Jane Doe

Dr. S.

English 4900

16 October 2016

The Unity of Story in Tolkien’s Works

Story in the form of myth, legend, and song serves to unify all elements in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Every event in these works hinges on a previous one, connecting each situation with all situations. Tolkien uses myth, legend, and song within the stories to connect them and hint at a continuation of the story beyond the written pages.

*The Hobbit* is the first story having to do with the Ring, thus bringing its adventurous tale into the unifying mix of Tolkien’s works. Many key characters are introduced, such as Bilbo Baggins, Gollum, and Gandalf. In this work, song is used to connect Bilbo to Gollum when they play a game of riddles and discover that they know many of the same ones (*The Hobbit* 76-77). In this way, Tolkien introduces the saga of the Ring, unifying this book with *The Lord of the Rings*. Song is also used to introduce the spiders in Mirkwood related to Ungoliat, from *The Silmarillion*, and later to Shelob, from *The Lord of the Rings*, when Bilbo sings to escape them (158-59). The myths of the ancient past are ushered in with the dwarves, who sing a dirge to explain the history of their feud with the dragon they seek to destroy (126), connecting them to the *The Silmarillion*. Thus song and myth are used to unify *The Hobbit* with the rest of Tolkien’s works.

*The Lord of the Rings* starts out as a continuation of the Ring and hobbit tales introduced in *The Hobbit* but quickly turns into a story scaling all of Middle-earth and unifying all elements previously written. This book continues the legend of the Ring laid out in *The Hobbit*, continues the myth of Beren and Luthien from *The Silmarillian*, and continues the saga of the Simarils through Frodo and the entire Fellowship in *The Lord of the Rings*. In fact, all elements of Middle-earth thus far unite in this last work, swirling together the different parts and moving the story along into its next age.

However, the tale does not seem to halt with the end of the book; rather, it continues beyond the written pages. Sam says it best when he realizes Frodo is holding light from the legend of Ёarendil’s silmaril: “Why, to think of it, we’re in the same tale still! It’s going on. Don’t the great tales never end?” (*Two Towers* 697). This scene underscores the unifying element of story throughout all three works in a powerful way. Frodo’s reply is that the great stories do not end as tales, but go on, people entering and leaving as they fulfill their role. The story in this book stops after Aragorn becomes king, Frodo and Sam clean up the Shire, and men begin to rule the known world. Yet by Frodo and Sam’s definition, the tale does not end; it is unified with all the other tales that are connected to this one. This is precisely the point of using story to unify these works.

These three works are all part of each other. Each song, myth, and legend told by a character unifies that scene with all the similar scenes before it in Middle-earth. In this way, Tolkien has used story as a vehicle to unify his works and express the beat of his heart to create a world in which legend does not end with the turn of a page, but continues on in an interconnected legacy lasting for all of time.

Works Cited

Drout, Michael D.C., and Hilary Wynne. “Tom Shippey’s J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century and a Look Back at Tolkien Criticism since 1982.” *Envoi*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2001, pp. 101-167. *ResearchGate*, www.researchgate.net/profile/Hilary\_Wynne2/publication/ 282942606\_Tom\_Shippey's\_'JRR\_Tolkien\_Author\_of\_the\_Century'\_and\_aLook\_Back\_at\_Tolkien\_Criticism\_since\_1982/links/56234dac08aea35f2682f284.pdf.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

- - -. *The Two Towers*. Houghton Mifflin, 1994.