical attitude about the world beyond the forest.

Pippin retrospectively describes his experience with Treebeard in the following: “It felt as if something that grew in the ground – asleep, you might say, or just feeling itself as something between root-tip and leaf-tip, between deep earth and sky had suddenly waked up, and was considering you with the same slow care that it had given its own inside affairs for endless years” (*Towers* 452). The theme of awakening saturates Tolkien’s trilogy as much as it does the years between 1955 and 1975.

Just as Norman Mailer lamented that Americans were “sluggish,” and encouraged a counterculture that would awaken America from its complacency, Merry and Pippin hope to rouse Fangorn Forest’s potentially powerful Ents to take a stand and fight Middle Earth’s foes. The counterculture that burgeoned throughout the sixties was responsible for inspiring people to wake from the self-satisfied languor they had become accustomed to in the Eisenhower years and begin “questioning and examining the society they lived in” (Miles 22). The hobbits encourage Treebeard the way the counterculture provoked people in the sixties.

Historically, the Elves are responsible for initially “waking trees up and teaching them to speak and learning their tree-talk” (*Towers* 457). But, as Treebeard admits,

many [trees] are growing sleepy,...many are half-awake,...some are wide awake...I have not troubled about the Great Wars, they mostly concern Elves and Men. That is the business of Wizards: Wizards are always troubled about the future. I do not like worrying about the future...I used to be anxious when the shadow lay on Mirkwood, but when it removed to Mordor, I did not trouble for a while: Mordor is a long way away. (461)

Like Treebeard, many Americans of the Sixties felt safely distant from the threat of violence. The old Ent verbalizes his attitude and that of the complacent Eisenhower American when he says, “There is naught that an old Ent can do to hold back [a] storm: he must weather it or crack.”

But like young Americans of the sixties, the young hobbits see that even the most insignificant or torpid individual has power. Merry and Pippin are quick to perceive the sleeping power of Fangorn Forest, as is Gandalf who proclaims, “A thing is about to happen which has not happened since the Elder Days: the Ents are going to wake up and find that they are strong” (488). Merry and Pippin continue to question Treebeard until the Ent himself can no longer deny that he has been idle. “What about yourself?” asks Merry, and “What do you know about Saruman’s history?” asks Pippin, curious about the powerful leader of wizards who has become corrupt. “There was a time when he was always walking about my woods,” Treebeard answers, “I think that I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things...Now it is clear that he is a black traitor” (462). The more Treebeard ruminates the closer he comes to finally acknowledging, “I have been idle. I have let things slip. It must stop!” at which he “raises himself up from his bed with a jerk, stands up, and thumps his hand on the table” (463). Pippin and Merry join in, Pippin saying, “Yes, I would like to see [Saruman] overthrown. I should like to be there.”

Like Americans in the 1960s were faced with the tragedy of the Vietnam War when their sons, friends, lovers, and brothers were drafted and more than likely sent to their deaths, Treebeard becomes “roused” when he is confronted with the destruction of forestland and deaths of some friends. He proclaims, “We Ents do not like being roused; and we never are roused unless it is clear to us that our trees and our lives are in great

danger” (474). Treebeard, having awakened from passivity, comprehends the gravity of his circumstances when he says, “It is likely enough...that we are going to our doom” (475). But Treebeard knows that the encroaching evil can no longer be ignored, saying, “If we stayed at home and did nothing, doom would find us, sooner or later.” The 1960s counterculture felt the same way – that if no one opposed the Vietnam War and the involuntary draft that sent so many young men to their doom, destruction would never end and peace would never occur.

Treebeard sets to work with Merry and Pippin on his shoulders “rousing” the Ents, who he believes to have grown what he terms “tree-ish,” or inactive. Now convinced that idleness is folly, especially in such troubled times, Treebeard wishes to convert his Fangorn friends. He speaks of his friend Leaflock who has “grown sleepy, almost tree-ish...He has taken to standing...half-asleep all through the summer...He used to rouse up in winter; but of late he has been too drowsy to walk far even then” (463). But Treebeard maintains hope, saying, “I daresay I could get together a fair company of our younger folks – if I could make them understand the need; if I could rouse them” (463-64). This unification and hope for change resounded throughout the counterculture of the 1960s who united to oppose their government’s leaders who, like Saruman, had sullied policy-making with their thirst for power and their fear of Communism as a threat to the American dream.

Treebeard recognizes that he and his friends “have a long way to go,” though “it is something to have started” (475). His perseverance against the odds must have been

inspiring to Vietnam War protesters, as to his peers who fall behind him in droves. On the way to the siege on Saruman's home, Isengard, Pippin looks back to find that "the number of Ents had grown," trees were moving, "the trees of Fangorn were awake, and the forest was rising." An era of awakening and rising up was similarly visible in the 1960s as America's young people demanded the end of the country's controversial war on Vietnam and communism.

The same activism that grips the Hobbits and Ents emerges in the realms of Middle Earth's human population. King Theoden of Rohan, a realm of men north of Gondor, suffers under a spell cast upon him by a corrupt advisor, Grima Wormtongue, until Gandalf arrives to awaken the king from lethargy. As in the mines of Moria, Gandalf brings illumination, lifting "his staff...to a high window" and clearing the darkness. "Not all is dark," Gandalf states, "Too long have you sat in shadows and trusted to twisted tales and crooked promptings" (*Towers* 502). Gandalf, being "a great mover of the deeds that are done" in Middle Earth at this time (*Towers* 655), succeeds in inspiring Theoden asking, "Will you not take the sword?" to which Theoden replies with a song that calls his people together to rise up against the evil that threatens them: *Arise now, arise, Riders of Theoden! / Dire deeds awake, dark is it eastward . / Let the horse be bridled, horn be sounded! / Forth Eorlingas!* (506).

Not unlike the protest songs of the 1960s, (i.e. Bob Dylan's 1964 ultimate protest tune *Times They Are A-Changin'* which claims, "Come gather 'round people wherever you roam / And admit that the waters around you have grown / And accept it that soon

you'll be drenched to the bone / If your time to you is worth savin' / Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone / For the times they are a-changin'” (Dylan, “The Times They Are a Changin'” 1964)), Theoden’s call-to-arms moves people to become active and purposeful. He later tells them, “You thought I remained...bent like an old tree under winter snow...But a west wind has shaken the boughs” (*Towers* 515). Now that their leader has become effectual, the people of Rohan must also awaken and assume their power. They, too, have been like their leader, in a state of torpor so that when he awakens from his spell, so must they: so they “look up at Theoden like men startled out of dream” (566).

In the midst of many other characters’ awakening and consciousness Tolkien provides a symbol of maturation in his beloved hobbits. To Tolkien’s baby boomer readers hobbits captured the spirit of their own predicament: the baby boomers were at odds with the preceding generation, but accustomed to the highest standard of living and the highest level of education American youth had ever known. The baby boomers connected with actors Marlon Brando and James Dean because their film roles expressed the same “alienation from adult assumptions” that the boomers themselves felt (Miller 33). Brando and Dean seemed like “defiant, anguished young rebels too sensitive to adjust to society’s expectations” and they were unafraid to challenge their parents’ judgment and lifestyle even though it had provided a comfortable childhood.

Bilbo and company, though less sexy than Brando and Dean, exemplified the same challenge to mainstream expectations. Perhaps it was their unsexy-ness that gave

hobbits such popularity with those coming of age in the 1950s and Sixties; the hobbits' cuddliness resonated with the generation who was reluctant to give up their contented childhood to adulthood that promised nothing more than conformity and resignation to social norms. This generation and Tolkien's main hobbit characters were determined to make a difference not only in the world they inhabited, but also in their own personal development. In fact, the Sixties became saturated with an emphasis on personal growth.<sup>2</sup> Many of the alternative forms of healing and wellness we are familiar with today got their rise in the Sixties; note that "the yoga classes and gestalt therapy of the sixties developed into a mass movement of self-examination and self therapy among the middle classes" (Miles 20).

Bilbo spends the majority of *The Hobbit* in conflict with himself: his inner Took, so to speak, is in conflict with that part of him that is reluctant to come of age; the latter is that part of Bilbo that all but refuses to extricate itself from his material wealth. But, alas, there is no turning back for Bilbo. Once the hobbit discovers his *tookishness* his childish connection with possessions becomes unfulfilling. Though Bilbo desires to be home in comfort and abundance, eventually his dreams of home express a void he never felt previous to the journey. After outwitting trolls, goblins, the creature Gollum, and evil wolf-creatures called Wargs, Bilbo dreams an unsettling dream about his home far away: "he dreamed of his own house and wandered in his sleep into all his different rooms looking for something that he could not find or remember what it looked like"

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<sup>2</sup> Even the Beats endorsed spiritual experimentation; they were "strongly attracted to Zen Buddhism" which provided them "an alternative to the hard-driving individualistic Protestant ethic" (Miller 43).

(Tolkien *Hobbit* 121). Clearly, Bilbo, having through so much experience transformed into someone unrecognizable to even himself, is searching in vain for his old *self*. His old self was a child, sheltered by his father's house, comforted by pocket-handkerchiefs and a whistling tea kettle, but his needs have transcended material comforts.

Like its hero, *The Hobbit's* form matures chapter after chapter; William Green notes that "The children's book fatuities of the early chapters vanish like mist, leaving only a few odd wisps behind" (Green 61). The little hobbit who started out from his womb-like childhood home grows more and more aware, more independent, more relevant, and more heroic as the book progresses. Likewise, the late-1950s penchant for rebellion gave way to the counterculture of the Sixties whose "liberated lifestyle and emphasis on personal fulfillment hastened trends already transforming mainstream society" (Miller 181). Like Bilbo, "the children of the postwar generation" were "secure in their pampered sphere, suspended between childhood and adult responsibility" but would soon begin to "explore a taboo-defying world"; Bilbo defies hobbit taboos that insist he stay at home in a comfortable realm that nurtures complacency and ignorance and the baby boomers defied social and sexual taboos by becoming open to what previous generations had considered hedonistic. This new youthful, rebellious generation would celebrate its independence with what has since become a cliché trio: sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

CHAPTER V  
DISTRUST AND CYNICISM

Hence, *The Hobbit* itself is a work that symbolically connects to the maturation of baby boomers during the Sixties. The themes of development and realization are unmistakable in the book and the era. But the enlightenment that maturation brought to baby boomers and to Tolkien's hobbits in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* also instigated a deep distrust in traditional leadership. In *The Lord of the Rings* Middle Earth turns to Aragorn, a seemingly insignificant drifter who turns out to be heir to the throne of Gondor and a peace-loving loner whose own self-doubt makes him reluctant to assume a position of power. In *The Hobbit* Bilbo comes to question the leadership of even his closest allies – his dwarf companions.

In the sixties, the Vietnam War caused an increasing number of Americans to criticize policy-makers. 1964's presidential campaign saw Lyndon B. Johnson claiming "that he wanted 'no wider war,'" that he would "neither deploy more troops to fight in South Vietnam nor extend the war by bombing North Vietnam," while his opponent Barry Goldwater insisted that America "must have the will to win [the] war" (Miller 157). Johnson's election to presidency by an overwhelming majority "proclaimed a mandate for peace." But peace would not be achieved: "By 1968 U. S. pilots had detonated more than 3.2 million tons of explosives, far more than the combined totals

used on all the fronts of World War II and in the Korean War” (158). Protesting the war became increasingly widespread, and the war’s home front opposition found innovative ways to make their plea for peace heard.

During the Vietnam War (1959-1975) “2.2 million men were drafted into military service” (“Our Generation: The Draft”). Some young soldiers, like Fran Tanzosch, did not question their duty to their country. He uses John F. Kennedy’s most famous motto to illustrate his willingness, explaining that he “lived in the Kennedy generation [when you] ‘asked not what your country could do for you, but what you could do for you country.’” But the 16 million men who avoided the draft disagreed.

J.J. Thompson, for one, still believes that the Vietnam War was “illegal, immoral, and unjust.” He says, “We not only had the right to refuse but a responsibility to refuse.” On June 30, 1966, Thompson and two other enlisted men held a press conference to announce their intentions to refuse to serve in Vietnam, insisting they were convicted by their “consciences.” The men were sentenced and served jail time. Less than a year later, famous heavyweight boxing champion Muhammed Ali refused to be inducted into the military, claiming conscientious objector status. Dennis Hammill, who stayed in college to avoid the draft, had the following response: “When the baddest ass on the planet says, ‘I’m not going to fight those little Viet Congs who never did anything to me,’ he summed it up in one sentence.” Ali’s actions summarized how many young men felt about fighting in Vietnam.

Other young men fled to Canada to avoid the draft; approximately 50,000 people immigrated to Canada during the Vietnam War. Although some of today's surviving Vietnam veterans hold in contempt their contemporaries who fled to Canada, citing them as cowardly, those who migrated describe the act itself as protest. In fact, Mark Satin, one of these emigrants founded a group, The Toronto Anti-Draft Programme, devoted to helping other young men avoid the Vietnam draft. Satin's publication, *The Manual for Draft-Age Immigrants to Canada*, sold a whopping "65,000 copies by mail" ("*Our Generation: The Draft*"). Satin adamantly opposes that by running away to Canada he cowardly dodged the draft; instead, he insists, "I hope the message [we sent] is 'wake up Americans; this country isn't making the right choices.'"

Americans eventually became enraged at the utter disregard for what had so clearly been their message in electing a supposedly peaceful president. Even the most trusted face and voice in American journalism, Walter Cronkite, expressed disillusionment in political leaders in his February 27, 1968 commentary. He remarked:

We have often been disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders both in Vietnam and Washington; to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find the darkest clouds. That we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic if unsatisfactory conclusion. ("*Our Generation: The Draft*")

Upon viewing Cronkite's cynical commentary, President Johnson reportedly lamented, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost the war." Just as American patriotism evolved into a

demand for peace and a suspicion of leaders, in *The Hobbit* Bilbo's admiration for his dwarf companions' theoretical bravery turns to disillusionment and hostility.

*The Hobbit's* youthful 1960s readers applauded Bilbo's "courage and...wisdom, blended in measure," as he questioned dwarf leader Thorin Oakenshield's authority and purpose; Bilbo becomes disillusioned with his dwarf companions' obsession with treasure. While Thorin, the dwarves' leader reveres the Arkenstone, the most valuable gem in the dragon's hoard of treasure, "the enchanted desire of the hoard [falls] from Bilbo" (Tolkien *Hobbit* 243-44). Bilbo sees the priceless Arkenstone only as an object that would encourage a negotiation between the army of dwarves and the army of lakemen. Where men and dwarves seek wealth to gain power and authority, Bilbo appropriates the coveted treasure to "buy peace and quiet" (Tolkien 301). Though war still ensues Thorin, on his deathbed, admits a lesson learned: "If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world." This sentiment seems a paraphrase of the popular 1960s adage, "Make love not war."

CHAPTER VI  
MISREADING TOLKIEN

Some critics accuse Tolkien of being pro-war because of his frequent battle descriptions and enraged races like the Ents and the battle-hungry Rohirrim. These critics support their arguments with the fact that in 1967, the South Vietnamese Second Corps took “the lidless eye of Sauron as its battle emblem” after an American special service officer translated *The Lord of the Rings* into Vietnamese (Stewart 333). But if Tolkien’s works do condone war, why were they so widely praised among Vietnam protestors during the sixties and early seventies? Critics who oversimplify and misread Tolkien’s intent overlook the works’ impact on and resonance with the anti-war movement. Furthermore, when a critic claims that Tolkien’s works condone war he/she insinuates that they are *about war*, but they are not. War in Tolkien serves as a means to victories which may be had when synergy, courage, passion, and very deep friendships take place. The elements I have just listed are far more important in Tolkien than the wars themselves, which is why he spends a far larger percentage of his works describing friendships, songs, meetings of all kinds, inner struggles like those Smeagol (Gollum) and Frodo undergo in their quest to conquer the Ring, etc. than he does the major battles of the books.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to stress that this paper does not treat Tolkien’s works as allegories, but more of a mouthpiece not only for the Sixties generation, but for subsequent ones. Because the works are *not* allegories, they are allowed to transcend their significance in the Sixties, and speak powerfully to later generations. If anything their universality bridges gaps between generations.

Some critics in the Sixties, immersed within the tumult of the era, resented what they saw as Tolkien's simplistic solutions to the increasingly complex and tragic crisis of the Vietnam War, not to mention what they believed to be the condoning of violence. These critics did not recognize that "although evil is clear to the reader, it is not always so to the characters [, especially in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, but also in *The Hobbit*]. All of them are put to hard choices and even the best of them have moments of weakness" (Ratliff & Finn 143). Reading Tolkien's works as allegories of contemporary events and tragedies was popular, though folly, in the Sixties. Douglas J. Stewart's 1967 article in *The Nation*, "The Hobbit War" exemplifies misreading Tolkien's works.

Stewart's article is a simplistic and unjustified dismissal of Tolkien's works, but it does prove one thing: *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are crucial to understanding the turmoil of the 1960s no matter one's interpretation. "Tolkien's War" represents the immense dissatisfaction the majority of America, especially intellectuals and collegiate Leftists, felt about the Vietnam War. They resented the holier-than-thou stance of anti-Communist politicians who strove to instill fear of Communism as a threat to the American way of life.

Stewart may dismiss *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* as cult fodder, but just writing about Tolkien and his stories' parallels to the Vietnam War prove that his works impacted the era and provoked readers to compare their own world's issues with those of Middle Earth. His comparison of Frodo to a U.S. GI is unflattering, but nonetheless powerful:

Frodo is *sent* for reasons he doesn't understand (and isn't supposed to understand: it would be too much for him to bear, which makes him remarkably like a modern GI) to do he hardly knows what, by means he can barely guess. But he is on the side of "Good," and if he doesn't lose heart the Good will prevail over the Evil of the land of Mordor and its wicked ruler Sauron. [...] Likewise in Vietnam, we are sent to do battle with the Evil of Communism. (Stewart 333)

Stewart may resent the message he gleans from *The Lord of the Rings*, but the text undoubtedly has a powerful effect on him. Nevertheless, his analysis is one-dimensional. He dismisses Tolkien's works as nothing more than pious Disney, good-versus-evil fairy stories. But Tolkien creates characters who by no means are void of vices and shortcomings. For example, Bilbo in *The Hobbit* relies too much on the advice of Gandalf, that is, until he 'grows up,' and he pines incessantly for material objects lodged uncomfortably distant at Bag End. And the dwarves, though protagonists of Tolkien's narratives, dream greedily of gold and treasure, but greed is often rebuked in Middle Earth; no good ever comes of it in Tolkien's works. Also, Gollum, Bilbo's antagonist, evokes sympathy when his history is revealed in the first book of the trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Unlike traditional fairy tales such as, say, *Snow White* or *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel* or *Sleeping Beauty*, in which the heroes and villains are clearly outlined and have nothing in common, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are full of moral gray areas between good and evil. And also unlike most traditional fairy tales which usually only

supply one hero of each sex (though the female is usually helpless), there are a “host of certifiable heroic-heroes” in Middle Earth (David M. Miller 11). But a number of these “certifiable” heroes are not apparent and some change their heroic status, for good or evil, in the course of their journey. For example, Sam is forced to evolve into the character no one ever believed he could be, least of all himself. Only until the end of his journey as Frodo’s right-hand man does Sam cease to shirk responsibility. To Sam, Frodo is only “Master.” Sam, who is merely Frodo’s gardener in the Shire, accepts that those who have a socially higher rank and/or education level (i.e. Frodo, Aragorn, Faramir) are much better suited to lead a quest. He detaches himself from effectualness by referring to himself in the third person and consistently undermining his own capability, granting title of “master” to almost everyone else, as long as they are bigger in stature or widely known throughout Middle Earth like Elrond (Tolkien *Fellowship* 264). By creating another self – a self who is brave and resourceful enough to literally shoulder Frodo and Frodo’s burden, the Ring – Sam is able to guide his Master to success. But Sam’s characteristic humility and goodness help him to differentiate between other’s integrity and wickedness even when it may not be clear to other characters or even to readers. He recognizes that Gollum is not to be trusted because the foul creature is motivated only by the hopes of obtaining the Ring. And Sam distinguishes that Faramir, who eventually conquers his temptation to hijack the Ring in order to please his father, is actually a man of “quality” (*Towers* 665). Sam is more perceptive than he gives himself credit for, saying sensitively but sagaciously, “Folk takes their peril with them...and

finds it there because they've brought it with them) (664). Sam recognizes the source of evil, that we are all susceptible to its power, whereas in simplistic traditional fairy tales evil simply exists, though no one really knows why.

## CHAPTER VII

### RELUCTANT AND UNLIKELY HEROES

Tolkien's redefinition of heroism enamored the children of the Sixties. A new spin on heroism was in demand, especially among literary genres and sub-genres like Tolkien's fantasy and in comic books, whose good-versus-evil storylines had gained vast popularity in the idealistic Fifties, but in the succeeding decade suffered a slump. Stan Lee's revamping of Marvel Comics's heroes in the Sixties demonstrates the demand for socially conscious role models: "the result was a lineup of unusual, accidental, reluctant heroes who wrestled with mixed emotions about pursuing their own lives yet shouldering communal responsibilities. [...] All combined superpowers with human weaknesses" (Ashby 356). Just like these updated comic book heroes, Bilbo represented an accessible hero for sixties youth; he is "unusual, accidental, [and] reluctant" but despite his youthfulness and naïveté manages to rise to the occasion and take his place in the intimidating big world beyond the doorstep of his childhood home.

Baby boomers had become disenchanted with American heroism, one Vietnam soldier recalling, "My generation came of age totally post-World War II. We were the savior democracy...I was bred to believe that...you served your country." But the older the Vietnam War grew, the more disillusioned Americans became, one Marine lieutenant witnessing, "When we marched into the rice paddies on that damp March afternoon, we

carried, along with our packs and rifles, the implicit convictions that the Vietcong would be quickly beaten. We kept the packs and rifles, the convictions, we lost” (Miller 162). Disenfranchisement was a key ingredient in the Sixties’ demand for more complex heroes, a departure from the jingoism the World War II era and the years immediately after that war offered.

Civilians who never fought in Vietnam were nevertheless exposed to the horrors of the war in a more confrontational way than the nation had ever seen; they watched the first televised military skirmish from the comfort of their living room armchairs and became outraged at the unethical follies of American soldiers. Post-World War II America could simply not ignore that some of Vietnam’s draftees failed to live up to the heroic image many smug Americans believed was a national tradition.

One incident in particular forced many Americans to admit to “going into the 1960s with a firm belief in ‘sports, mom and dad, apple pie’ only to come out of the decade “seeing American society as rotten to the core” (Ashby 348). Philip Helms laments the incident in his essay “The [Vietnam] War and the Rings”:

Captain Daniel Medina and Lieutenant William Calley of the U.S. Army were the officers responsible for destruction of a Vietnamese village and the massacre of civilians in the village. They were tried and convicted of these war crimes in a U.S. military court. These events were widely publicized and many Americans were shocked; the popular image of the U.S. military prior to this period drew heavily on legend of the selfless, heroic, and high-minded citizen soldier. (Helms, “War” 12).

While traditional ideas of heroism crumbled, Tolkien provided more realistic ones, no matter that he wrote about a world that existed only in his imagination. Tolkien constructed a hero in Bilbo Baggins by tapping into “buried potential,” something the Sixties generation deeply related to (Green 40). William Green points out that Bilbo “is a hero called to change the world. By the end of the story Bilbo is quixotic in the highest sense: he has dared and succeeded beyond all sane expectations” (41). Vietnam protestors drew from Bilbo’s story inspiration to fuel their cause; Bilbo is an unlikely hero who inspired other unlikely heroes like those who protested war in spite of its institutional status in American history. American readers of *The Hobbit* were encouraged by Tolkien’s diversification of the notion of bravery. Bravery is demonstrated in the warring dwarves and the strong men of Laketown in *The Hobbit*, but “bravery is not a substitute for insight.” Green acknowledges that “Bilbo is an important counterbalance for the dwarves [with whom he travels] precisely because he feels fear, is conscious of his vulnerability, and yet has the courage to move from his womblike home into danger” (50).

*The Lord of the Rings* provides almost exclusively unlikely and/or reluctant heroes. It seems no protagonist the trilogy provides really *wants* or *chooses* to be a hero, but instead they are forced into the role, many times through inheriting misfortune or curses like Frodo inherits the Ring and Aragorn inherits the throne of Gondor. Though

Aragorn by the conventional definition of hero seems the most likely to become one, he is haunted by the shortcomings of his ancestors, particularly Isildur who was given a remarkable opportunity to destroy the ring, but failed. Aragorn is reluctant to assume a position of such great power because he fears failure and corruption. But a hobbit seems the least likely creature to heroically march into Mordor, the cradle of evil, and succeed in destroying the definitive token of malevolence; yet that is what Frodo does.

Frodo and Aragorn are reluctant, resentful of their inherited positions. Frodo laments, "I wish [Bilbo] had not kept the Ring. I wish he had never found it, and that I had not got it!" (*Fellowship* 58). Frodo grows courageous. He certainly does not set out with courage, but finds that Gildor the Elf's advice is true: "Courage is found in unlikely places" (*Fellowship* 83). Frodo's courage is nurtured by his love for the Shire and a sense of duty to its preservation. From the genesis of his journey he senses its importance, saying, "I don't rightly know what I want: but I have something to do before the end, and it lies ahead, not in the Shire. I must see it through" (*Fellowship* 85). His feelings are confirmed when wise Elrond Halfelven, a most revered figure among the leaders of Middle Earth, tells Frodo, "Such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must" (262).

Frodo's sense of duty to purity and Elrond's validation resounded among *The Lord of the Rings*'s fans in the Sixties; many of the era's cultural revolutionaries felt it their duty to instill peace and prompt social progress. In October of 1965 "four thousand protestors from across the western states gathered to march on the Oakland induction

center in the Bay Area's first big antiwar demonstration" (Echols 36). Even the police and Hell's Angels could not quell the determined protestors' fervor; they were determined to be heard. But the antiwar movement was only one revolutionary front; in 1968, zealous women's liberation activists protested "that most apple-pie of American institutions, the Miss American Pageant" (75) by unfurling a banner that read "Women's Liberation" as "sixteen protestors shouted 'Freedom for women' and 'No more Miss America'" from the audience during 1967's Miss America's concession speech (76). Though the televised pageant's producer hindered camera operators from covering the commotion, "the TV audience did not remain in the dark for long, because Monday's newspapers described the protest in some detail." The Sixties equal rights movement was equally if not more fueled. As early as 1960, sit-ins to protest segregation had shaken Greensboro, North Carolina and sent tremors across the whole United States (Cluster 1). These three branches of activism gave platforms to young people who were appalled at the thought of spending the anticipated "serene sixties" insignificant, unheard, and unchanged when so many injustices were at hand (xi).

The hobbits' feelings of insignificance spoke to youth in the Sixties. Carried away helplessly by a band of perfidious orcs, Pippin and Merry feel irrelevant and small, "just a nuisance: ...a piece of luggage" (*Towers* 435). This incident marks a turning point for the two hobbits. The revolting orc leader, Ugluk, complains, "My lads are tired of lugging you about...Be helpful now" (438). Afterwards, Merry's and Pippin's objectives change from surviving to mattering. They wish to serve, to become active, to

make a difference, instead of merely being exchanged by hands presumably stronger and bigger, more capable than their own.

Even when separated, Merry and Pippin struggle to find their meaningfulness in the present turbulence of Middle Earth. One of the greatest challenges they face is reinventing themselves to other races, mainly those of larger statures like men and Ents. Treebeard proclaims that of all Middle Earth's races "hobbits do not see to fit anywhere!" (453). And Beregon, Captain of the Guard in Gondor, condescendingly comments to Pippin, "At the table small men may do the greater deeds," as if a hobbit's size only suits servitude or gluttony (*King* 744). And even though men of renown like King Theoden admit that "A little people, but of great worth are the Shire-folk," Merry feels "very small" when he is left behind in the wake of the Riders of Rohan as they depart for battle (762).

But Merry, for one, finds an unlikely ally, one who understands his disappointment in being left behind to settle for triviality. Eowyn, King Theoden's niece, as a woman, smolders at her bravery and passion being repeatedly overlooked and unappreciated. "I have waited on faltering feet long enough. Since they falter no longer...may I not now spend my life as I will?" she asks (767). She resents being left behind to care for the sick and weak, wondering, "Shall I always be left behind when the Riders depart, to mind the house while they win renown, and find food and beds when they return?" She grieves that "when the men have died in battle and honor, [she has] leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need [her] no more." Eowyn fears

outlasting others' need of her, and laments because she is unfulfilled confined to the traditional feminine realms – the kitchen, the bedsides of the sick, and the role of motherhood, for she is unmarried and has no children, but desperately desires to fight for the freedom of her people and the preservation of their dominion.

CHAPTER VIII  
GENDER ISSUES IN MIDDLE EARTH AND THE 1960S

Like Eowyn's struggle as a woman trying to prove her worth in the politics of Middle Earth only to be pushed aside by male superiors insisting that her place is at home caring for others, women in the Sixties wrestled with like confinement and peripheral existence. Moreover, by the 1960s women had proven their value in the work force and to their country: women had made up almost the whole labor force during World War II only to be marginalized when the men came marching home. They were expected to resume their traditional places in the home without complaint.

As Alice Echols writes, "new patterns of consumption were made possible in large part through the emergence of the two-income family as wives increasingly 'sought to aid their husbands in the quest for the good life'" (Echols 78). In fact, "by 1960, 30.5 percent of all wives worked for wages." Furthermore, women's growing "labor force participation was facilitated by the growing number of women graduating from college and the introduction of the birth control pill in 1960," which freed them from unwanted pregnancies that restricted them to early motherhood and a lifetime of domesticity (78-79).

Nonetheless, the era's "ideas about women's proper role in American society were quite conventional throughout the fifties and the early sixties" (79). Exactly like

Eowyn, Sixties' women were inspired by the "climate of protest." Both Middle Earth and mid-century America were saturated with protest and political debate; the women of both settings tried to capitalize on the mood of the era, Eowyn disguising herself as a young male soldier in order to prove her worth on the battlefield and sixties' women staging mass protests on the objectification of the female body in the Miss America beauty pageant and to generally "question conventional gender arrangements."

Tolkien addressed gender conventions in *The Hobbit* long before he ever began writing *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Early in *The Hobbit* Tolkien describes Bilbo's parents' histories, which turns out to be quite significant in a discussion about gender in Middle Earth: the part of Bilbo which allows him to embark on the adventure of self-discovery he inherits from his mother. Throughout Bilbo's adventure, though, he grapples with his matrilineal "Tookishness" and the evils of straying from conventions that patriarchal hobbit culture stresses.

The narrative tells the following about Bilbo's mother, Belladonna Took:

It was often said (in other families) that long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife. That was, of course, absurd, but certainly there was still something not entirely hobbitlike about them, and once in a while members of the Took-clan would go and have adventures. They discreetly disappeared, and the family hushed it up; but the fact remains that the Tookes were not as respectable as the Bagginses, though they were undoubtedly richer. (Tolkien *Hobbit* 11)

The narrative goes on to point out that Belladonna certainly never had “any adventures after she became Mrs. Bungo Baggins,” who built luxurious Bag End. “It is probable,” explains the text, “that Bilbo, [Belladonna’s] only son, although he looked and behaved exactly like a second edition of his solid and comfortable father, got something a bit queer in his make-up from the Took side, something that only waited for the chance to come out.” Certainly, the same was true of women in the Sixties: the time was right and inviting for them to force society to come to terms with its unfair and hypocritical treatment of women. Thus, women in the Sixties became very active and persistent; they simply refused to bow to social convention which held them captive in stasis.

*The Hobbit* goes so far as to imply that Bilbo’s emotional inertia is a masculine trait while adventure and personal growth is feminine, or matrilineal. In his book *The Hobbit: A Journey into Maturation*, William Green notes that “Bilbo is bound to the house of his father” and suggests that Bilbo exists in “a type of arrested development” that could be described as “captivity” (Green 47). Green recognizes that the future hobbit-hero’s “ego ‘remains totally dependent upon the father as the representative of collective norms.’” In order to mature Bilbo must reject the patriarchal standards his father has built around his son and wife (in the literal form of a grand and comfortable house in a Shire quite removed from worldly incident), and embrace his Took side, or *Tookishness*. Green shrewdly theorizes that Gandalf the wizard participates as a kind of surrogate “spiritual ‘father’ sent to wake the hobbit out of his dreamlike ‘castration.’”

## CHAPTER IX

### TOOKISH ACTIVISM AND BAGGINS PASSIVISM

Throughout his adventures the text continues to refer to Bilbo as bifurcated by “Tookish honor” and Baggins passivism (50), arguing with himself repeatedly, as in the following passage:

“Now you are in for it at last, Bilbo Baggins,” he said to himself. “You went and put your right foot in it that night of the party, and now you have to pull it out and pay for it! Dear me, what a fool I was and am!” said the least Tookish part of him. “I have absolutely no use for dragon-guarded treasures, and the whole lot could stay here forever, if only I could wake up and find this beastly tunnel was my own front-hall at home!” (Tolkien *Hobbit* 226).

Notice Bilbo is prone to self-doubt, but musters up courage to face danger head-on, for, with his “belt tightened and his dagger loosened in its sheath” he manages to go “on and on.” Here Bilbo’s transformation reminds us of that of Sixties youth: “Already he was a very different hobbit from the one that had run out without a pocket-handkerchief from Bag End long ago.” Bilbo and the youth of the 1960s have in common determination to defeat not only the limitations they inherit, but also themselves.

Middle-class Americans born after WWII were in a similar situation to Bilbo. Their mothers were discouraged from extra-domestic interests while their fathers

remained the reigning authority of the household, a microcosm of government stratification that was, in the Sixties, challenged by the sexual revolution. Bilbo experiences a revolution from patriarchal influence, too, when, faced with Smaug the dragon for the first time he muses, “‘Every worm has his weak spot,’ as my father used to say, though I am sure it was not from personal experience” (233). In this significant remark, Bilbo realizes he has overcome the provinciality his father’s safe home promoted. In the Sixties, the youthful generation would make the same realization, consequentially becoming more confident in their abilities and influence, just as Bilbo does.

Frodo is also heir to *Tookishness*; *The Fellowship of the Ring* notes that “the Took family was still...liable to produce in every generation strong characters of peculiar habits and even adventurous temperament” but “the latter qualities...were now rather tolerated...than generally approved” (*Fellowship* 9). This “adventurous temperament” is what inspires Frodo to find “himself wondering at times...about the wild lands” and to “feel restless” (42). Restlessness, or dissatisfaction with the status quo, is a Tolkien ideal. It allows one to contest injustice, to become active. Hence, eventually, Frodo recognizes that hope for a better future can only be achieved on “a hard road, a road unforeseen,” and he realizes that he will have to “walk into peril” in order to save Middle Earth. Frodo’s realizations and determination make him an activist.

Aragorn is another activist: he sees an injustice and sets out to correct it. Even when faced with hopelessness of catching the elusive band of orcs who have

captured Merry and Pippin Aragorn “rouses” his colleagues by proclaiming, “Nonetheless we will still follow as we may” (*Towers* 416). Overcoming hopelessness was a large part of what made activists successful in the 1960s. *The Lord of the Rings*’s Sixties audience related to Aragorn’s suspicion of the world around him, a world increasingly teeming with foes and obstacles such as greedy men, corrupt wizards, and despicable orcs; Aragorn recognizes, “There is something strange at work in this land,” and admits that he “distrusts the silence [and] even the pale Moon” (*Towers* 417). Similar to Aragorn’s doubt, the cynicism of Sixties youth tempted them to feel hopeless, but revolutionary works such as Tolkien’s inspired them to initiate social progress.

The Sixties generation relied on the power of art (through song, mostly) to combat hopelessness and to support unification just as the races of Middle Earth do. Tom Bombadil’s song is what saves the hobbits from the clutches of the eerie barrow wights in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. He commands the phantoms in a tune, singing, “Get out, you old Wight! Vanish in the sunlight!” (*Fellowship* 389).

The good forces of Middle Earth, especially hobbits, never underestimate the power of tales and history, most frequently expressed in song. When the hobbits are starved for optimism they return to their custom of song, claiming, “Won’t somebody give us a bit of song, while the sun is high?...We haven’t had a song or tale for days” (201). And they find that Bilbo is honored among the Elves for his aptitude for verse. The Elves acknowledge the essence of longevity is record, and Bilbo is a master of creating lyrics about actual events and recording them in his book. Songs are handed

down from one generation to the next, so serve Middle Earth's races as a reminder of their own endurance by relating others' adventures and successes. Hence, songs are crucial for keeping morale high.

On his journey to Mordor, Frodo is constantly confronted by hopelessness. Frodo grieves for his "homelessness" (*Fellowship* 183), but he is urged on by "a reminder of Bilbo's first successful adventure"; Frodo and his companions are "heartened" when they see the trolls Bilbo encountered early in his own journey, turned to stone just as Frodo's "family history" chronicles (*Fellowship* 200-01). And before the grievous "Breaking of the Fellowship," while the hobbits are all still together, they share a rare carefree moment "basking in the sun with the delight of those that have been wafted suddenly from bitter winter to a friendly clime, or of people that, after being long ill and bedridden, wake one day to find that they are unexpectedly well and the day is again full of promise" (*Fellowship* 141). The hobbits draw their strength from their memories of the peaceful pastoral Shire, constantly reflecting on its natural beauty and peace. And even though the hobbits lament they ever left the Shire, they realize their responsibility to save it from destruction and impurity. The hobbits agree with Merry when he reflects, "If I had known what the world outside was like, I don't think I should have had the heart to leave [the Shire]" (339), but they also understand that "the courage that had been awakened" in all of them cannot be discounted (138).

In many ways the pampered youth of the Sixties were the most unlikely to recognize a need for change, much less to set a revolution in motion. The hobbits'

situation is analogous in Middle Earth. But Elrond, revered Elf leader, discerns, “This is the hour of the Shire-folk, when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the Great” (*Fellowship* 264). The hobbits prove Elrond right. By reinventing their own and the world’s definition of *hero*, the once isolated and complacent creatures bring about the greatest change Middle Earth has ever seen.

CHAPTER X  
ARE HOBBITS HIPPIES?

No exploration of the Sixties' counterculture's fascination with Middle Earth would be complete if it did not address hippies. For hippies are possibly the most recognizable (though mistakenly) representatives of the Sixties'. Hippies claimed a special bond with Tolkien's works in the Sixties, insisting that they shared much with the nature-loving elves and the pacifist hobbits.

But many people today who were not alive in the Sixties mistake exactly what it meant to be a hippie. Dave Getz of Janis Joplin's band, Big Brother and the Holding Company, insists, "I never called myself a hippie. I hated it" (Echols 29). Early in the Sixties, Beatniks made sure to set themselves apart from hippies; Beatniks were activists who sought improvement and change, they fought injustice. Indeed, many members of the counterculture described hippies as "White kids who weren't that hip" (29-30). Hippies were looked down upon by members of the counterculture who "were older than the kids who...flooded into the Haight" around the time of The Summer of Love (1967). Hippies were notorious for being "people who just kind of showed up and didn't seem to have any sense. They didn't know how to take care of themselves. They didn't know how to wash their clothes, hold down a job, or make sure they were going to live through [the decade]" (30). *Time Magazine* ran a special issue on hippies in 1967, reporting that

“to their deeply worried parents throughout the country, they seem more like dangerously deluded dropouts, candidates for a very sound spanking and a cram course in civics – if only they would return home to receive either” (*Time* 7 July, 1967).

Taking drugs led to lethargy in hippies and they clung to their naïve beliefs that free love would change the world. Essentially, hippies were selfish, spoiled white kids who exploited the turbulence of the decade; they were “dopey optimists,” as *Time*’s article refers to them. They did not *do* much, but what they did do usually had adverse effects; for example, when opportunists began to mass produce counterculture fashion, hippies were the ones who were buying, feeding the capitalism’s exploitation of the counterculture.

Hippies were followers who were really only interested in taking advantage of the short-term good time promiscuity and drugs the idea of free love made available. Northrop Frye saw “the hippies as inheritors of the ‘outlawed and furtive social ideal known as the “Land of Cockaigne,” the fairyland where all desires can be instantly gratified” (*Time*). Hippies of the Sixties were not as interested in making a difference as they were having as good a time as they could while they could, without so much as an afterthought to the future. *Time*’s cover story about hippies criticizes them for “condemning virtually every aspect of the American scene, from its foreign policy to its moral values, [but] offer[ing] no debatable alternatives” (*Time*). The article goes on to chastise hippies for “having no desire to control the machinery of society or redirect it toward new goals [and having] no urge to reform the world, if only because its values

seem irrelevant to them.” Indeed, hippies failed to provide solutions to the problems they saw with 1960s American society. In the 1968 essay “Are Hippies Real?” Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi hesitates to pair the words *hippie* and *movement* because when hippies are the subject matter “we are talking about vastly different, completely disorganized individuals” (Csikszentmihalyi 135).

When “Scott McKenzie’s...ode to...San Francisco ([which advised,] “be sure to wear some flowers in your hair”) hit the charts...the squares were on the march, kicking down little old ladies’ picket fences to get flowers in their hair so they could arrive dressed to the code described in the papers.” The hippies’ tag-along attitude caused them to become burdensome to society. Hippie families did not offer alternatives to the traditional family lifestyle as they had promised to. Hippie women got stuck with the housework while their (many times multiple) partners stayed high on marijuana and “managed to avoid nine-to-five jobs” (Echols 34). The result was “the vast majority of women in that scene” getting pregnant in order to stay on welfare (35). By the late sixties hippies had become the quintessential social parasites.

So what connections do adolescent, stagnant hippies share with turbulent, evolving, warring Middle Earth? Why do some past and present critics dismiss *The Lord of the Rings* as a hippie handbook? Well, hippies and these critics simply *misread* Tolkien’s works. As Philip Helms writes, “Many [critics] attempt to make [Tolkien’s] works seem inane; most ridicule the fans and attempt to link them with the ‘hippie movement,’ if such an oxymoron ever truly existed” (Helms 7). Now, I will admit that

*Time*'s description of hippies sounds very much like Tolkien's description of hobbits.

Note the similarities; this is *Time*'s description of hippies:

Hippies preach altruism and mysticism, honesty, joy and nonviolence. They find an almost childish fascination with beads, blossoms and bells...[they maintain] a belief in the revealing, mind-expanding powers of potent weeds and seeds and chemical compounds known to man since prehistory but wholly alien to the rationale of Western society...Overendowed with all the qualities that make their generation so engaging, perplexing and infuriating, they are dropouts from a way of life that to them seems wholly oriented toward work, status and power. (*Time*)

And here is part of Tolkien's description of hobbits:

They do not...understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they [are] skillful with tools...Hobbits have never studied magic of any kind, and their elusiveness is due solely to a professional skill that heredity and practice, a close friendship with the earth, have rendered inimitable by bigger and clumsier races...they [are] lovers of trees and woodlands...and meddle not at all with events in the world outside...At no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they [have] never fought among themselves...They imbibe or inhale, through pipes..., the smoke of the burning leaves of a herb, which they [call] *pipe-weed* or *leaf*. (*Fellowship* 2-8)

These passages make correlations between flower children of the Sixties and hobbits obvious. Both hippies and hobbits claim simplicity, an aversion to industrialism and a penchant for nature. And they are both fond of recreational smoking, the hobbits smoke pipe-weed and hippies smoked marijuana, also referred to as "weed." And both hobbits

and hippies choose to distance themselves from society; hippies are critical of the society in which they live, hobbits volunteer to ignore incidents outside their homely realm.

To say that the Sixties' hippies misunderstood Tolkien's message is not to say that they had nothing in common with the peoples of Middle Earth. Indeed, both "rejected [] the 'rationalist progressive' view of history as a series of distinct improvements over the past and [] the materialist belief that matter is the ultimate determinant of all things" (Ratliff & Finn 144). The authors of the 1968 article "The Hobbit and the Hippie," William Ratliff and Charles Finn, astutely recognize that even though Tolkien and hippies reject the same concepts, they do not agree "on the grounds for the rejection."

Certainly, Tolkien's works focus on the mystery and importance of nature; at the time Tolkien was writing *The Hobbit* he was still feeling disillusioned with the First World War and was appalled by the industrialization of England. The deep connection and love for nature the fair races of Middle Earth felt surely appealed to the 'tree-hugging' hippies. Regarding the trilogy, Ratliff and Finn admit that "even those of us the hippies call 'straight people,' after reading the passages about the Old Forest and the Ents, come away feeling greater communion with forests in general and trees in particular." And the Sixties marked a significant time for ecologists as Rachel Carson "amassed evidence of the deadly effects of pesticides on the environment" (Miller 183). Ecology and the environment was becoming more and more a hot button issue in the Sixties, even for the "60 million Americans [living] in suburbia" by 1960. Suburban

developments were beginning to infringe upon valuable forests and farmland. But real estate opportunists capitalized on “the human urge to get back to pastoral paradise, away from urban grime, crime, and crowding,” labeling their “tracts with such names as ‘Wildwoods,’ ‘White Hills Estates,’ and ‘Crystal Stream,’ although no woods, hills, streams or estates lay in sight” (Miller 21). This attempt to fool Americans into believing they populated an authentic pastoral setting backfired when the baby boomer generation questioned authenticity. In a way, the nature they encountered among the pages of Tolkien’s works was more real than what they saw in their own backyards.

However, where the hippies’ and Professor Tolkien’s philosophies diverge is in the message of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. *The Oracle*, a famous hippie newspaper published in the famed Haight-Ashbury (or, ‘Hashbury’) district of San Francisco, the nucleus of hippie culture in the 1960s and Seventies, commented “that *The Lord of the Rings* is ‘the most realistic fiction that has been recently published. The hobbits are very much a sub-culture in their own time [...]; for they like to keep to themselves, not bothering others. They enjoy living and are a very happy people” (144-45). The writer of this comment misestimated how his/her analysis contrasted with Tolkien’s own. Not only do “the lives and values of the hobbits [...] include a respect for quiet and good order which would be repelled by the frenetic behavior and art of the Hashbury community” (145), Tolkien does not allow the primary hobbit characters to remain in their safe, isolated community, which appears to be an ideal lifestyle for the *Oracle* writer. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo is forced to connect with the outside world; he is

shoved out of his comfort zone so that he may learn not only about the happening of other races who inhabit Middle Earth, but also about himself!

In Tolkien's Middle Earth it is simply not enough to read about things; experience holds utmost importance because it inspires personal development. Those who shy away from new information or experience, who stay safely locked away in their own consciousness, are undesirables in Tolkien's work. Upon his first encounter with sheer evil – trolls – Bilbo reflects that “he had read of a good many things he had never seen or done” (Tolkien 44-45). Bilbo knows, for the first time, that he must *act*. In contrast to Bilbo, the narrative has the following to say about trolls: “Trolls are slow in the uptake, and mighty suspicious about anything new to them” (45). Trolls revel in their ignorance while elves, the most idyllic of all Middle Earth's races, “know what is going on among the peoples of the land, as quick as water flows, or quicker” (60). Bilbo's exposure to both races – trolls and elves – leaves him admiring the wisdom of the elves and scorning the dullness of the trolls.

Given the characteristics of Middle Earth's peoples, some critics see hippies' lifestyle as being closer to that of the trolls than of hobbits or elves; Ratliff and Finn note that “the hobbits are a geographically isolated group and are generally most unaware of what is happening outside the Shire; the hippies remain in the centers of greatest population and both explicitly and implicitly condemn the whole society that surrounds them” (145). Tolkien views lack of activity as the ultimate sin. As *The Hobbit* illustrates, recognizing evil is only the first step; one must put on the metaphorical “dwarf

hat,” and step outside one’s comfort zone, whether it be The Shire or the “Hashbury,” in order to find solutions. Bilbo could hardly have played a major role in destroying the evil Smaug had he not stepped outside his hobbit hole and taken risks to find out what the rest of the world was all about.

In a word, hippies lack *tookishness*. And they are idealistic. They may find *The Lord of the Rings* inspiring, but what does it inspire them to *do*? A major hippie theme in the sixties was “drop out,” but if one drops out of society, how can one make a difference? By “dropping out” hippies claimed an allegiance to such figures as Buddha, who “was a dropout from a royal family who later [returned] to the palace and turned on his father...with nothing more than sincerity and a mendicant’s bowl,” and “St. Francis of Assisi, who left a rich Italian family to live in poverty among the birds and beasts” (*Time*). But hippies, unlike the above historical examples, discard any social obligation, and even for all the superficial similarities in hobbits’ and hippies’ lifestyles, if Frodo had “dropped out” Middle Earth would have been destroyed.

Certainly, hobbits, in all their wonder, innocence, and naïveté, are, like hippies, childlike. But the hobbits, on a journey of worldly significance and magnitude, mature at the rate of their journey. They grow up. But 1960s hippies reveled in their own stagnation and indulgence. Their stunted maturation and moral flimsiness resulted in disaster. In fact, it resulted in what some call “the death of the counterculture” when some let themselves be led to commit gruesome crimes in the name of a revolution. Infamous professional criminal and drifter Charles Manson capitalized on people of the

Hashbury “completely losing their bearings with drugs, sex, everything...[to] convince them that he [was] Jesus Christ” (“Our Generation: Death of the Counterculture”).

Manson collected followers from the Hashbury to comprise his commune in California of which he would be the leader. One former Manson Family member, Catherine Share, remembers, “He wanted to be the one to think for us so that we wouldn’t have any thoughts of our own” (“Counterculture”). Incidentally, one attribute Manson possessed that set him apart from Tolkien’s idea of a hero was that he “was more or less illiterate” (Miles 272), and from Share’s comments we can ascertain that he was not an advocate of education or personal growth.

The notorious Manson Family murders marked the death of the counterculture. The scores of mainly privileged, mainly white young people Manson recruited to be his followers “seemed to have no direction or purpose” until he gave them one. Hippies’ aimlessnessness made them “easy pickings for Manson.” Where their predecessors, the Beats, or beatniks, stood for change and social evolution, hippies were simple, swayable minds, indolent and only half-conscious of the tumult that surrounded them. Catherine Share suggests that hippies “were way too innocent, too gullible.” She posits, “Your dream [of] taking acid and everybody making love...[is]...not going to solve anything. Maybe it just took a Charles Manson to wake people up.” The Manson Family murders certainly brought the endless-summer, perpetual-party atmosphere of the 1960s hippiedom to an abrupt halt. The generations who were already at odds – the baby boomers and their predecessors – had dissimilar reactions to the bloody tragedy, further

illustrating the atmosphere of change and conflict that inundated America in the Sixties: “To many older Americans the murders were symbolic of the drug-infested morality-free hippie movement. But to [the counterculture] Manson was an example of America itself – a violent nation fighting an immoral war, a country where assassination had become the norm” (“Counterculture”). While older, conservative Americans blamed the Manson tragedy on the counterculture’s rejection of conventional morality, the active branch of American counterculture astutely recognized that hippies’ spinelessness and weak will was at fault. Both parties considered hippies to be shameful.

I have already claimed that to read Tolkien as an allegory for any time period is folly. But, as this paper proves, similarities between the Sixties and particular incident and characters in Tolkien’s works are undeniable. These similarities made it seem as if Tolkien was speaking directly to the Sixties reader. Even the Manson Family has a counterpart in Middle Earth. When Catherine Share relates that after the Manson murders, her fellow Family members were “totally changed; they looked like there was no life in them.” Even those who had not been involved in the actual killings were oppressed by their own commitment to the man who orchestrated them. Manson had such an evil grip on his Family members that even from prison he commanded his henchmen to torture anyone who tried to leave the commune. The hippies who had followed Manson were now inextricably linked to his evil; they were doomed to live like fearful, unfree ghosts of themselves.

I cannot help but be reminded of Middle Earth's evil Ringwraiths when I think of the Manson Family. The Ringwraiths, or Nazgul, are "the nine mortal men who were ensnared by lust for power during the Second Age and who were forced to linger in Middle Earth as undead creatures, totally subservient to their Master, unable to pass on or find rest" (Tyler 402). Though the wraiths were "ensnared by lust for power," and the Manson hippies were ensnared by Charles Manson's lust for power, the end result was analogous. Both the Manson family members and the Ringwraiths were doomed by their lack of strength: the Ringwraiths and Manson's followers bowed to their ability to be controlled, consequentially suffering a death-like existence.

Aside from all their lassitude, naivete, and ineffectuality hippies do provide an example of one of Professor Tolkien's most important themes: hope. Perhaps like children in any generation hippies provided the Sixties with hope, albeit naively founded. Though hippies' progenitors, the Beats, retreated "into hopeless solipsism" having been mystified by "existential anxiety," hippies sought "pieces of hope – from Navajo prophecies, The Mantra Yoga, The Little Flowers of St. Francis," etc. Granted, this achievement was unconsciously accomplished, but nevertheless, hippies' advocacy of alternatives to their parents' "over-all goals of gain, status, and power" (Csikszentmihalyi 137). Even as late as 1968, though, scholars believed that even though "the hippie phenomenon is real, with a revolutionary potential that has few parallels in history [] so far it is only *potential*" (139); and hippies' "influence could never be as thorough-going as some of us fear – or hope" (141). Hippies' Middle Earth counterparts proved the

opposite of themselves: hobbits' proved their influence fathomless, their value to the peoples of Middle Earth inestimable.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

Readers who continue to comb the pages of Tolkien's work in search of some message pertaining to contemporary events will inevitably find themselves successful. But Tolkien's works' themes are universal, their impact timeless, so they will always find an audience. The fantasy genre within which Tolkien wrote found especial invitation in the Sixties because it was a decade so enamored with revolution, not just political and social revolution, but cultural revolution as well. The Sixties' young people were enticed by literature and art that expressed the innovation that was occurring and would mark their decade of coming of age. Sixties youth valued lore and song as much as one of their Tolkien heroes, Faramir whose followers described him as "more bold than many deem" even though "in these days men are slow to believe that a captain can be wise and learned in the scrolls of lore and song, as he is" (*Return* 750). Faramir's love of history and culture set him apart from his father, just as the young counterculturalists of the Sixties found their penchant for rock and roll music and experimentation of all kinds created discordant division between themselves and their parents' generation.

Like Faramir, some youth of the Sixties wished to be appreciated for their knowledge and alternatives to violence, and some, like hobbits, wished to be valued for their love of peace and nature. Still more longed to be effective like their heroes Gandalf

and Aragorn who set the wheels of change in motion. Tolkien's works are simply inundated with admirable characters ripe for the Sixties counterculture's hero picking.

The baby boomers were inspired by legacy, as was Tolkien. The boomers struggled with generational inheritance because they had inherited an undesirable war and an emphasis on materialism and security. But they were extremely successful in the legacy they themselves would will to the next generation. The themes of inheritance *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* stresses resounded throughout the Sixties generation; the Ring resulted in being only part of Frodo's inheritance. Perhaps even more important to Tolkien's baby boomer readership was Bilbo's book, which he passed on to Frodo and to which Frodo contributed. Bilbo's book, a chronicle of all his furtive adventures, is a sacred and portable legacy he carries away with him when he departs from Bag End.

Frodo, understanding the significance of the book as an essential and positive part of generational inheritance, places it in responsible hands before he permanently leaves the Shire at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*:

There was a big book with plain red leather covers; its tall pages were now almost filled. At the beginning there were many leaves covered with Bilbo's thin wandering hand; but most of it was written in Frodo's firm flowing script. It was divided into chapters but Chapter 80 was unfinished, and after that there were some blank leaves. The title page had many titles on it, crossed out one after another. (*Return* 1003-4)

Frodo tells Sam, who is a symbol of hope throughout the trilogy, “The last pages are for you” (1004). The book, therefore, is a harbinger of hope for ages to come because it reminds people that hope has been an ally to the successful in the past. In Rivendell Gandalf is sure to applaud Bilbo’s writing, advising, “Finish your book, and leave the ending unaltered! There is still hope for it. But get ready to write a sequel, when [Frodo and company] come back” (*Fellowship* 263). Continuity of culture, here in the form of literature, symbolizes the continuity of the good peoples of Middle Earth. Bilbo is a mouthpiece for what many young people in the Sixties were trying to convey when he acknowledges that “someone else always has to carry on the story” (226). The Sixties generation recognized that culture was a symbol of survival of the human race. War and violence, on the other hand, was not only the destroyer of culture, but meant death to the human race.

In order to preserve culture, therefore preserving human life, the Sixties generation felt it their duty to challenge authority, whose fallibility their protesting brought to light. Hence, rebellion became a mark of their generation. This generation changed traditional concepts about government, politics, and the power of people, and their appetite for literature that reflected their revolutionary ideas was insatiable. The decade of the 1960s proved to be a coup within western culture. Conservatism was overthrown by experimentation. Youth revolted against previous generations’ emphasis on security and materialism. While reading *The Lord of the Rings*, Sixties youth compared America to Gondor, whose great hall contains an “avenue of kings long dead,”

at the end of which sits an empty throne waiting for its new heir to ascend it (*Return* 738). In Gondor and in 1960s America, the time was right for new leadership.

The gap in leadership Gondor endures in the absence of a king represents a disconnection between generations that compares to the discord between youth and their parents in the Sixties. The nuclear family that was the promise of security and prosperity in the Fifties was in shambles by the end of the Sixties. *The Lord of the Rings* reflected the fragmentation of familial traditions by describing a fellowship, and then its division as the hobbits splinter into two pairs of adventurers and man, elf, and dwarf are forced to go forward on their own. Aragorn laments over the dead body of Boromir, “Now the Company is all in ruin,” and wonders if he is to blame (*Towers* 404). But the passing of Boromir is the passing of the patriarchal structure he symbolizes. Boromir’s father, Denethor, upholds the traditional structure of power and is loathe to surrender it, will also meet a tragic and untimely death. Aragorn is an emerging leader with new ideas about leadership; and Aragorn endures.

As a matter of fact, Boromir’s death is handled much more ceremoniously in *The Two Towers* than is Gandalf’s in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, even though Gandalf is a far more consequential character. This is simply because the people of Middle Earth anticipate the longevity of Gandalf’s corollary, whereas Boromir’s role is a dead-end, like the avenue of dead kings in Minas Tirith. Boromir’s effect on Middle Earth, like the old leaders he aligns himself with, is limited to the length of his existence; like his trademark horn, the leadership Boromir represents is “cloven,” while the symbol of

leadership Aragorn brings to his nation is a sword of his ancestors, repaired and improved. The activists of the Sixties strove for this kind of progress; they backed leaders who were less interested in power and more interested in making and maintaining peace and culture.

Gandalf continues to be relevant even in his supposed death. His reincarnation is more of Professor Tolkien's emphasis on the importance of education; Gandalf returns to Middle Earth wiser and more powerful. His reincarnation also stresses transformation and growth, ideas baby boomers were especially interested in and hoped to achieve. In Middle Earth the enemies of growth are orcs of whom Legolas the Elf says, "No other folk make such a trampling. It seems their delight to slash and beat down growing things that are not even in their way" (*Towers* 409). The Sixties generation championed Gandalf for his learnedness, but they also felt life affirmed as he is reincarnated into an even more potent being. They felt the same was happening to them as they drew upon their high education and determined to keep culture alive as long as they could overcome destructive, war-mongering government leaders they compared to the destructive orcs of Middle Earth.

Gandalf's fate also symbolized Sixties youth's awareness. Sixties youth's understanding of the world became more elucidated as they decade passed. Not only were they more educated than any generation before them, but they were more willing than any other generation to confront their growing cynicism. *The Lord of the Rings* provided one image that haunted young people of the Sixties who refused to grow

complacent like their parents had – the Dead Marshes. Frodo and Sam warily creep among the marshes startled by the “many faces proud and fair, and weeds in their silver hair. But all foul, all rotting, all dead” (*Towers* 614). The image was too reminiscent of boys who lost their lives in Vietnam for the Sixties generation to ignore. To the Sixties counterculture, to go to battle for a corrupt and uncaring government in an unjustified war was as “foul” as the Dead Marshes’ rotting corpses.

Tolkien’s themes spoke to Sixties readers who made the works enormously popular; the themes did not describe the times, but happened to be particularly relevant to the times. Tolkien’s Sixties readers were comforted by men’s regeneration in Middle Earth; in the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo reluctantly admits to Boromir his mistrust in “the strength and truth of Men” (*Fellowship* 388). But by the end of the tale Aragorn’s humane leadership restores all of Middle Earth’s faith in the valor of men. Activists of the 1960s backed the same brand of leadership. The restoration of a valiant and compassionate king to the throne of Gondor gave hope to disillusioned youth of the Sixties that peace in their own world would prevail.

Today, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are read, studied, debated more than ever before. Though Tolkien’s Sixties audience was among the first to realize the works’ consequence, their universality keeps them relevant. The works will always speak to the most turbulent of historic moments because they address those dark elements of humanity that have become a part of our daily awareness that we will never cease to lament – war, destruction, environmental upset, dissatisfaction with leadership.

Tolkien's works will continue to provide a glimmer of hope and a reminder of mankind's longevity and the even more lasting endurance of nature, just as they did in the tumultuous Sixties.

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