

Nienna, Lady of Pity and Mercy, and the Fall of Sauron

by

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Merriam-Webster defines pity as “sympathetic sorrow for one suffering, distressed, or unhappy.” It contains several meanings for mercy, many of which reflect the uses J. R. R. Tolkien makes in his legendarium: “compassion or forbearance . . . shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one’s power . . . a blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion . . . a fortunate circumstance . . . compassionate treatment of those in distress . . .”

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the word pity appears 61 times, far more than it does in any other of Tolkien’s works. At times, it is within the context of “What a shame . . . ,” which will not be addressed. Mercy appears 11 times. The pity Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam give to Sméagol-Gollum is critical to save Middle-earth from falling under the Shadow, but none of them initially choose it. Sam sees no value in it after he and Frodo meet the creature with “a dual personality that is manipulative, wicked, and consumed with and by the One Ring” (Sheppard-Goodlett 6). The gardener is more than once openly critical of his master’s choice to extend the same pity Bilbo did. If he could have his way, Gollum would not live long. Faramir is initially reluctant to extend any pity or mercy either, yet Frodo begs him to do so because of what he learned from Gandalf. What stirs the hearts of others in the long history of Middle-earth to extend pity to others, whether allies or enemies? The actions that flow from them are abundant throughout Tolkien’s tales.

Even though the stories of Middle-earth and beyond are set in a far distant, pre-Christian past, Tolkien still abundantly embeds major elements of what later becomes this particular view of life: self-sacrificial love; loyalty; and pity, mercy, and compassion for enemies. Indeed, Ralph C. Wood asserts “love--understood as pity and mercy and forgiveness--[is] the central virtue of *The Lord of the Rings*” (“Augustinian” 99).

Tolkien began his exploration of the themes of pity and mercy decades before he so prominently features them in *The Lord of the Rings*. The Vala Nienna is the soul of pity, even though in *The Book of Lost Tales*, she was originally conceived quite the opposite. It is almost as if her earlier incarnation as the pitiless Fui is the Old Testament version of her, where pity is mentioned over two dozen times but many times in instances that show utter lack of it. To name just one example, “And I will smash them one against the other, father and son together - it is Yahweh who speaks. Mercilessly, relentlessly, pitilessly, I will destroy them” (*Jerusalem Bible*, Jer. 13:14). This could just as easily be Fui who speaks and acts. This is not at all to equate her with Yahweh as equivalent beings, but she, too, is merciless, relentless, and pitiless in her judgement of the souls she sends to Melko (originally spelt without the ‘r’) (*Lost Tales I* 77). Nienna, as she appears in every other version of the stories of the Valar but the first, is the New Testament version where mercy is more prevalent.

There are also many others who reach out in compassion through the millennia to those suffering within Morgoth’s Ring. But it was not this way in the ancient Primary World, where pity for enemies was an alien concept. Wood notes the ancient Greeks only gave it to “the pathetic, the helpless, those who are able to do little or nothing for themselves. . . . But pity is never to be given to the heinous and undeserving, for such mercy would deny them the justice that they surely merit” (“Augustinian” 102). Here is the crux of the difference between the mercy of Nienna and the justice of Fui, just as Greek pity is different from that given to Gollum.

Mary Scott notes the disconnect between why the modern reader feels pity while reading the works of Homer and what the author’s original audience felt. The latter may have felt “pity for those who died, not in any modern humanitarian sense but in that, through dying, they had in

effect failed” (2). There was also in Homer’s time a complete lack of the worth of an individual as an individual. Men were to protect their wives and children. If they could not or another male kinsman could not in the deceased man’s place, then the women and children were considered valueless (3). Men show pity in offering hospitality to those who cannot repay them, as in a child who must now beg for food after his father’s death and the loss of any value he had in Homeric society (13). The Old Testament is far harsher: “The baby boys all cut to pieces, the baby girls all crushed. They [Babylonians] have no mercy on the fruit of the womb, no pity in their eyes for children” (Isa. 13:18).

Scott mentions several times the gods feel pity for mortals and act upon it to ease the situations that cause it. This could be to help someone who struggles in a battle, to keep a body from being dishonored after death, or to aid someone who weeps. “In each case, it is possible to discern, from the words or actions that succeed *eleos* [pity], an impulse to put right, as far as possible, the situation which has caused the god . . . to pity” (9). When “*eleos* is a positive impulse in favour of someone in trouble, which, when followed up, leads to action on his behalf,” (13) one sees this reflected in the intervention of the Valar upon the plea of Eärendil for succor for the Men and Elves hard beset by the forces of Morgoth.

R. Marshall and A. Bleakley observe when in the context of Hector’s father, Priam, coming to Achilles, his son’s murderer, to claim the body, *eleos* has a double meaning that encompasses pity and mercy, just as does the Christian prayer *Kyrie eleison*, which they note means not only “Lord, have mercy on us” but “Lord, pity us” (11). Achilles has up to this point been a savage and merciless brute even to those who cried out for mercy. He has dishonored Hector’s body. But he finally comes to pity and back to humanity in this encounter with Priam and speaks to the

man about sufferings and blessings sent by Zeus to mortals. C. W. Macleod observes, “This is also the fullest and deepest expression in words of Achilles’ pity for the suppliant; for pity, as Homer and the Greeks represent it, is a sense of shared human weakness. And it is pity which is at the heart of Homer’s conception of poetry” (13-14).

Macleod notes, even though a single god may intervene in the affairs of men and save their lives in battle, the gods are, in the last analysis as a group, apart and indifferent (14).

Tolkien takes the opposite stance with Elbereth taking an active role to aid the Children of Ilúvatar who call upon her. Likely it is also Irmo who sends refreshing and prophetic dreams to Frodo, and Ulmo who sends water in Frodo and Sam’s desperate need in Mordor.

Rajat Singh notes another reason for the word pity to be used in ancient literature, which echoes strongly in Tolkien’s works:

For centuries, translators have leaned on the word *pity* to bind the experiences of classical heroes together with the ordinary lives of their readers, such that their instability offers us a window to glimpse our humanity most viscerally. Pity lets us imagine the other--a quality Aeneas ultimately loses sight of. Yet even the worst of us are capable of acts of grace. This is, after all, the resounding significance of the epic tradition. (n.p.; emphasis in original)

The climax of *The Lord of the Rings* reveals the grace-filled moment of the destruction of the Ring brought about through the action of the anti-hero Gollum. Marion Zimmer Bradley acutely comments, “He tears Ring and finger from Frodo--but his fall into the Crack of Doom, glossed as an accident of his exaltation, is more, far more, than accidental. . . . he *genuinely*

saves Frodo, whom he loves as much as he hates, from destruction . . . bringing the accursed Ring and his own long agony to an end . . .” (123; emphasis in original).

Another connection with Tolkien and the ancient view of pity is Singh’s reflection on the Greek word *oiktos*, which shows a heart unmoved by pity upon the sight of suffering. This is the opposite of what happens when Frodo meets Gollum for the first time, and why Faramir is such a contrast to his father, Denethor. “[Faramir] read the hearts of men as shrewdly as his father, but what he read moved him sooner to pity than to scorn” (*LotR* 1031). The Steward of Gondor’s heart is cold and close to death where his son’s is warm and living. Singh observes, “Where *oiktos* reflects a shrinking away from suffering, *eleos* signals a move toward relief, an ethical response toward reflecting on the pain of others” (n.p.). Denethor flees into suicide rather than face what he thinks is to come. Frodo tells Sam to remove the rope around Gollum’s ankle once he is convinced the creature is in genuine pain. Faramir actively works to heal the emotional trauma that traps Éowyn in such a desolate place.

There was once a link between pity and piety in a shared Latin root, *pietas*, or devotion. They are many who model this, either to a person, such as Sam to Frodo, or to a cause: Frodo to the Quest, Aragorn to his long road to kingship and marriage with Arwen, and Gandalf’s far longer sojourn in Middle-earth to strengthen the Free Peoples against Sauron.

Another definition of pity in the ancient world comes from Aristotle. He defines pity as “a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours, and moreover to befall us soon” (113). The effects of evil caused Nienna great grief, as Melkor marred the Great Music and so Arda. Gandalf considers Sméagol’s fall sad. Readers could won-

der whether the wretched hobbit deserved the hell of centuries of madness and enslavement to the Ring and Gollum, which is all he gained from what he murdered to obtain.

Aristotle also observes, “In order to feel pity we must also believe in the goodness of at least some people; if you think nobody good, you will believe that everybody deserves evil fortune” (113). Here hinges the two views Frodo has about Gollum. Before he sees the creature face-to-face, he does not believe there is a shred of goodness in the wretched being, who merits nothing but death. Once he does see him, pity wells up in him, just as it did in Bilbo.

Wood notes the great differences between other ancient cultures and what is exercised in Middle-earth and by Primary World Christians. “According to the warrior ethic of antique Germanic and Scandinavian cultures, the offering of pardon to enemies is unthinkable: they must be utterly defeated. For Tolkien the Augustinian Christian, by contrast, love understood as mercy and pity is essential . . . . Christians are called to have pity for those whom we do not trust, even and especially our enemies” (“Augustinian” 102). This is a difficult concept to understand from Frodo’s initial inability when Gandalf proposes it for Gollum to some modern-day cultures. Why give mercy to an adversary and so enable the opportunity for him to do more evil? Yet Tolkien extols these virtues.

Tolkien makes clear in his letters what he considered pity and what he did not. In regard to whatever feeling William the troll has for Bilbo, Tolkien notes, “I do not say William felt *pity* - a word to me of moral and imaginative worth . . . . Pity must restrain one from doing something immediately desirable and seemingly advantageous. There is no more ‘pity’ here than in a beast of prey yawning, or lazily patting a creature it could eat, but does not want to, since it is not hungry” (*Letters* 191; emphasis in original).

Regarding Sam's tragic interference with Gollum's repentance, Tolkien explains what he means when he tells a correspondent the pity Frodo gave to the wretched creature is from one point of view "wasted." "In the sense that 'pity' to be a true virtue must be directed to the good of its object. It is empty if it is exercised *only* to keep oneself 'clean', free from hate or the actual doing of injustice, though this is also a good motive" (330; emphasis in original).

In a draft of a letter, Tolkien speaks of the victory of the Ring's destruction despite the collapse of Frodo's will under the weight of months of demonic torment. "He (and the Cause) were saved - by Mercy: by the Supreme efficacy of Pity and forgiveness of injury" (251-252).

Because Tolkien considered pity and mercy of such vital importance to the sub-creation that was his life's work, it continues to enrich myriad lives long after his death. But why were these recurring themes so critical *The Lord of the Rings* "breathes Mercy from start to finish" (Shippey, *Road* 145)? Many scholars have addressed the Christian reasons. In an essay in *Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J. R. R. Tolkien*, Kristine Larsen is one of the few who has contemplated the pity of Nienna (189-203). This is surprising because it is such a crucial part of the story of the Ring, for at her feet, Gandalf learns of pity and mercy. What her prize pupil gleans of her wisdom and makes a vital part of himself, he later teaches in word and deed to those he grows closest to in Middle-earth. Because he does, one of the clearest of the great many lessons from the Red Book of Westmarch comes to light in the cases of Gollum and Saruman. As it is impossible to have full knowledge what a person may become in the end, one should extend a hand up if the chance arises for redemption rather than thrust a sword in and end all opportunity. Bilbo's critical use of pity for Gollum does not come from Gandalf's counsel but from an even higher source, either Nienna or Ilúvatar Himself.

But before Tolkien discovered Nienna was the essence of pity, he had a radically different view of this essential Vala. In the earliest version of what becomes *The Silmarillion*, she is “the spouse of Mandos, and is known to all as Fui Nienna by reason of her glooms, and she is fain of mourning and tears. Many other names has she that are spoken seldom and all are grievous, for she is Núri who sighs and Heskil who breedeth Winter, and all must bow before her as Qalmë-Tári the mistress of death” (*Lost Tales I* 66). Her Gnomish name is Fuil ‘Queen of the Dark’ (253).

Neither Mandos nor Fui can bear the brightness and beauty of Valinor. They take no joy in the Eldar and have little interaction even with each other. They abide in two separate halls with virtually no interior light.

Fui’s domain is a terrible place, reflective of her own dark heart. “Therein before her black chair burnt a brazier with a single flickering coal, and the roof was of bats’ wings . . .” (77). She labors long to make all who live within the world as completely miserable as possible. Her days are spent “at the distilling of salt humours whereof are tears, and black clouds she wove and floated up that they were caught in the winds and went about the world, and their lightless webs settled ever and anon upon those that dwelt therein. Now these tissues were despairs and hopeless mourning, sorrows and blind grief” (76-77).

To Fui’s house of horror, all Men come to hear of their fate after death. Some she sends to stay with Mandos. Some she mercilessly drives to Melko for hellish torment. Most she sends on a ship to Arvalin where they will stay not entirely unhappily until the end of the world. Before the ship bears them away, they glimpse Valinor at a great distance and then see it no more. A lucky few are sent to dwell in Valinor (77).

Christopher Tolkien notes how completely different these ideas are from his father's later conception of the fate of Men after death, which remains unknown (90). With the exception of those who go to Mandos, he observes how explicitly these locations compare to Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven (92). He remarks the idea of death as a Gift to Men is present from the earliest stages, but not explicitly named, as in the published version of *The Silmarillion*. In this earliest of tales, death is a gift to only a select few, and it does not come easily to any. Men cannot travel upon Ilweran, the rainbow bridge Oromë fashioned for the Valar, though at times they can see it. For them and most Elves, there is only one path to take, which is "very dark; yet is it very short, the shortest and swiftest of all roads, and very rough, for Mandos made it and Fui set it in its place. Qalvanda is it called, the Road of Death, and it leads only to the halls of Mandos and Fui" (213).

In subsequent versions, Tolkien utterly abandons the merciless and cold-hearted Fui, and Nienna, the soul of mercy and pity, appears. Rather than someone one would not wish to meet even in a well-lit alley, she becomes one the dead seek out, and to whom she brings consolation.

Larsen notes, "Nienna is one of the most powerful of the Valar and plays a central, albeit subtle, role in the legendarium" (190). Fui was anything but subtle. Her power as judge of souls is absent in Nienna, whose power is far different and put to much better use. Rather than avoid the Halls of Mandos as Fui often did, Nienna actively seeks out those who call out for her from there. No one would have thought or desired to do this with Fui, and even if they had plead for mercy and solace, they would have received none that Nienna so generously gives. As dedicated as Fui was to causing grief and mourning, Nienna devotes herself to relieving it. "But she does not weep for herself; and those who hearken to her learn pity, and endurance in hope. . . . all

those who wait in Mandos cry to her, for she brings strength to the spirit and turns sorrow to wisdom” (*Silmarillion* 16). Where Fui’s heart was cold, Nienna’s is warm, living, and loving. Fui was just. If she discerned a soul merited entrance to Valinor, she granted it. If otherwise, she dealt out what was appropriate.

Nienna, however, is merciful. It is impossible to imagine her sending any soul to hell. In the earliest version of the tale of Finwë and Míriel, Nienna advocates for pity over justice for Míriel, who refused the call to return to life after she died shortly after giving birth to Fëanor. The other Valar find her death unnatural and a sorrowful sign of the marring done by Melkor. Nienna’s contribution to the debate opens with, “In the use of Justice there must be Pity, which is the consideration of the singleness of each that cometh under Justice. Which of you Valar, in your wisdom, will blame these Children, Finwë and Míriel?” (*Morgoth’s Ring* 241). After Mandos initially refuses to release Míriel’s soul from his halls, Nienna again says, “Pity must have a part in Justice” (248). Finwë adds his plea for pity for his wife after he enters the domain of Mandos. Nienna presses her case once more. Mandos releases Míriel’s soul to rejoin her body (249). Fui would have never said these words, even if she was a judge of Elven souls.

An earlier version from *The Annals of Aman* sheds further light on Nienna’s heart:

For it is said that even in the Music Nienna took little part, but listened intent to all that she heard. Therefore she was rich in memory, and farsighted, perceiving how the themes should unfold in the Tale of Arda. But she had little mirth, and all her love was mingled with pity, grieving for the harms of the world and for the things that failed of fulfilment. So great was her ruth [compassion], it is said, that she could not endure to the end of the

Music. Therefore she has not the hope of Manwë. He is more farseeing; but Pity is the heart of Nienna. (*Morgoth's Ring* 68)

Nienna's compassion is so great she pleads for the devil himself, after Melkor comes before his fellow Vala and feigns repentance for all the evil he set loose in the world. He asks for their pardon and vows to help them in all ways, most especially with their efforts to heal the harm he did. "And Nienna aided his prayer; but Mandos was silent." Melkor fools the unsuspecting Manwë into believing he has indeed reformed his ways, but others are far more suspicious, and they are right to be (*Silmarillion* 57).

Larsen notes the quote from the *Annals* "most clearly articulates Nienna's cosmic role as the personification of not only sorrow *for* the evils of the fallen world, but also of pity and its central role *in* Arda Marred" (197; emphasis in original). "In such a world, there is much need for a lady of mourning, mercy, and pity" (198).

And into such a world comes one who learned much at the feet of Nienna. "Wisest of the Maiar was Olórin. He . . . dwelt in Lórien, but his ways took him often to the house of Nienna, and of her he learned pity and patience" (*Silmarillion* 18). In a dwelling that must be far more hospitable than Fui's, Olórin absorbs her wisdom into his heart and brings her heart with him to Middle-earth. He shows it to the Elves, Aragorn, Faramir, and Frodo, so they also carry her message of pity and mercy for those who do evil while within Morgoth's Ring. Larsen notes it is Gandalf who "most clearly illustrates the handiwork of Nienna in the novel [*LotR*]. Not only does the wizard understand the importance of pity and mercy in the thread of events that connects the Ring to Gollum, Bilbo, and Frodo, but he practices the virtue regularly" (199-200). Indeed, as Andrew Fenwick observes, he is "the physical manifestation of Pity" (27). As the am-

bassador of the Valar “he comes bearing their Pity (which is the Pity of the One)” and his Pity begets pity (28). This extends not only to Gollum, but to Sauron’s slaves and Saruman, and indeed, to all in Middle-earth. It is this practice of pity and patience that “allows [Gandalf] to sift through Gollum’s lies, half-truths, and stubborn silences to create a realistic and even moving portrait of Gollum’s former life” (Bebb 9).

*The Hobbit* introduces readers to Bilbo and to Gollum, “one of [Tolkien’s] most fascinating creations” (Christensen 9). As Bilbo wanders lost in the total darkness of the goblin tunnels, he encounters this being “as dark as darkness” (*Hobbit* 88). He agrees to play a riddle-game with terribly high stakes: if Bilbo wins, Gollum will show him the desperately sought exit; but if he loses, Gollum will eat him. The game reveals the worldview of both hobbits. Bilbo speaks of life, light, and beautiful things, while Gollum focuses in retaliation for the most part on death, darkness, and decay. Corey Olsen notes the sad story behind the wind riddle. “The wind doesn’t roar; it cries. It doesn’t soar; it only flutters. The wind is described as being nobody and having nothing, and yet it is still always biting, always crying, always muttering. This, of course, is also a perfection description of Gollum’s own nightmare reality . . .” (98). The darkness riddle “also has its autobiographical aspects” (98).

*It cannot be seen, cannot be felt,*

*Cannot be heard, cannot be smelt.*

*It lies behind stars and under hills,*

*And empty holes it fills.*

*It comes first and follows after,*

*Ends life, kills laughter. (Hobbit 93; emphasis in original)*

Gollum's reason to use this is far more chilling than the pity the wind riddle evokes.

Olsen observes, "Those first two lines . . . sound like the ultimate version of the hunting Gollum: undetectable, irresistible. . . . the dark is Gollum's true world, his perfected self" (98).

In the first edition of *The Hobbit*, before Tolkien discovered the true nature of the Ring and Bilbo was less than truthful in his memoirs about this momentous period in his life, Gollum promises Bilbo an unspecified gift if the hobbit wins the riddle-game. After Bilbo does, he asks Gollum to hold up his end of the bargain. The wretched creature searches hard for the ring he meant to give, but he finally comes back empty-handed. "I don't know how many times Gollum begged Bilbo's pardon. He kept on saying: 'We are ssorry; we didn't mean to cheat, we meant to give it our only present, if it won the competition.' He even offered to catch Bilbo some nice juicy fish to eat as a consolation" (qtd. in Anderson 325). Bilbo refuses and states instead he will let Gollum out of his promise on the condition the creature guides him out of the tunnels. Gollum gives up on the idea of having Bilbo for a tasty meal and guides the hobbit out until too afraid to go any farther. At this point, they part amicably.

The two editions agree up to a point and then diverge sharply, and the history of Middle-earth changes profoundly with it. Despite the fact "the riddle-game was sacred and of immense antiquity, and even wicked creatures were afraid to cheat when they played at it," Gollum decides upon this in the new and improved version (*Hobbit* 98). Just as in the first version, the creature goes back to his island to fetch his ring "in whose shining symmetry is encased Gollum's dark soul" (O'Neill 61). This time, however, not as a present to give Bilbo, but as a way to conceal himself in order to slay the hobbit. Upon hearing Gollum's lament for whatever it was he lost, "Utterly miserable as Gollum sounded, Bilbo could not find much pity in his heart, and he

had a feeling that anything Gollum wanted so much could hardly be something good” (*Hobbit* 101).

After Bilbo sees Gollum remains intent upon his meal, he flees. Luck remains with him throughout his flight. Because the Ring slips itself on his finger, Gollum goes past him without seeing him after Bilbo slips and falls. The Ring-finder stealthily follows his would-be murderer in the hope of finding the way out rather than blindly running away in the dark. He sees his hope fulfilled, only to watch it seemingly snatched from him. Gollum gets him close enough to find his way out, but then blocks his way and detects by senses other than sight the thief of his precious is nearby. A terrible desire to kill Gollum as the only way to save himself surges through Bilbo.

He was desperate. He must get away, out of this horrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He must fight. He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo’s heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering. All these thoughts passed in a flash of a second. He trembled. And then quite suddenly in another flash, as if lifted by a new strength and resolve, he leaped. (*Hobbit* 106)

Why does Bilbo choose to save this “pathetic, sniveling residue of a life starved by its own selfishness, thoroughly repulsive, and deadly” (McGrath 177), this “masterpiece of nasti-

ness” (Rutledge 26), this “finest depiction of evil ever written” (Peck 45)? Susan Ang and Fleming Rutledge point out the preciseness of Tolkien’s words:

The prose of the first few sentences, with its jerky ragged rhythms, manages to suggest the panicked workings of animal instinct. . . . Gollum is an ‘it’, a ‘thing’. However, the rhythm then eases into reflectiveness. Gollum is given a name in Bilbo’s thoughts and becomes ‘he’, a person, whose ‘otherness’ . . . [is] suddenly comprehended . . . . There is no need to put out his eyes; Gollum’s days are already lightless. . . . This is a moment of immense compassion, both in the modern meaning of this word and in its original (Latin) sense: *compassio*, ‘I suffer with.’ (Ang 55)

[Tolkien] does not write ‘Bilbo suddenly understood,’ or ‘Bilbo acquired a new strength.’ Bilbo is not the acting subject. Understanding and pity *well up*; a new strength and resolve *lift him*; they are active agents. . . . Bilbo is the passive receipt of understanding and pity, strength and resolve. They come to him from outside himself. . . . Bilbo is *enabled* to put his new gifts to work . . . . (Rutledge 27; emphasis in original)

Louis Markos notes, “Gollum’s ‘life’ is wholly lacking in love, in peace, in purpose. He simply goes on, like a gnawing toothache or a perpetual grudge. Death for him would be a release, a mercy, yet he must continue on, yearning joylessly and hopelessly to regain the very thing that robbed him of his joy and hope” (150). This is life within Morgoth’s Ring for those caught in the webs of evil. For a piercing moment, Bilbo perceives Gollum’s hell. Rutledge claims it is not the creatures’s physical state that touches the Ring-finder so deeply, but “the hopelessness of his bondage” (27).

Markos observes:

The pity that stays Bilbo's hand is a pure expression of *caritas* that is born out of Bilbo's ability to move out of himself (out of his fear, hatred, and disgust) and feel a sympathetic (even empathetic) connection with the loathsome and deceptive Gollum. . . . the pity that wells up within Bilbo at this decisive moment is not human but divine. . . . It is that insight that allows him to love Gollum as a suffering thing in need of grace. . . . Bilbo takes pity on Gollum, not because he deserves pity but because Bilbo allows himself to be a conduit of a higher pity. (136-37)

Bilbo sees through the eyes of Nienna and responds as she would. He bases his action on what thousands of years later Jesus tells His followers: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27) and "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate" (Luke 6:36).

Joe Kraus notes how the Ring provides critical, unwitting aid here. "Bilbo's invisibility gives him a glimpse into another's humanity. The power to see and not be seen . . . liberates him and allows him to show mercy in a way that . . . proves essential to Sauron's downfall" (246). This free, grace-inspired decision enables all the other actions that concern Gollum's fate and the fate of all Middle-earth. Indeed, Rutledge asserts, "It can't be stated too strongly: this brief passage in *The Hobbit* lays out the theological foundation for the climax of *The Lord of the Rings*" (28).

No foreknowledge of this, however, moves Bilbo's heart to act as he does. He makes his decision based on present reality, not a nebulous unknown future. He is well aware Gollum is most keen to murder him, but he refuses to kill the creature for a crime not yet committed. Bilbo shows "mercy for mercy's sake alone" (Ware 53; emphasis in original). He restrains his hand,

surrenders the control the Ring gives him over the creature's life or death and willingly enables his own possible future death at Gollum's hand.

Ryan Marotta argues:

This is Bilbo's defining moment of spiritual maturation, the point at which he ceases to be an ordinary hobbit and finally grows into a heroic adventurer. . . . Bilbo's act of mercy anoints him as a true hero . . . : it is a willful demonstration of self-control, peace, and in its deepest meaning, love. Bilbo's simple act of compassion, his choice to preserve the life of another at the risk of his own, completes his metamorphosis from a creature of routine to a being of will, and would ultimately change the fate of Middle-earth. (Marotta 23-24)

This is the exact opposite of Sméagol's absolute and unjust control over Déagol's life and death. Selfless restraint allows Bilbo to escape without shedding blood or taking a life and so preserve the purity of his own soul. Sméagol's selfish lack of restraint begins his long slide into torment and madness.

Decades after Bilbo's life-changing adventure, Frodo embarks on his own. Ang notes, "*The Lord of the Rings* is steeped in sorrow and death and evil in a way that *The Hobbit* is not. But there also runs through it the quality of mercy. In *The Lord of the Rings*, mercy becomes more important than justice" (85). Frodo learns this while he undertakes his own arduous physical and spiritual journey through tremendous beauty and terrible desolation as a direct result of Bilbo's awe-ful discovery of the Ring and fateful meeting with Gollum.

Christensen notes the changes to Gollum in the second edition of *The Hobbit* into a “withered, totally depraved creature dominated by an evil ring and capable of any crime,” are vital because of the part the creature and the Ring will play in these later adventures (10, 27).

Gandalf relates to Frodo Sméagol’s sad fall into darkness begins innocently enough with a curious nature. But the hobbit’s topic of interest was what is in the ground, which brings his head downward, away from life and light, and ultimately into the black night of the mountain where Bilbo finds him centuries later. After Sméagol murders Déagol and acquires the Ring, his slow transformation into Gollum begins. It seems, despite a hobbit nature which is normally more resilient to the malice of the Ring, he falls instantly under its lure. But is this true? His people lived by the river near where the foul object was lost millennia before. Like a poison, Sauron’s treasure may have dripped slowly into Sméagol’s heart and soul for decades, and what appears as instantaneous could well be the consummation of a long seduction. His grandmother exiles him because he becomes “sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful. The ring had given him power according to his stature” (*LotR* 52). Quincey Vierling Upshaw asserts, “This idea is critical, for it sets the standard for a character’s individual reaction while in close personal proximity to the Ring of Power. While Bilbo, protected by his first act of mercy, appears shielded from the Ring’s full wrath, Frodo too gains a sort of grace by continuing this mercy and his initial revulsion to the concept of an all-powerful weapon” (23). Sméagol cries “a little for the hardness of the world” (*LotR* 52) without realizing he is the author of his own misery through his growing addiction to the Ring. Slowly he loses touch with his humanity and become more animal-like. He “wormed his way like a maggot” into the depths of the mountains (53).

By the time Bilbo meets Gollum, he has acquired fish-like qualities as he wriggles and squirms, and his feet are web-like. His sibilant speech is dragon-like. Tolkien describes him with qualities of a spider, frog, and dog once Frodo and Sam meet him. Brent Nelson notes many of these. He also states, “Gollum is continually associated with filth (particularly slime) and all that is bestial, especially in his appetite” (476).

Verlyn Flieger adds more descriptions. “Gollum is also psychotic, driven mad by his obsession with the Ring,” a “degenerate, feral figure,” “warped and grotesque,” a “twisted, broken, outcast hobbit” who is “maddened by reminders of joy he cannot share” (124, 125, 154, 155).

Gandalf chillingly relates Gollum’s depraved behavior after leaving the tunnels to seek after the Ring. “The wood was full of the rumour of him, dreadful tales even among beasts and birds. The Woodmen said that there was some new terror abroad, a ghost that drank blood. It climbed trees to find nests; it crept into holes to find the young; it slipped through windows to find cradles” (*LotR* 56-57). John Wm. Houghton and Neal K. Keese note, “Here we have the Ring’s need for a victim, its temptation and deception of that victim into nothingness, and the real evil it brings to the victim as well as to others” (145).

Gandalf’s recounting of Sméagol’s tortuous existence fails to move Frodo. He considers Gollum “loathsome” and the idea the creature could be at all related to hobbits “abominable” (*LotR* 53). The wizard, however, advocates for the little bit of Sméagol, who with miraculous tenacity still remains after centuries of torment and bondage to the Ring and Gollum. David Callway observes, “For a creature to possess the Ring for this long and not yet be ‘devoured’ by the dark power and still have hope for a ‘cure,’ or still have a fraction of good tucked

away somewhere in his mind, shows strength of will, and it is this strength which earns Gollum the pity of those who understand [how] possessing the Ring can be” (16).

This ‘fraction of good’ is who Gandalf wants Frodo to pity. He validates the hobbit’s suspicion about Gollum’s murderous intentions in initiating the riddle-game with Bilbo. But he wants Frodo to look deeper rather than rush to condemnation. He wants him to look at the wretched creature through the eyes of Nienna and see Sméagol.

Even Gollum was not wholly ruined. He had proved tougher than even one of the Wise would have guessed - as a hobbit might. There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark: light out of the past. It was actually pleasant, I think, to hear a kindly voice again, bringing up memories of wind, and trees, and sun on the grass, and such forgotten things. (*LotR* 53)

After Frodo learns Gollum is responsible for placing his life in deadly danger, he allows his fear to speak for him. “What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance!” Yet, pity is exactly what Gandalf wishes for Frodo to feel. “Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity” (58).

Rutledge notes not only the importance Tolkien places on pity and mercy by capitalizing the first letters, “but also to hint at the Power from which they emanate. Gandalf’s image of light coming through the tiny chink in Gollum’s mind subtly indicates that the source of the light is *outside* Gollum’s mind . . .” (61; emphasis in original). The cure Gandalf hopes for “cannot come from within the person himself; nor, in intractable cases, can the cure come from within a

purely human source. Only an intervention from *another sphere of power* can remove the cause of the paralysis, the insanity, the accursedness” (61; emphasis in original).

Fear, however, continues to override any reason or sympathy in Frodo. He makes it clear once more he finds no pity in his heart for Gollum. Rather, he calls out for justice and death. He still looks at his enemy as Fui would have, or as Anglo-Saxons to come with their belief in *wyrd*. Gandalf again acknowledges Frodo’s viewpoint as valid. But he also again undercuts it and asks for the hobbit to look at his foe differently.

Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many - yours not least. (*LotR* 58)

Helen Theresa Lasseter notes, “Justice as the inescapable judge for deeds is a key element of *wyrd* in defining a fated world order. . . . Through offering a new foundation for proper action in pity and mercy rather than justice, the implied author [of *LotR*] implicitly undermines the traditional role of *wyrd*” (168-169). Wood also offers a perspective on this moment. “. . . pity establishes the fundamental solidarity of giver and receiver. Pity understood as *pietas* entails responsibility, duty, devotion, kindness, tenderness, even loyalty. In commending Bilbo’s pity for Gollum, therefore, Gandalf is urging Frodo to acknowledge his elemental kinship with ‘that vile creature’” (*Gospel* 152; emphasis in original). Frodo does not understand this until he meets Gol-

lum face-to-face and takes the creature into his keeping and embraces all that is bound up in *pietas*.

Combined with such a deep understanding of pity, Gandalf is also self-aware enough to know the Ring could corrupt him through his exercise of it. He adamantly refuses Frodo's plea to take the fell object. "Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good" (*LotR* 60). Twice he begs Frodo not to tempt him. Houghton and Keese note Gandalf knows his strengths could be twisted into weaknesses and how the Ring would use them both to devour him just as Sauron himself was, while also turning him into a formidable force capable of inflicting great evil upon the world (144). He does not wish to become a shadow of Fui.

The shadow of Fui yet remains though in the words and heart of Boromir at the Council of Elrond. The man assumes Aragorn justifiably killed Gollum after he captured him. Yet Gandalf's protégé speaks of mercy. "He is in prison, but no worse . . ." (*LotR* 248). Legolas speaks of mercy and compassion also. "But Gandalf bade us hope still for [Gollum's] cure, and we had not the heart to keep him ever in dungeons under the earth, where he would fall back into his old black thoughts" (249).

It is no surprise with Gandalf as a mentor, Aragorn lives and breathes the pity of Nienna. After Frodo asks for time alone to decide at Parth Galen which route he will now follow to continue the Quest, the Ranger regards him with "kindly pity" (387). Decades before, the man willingly chose the path of loneliness and exile. For Frodo, this life was thrust upon him. He still freely chose to follow his Road, but it was not the same decision Aragorn made. The burdens

Aragorn has carried are not the increasingly terrible weight placed upon the hobbit's small shoulders.

Another moment Aragorn shows how much of Nienna's wisdom he absorbed over the years is after he, Legolas, and Gimli come upon a strange man in Fangorn Forest. The dwarf wonders why the Elf hesitates to shoot. Legolas is aware "some other will" does not wish this. Aragorn says, "We may not shoot an old man so, at unawares and unchallenged, whatever fear or doubt be on us" (481, 482). The Ranger's reason is the same Bilbo and Frodo use in deciding what to do with Gollum. They all surrender control over another's life and death and choose mercy over murder.

After Gandalf frees Théoden from Saruman's deadly grip and exposes Wormtongue as a traitor, the latter begs for mercy and pity. The king freely gives it, but his heart is finely balanced between Nienna and Fui. Gandalf notes it would be just to kill the traitor but also states Wormtongue was not always wicked. He suggests the wretched counsellor have a choice: to either renew his allegiance to Rohan or to return to its enemy, Saruman. Théoden gives the snake his freedom, but states there will be no mercy if they meet again.

By the time Frodo and Sam meet Gollum face-to-face, Peter S. Beagle provides a chilling description of the ruined hobbit but one that also evokes pity:

At the time Frodo takes him, Gollum is, of course, quite mad. The dark, silent centuries of living with the Ring's hunger, and the torments of Sauron after that, have burned his mind away to a single, glowing cinder of meaningless desire. He is two creatures now, two voices that hiss and chatter in him night and day: Gollum and Sméagol--one no person at all, no *I*, but the Ring's thing; the other somehow still alive, still retaining a few

shreds of its own will after all this long time, and even able to feel a stunted yearning toward Frodo, whom he must betray. (“Ring” xiii; emphasis in original)

Rutledge adds, “[Gollum] has become the very epitome of nastiness, so repellent that it is almost impossible to feel any mercy toward him” (198). Yet, this is exactly what the Ring-bearer extends. With Sting at Gollum’s throat, Frodo is in a position to dominate and control his adversary, but like Bilbo, he does not take advantage of it. Gandalf hinted pity would come to him after he saw the creature with his own eyes. With the wretched being now before him, he sees not only with his eyes, but with his heart, and not only with his own eyes, but with Gandalf’s and through him, Nienna’s. He is no longer hungry for justice as he was, and Fui would have been if she could judge the living as well as the dead. Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull mention an unpublished note from Tolkien: “He [Gollum] remained a human being, not an animal or a mere bogey, even if deformed in mind and body: an object of disgust, but also of pity - to the deep-sighted, such as Frodo had become” (447).

Linda Greenwood notes:

The pity that Frodo shows Gollum is what brings mercy to himself. . . .

. . . the prophetic words of Gandalf are the catalyst that stays Frodo’s hand . . . .

. . . What is his motive? It seems to be a pure act of pity. His act is motivated by compassion. He acts with a mercy that demands and expects nothing in return, with the ‘Divine Gift-love’, which [C.S.] Lewis explains, enables a man ‘to love what is naturally unlovable . . .’ (*Four Loves* 128). (178-9)

What is interesting about this remembered conversation is it is not exactly what Gandalf said, but what Frodo recalls. “*Then be not too eager to deal out death in the name of justice,*

*fearing for your own safety*” (*LotR* 601; emphasis in original). Gandalf never said ‘in the name of justice, fearing for your own safety,’ but this is what comes to the frightened hobbit. He well remembers his cry for Gollum’s death after he learned Bilbo’s earlier rescission of a terror-inspired desire to ‘deal out death’ jeopardizes his own life. Frodo stands now at this same crossroad, and despite fear, makes the same choice. He understands justice in a different light. Before he thought it would be perfectly just to kill Gollum for all his crimes, but like Bilbo, he sees it would not be just to kill the creature for a crime not yet committed.

Sam does not understand why his master is kind, but from the first Frodo sees behind and beyond Gollum, to the soul of Sméagol still there suffering after centuries of torment. This is another part of the discernment, wisdom, and grace growing in Frodo, that he would not have had without being in the same crucible as Sméagol. Not yet wholly consumed, the Ring-bearer stands outside the prison the wretched creature is in, though his back is to the gate. He understands what is happening in his soul and in Sméagol’s and guides his fellow Bearer from the viewpoint of light. Lasseter notes, “Such an act of mercy is possible only out of concrete love for another’s personhood--what the person should have been, what he is, and what he still might be” (171). In some ways only an addict can understand another addict. Frodo is doing what every Christian should: to look after another’s soul, to attempt to guide it back, to be “his brother’s keeper” (Gen. 4:10). Wood observes, “Perhaps because Frodo treats him in a civil and polite fashion, Gollum begins to recover his freedom, his Sméagol self. Frodo calls forth Gollum’s best traits by refusing to focus on his worst ones. Tolkien thus echoes what, in his *Confessions*, St. Augustine says about God’s own love for him: ‘In loving me, you made me lovable’” (*Gospel* 132).

Kerry Dearborn comments, “*Mercy* is a fascinating word whose derivation in both Arabic and Hebrew comes from the same root as womb. It means providing a safe place where life can grow and be nurtured. It means becoming a host, where you become the source of life for others” (144; emphasis in original). Though she mentions this in the context of the hospitality offered by the Elves of the Golden Wood, it even more movingly describes Frodo’s efforts to rehabilitate Sméagol. The Ring-bearer actively begins to work toward the cure Gandalf carried hope for. This would be Nienna’s hope also. Frodo calls his new guide by his given name and treats him with a compassion the miserable being lacked for centuries. Though speaking of doctor-patient relationships, the following is apt for the relationship that now forms with ‘Dr.’ Frodo and his ‘patient’: “Entering the mind of the other . . . [is] an essential characteristic of empathy” (Marshall and Bleakley 8).

This unwitting good the Ring provides is key to its eventual downfall. As St. Paul will write millennia later of those in Colossus, Frodo is “clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience” (Col. 3:12). Roger Sale notes, “Sméagol loves the specialness that is Frodo’s care of him.” The cautiously dawning love Frodo receives in return is “the tentative unbelieving response to a caring so unlikely it seems heroic even to the Gollum” (287). Wood adds, “He seems to understand that Frodo has trusted him again and again—not out of mere necessity, but in a desire for friendship” (*Gospel* 134). Joyana Nicole Richer notes, “Gollum starts to experience a sort of transformation as a result of Frodo’s stern but compassionate love, revealing that even in the most corrupt minds, there is a sliver of hope for love to find a way” (19).

Richard Mathews speaks of this transformation that brings Sméagol to the surface from the depths of Gollum and the stranglehold the Ring has on him:

Every instant of time is in some sense timeless, for the choices made at every moment have the potential for changing the course of all future time and the meaning of past time. Pity, Mercy, Forgiveness are the qualities which make it possible to assume this about time: those driven by greed, possessiveness, hatred are tied irrevocably to the past Fall and to time. Frodo's act of mercy seems to touch something deep in Gollum, to remind Gollum that he might not be as bad as he has been . . . . (39)

Beagle also mentions there is still a small bit left of hobbit nature to respond to Frodo's care, as sunlight stimulates a flower. Though this particular flower is terribly malformed by the corrosive power of evil and addiction, and even pale moonlight causes it pain, it still movingly turns to Frodo's light ("Gollum" 13).

As Frodo and Sam continue to follow their guide, they meet another of Gandalf's students in the woods of Ithilien. Tolkien describes Faramir as "modest, fair-minded . . . and very merciful" (*Letters* 323). This well-respected and beloved man declares he would not lie even to an orc, takes no joy in killing, and even spares the lives of animals if he can. With Gandalf as a mentor, he sees with the eyes of Nienna. He looked upon Boromir with pity at the sad but blessed sight of his brother's funeral boat. He spares the lives of Frodo and Sam rather than blindly follow the dictates of his land to take any strangers and potential enemies to his father to decide their fate.

After Faramir and his Rangers take the hobbits to Henneth Annûn, Sam lets slip Frodo has Isildur's Bane. Much like Aragorn, Faramir holds Frodo in high regard, as he now under-

stands better what a burden the small being carries. The pity for someone suffering stirs his gentle heart, but he also honors the Ring-bearer, as one warrior would honor another, for sacrificially accepting to take this pain upon himself and successfully fight the spiritual battle against the Ring.

Faramir's regard for Frodo also saves Gollum's life, for he listens and heeds the Ring-bearer's advocacy for the creature at the Forbidden Pool. There are strong echoes here back to when Bilbo spared the creature. Even the same words could be used in the reasons Frodo gives: "The creature is wretched and hungry . . . and unaware of his danger" (*LotR* 670). The hobbit even tells Faramir to shoot him if he is not successful in capturing Gollum. The younger Baggins has come a long way from utter lack of pity to now offering his life in Gollum's place if need be. The lessons of Nienna through Gandalf have taken firm root in his heart. He crawls down to his fellow Ring-bearer using his hands akin to how Gollum himself likes to travel. With a mixture of "pity and disgust" he listens to the creature talk to himself (671). Frodo squelches a brief temptation to tell Anborn to shoot. It grieves him what he actually does seems to Gollum no less a betrayal.

Faramir extends mercy and spares Gollum's life when at any other time it would have been automatically forfeit. At the same the Ranger captain, as an adept discerner of souls, recognizes the evil that dwells within the creature. He calls him wicked, but Frodo challenges the young man, "No, not altogether wicked" (676). The Ring-bearer advances his advocacy of Gollum another step in his insistence the men blindfold him first upon leaving the hidden Ranger refuge, so to reassure his guide there is no evil meant in such an act. Rutledge observes:

The depth of Frodo's growth in wisdom and charity runs parallel to the increasing pressure from the evil of the Ring. . . . The deep reserves of mercy and empathy that we see rising in him now are new; they are not innate. They are gifts given from on high, through Gandalf. Tolkien is telling us that solidarity with others in mercy and sympathy is the only true and lasting antidote to the malignity represented by the Ring. (225)

As Gollum stands upon the brink of repentance on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol, Karin Olsson speaks of the power of the remnants of Sméagol that remain:

. . . . In this scene he appears for a moment as an old, tired hobbit, completely free from the influence of the Ring. If there had been no goodness in Sméagol from the beginning, there would have been no goodness for Gollum to fall back on after all those years and if Sméagol had never come across the ring, he might never have become evil in the first place . . . . (13-14)

If only Sam understood this before he unwittingly helps to enable the tragedy of Sméagol's death. Gollum, conceived and born out of the evil of the Ring and Déagol's murder, dies in the fires of Mount Doom. Sméagol, the tormented hobbit who despite five centuries of the overwhelmingly toxic presence of Gollum and the Ring still held out against complete annihilation, dies here, unnoticed by Frodo and Sam. David Callaway notes the light Gandalf spoke of "still more powerful than many of the characters expect" winks out (22). How Nienna must have mourned. Who else but a divine or angelic being could have helped him hold on for so long to what little self and sanity remained? Callaway comments Sméagol had no Gandalf to help him as Bilbo did (17). The only hint about what sustained the fractured hobbit, even while under torture in Mordor, is from the unfinished tale "The Hunt for the Ring":

[Sauron] did not trust Gollum, for he divined something indomitable in him, which could not be overcome, even by the Shadow of Fear, except by destroying him.

...

Ultimately indomitable he was, except by death, as Sauron guessed, both from his halfling nature, and from a cause which Sauron did not fully comprehend, being himself consumed by lust for the Ring. (337)

After the decision to embark on what is by all appearances a suicide mission to give Frodo and Sam more time to reach Mount Doom, Aragorn continues to model his actions after his mentor, Gandalf. The uncrowned king takes pity upon those who are unmanned by the terrible doom ahead of them and assigns them another task. Fenwick notes, “Aragorn - in a marked contrast to the Homeric ethos - has as much Pity for the weak as Gandalf” (92). The narrator of the Red Book tells of the profound effects this has. “Then some being shamed by his mercy overcame their fear and went on, and the others took new hope, hearing of a manful deed within their measure that they could turn to, and they departed” (*LotR* 868).

In the desolation of Mordor, Sam knows it is pointless, and possibly even dangerous, to offer to carry the Ring after Frodo tells of its terrible weight, “but in his pity he could not keep silent” (916).

Sam beholds a vision of Frodo on the slopes of Mount Doom as a white-robed figure “untouchable now by pity” (922). Up to this critical point, the gardener views Gollum as Fui would have. From the time of their first meeting, Sam advocated and wished for Gollum’s death. On the Stairs of Cirith Ungol, he mercilessly verbally attacked Gollum at the moment of his greatest vulnerability, the apogee of his possible redemption, and unknowingly snapped the frail thread

upon which Gandalf's slim hope for the creature's cure hung. But Sam was not yet a Ring-bearer then. He had not seen or felt in his heart what torment Sméagol suffered all those myriad years, which Sam felt but for a fleeting moment.

But a moment is enough to change Sam's heart, just as months of exposure to the malignancy of the Ring prepared the soil for pity to grow in Frodo's heart. Here it happens to Sam in an instant, as it happened to Bilbo, and for the same reason. In a sudden insight, as his beloved master's pity fails, he hears the wretched being beg for his life and glimpses "the agony of Gollum's shrivelled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again" (923). Now at the moment Sam has longed for, he resists the temptation to serve out justice. He stays his hand, just as his two masters have. Lisa Hillis points out, "Again the quest might have come to a bitter end, except for the intervention of a force which moves Sam to pity and causes him to spare the wretch" (75). The gardener has at last become a student of Nienna rather than a disciple of Fui. He has learned compassion and empathy, even if he cannot quite understand it himself. He chooses not to act in judgement and condemnation, but he still threatens to carry it out if Gollum does not leave him. April Bates observes, "Although killing Gollum would have been just, it took much more courage to extend grace to someone who so little deserved it, a characteristic which clearly applies to our Christianity today" (5).

If the pity of Bilbo rules the fate of many, the pity of Sam rules the fate of all. Every other act of it would have come to naught if Sam did not exercise it here. Brian Pentony asserts, "The mercy shown by the hobbits reflects true spiritual growth . . . . All the time the hobbits are confronted with a choice: use the power of the Ring to dominate, defeat, hold the judgement of life and death in their hands, or abandon power and adopt an ethic based on love" (n.p.) Rutledge

agrees. “This Mercy (Pity) is the theme that is highlighted by Tolkien perhaps most of all. . . . This is the same theological point made by Shakespeare’s Portia, and for Christians it remains the strongest argument against any kind of brutal treatment, including capital punishment” (340).

More than once, Gandalf spoke of his intuition Gollum had his own role to play in the drama of the Ring. At Mount Doom, just as Frodo’s vocation reaches its complete fulfillment, so does Gollum’s, who “attains the antiheroic glory he was so sorrowfully born for” (Beagle, “Gollum” 13).

Tolkien speaks of the primary roles of pity and mercy in saving Middle-earth and Frodo himself. Because Gollum received them what Gandalf foresaw came about. “. . . a situation was produced in which all was redressed and disaster averted. . . . Of course, [Gandalf] did not mean to say that one must be merciful, for it may prove useful later - it would not then be mercy or pity, which are only truly present when contrary to prudence” (*Letters* 253). Tolkien also notes:

. . . at this point the ‘salvation’ of the world and Frodo’s own ‘salvation’ is achieved by his previous *pity* and forgiveness of injury. At any point any prudent person would have told Frodo that Gollum would . . . betray him, and could rob him in the end. To ‘pity’ him, to forbear to kill him, was a piece of folly, or a mystical belief in the ultimate value-in-itself of pity and generosity even if disastrous in the world of time. He did rob him and injure him in the end - but by a ‘grace’, that last betrayal was at a precise juncture when the final evil deed was the most beneficial thing any one cd. have done for Frodo! (234; emphasis in original)

“Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them” (Matt. 5:7). Not only does Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam escape possession by the Ring because of their mercy to Gollum, they save

all of Middle-earth from falling under the Shadow. If they had not, Beagle offers a chilling alternative far too terrible to contemplate: “Without Gollum, Middle-earth might very well have ended as a world of Gollums--hobbits, men and elves alike enslaved to the One Ring, at times vaguely and briefly recalling that once they were other than the Ring. Generations of their descendants will owe an incalculable debt to Gollum, unaware” (“Gollum” 13). This encompasses Gandalf’s whole point to save a life rather than take one, even when it seems just to do so because “even the very wise cannot see all ends” (*LotR* 58).

What was Gollum’s final fate after his fiery death? Frodo and Gollum were both overcome by the Ring at the Fire, but one was saved, soul and body, and one lost both? Sméagol was in the torment of Hell for centuries already while still walking on the earth. Perhaps this death was a mercy, as well as a judgement. Fui would have justly thrown him into the arms of Melkor to punish his myriad misdeeds in life. Tolkien seems to agree. “Gollum was pitiable, but he ended in persistent wickedness, and the fact that this worked good was no credit to him. . . . I am afraid, whatever our beliefs, we have to face the fact that there are persons who yield to temptation, reject their chances of nobility or salvation, and appear to be ‘damnable’” (*Letters* 234). Tolkien considers Sméagol’s inability to decisively win the argument he has with Gollum about the Ring weakens him too greatly to overcome Sam’s harsh words on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol. “After that he was lost,” (235). But Tolkien also notes in a letter to Milton Waldman “nothing but death could heal” Gollum from the power the Ring had over him (qtd. in Hammond and Scull 747). As Nienna pled for Melkor, surely she would have pled for Gollum. If only death could heal Gollum of the wounds the Ring caused, perhaps her tears could also.

Faramir once more acts a conduit of Nienna's pity in aiding to heal Éowyn from her invisible wounds. John Bowers comments, "The passage recalls Chaucer's favourite line *For pitee renneth sone in gentil herte* from the Knight's Tale, Merchant's Tale, Squire's Tale, and *Legend of Good Women*" (247). In so doing, his own heart receives healing. Brian Johnson notes how specially qualified Faramir is to help the distraught shieldmaiden:

There are ways to plant healthy coping skills in the garden of the soul, and to help someone reconcile with their losses. Faramir, the quiet student of Gandalf, . . . demonstrates the skills needed . . .

. . .

. . . one may wonder how much of Nienna's wisdom Faramir had picked up over the years. One would almost wonder if Númenórean gardens near Houses of Healing were named Nienna's Garden. (124)

Aragorn is both merciful and just in banishing Beregond from Minas Tirith for his transgression of killing a fellow guard who tried to block his path in his desperate attempt to save Faramir. Just, because the crime had to be punished; merciful, because he is banished to Faramir's side in Ithilien.

Frodo's nonviolent approach to what must be done to scour the Shire of its invaders comes from Nienna's point of view, as well as his ordeal as Ring-bearer. He endured months of ravaging by the malice of Sauron, so knows overwhelmingly well what hatred and rage does to a soul. He twice advocates for a position of mercy rather than the sword for the ruffians and any hobbits who willingly helped them. He does not want anyone to die if it can be at all helped. He pities even the despised Lotho Sackville-Baggins, something Pippin finds beyond comprehen-

sion. Fenwick notes, “Had the hobbits begun their re-possession of the Shire with revenge and not Pity, nothing but evil could have come of it” (102). Frodo is not a pacifist; he merely continues to see through Nienna’s eyes.

The Ring-bearer regards Saruman through this same blessed sight, even after the fallen Maia murderously assaults him. Houghton and Keesee assert, “Saruman is unquestionably evil, and unquestionably powerful; yet even so . . . he is pitiable . . . . Evil such as this must be fought, but fought with pity always in mind” (141). All the other hobbits, with Sam at the forefront, are ready to kill the wizard, but Frodo forbids it for the same reason Gandalf countered the hobbit’s initial desire for Gollum’s death. “He [Saruman] is fallen, and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find it” (*LotR* 996). Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen’s observation of how Jesus loved even great sinners reflects Frodo’s view here: “He saw that a jewel had fallen into the mud and though encrusted with foulness that it was still a jewel” (155).

Rutledge notes what the Ring-bearer extends is “mercy as a force so powerful that it is in itself a weapon - precisely what Martin Luther King and other apostles of nonviolence have taught” (364). Ang adds, “This mercy goes beyond mere compassion or even forgiveness. It is, ultimately, the expression of hope, a belief in the possibility of redemption and change” (87). Clyde Kilby notes the compassion Frodo exercises “surpasses the norm of ordinary morality. It has the quality of such as Portia called ‘an attribute of God himself’” (137). And of Nienna.

Saruman quite rightly observes how greatly Frodo grew spiritually throughout his horrific ordeal, which Fenwick also notes:

The Ring is destroyed but Frodo returns out of Mordor with a far more precious object - the Pity that has allowed him to save the world . . . . In a very real sense, the true quest is

not to destroy the Ring but to give Frodo an awareness of the power of Pity equal to Odysseus' understanding of wisdom; for without that heroic virtue the anterior effects of the quest (the destruction of evil, the return of the hero, the cleansing of the homeland) would have remained forever unachievable. (100)

Frodo's words astonish and enrage Saruman. He finds pity and mercy incomprehensible, indeed loathsome. "You are wise, and cruel. You have robbed my revenge of sweetness, and now I must go hence in bitterness, in debt to your mercy. I hate it and you!" (*LotR* 996). Fenwick comments, "Saruman's rejection of Frodo's Pity is a rejection of the (divine) Pity of the Valar" (101). Gandalf, Galadriel and now Frodo gave the corrupt Maia several opportunities to return to the light. With increasing bitterness and utter rejection, Saruman made it perfectly clear he had no interest in what would have been extended to him if he had the humility and courage to admit he had done wrong and repented. Beyond his physical life, he at last reaches out for it, but it is too late. The Valar reject him, as he previously rejected them. Frodo's pity continues even then for the waste of such a life.

So what in the end is the worth of pity and mercy in Tolkien's view? He provides many answers in his legendarium. Mary Ducey notes:

Ultimately, it is an action of forbearing to harm another, directed to the good of its object, which goes beyond the judgement of justice, done after a personal consideration of the other's state of being, that is not reducible to pure emotion and is not done in the assurance of reward, but is nonetheless often rewarded in a theistic universe. (301)

Farid Mohammadi observes:

The Medievalist Tolkien had observed keenly about his beloved country's shortcoming in the matter of having any kind of English Mythology . . . ; he intended therefore, to create and leave to posterity, a long-lasting legacy for his country. Tolkien's attempt . . . filled and fulfilled the barren souls of the unfortunate people . . . by attracting their attention to rediscovering the existence of Hope, Faith, Chivalric manners, Pity and Mercy. (123)

As a devout Catholic, another reason Tolkien placed such emphasis on pity and mercy for one's enemies is to give troubled souls the opportunity for redemption and to hope and work toward their cure. Bilbo's divinely or angelically inspired action began this process for Gollum with Sam's critical act as the culmination. All who extended pity and mercy to Saruman did so for the same reason. Fenwick observes, "In an age of petty Sarumans and Saurons each trying to establish his own Mordor, Tolkien saw in the power of his faith a way to transcend the limits of self-interest. Rightly or wrongly, Tolkien's vision is of a universe where Hobbits can overcome the evil of pride incarnate by embracing Pity, thus making the world a better and safer place . . ." (110).

Frodo and Bilbo did not pity Gollum in ignorance of how wicked the creature was. Both hobbits were well aware the wretched being could harm if not kill them. Geoffrey Allen Matthew asserts, "Tolkien paints him realistically to indicate that even a monstrous sinner has hope. He is not clearly black and white. And through his incapability of forsaking goodness entirely, he attests to its potency all the more. His relationship with Frodo starts to cure him of his illness, but in order to be truly free he has to die to his own desires" (27-28). This he ultimately could not do, yet both Bilbo and Frodo gave him the chance to do so through their refusal to kill him.

Love is a choice. Pity is a choice. Mercy is a choice. Larsen argues:

Nienna owes many of her later attributions to virtues Tolkien felt were central to living successfully in our fallen world, namely mercy and pity, and the faith to reach out in our suffering toward a virginal divinity who (in Tolkien's mind) could both understand and ease our suffering. . . . I would . . . suggest that Tolkien meant for us to consider Nienna's later role in his subcreation as parallel to the role of Mary in the Catholic world.

(201)

The actions of either Lady of Sorrows or their devotees is beyond the comprehension of Sauron and Morgoth and all those who practice evil, whether in the Secondary or Primary World. As is said of Morgoth, "to him that is pitiless the deeds of pity are ever strange and beyond reckoning" (*Silmarillion* 258). And because of this fatal inability to realize "it is mercy, not justice or courage or even heroism that alone can defeat evil" (Kreeft 217), the forces of darkness fall under those who practice these virtues.

Michael C. Haldas observes:

In the end, pity and mercy save Middle-earth. It is pity that comes from the wisdom of the heart that transcends logic and reason. Sauron, and those that follow him, operated in a logical, myopic manner based on reason; Gandalf, Frodo, Aragorn, Sam, and others, operated from a deep sense of conviction in their hearts as to what was right and what was true, and held to values such as pity that trumped any sense of self-preservation. (80)

David Waito adds:

Sympathy is a prerequisite to pity, and knowledge of the Ring's effect on its wearer is required for one to pity another who has possessed it. . . . Gollum's intentions [in the

Sammath Naur] were not benign, and he cannot be acclaimed as the savior of the Ring Quest. The true saviors are pity and forgiveness. (171)

The extension of pity, mercy, sympathy, and forgiveness would have been beyond the comprehension of Fui as well.

But not Nienna.

“At the end of days, when the Firstborn and Secondborn meet again . . . the Queen of the Stars [Varda] will not lead the playing of the theme aright, but rather, the Queen of Pity, Mercy, and Mourning. In the end, Nienna will reveal her true power, and her centrality to both the World That Is, and the hope of attaining a better World That Can Be” (Larsen 202).

One shudders to think what Olórin would have learned from Fui, but he learned instead at the feet of Nienna.

And that made all the difference.

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