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Master of Doom by Doom Mastered: Heroism, Fate, and Death in *The Children of Húrin*

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Abstract

This extensive study of Túrin Turambar uses two frameworks to examine his character and story: that of the Byronic Hero (with a side glance at the Gothic Villain in order to differentiate the two), and that of the Absurd Hero, exemplified by Camus's Sisyphus.

Additional Keywords

Absurd Hero; Byron, George Gordon Byron, Baron. Cain; Byron, George Gordon Byron, Baron. Manfred; Byronic Hero; Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*; Fate in J.R.R. Tolkien; Heroism in J.R.R. Tolkien; Suicide; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Túrin Turambar; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Children of Húrin*



MASTER OF DOOM BY DOOM MASTERED:
HEROISM, FATE, AND DEATH IN
THE CHILDREN OF HÚRIN

JESSE MITCHELL

IN A LETTER TO MILTON WALDMAN, J.R.R. TOLKIEN WROTE, “the *Children of Húrin* [is] the tragic tale of Túrin Turambar and his sister Níniel—of which Túrin is the hero” (*Letters* 150). Heroism is a predominant—if not *the* predominant—focus of Tolkien’s entire creative corpus. His readers have come to expect a rich and kaleidoscopic range of heroes and heroines as varied as their races. Their characteristics are no less diverse; indeed, while some of his heroes fit conventions and meet a reader’s expectations, others unexpectedly depart from convention and demand that the reader take a second look.

According to Richard C. West, Túrin Turambar is little more than an object of derision: “Tolkien uses the character of Túrin to examine the theme of heroic excess, a hero who is the embodiment of a critique of heroism” (291). Of course, trivializing Túrin is not the primary focus of West’s essay “Setting the Rocket Off in Story” (which examines the Finnish “germ” of Tolkien’s works), but his reading of the character of Túrin is far too simplistic, and it fails to appreciate the rich thematic elements of one of Tolkien’s least known heroes. Certainly, Túrin is hardly the Arthurian Aragorn or the bumbling-but-lovably-Victorian Bilbo, but to pigeon-hole him as a caricature of what the hero *should not* look like is a sad misreading. The proposition then arises: if Túrin is not a critique of heroism, what in fact is he? There are two viable answers: the Byronic Hero and the Absurd Hero, as defined in Albert Camus’s essay “The Myth of Sisyphus.”¹

West’s skewed observation might have been understandable if until 2007 *Narn i Chîn Húrin* had existed only in the form of its original obscure epic poem or as a random series of notes known only to the most devoted disciples of the Tolkienian mythos, but a rough prose version is to be found in *Unfinished Tales*, first published in 1980 by Tolkien’s literary executor and youngest son, Christopher. (The novel *The Children of Húrin* is essentially the polished edition of the *Narn* that is to be found in *Unfinished Tales*, which has been readily available to public eyes for three decades). The prefatory issue of authorship therefore becomes a major one: whose accomplishment is *The Children of Húrin*? Because

¹ I feel I need to specify that all forthcoming references to Sisyphus are specifically concerned with *Camus’s* treatment of the myth in terms of the realm of the Absurd, and not the more generic mythic tradition handed down by Antiquity.

the story has traversed from the father's original poem to two versions of the son's prose, assigning credit for the story as it now exists is tricky. Much of the wording and phraseology in the novel has been grafted from the poem, so that the father's authorial voice frequently carries the line of narration. In order to prevent any further digression on the grounds of assigning authorship, my position is that the *story* is John Ronald Reuel's; the *novel* is Christopher's.

Still puzzling, though, is that West claims that Túrin is in any way a critique of heroism itself. Aside from *Unfinished Tales*, yet another much shorter prose incarnation of the Túrin story is available as the twenty-first chapter of *The Silmarillion*, and even that fragment offers more insight into Túrin's character than West's assessment recognizes. Anyone even obliquely familiar with Tolkien's monumental works can find dozens of examples of the high esteem in which he held all epic heroism; if Túrin is a symbolic critique of heroism, he is a minority (keeping such particular company as Fëanor, Thorin, and Boromir). Of some importance, however, is that these misanthropic characters are still on the side of Good, murky though their agendas may at times seem; they are all still *heroes*, not caricatures.

Any attempt to speculate about Tolkien's authorial intent to a degree beyond any statement he may have made regarding the source(s) of *Narn i Chîn Húrin* would be utterly futile, although he admits that he drew his symbolic inspiration for Túrin from *The Kalevala* story of Kullervo. His letter to Waldman is the only authorial acknowledgement that he makes concerning the source of the Túrin story, though he clearly wished to put the notion of emulation of epic precedents at a distance: "Túrin is [...] a figure who might be said (by people who like that sort of thing, though it is not very useful) to be derived from elements in Sigurd the Volsung, Oedipus, and the Finnish Kullervo" (*Letters* 150). Regarding Camus, Tolkien's mythology had already been set as the foundation for his literature for several decades prior to Camus's publication of "The Myth of Sisyphus" in 1942. Hence, the forthcoming interpretation of *The Children of Húrin* is based upon the text itself and the literary resonances that it bears and not upon any coincidental social conditions of the era in which it was conceived (after all, the story has been written and re-written several times over throughout the course of some ninety years, accumulating new layers of narrative sediment as others have crumbled away, so that any attempt to isolate the story-writing process historically would be pointless).

The precedent of a solid hermeneutical lens exists linking Tolkien to the Romantic tradition. There is no evidence that Tolkien drew any *particular* inspiration from Lord Byron, aside from the probability that, as a professor of English, he had a professional familiarity with his works. Based upon that probable familiarity, it is equally assumable that he allowed strains of Romantic ideals and types to echo in his own work. For example, Tolkien's seminal essay

concerning the composition of fantastic literature titled "On Fairy-Stories" re-approaches Coleridge's notion of the temporary suspension of disbelief by redefining the concept with a new term: "the enhanced state: Secondary Belief" ("On Fairy-Stories" [OFS] 132). In the essay, according to Chris Seeman, "Tolkien revises the Romantic tradition by asserting the validity of fantasy as a distinct mode of art" (73). To examine Tolkien as a story-teller, Seeman uses his interpretation of "On Fairy-Stories" as a lens using what he calls "a more or less explicit Coleridgian hermeneutic" (74). By shifting the idea of suspension of disbelief to the assumption of secondary belief, Tolkien rethinks Coleridge's axiom and establishes a second, deeper level of textual interaction for the sake of verisimilitude of fantastic events in literature:

I can achieve (more or less) willing suspension of disbelief, when I am held there and supported by some other motive that will keep away boredom: for instance a wild, heraldic preference for dark blue rather than light. This suspension of disbelief may thus be a somewhat tired, shabby, or sentimental state of mind, and so lean to the 'adult'. I fancy it is often the state of adults in the presence of a fairy-story. They are held there and supported by sentiment (memories of childhood, or notions of what childhood ought to be like); they think they ought to like the tale. But if they really liked it, for itself, they would not have to suspend disbelief: they would believe [...]. (OFS 132)

Therefore, according to Seeman, "Tolkien is here strengthening Coleridge's words by giving them an affirmative rather than a negative sense [...] by shifting attention from the passive acceptance of the reader to the active role of the author" (74). The Romantic hermeneutic is then based upon both the reactive interpretation of the text on the part of the reader as well as the internal textual tension of the story, which is endowed by a writer who places faith in the reader's assumption of Secondary Belief.

The other concept introduced by Tolkien in his essay is *eucaatrophe*, which he claims is universal to all fairy-stories. He frames fairy-stories against classical drama, proposing that regardless of fantastic elements of a given tale, the fairy-story must specifically have a happy ending—or more accurately, any fantastic tale with a happy ending is a fairy-story:

But the 'consolation' of fairy-tales has another aspect than the imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires. Far more important is the Consolation of the Happy Ending. Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it. At least I would say that Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairy-story. Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses the opposite—I

will call it *Eucatastrophe*. The *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function. (OFS 153)

By Tolkien's own definition, then, stories like *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, in their very eucatastrophic resolution, are grandiose Fairy-Tales.

What, then, of sad endings? *The Children of Húrin* is unique amongst Tolkien's works because it ends tragically. Based upon "On Fairy-Stories," tragedy to Tolkien is clearly rooted in hopelessness—*true* hopelessness—which is distinct from the hopelessness of characters such as Frodo and Samwise as they trudge through the wastes of Mordor. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the universe is not the vacuum it is in *The Children of Húrin*; for example, the convenient intervention of Eagles would be unthinkable in Túrin's story.² One implied device of eucatastrophic resolution is the writer's plausible recourse to *deus ex machina* as a means to ensure not only that the hero defeats the villain, but also that he survives to enjoy the world he has either created or preserved.

Tolkien's prerogative, then, raises the question: why does he intervene on the behalf of some heroes like Frodo and allow others like Túrin to be crushed under the weight of the world? An easy answer would be merely that Tolkien does not consider Túrin a hero, or at least not one worth saving (as the subtext of West's analysis would imply); but that would mean that he had a very narrow—even bottlenecked—definition of heroism and the virtues thereof. George Clark claims that Tolkien had a more open mind concerning the constitution of a hero: "Tolkien sought a true hero motivated by a heroic ideal consistent with his own religious and moral ideals, but he could not rid himself of his desire for the glorious heroes of old" (39), which is why he was able to approach heroism from different angles. The different hero types to which Clark refers are, of course, based upon different value systems: one Christian, the other pagan. He continues: "Tolkien's desire for heroes drove him to give the spiritual strand of the story its own heroic metaphor, heroic valor, violent heroic action, and a hero who feels the longing for *lof* and *dom* that guided Beowulf's life" (44). *Dom* and *lof* Clark defines respectively as "good report [and] fame," two virtues upheld for the pagan hero type that was the subject of study of most of Tolkien's scholarly efforts (43). Tolkien therefore recognized at least two different kinds of heroic ethos: the heroes with a Christian ethos (like Frodo and Sam) live by principles of enduring hope; the heroes with a pagan ethos (like Boromir and Túrin) have no hope, but are rather preoccupied with aspirations of immediate *lof* and *dom*.

² However, prior to the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, Húrin and Huor are rescued by eagles and delivered to the safety of Gondolin after being ambushed by orcs (*Children* 35). The contrast between two distinct ethos of hope is evident even within the same story, separated merely by a single generation.

Regardless of the predispositions of Tolkien's heroes, they all seek the agenda of Good, but if the outcome of a hero's struggles is doomed to fruitlessness, why does he persist? Gunnar Urang asserts that in Tolkien's world, productivity does not drive the hero, but rather principle: in his aptly-titled essay "Tolkien's Fantasy: The Phenomenology of Hope," Urang asserts that "Tolkien's fantasy speaks of the nature of the struggle against evil, the inescapability of involvement, the qualities of heroism, and the possibilities of real loss in that encounter. It also declares the viability of hope. The happy ending is meant to be taken very seriously" (105-6). To Tolkien, if it is to be found nowhere else, then there is hope in action; those who, like Denethor for example, stand by out of sheer hopelessness and allow evil to metastasize are just as much to blame for the consequences of evil as those who perpetrate it. The true hero takes up the struggle on principle first, and any other minor motivating factors such as pride, vengeance, duty, etc. second. Heroism of any sort is conditional upon action and the refusal to tolerate evil—not upon motive or personality.

Túrin's story is tragic, not necessarily due to the sequential disasters that befall him, but because of the manner in which he copes with them. Katharyn F. Crabbe claims that Túrin's death is not only inevitable, but even advantageous: "the succession of disasters visited upon Túrin [...] nearly exceeds even the bounds of the tragic [...]. His suicide, by which he acknowledges the final victory of despair, shows [...] how death may come as a blessing" (121-2). Unfortunately, Crabbe's assertion assumes that Túrin is merely a speck caught up in the slipstream of fate. Death is only a blessing if the world reaches some point at which, for Túrin, it becomes uninhabitable—which is hardly the case. The tragedy of Túrin is not concerned with what happens to him (for even prolonged sequences of horrible events can be conducive to eventual *eucatastrophe*) but rather upon his deliberate actions and his perception of the nature of Morgoth's curse upon his house.

Túrin's parentage is another important issue. Though he carries the name of the House of Hador, he is more akin in personality to his maternal ancestors, the House of Bëor. The combination of the two into one noble household, of which Túrin is the principal figure, anticipates both greatness and tragedy to come: "He was dark-haired as his mother, and promised to be like her in mood also; for he was not merry, and spoke little, though he learned to speak early and ever seemed older than his years. Túrin was slow to forget injustice or mockery; but the fire of his father was also in him, and he could be sudden and fierce" (*Children* 39). By the combined dispositions of Morwen's imperiousness and brooding darkness and of Húrin's ferocity and short temper, Túrin's personality seems almost genetically pre-established. Túrin is an amalgam of matrilineal coldness and patrilineal aggression, a combination that forebodes the eventuality of Túrin's solitude and incorrigibility.

The Mother role is an important feature for Túrin; the mother-son dynamic lasts no longer than Túrin's childhood, for he is nine years old when he leaves Dor-lómin for Doriath (66-79). Tolkien scholar Tom Shippey remarks, "So mother and son are separated. Pride keeps up the separation, and separation generates the fear that turns Túrin savage" (264-5). For Túrin, Morwen is a symbol of home; to rescue Morwen is to save the land that is his inherited charge to rule. How fitting that his homeland is naturally harsh and frigid—so too is his mother. Túrin constantly associates his home and family with purpose; firstly, he is disinherited from the rightful lordship to which he is entitled; secondly, Morwen and Niënor remain in Dor-lómin (as far as Túrin knows until the catastrophe of Tumhalad). Their safety in Dor-lómin is tenuous and necessarily cannot last forever. The emancipation of his family and of his homeland is his principal *raison d'être*. All of his vision is focused on what he sees as a single strand of goals that amount to the reclamation of Dor-lómin, a purpose that is at first subsumed by—then which *subsumes*—the war against Angband.

Túrin's adventures accrue for him a long series of mistakes, tragedies, and accidents that he carries with him until the end, and over time, he is beaten down under the weight of guilt and self-reproach. Between the debacles he causes, he amends his ways, not as gestures of repentance, but as pragmatic lessons learned in order to avoid recurrence of past mistakes: he seems determined to learn everything the hard way. King Thingol's presentation to Túrin of the Dragon-helm of Hador is a call to action, a recurrent semiotic theme in *The Children of Húrin*. Melian tries to temper the endowment of the hereditary mantle of duty with the advice:

Beware of yourself, lest it be ill. [...] Go now, fosterson; and take the advice of the King. That will ever be wiser than your own counsel. Yet I do not think that you will long abide with us in Doriath beyond the coming of manhood. If in days to come you remember the words of Melian, it will be for your good: fear both the heat and the cold of your heart, and strive for patience, if you can. (*Children* 85)

But after the King says, "No force of the arms of Doriath will I send out at this time; nor at any time that I can yet foresee" (84) Túrin soon comes to feel that Thingol is too cool-blooded and fastidious to serve any immediate purpose against Morgoth. All of the Eldar, it seems to Túrin, rely on their immortality to win some blurrily-defined war of attrition against the forces of evil. Given the circumstances, however, his service on the borders of Doriath is better than complete idleness. He needs only a single excuse, however, to abandon the Hidden Realm and set out on his own. The incident with Saeros affords him just such an opportunity.

Saeros's death is the first incident that propels Túrin into a life as an outlaw. For the first time, Túrin has blood on his hands—the first tally against him. His lamentation, “Unhappy fool! From here I would have let him walk back to Menegroth. Now he has laid a guilt upon me undeserved” (90) is too little too late; his irascibility and short temper have now cost him his innocence. His role at this juncture of the story is one of the features of Byronic Heroism that Peter L. Thorslev discusses at some length concerning the prototype known as the Noble Outlaw, who “is always first a victim of, and only then a rebel against, society” (22). He feels that he had been innocent from the beginning of the quarrel with Saeros; therefore, he was ultimately blameless of the death that the haughty elf incurred upon himself, which is why he rejects Mablung's offer to return: “If the King were just, he would judge me guiltless. But was [Saeros] not one of his counsellors? Why should a just king choose a heart of malice for his friend? I abjure his law and his judgement. [...] I refuse your bidding. I will not seek King Thingol's pardon for nothing; and I will go now where his doom cannot find me” (*Children* 91).

Túrin's rejection of Thingol represents his rebellion of will against the very kind of “unjust” society that Thorslev mentions, but it is not, however, tantamount to *hubris*, for the kind of rebellion that Túrin exhibits against the forces of Good is based upon a variance in his immediate agenda from theirs; his *hubris* is in fact aimed against the forces of Evil, whom he genuinely feels are the highest power in Middle-earth; to use Thorslev's words, for characters like Túrin “adjustment to society as it exists, is impossible [...]; they either go down to glorious defeat, cursing God and dying, or they commit their lives to transforming the world” (66). Túrin's autonomy of the will is the primary trait that he shares with virtually every Byronic Hero from Cain to Giaour, for throughout *The Children of Húrin*, he is painted as “invariably fiery, passionate, and heroic; he is in the true sense bigger than the life around him” (68). His strength of will (compounded by and subtexualized with humanity, gentleness, and chivalry) defines him to the reader as a sympathetic character in spite of his frequent belligerence. Nonetheless, he follows no advice but his own line of reason, has no friends but those who bend to his will, and gives no consideration to any designs but his own personal vendetta against Morgoth.

The second tally against Túrin is his life of crime amongst the Outlaws during his self-imposed exile from Doriath (*Children* 98-120). In the grand scope of the story, his adoption of predatory criminality and aimless aggression is an expression of rebellion against the forces of Good that amounts to little more than a large-scale temper-tantrum. His idea of rejecting Elvish fastidiousness is to do the polar opposite and engage in reckless and purposeless aggression in the company of other Men. Túrin's waywardness is put into perspective when Beleg falls into the rough handling of the Outlaws, and Túrin emerges from his

petulance, deciding never again to prey upon the innocent, resolving, “At least my hands shall not again be raised against Elves or Men. [...] Angband has servants enough” (114). Túrin now acknowledges and accepts the fault of his criminality, but only when it is his closest friend who suffers from it.

At Túrin’s behest, Beleg reluctantly joins the Gaurwaith, granting him “as a fond father who grants his son’s desire against his own foresight, I yield to your will. At your asking, I will stay” (117). Conversely, Túrin stubbornly replies to Beleg’s request that he join the defense of Doriath in the territory of Dimbar, saying, “Nay, I will not walk backward in life” (118); forever unwilling to waver in his priorities, he expects others to waver in theirs in order to accommodate him. He realizes his past faults, but his vengeful purposes he resolutely refuses to set aside, which means that no one may share in them; the objective is his and his alone. The prudence of the Elves is but a hindrance to him; the aimless volatility of the Outlaws is only his means to an end for which he has no clear vision; the habitation of the Petty-dwarves is merely a safe-house. Túrin knows no loyalty but temporary situations of convenience and safety. Even Beleg’s friendship means less to him than his hatred of Morgoth, which he nurtures and cultivates to fuel the reclamation of his homeland.

The third tally (Khîm’s death) is less Túrin’s fault than the fault of his undisciplined underlings, but although Khîm’s blood is on Andróg’s hands, it is Túrin who feels responsible. Had he maintained a tighter hold on his men, Mîm would not have any reason to eventually betray Talath Dirnen to the orcs. Túrin’s heterogeneous hodgepodge of companions is more a situation of incompatible species sharing a common environment than of diverse allies working toward a single ideological aim. He makes no real attempt to consolidate his companions (who are already chilly bedfellows) under a concrete, common ideology because he hardly knows one himself; any specific ideology would be too prescriptive and dogmatic and reminiscent of the kind of rule structure Túrin left behind in Doriath. As a result, because of his motley group of companions, he is unable to depend upon their commitment, integrity, or motivation—a truth that reveals itself when, out of wanton hatred of Beleg and Andróg, Mîm betrays them all.

Once Beleg rejoins him, Túrin is still conflicted between his staunch resolution never to accept Thingol’s clemency, and by the love he has for his best friend; the scales are tilted in Beleg’s favor when he presents Túrin with the Helm of Hador, which renews his *raison d’être* to affront Morgoth. Beleg is the only person who can get Túrin even to consider wavering in his stubbornness of will: Túrin says “I wonder, friend, that you deign to come back to such a churl. From you I will take whatever you give, even rebuke. Henceforward you shall counsel me in all ways, save the road to Doriath only” (*Children* 140). Túrin’s erstwhile time at Amon Rûdh has been defined by fugitive idleness; only when they are rejoined by Beleg does Túrin assume his responsibility, not only over his

own actions, but also over the band he now feels it is his duty to lead. Interestingly, the only way Beleg can persuade Túrin to accept his responsibilities is by stirring in him the memories of the hurts of his homeland and his family, effectively indulging his hereditary vanity in order to manipulate him into doing what he should be doing in the first place.

The Helm of Hador again becomes a symbolic wake-up call. Túrin recognizes that the potential of the Outlaws had always been there; all that was lacking was discipline and a focus of energies. Hereafter, the Gaurwaith become less of a gang and more of a regimented military unit. Unlike the previous resolution of fugitive neutrality, Túrin now reawakens to his cause that will both shake him out of his brooding, sedentary seclusion and expose him finally to the attention of Morgoth. But what does it mean to be the object of Morgoth's hatred? In order to address this, I shall now examine the nature of the ultimate evil in Middle-earth.

Tolkien's creation myth in the section of *The Silmarillion* titled "The Ainulindalë" provides an origin to his entire legendarium that bears a resemblance to the early books of *Paradise Lost*. Like Milton's, Tolkien's myth is sparked by the first notes of discord that echo out and mar the purity and perfection of the starting stage:

But now Ilúvatar sat and hearkened, and for a great while it seemed good to him, for in the music there were no flaws. But as the theme progressed, it came to the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself. To Melkor among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren. (*Silmarillion* [Silm.] 16)

But unlike Milton's Satan, Morgoth (then, Melkor) is never given the depth or roundness of character that Milton gave his anti-hero; Melkor never broods or laments any injustice. All that Tolkien offers is that when Ilúvatar chastises him, he is "filled with shame, of which came secret anger" (17). His motivations are one-dimensional and merely intended to fit him into a flat type. As soon as he is expelled, he pursues his evil designs mechanically with no evidence of any lucid consideration. He then becomes the Gothic Villain, the Romantic archetype of which is the dastardly aristocrat or warlock, wringing his hands, malevolently plotting some species of evil for evil's sake from within his dark tower or his underground citadel—a character actually little more than a *caricature* of evil, evoking in the reader neither sympathy nor desire to understand him. He is merely a figure of opposition against whom the hero or heroine proves his or her mettle and personal valor. Plain simplicity of

motivation translates into a string of characters of equally plain dimension. He is Gothic in the sense that he merely supplies the story with tension and conflict. Never in any of Tolkien's mythos is Melkor/Morgoth portrayed as a sympathetic character. His rebellion is therefore never seen through any lens to be in any way justified; in essence, he spoiled perfection out of selfish aspirations, nothing more. Morgoth's hubris is against Ilúvatar, whose heavenly status quo is unblemished; Túrin's hubris is against Morgoth, whose status quo in Middle-earth is hellish.

Though he is a Vala by nature, Morgoth's rebelliousness renders him flawed. As Ilúvatar decrees in the *Ainulindalë*, "thou, Melkor, shalt see no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined" (17). Melkor, who among the Ainur was the most powerful (just as Lucifer was among the angels), is sentenced to ultimately finite power because he desires it for himself only; the Valar, though individually less powerful than he is, are a community whose might vastly overpowers his. Morgoth cannot defeat the Valar, but he can ravage the material world and cause as much havoc as he can. But he is going to fail and he knows it full well; still, to his mind, it behooves him to bring as many of his enemies down with him as he can. The pain and destruction that both Satan and Morgoth wreak is their only pleasure; their evil work is their only comfort because they both are preoccupied with acts that mar the perfection of the worlds they cannot in fact wholly destroy. Their work is entirely devoted to causing mischief, which is mere discord on a spiritual plain, but which is catastrophic on a corporeal plain. Therefore, Satan and Morgoth fit very well the role of Gothic Villain, for they are willfully wicked and commit their atrocities with complete moral impunity.

The Gothic Villain and the Byronic Hero share the same wellspring, but they are diametrically opposed to one another and therefore are bitter enemies. In each, the other sees a reflection of himself that he hates; the Byronic is what the Gothic would be if he were bogged down with self-doubt, integrity, and inner-reflection. Both Gothic and Byronic characters are largely defined by strength of will, which makes the Gothic Villain so single-minded in his (often rapacious) determinism, and which prevents the Byronic Hero's frequent bouts of brooding and self-deprecation from deteriorating into the pitiful and pusillanimous. Had Tolkien given Morgoth the same roundness of character that Milton gave to Satan and Byron to his heroes, Morgoth would have traversed the border from Gothic to Byronic. Though Tolkien does not move him that step, he certainly does so with Túrin.

With Morgoth framed as a Gothic Villain, it is therefore fitting to examine Túrin as a Byronic Hero. All of Túrin's personal development of

character is conditional upon only changing by his own terms and guided by his own misguided principles. Any concessions he makes are grudgingly made out of acknowledgment of his prior follies. His haughty indignation toward Thingol results from the principle of his own individual gauge of right and wrong (as opposed to the dogmatic concepts of *good and evil*). He uses the model of good and evil, but applies his own personal criteria to define them and act accordingly. His hubris is aimed against Morgoth; his rebellion, against Thingol, to whom he bears no real hostility other than the resentment that he does not help him other than offering a safe haven. He fights against Morgoth, not simply because Morgoth is evil and evil must be combated, but because he has wronged Túrin's family and homeland. He is single-minded in his hate of Morgoth whose plague killed his sister (*Children* 40), who imprisoned his father (61-5), and who threw his homeland as scraps to foreign invaders (66-70). Morgoth is the object of hubris for Túrin, for he believes that the Dark Lord is the ultimate power in Middle-earth; the only deity with whom Túrin is concerned is an evil one against whom it is the duty (as Túrin sees it) of all in Beleriand to oppose.

One Byronic Hero who clearly anticipates Túrin is Cain. In both *Children* and in Byron's *Cain*, one finds two opposing binaries of good and evil, but Túrin and Cain are each ideologically independent from the dynamic of opposition (or they want to think that they are). Though Cain scorns Lucifer and rejects his demand that he worship him (*Cain* Li.317-319), he nonetheless falls on the side of evil—Lucifer's domain—when he kills Abel (III.i.315-21). In contrast, though Túrin renounces his allegiance to anyone but himself and rejects Thingol's clemency, his continued fight against Morgoth lands him on the side of good. For both heroes, good and evil are artificially imposed ideologies, but their respective sensibility of right and wrong lands them on one side or the other, regardless of how autonomous they think they are. In his ethical solitude, the Byronic Hero governs himself based on a new rubric *felt* on a pathetic/ethical sense of Right and Wrong, with the result that Cain is "Right" and accomplishes Evil whereas Túrin is "Right" and accomplishes Good. His *actions*, not his *philosophy*, land him ultimately on the side of Good or of Evil. The Byronic Hero has integrity to his own ideals, which in his own eyes justifies his alienation and (more often than not) eventual death that he manipulates into martyrdom. As Noble Outlaw, Túrin is not a villain, but a disobedient hero, for, as Thorslev asserts, his "rebellion, for the most part, [is] against the laws of society, not against the laws of God" (92). He does not break the rules so much as he merely supersedes them, prioritizing his personal code of ethics over the ruling body of laws. In this regard, he is not so much a rebel as a wayward child.

The trait of the Byronic Hero that makes him no worse than a disobedient child is found in the fact that he is self-willed, which is the primary issue regarding the respective falls of Satan and Prometheus, but it is important

to remember that the discontent of each began in a state of universal harmony and perfection; their rebellion, however minor, is catastrophic to the order of things *because it is without precedent*. Byronic (and Absurd) Heroes are born into a flawed reality in which perfection and universal harmony are a non-issue. The root of the entire Byronic situation comes from the notion that the individual can improve upon the norm; the crimes of Prometheus and Satan are that the norm they mar is still unblemished; the Byronic Hero wishes to improve upon the marred world around him. Unfortunately, he receives no help from would-be allies because he is too rash for their pragmatism and patience. Thorslev attributes this discontent with a status quo to an inherent rebelliousness of spirit: “ambition and inventiveness, attributes which demonstrate an aggressive and analytic attitude toward the universe, are associated with rebellion” (93-94). Taking the same route as Aeschylus and Milton had explored before him, Byron sought to understand the spirit of rebellion as a justified (or at least sympathetic) situation; in the hands of Lord Byron, Cain, for example, was for the first time a misunderstood and brooding figure of rich complexity and endearment. Byron (and his predecessors) recognized the importance of the virtues of “evil” characters, if not their values. Even orthodox Milton acknowledged the profundity of character such as Satan, who actually evokes sympathy with his lamentations after having been soundly defeated in his attempted celestial coup. Due to the fluctuating rubric of justifiable rebellion during the Romantic Period, hubris and heroism essentially became mutually interchangeable.

The prototype of the Byronic Hero invariably falls into good or evil in spite of his self-assured autonomy: Milton’s Satan petulantly and wantonly embraces evil, resolving to “make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (*Paradise Lost* [PL] I.255); Prometheus remains defiant, cursing Zeus even as his mountain crumbles around him (Aeschylus 1088-93). The reason for both is that they each still seek vindication, and if victory is out of the question, then a glorious defeat will have to do. Satan and Prometheus want to be martyred victims of unjust deities. What Byron accomplishes with his hero type is to add another dimension to the dynamic: a character too complex for either of the two pre-existing binaries of Good and Evil; a metaphysical orphan of principle at once too virtuous for the demonic and too rebellious for the angelic. The factor of depth is found in the opposing facets of sympathy and brooding. The Byronic Hero feels he has been betrayed by Good—for example, Cain feels he has been cheated and lied to by God: “It was a lying tree, for we *know* nothing. / At least it promised knowledge at the price / Of death, but knowledge still; but what *knows* man?” (*Cain* II.ii.161-163)—but in contrast to the Faustian precedent, his principles do not allow him to sign up with the opposition. He therefore becomes an ethical island set against the tides of two opposing extremes. The only true resource that sustains him is his inexhaustible strength of will.

When advised in Nargothrond that the only hope against Morgoth rests in patience, stealth, and in the faith that the Valar will someday come to Beleriand's aid, Túrin illustrates a very Byronic trait:

The Valar! [...] They have forsaken you [Elves], and they hold Men in scorn. What use to look westward across the endless Sea to a dying sunset in the West? There is but one Vala with whom we have to do, and that is Morgoth; and if in the end we cannot overcome him, at least we can hurt him and hinder him. For victory is victory, however small, nor is its worth only from what follows from it. But it is expedient also. Secrecy is not finally possible: arms are the only wall against Morgoth. [...] Better then to win a time of glory, though it be shortlived; for the end will be no worse. (*Children* 161)

Túrin's diatribe is in fact a statement of frustration against those whose intervention would relieve the suffering of Man and Elf alike. His recalcitrance is not based on a rejection of the Divine, but in an impatience with it. Just as Cain feels that the promises of Knowledge of Life and Death have gone unfulfilled, Túrin rails against what he considers the absentee governors of Arda (Earth). Is it a mark of disrespect? Certainly. Of blasphemy? Perhaps. Of hubris? Absolutely *not*.

The difference in the priorities of the Elves and Men is important: the Elves are immortal and hence are able to afford patience with the tides of fortune; conversely, Men are compelled to be more active in achieving and sustaining peace because their time is so fleeting. Túrin is therefore even more isolated from the Elves because their tactics are not conducive to the individual life-spans of Men; the only reasonable plan takes much longer than any one generation of Men to succeed; "though mortal Men have little life beside the span of the Elves, they would rather spend it in battle than fly or submit" (*Children* 161). Essentially, he cannot imagine what the Valar are waiting for, nor does he care. Time is much more precious to him than it is to the Elves and the Valar. In accordance to his ethically autonomous set of principles (Right and Wrong as influenced by necessity of mortality), he has drawn his own line in the sand and found that the Elves and the Valar are not on his side.

"Is the sun dimm'd, that gnats do fly in it?" Shakespeare's Tamora soothes the temper of frantic Saturnine, who rails at the insult of Andronicus's arrows to the gods (*Tit.* IV.iv.82), which is essentially the predicament Túrin faces in spite of his efforts against the Morgoth. A touching-point of Byronic and Absurd Heroes is their respective hopelessness of plight. As Beleg warns Túrin (and is ignored), all of their efforts and toil have but "burned the fingertips of the Black Hand—no more" (146). His overall accomplishments are almost universally negligible; but on a deeper level than mere military or material

achievement, measurable gain is actually beyond the point. Túrin, by his own admission, cannot achieve any triumph but those that do not ultimately matter. He spends all of his energies and efforts on scorching Morgoth's fingertips with no reasonable chance of ever delivering a substantial blow, which by Urang's logic, actually vindicates him because he refuses to be a passive observer of rampant wickedness. The road to hell may be paved with good intentions, but when *all* roads lead to hell (as Túrin believes), good intentions are the best anyone can offer. Túrin will never change the world. He will never defeat evil. He will never create a utopia in Beleriand. The only avenue that promises any glimmer of success is one that demands patience, which lies in direct opposition to what Túrin's lifetime can afford. Any success, fleeting though it almost always is, is a token of filial veneration and honor. The true tragedy is the fact that all of Túrin's toil cannot meet with ultimate success—tragic, that is, in the sense that on some level, he *expects* it to.

Just as Byron shone new typological light on Cain, Tolkien undertook Túrin as an answer to and reinvention of the buffoonish Kullervo with very much the same story, but with a complexity of character that evokes a sympathy that is missing with the Finnish version. To return to Richard West, the importance of Kullervo's influence is key to understanding, not only the kind of hero he is, but also what kind of death he suffers:

Tolkien frequently refers to Kullervo as 'hapless,' and this element is certainly retained in Túrin, but the story that Tolkien called 'most tragic' has had the tragedy intensified. Túrin, with the best intentions, wreaks a good deal more havoc wherever he goes than even Kullervo managed, and, unlike Kullervo, not by being a somewhat dim-witted hero who does not know his own strength. (291)

Kullervo is merely the semiotic/mythological inspiration for Túrin, whose personality and consequent actions are much more conducive to a Byronic interpretation because the Kullervo episodes of the *Kalevala* are intended to be read as darkly comical (almost satiric) whereas even the roughest incarnations of the original *Narn i Chîn Húrin* were obviously intended to be read as tragic.

To consider the likeness between Kullervo and a hero like Byron's Manfred (for example) *archetypal* would be too hermeneutically and semiotically simplistic; but the similarities are nonetheless far too intriguing to dismiss as mere coincidence. Manfred is an odd example of the Byronic Hero because he is more amicable in spirit to the forces of evil than, say, Cain; much of his demeanor and actions paint him as a Gothic Villain. His only heroic (and therefore *redeeming*) quality is his tender attachment to his sister, Astarte, the memory of whom cripples him with the typical brooding guilt of the Noble Outlaw. In this regard alone is he heroic: without an emotional attachment, there

would be nothing then to keep him from falling under the category of the Gothic Villain. The Byronic Hero is always hounded by guilt. What the guilt may stem from varies; for Manfred, his broken heart stems from the death of (and incest with) Astarte; for Cain, the murder of Abel. Guilt is another distinction between the Byronic and Absurd heroes: Absurd heroes have no reason to feel guilty, which, in a sense, is the primary difference between Byronic and Gothic characters as well; according to Thorslev, “[The Byronic Hero] is almost invariably sympathetic in spite of his ‘crimes,’ none of which involve unnecessary cruelty, as do the crimes of the Gothic Villain” (8). Similarly, Byronic Heroes are innocent of outright malevolence insofar as the precedents set by Milton’s Satan and Aeschylus’s Prometheus; neither Satan nor Prometheus flinches in his resolution for an instant. Túrin’s mistakes and subsequent changes of heart are symptomatic of Byron’s heroes, who are constantly hounded by the memories and consequences of disasters in their respective pasts. For Túrin, the accidental death of Beleg is the first truly devastating stain that he will bear for the rest of his life.

The fourth tally against Túrin takes place in a scene that echoes Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*: Beleg frees Túrin from captivity, but not before Túrin’s confusion, rashness, and now-innate bloodlust cause him to mistakenly kill his friend. Just as Bosola bewails once he has slain Antonio, “The man I would have saved ‘bove mine own life! / We are merely the stars’ tennis-balls, struck and bandied / which way please them” (Webster V.iv.55-57), Túrin’s guilt reaches its pinnacle when he realizes what he has just done; “Thus ended Beleg Strongbow [...] at the hand of him whom he most loved; and that grief was graven on the face of Túrin and never faded” (*Children* 156). Tom Shippey uses the quotation from Webster’s play to illustrate a distinct tragic trend in Tolkien’s work concerning the resolute hopelessness of Túrin, who earnestly believes that he is very much one of “the stars’ tennis-balls” (qtd. in Shippey 255-6); deaths are pointless, and struggles are hopeless.

The Battle of Tumhalad is the fifth tally against Túrin. In Nargothrond, Túrin once again undertakes to resume the offensive against his nemesis, and again, the fastidious elves are reluctant to commit to open war, which they feel ill-prepared to fight. His arrogance at being at the helm of a strong military machine blinds him to the fact that he is not facing a fair opponent. Morgoth trumps Túrin’s hand by unleashing the dragon Glaurung. When the dust settles, Túrin has the blood of an entire kingdom on his hands, though he does not initially realize it. Shippey returns to Túrin’s familial zealotry, pointing out that “Glaurung [...], like Saeros, strikes the hidden fear when he calls Túrin ‘deserter of thy kin’; and so Túrin abandons Finduilas to save Morwen” (265), yet another example of Túrin’s fanatical devotion to family as a major source of vulnerability.

The sixth tally is the result of his arrogant assumption that he could withstand looking into Glaurung's eyes, which eventually results in Finduilas's death. The seventh tally against Túrin is that he does more harm than good in Dor-lómin by killing Brodda, which leads to the death of his childhood mentor and confidante, Sador. The death of Brodda naturally anticipates a time of even deeper hardships for the people of Dor-lómin. His own people have little reason to rejoice at his homecoming, for his actions will necessarily magnify the oppression under which they are trampled. Túrin's return is a token of promises for the future at the cost of the present, which is well-illustrated by Asgon's farewell to Túrin that clothes his annoyance and the annoyance of all of Dor-lómin in the garb of weary optimism: "Farewell now, Lord of Dor-lómin. [...] But do not forget us. We shall be hunted men now, and the Wolf-folk will be crueller because of your coming. Therefore go, and do not return, unless you come with strength to deliver us" (*Children* 191).

Thinking his mother and sister are still in Doriath, Túrin temporarily relinquishes his self-appointed charge of them, believing that they are better off at a distance from someone who ruins everything he touches; he broods, "by my wrath and rash deeds I cast a shadow wherever I dwell. Let Melian keep them! And I will leave them in peace unshadowed for a while" (192), restating his belief in Morgoth's curse and in his own incompetence. But having wasted so much time in Dor-lómin, he has done nothing to prevent the next catastrophe that he will presently discover has already transpired. The sixth and seventh tallies flood him at once when he discovers the full extent of Glaurung's lies. The culmination of guilt upon hearing of Finduilas's death weighs down upon Túrin and he undergoes a complete metamorphosis of character when he arrives a month after the fact to be informed of it by Dorlas at Haudh-en-Elleth. Túrin's reaction surpasses even his stupor after having killed Beleg; "he laid himself down, and a darkness fell on him, so that they thought he was dead" (195).

After the deaths of Beleg, Orodreth, Gwindor, and Finduilas, the fall of Nargothrond, and the debacle of his return to Dor-lómin, Túrin becomes a pacifist in attempt to subvert the direction he is following; unlike his time with the Outlaws, he is not a fugitive in Brethil, but a convert. The idea has finally solidified for Túrin that—whether out of incompetence, rashness, or plain bad luck—he cannot achieve anything substantial on his own—a true watershed moment in overcoming his own stubbornness. The advice he had long dismissed as lukewarm and timid he has been pummeled into acknowledging is the right course to take. Only after hitting rock-bottom upon finding the burial site of Finduilas is he able to start wholly anew. Once he finds and falls in love with his own estranged sister, he indulges her desires for peace in Brethil; "I will wed you and go never to war again—save only to defend you, if some evil assails our home" (220). The once-volatile warmonger has finally resolved to contentment in

an imperfect world, rather than trying single-handedly to re-create a world that can never be remade.

The name *Turambar* is effectively Túrin's quitclaim to the lordship of Dor-lómin, the reclamation of which had always presented him with purpose. Glaurung's attack on Brethil, however, exemplifies his (Túrin's) past coming back to haunt him, for Brethil it is an obvious target because it had remained comparatively unmolested by the forces of Morgoth (221). The second encounter with Glaurung is exemplary of Turambar's earnest resolution; his bold defiance of the dragon in Nargothrond had been a statement on his overall enterprises against Morgoth, which had resulted in Túrin's stupefaction and failure. By telling the people of Brethil, however, that "numbers will avail little; we must use cunning, and hope for good fortune" (225), one of his resolutions has for the first time taken root: he puts his change of heart into practice. Rather than making his prior mistake by once again directly assaulting Glaurung, he sets a successful ambush.

Túrin's reform would here be considered complete and secure, were it not for Glaurung's spell upon Niënor, which precludes eucatastrophic resolution and all but ensures a tragic ending. With the death of the dragon, "the veil of his malice fell from [Niënor], and all her memory grew clearer before her, from day unto day, neither did she forget any of those things that had befallen her since she lay on Haudh-en-Elleth" (243)—namely her unnatural union with her own brother. Believing him to have been killed already, that she has lost both her husband and her brother in one person, her grief culminates in her taking her own life. The eighth tally against Túrin comes when the news, not only of Níníel's suicide but also of her true identity, causes him to fly into a maniacal wrath and kill Brandir in cold blood (a murder reminiscent of the rashness with which he killed Brodda), thereby catalyzing a reversion to his former self. His inability to control his temper has again led to another innocent death: the bearer of the bad news. Mablung's report that, yes, it was indeed his sister, Niënor, whom he had found, renamed, married, and impregnated is the final straw and he embraces his despair amidst the overwhelming shock of emotions. In that moment, the meaning of the name *Turambar* at once both falls apart and takes on a deeper meaning than Túrin had intended; for the first time, he takes literal control of his fate by destroying himself. For Túrin, the only control he can possibly hold over his life is by deciding the manner in which it will end.

His death, with which he actually imprecates the sword Gurthang, "what loyalty do you know, save the hand that wields you? From no blood will you shrink. Will you take Túrin Turambar? Will you slay me swiftly?" and to which Gurthang replies, "Yes, I will drink your blood, that I may forget the blood of Beleg my master, and the blood of Brandir slain unjustly" (256), directly echoes Kullervo's suicide (*Kalevala* 36:319-34). Túrin's and Kullervo's deaths are

deliberate, though not premeditated; they are singularly maddened by the unbearability of circumstance. The replies of their respective swords illustrate their projections of their internal voices of justice accusing them. Both Kullervo and Túrin believe that they are not committing suicide so much as they are executing the fullest penalty upon their respective follies and mistakes that can be delivered—death. Because only they know the full extent of their sins, only they have the right to act as their own executioners.

Throughout *The Children of Húrin*, Túrin constantly tries to leave his past behind; his death is the culmination of his firm belief that he has nowhere else to go. Prior to this epiphany (imagined or not) each time he turns over a new leaf, he takes on a new name as a means of dissimulating his identity for two reasons: firstly, the practical necessity of remaining undiscovered by Morgoth (and Thingol); and secondly, in order to assume a new sense of self. Elizabeth Broadwell illustrates this trend in Tolkien's literature as a commentary on how much weight identity has in the epoch in which such stories as *The Children of Húrin* take place: "The appellations of the major figures in the tales of the First Age are less 'capsule characterizations' than they are 'capsule narratives'" (35). Each time Túrin adopts a new sobriquet, he is trying to re-invent himself, even within his own conception of himself. In a sense, he is living vicariously through himself, for the "alias tells, in effect, somebody else's story" (35). Túrin's names are devices of self re-creation, as if by assuming a new name he is shedding his old skin and enabling the possibility of starting anew. As Broadwell points out, each of his names reflects the state of despair in which he finds himself at each respective point of self-discovery, for "[t]itles and epithets function much like proper names [...]; they identify their possessors in terms of a specific (usually social) role" (36). However, at the same time, his constant re-definition indicates a dysmorphic character in that his real name is no more a part of him than a garment that can be shed when no longer necessary or aptronymous.

To distil the underlying importance of identity in the story, Broadwell puts Túrin in contexts of other Tolkienian heroes in terms of their purposes, asserting that "[unlike] those of other Tolkien heroes (e.g. Frodo or Beren), Túrin's story does not have a great quest as its organizing principle; it does not, in fact, appear to be goal-directed at all. Neither the reconquest of Dor-lómin [...] nor the slaughter of Glaurung [...] finally governs the course of his actions" (42). The only clear objective that Túrin consistently maintains is his desire to affront Morgoth; but that means very little without some practical schematic which he would have if he only accepted the friendship of wiser minds than his own. Túrin's persistence in the face of hopelessness brings him into the realm of the model of Camus's Sisyphus, who (within the Absurdist lens) has no reason to persist, for his boulder will never rest upon the top of the hill. Gunnar Urang's analysis therefore finds a suitable application in *The Children of Húrin*: for Túrin

will (as will all mortal Men) find hope in action at the present, not in projections of the future.

Each name he assumes is but a marker of a phase of the story that, though superficially distinct, are actually different-colored repetitions of the same episodes. Each phase is marked by his self-appointed aptronyms: amongst the Outlaws, he is Neithan, The Wronged (*Children* 101); while commanding the forces of Talath Dirnen, he is Gorthol, The Dread Helm (146). In Nargothrond he shuffles four different names: "Agarwaen, son of Úmarth" (Bloodstained, son of Ill-Fate) (159); "Mormegil" (The Black Sword) (160); "Adanedhel" (The Elf-man) (164); and "Thurin" (the Secret), the alarming name given to him by Finduilas. When Gwindor reveals Túrin's true name to Finduilas (168), Túrin considers it a grave betrayal, and his friendship with Gwindor begins to disintegrate. Gwindor's sage observation "The Doom lies in yourself, not in your name" (170) has a retroactive effect, for when Túrin adopts the name "Turambar" (Master of Doom) after the Fall of Nargothrond, his foolhardy actions in Dor-lómin, and his discovery from the men of Brethil that Finduilas is dead, his despair is so profound that the only thing he knows to do is to adopt a name that he feels will give him control over his actions and over any incident that may befall him. All of his self-applied names to this point have been symbolic; Turambar, however, is literal. Broadwell emphasizes the singularity of this particular name, pointing out that both it and the phase Túrin enters therewith are unique: "Constant misfortune has led Túrin to believe that the 'dark shadow' of Morgoth's curse dominates his destiny to such an extent that his life must end in calamity" (36).

The metamorphosis from Túrin to Turambar is sincere but nonetheless shadowed by the fact that Túrin, regardless of what name he takes, has made some incredible mistakes, the consequences of which will indefatigably haunt him. The fact that he does not truly change whenever he changes his name again and again implies that he misunderstands his own potential to overcome the curse upon his family:

Therefore he took a new name, calling himself Turambar, which in the High-elven speech signified Master of Doom; and he dwelt among the woodmen, and was loved by them, and he charged them to forget his name of old, and to count him as one born in Brethil. Yet with the change of a name he could not change wholly his temper, nor forget his old griefs against the servants of Morgoth, and he would go hunting the Orcs with a few of the same mind. (*Children* 196-7)

Turambar is literal, but only insofar as he can control himself (which he is able to do until Mablung's news, at which point, Turambar crumbles away and Túrin reappears for one final spectacle).

Though Turambar means *Master of Doom*, in practical application to Túrin's character, it actually means Master of Self; for as Broadwell asserts, "[t]his particular name is unique among Túrin's many appellations in its prolepsis; it does not confirm a change in his identity which has already taken place, as **Agarwaen** does, but anticipates a change to come" (36-7). By shifting his focus from the past to the future, Túrin is able to control himself, rather than establishing an identity based upon his past that will only be disappointed by events in the immediate future. All of Túrin's names have hitherto been conceived in response to what he senses to be a slight against him; Turambar is the only one that reflects a consideration of the future. Almost as if he were joining a monastery, Túrin's arrival in Brethil exhibits all the signs of an existentialistic rebirth, one condition of which is the adoption of a new identity, wholly independent of the throng of personalities he had previously donned. Only once does the issue of Turambar's past identity come up when Dorlas remembers the name and reputation of Mormegil; "You have renounced the name, but the Blacksword you are still; and does not rumour say truly that he was the son of Húrin of Dor-lómin, lord of the House of Hador"; to which Turambar replies: "So I have heard. But publish it not, I beg you, as you are my friend" (*Children* 197). The contrast of Túrin's gentle request with the anger he had launched at Gwindor for revealing his true name to Finduilas marks his genuine change of heart.

After Glaurung casts his amnesiac spell upon Niënor, neither she nor her brother has any way of recognizing one another, for Morwen had birthed Niënor after Túrin had taken up his residence in Doriath. The sibling dynamic is therefore rendered effectively moot within their ironic relationship in Brethil. Though Túrin singlehandedly causes the ruin of Nargothrond, is responsible for the deaths of many of those close to him, and is indirectly to blame for the misadventures that befall Morwen and Niënor, Túrin's self-hatred does not boil over to the point of killing himself until the compounded truths of Níniel's true identity, their incest, and her death all compound his guilt. By the time he has unjustly murdered Brandir and discovered the injustice of the deed after the fact, the weight of that guilt is already more than anyone could ever be expected to bear. The revelation that Níniel is not only his estranged sister, but is also dead by her own hand, culminates in the fulfillment of Morgoth's curse upon Húrin's family. Túrin's misery has reached its nadir.

After the shocking twofold news about Níniel, Turambar becomes Túrin once more, and his last action after having killed Brandir and heard from Mablung that his mother and sister had long ago left Doriath is to kill himself, thereby solidifying his identity as he who controls his own fate in spite of Morgoth's curse. Because his epitaph bears the name Túrin Turambar, as Tom Shippey claims, the combination of his birth-name and his aptronym form an

amalgam of two distinct identities: “What these words [doom and fate] imply is in a sense illogical or self-contradictory. They indicate the presence of controlling powers, in whose toils the heroes are ‘caught’, ‘meshed’, ‘ensnared’; yet people can be told, as Túrin is [by Gwindor], ‘the doom lies in yourself’. [...] Túrin calls himself ‘Turambar’, [...] only to have the boast thrown back in his epitaph [...] ‘Master of Doom, by doom mastered’” (255). As he takes his own life, Túrin acknowledges that, other than committing the act of self-destruction, there is nothing he can possibly attempt that he will not inevitably ruin.

With all of the textual evidence provided, the proposition of the nature of Túrin’s heroism comes to a crucial juncture. Túrin is an Absurd Hero *if*, like Sisyphus, the curse upon him is inescapable and taking his own life is but an unavoidable incident within the process of toil that is inescapably overshadowed by the curse. If Absurd, Túrin’s constant struggle against Morgoth and every endeavor he undertakes is merely a self-perpetuating praxis: a means and an end in one.

In contrast, Túrin is *not* an Absurd Hero *if* his death is indeed suicide, implying despair and a rejection of his own self-preservation instincts (in which case, he is Byronic). Some clarification of terms is in order to place a definitive wedge between the Byronic and the Absurd: suicide in this context is exclusive to the Byronic Hero whose integrity to a purpose has faltered, for although the Absurd Hero may well be the perpetrator of his own death, the term “suicide” does not apply to him. If he is truly Absurd, his death is incidental—not a climactic culmination of despair; the Absurd Hero may destroy himself, but it is only a matter of course without any objective or purpose. That Túrin slays himself is not in dispute, and the act itself is largely unimportant; the true question is concerned with what his death *is*.

Camus’s treatment of suicide is concerned primarily with the suspension of both logic and instinct, both of which work for the individual to preserve his or her life. One must premeditatedly sidestep both logic and instinct in order to actually carry out a willful act of self-destruction; viz. “In a man’s attachment to life there is something stronger than all the ills in the world” (8). Regarding those who are capable of overlooking their logic and their instincts, he observes that “[r]arely is suicide committed [...] through reflection. What sets off the crisis is almost always unverifiable” (5).

The Absurd Hero does not commit suicide because suicide is the action of the victimized and of the guilty: “[K]illing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it. [...] Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering” (5-6). Camus’s statement encapsulates precisely the conditions of the Byronic

death when the Hero finds himself contemplating the power he wields over his own mortality. Túrin is maniacal upon receiving Mablung's news (*Children* 253-6), ergo his death is *not* logical, for as Camus is clear to point out, "[i]t is always easy to be logical. It is almost impossible to be logical to the bitter end. Men who die by their own hand consequently follow to its conclusion their emotional inclination" (9).

Is Túrin merely ending Morgoth's curse by killing himself (which would mean that he has no control over his fate after all), or is he committing suicide (by Camus's definition) out of pride, vengefulness, and hate that drive him toward ruin, thereby making Morgoth's curse a self-fulfilling prophesy? The answer is found in examining what constitutes agency in one's own death. For an example on the Byronic side, Manfred merely dies under the weight of his guilt and self-loathing, which is largely construable as the way in which Túrin dies.

The proposition is established: if Túrin's death is suicide, he is a Byronic Hero; if his death is not suicide, he is an Absurd Hero. The clearest distinction between the two in the context of *The Children of Húrin* is the difference of the conditions in which the hero's life comes to an end. The difference between tragedy and *eucatastrophe* is the principle of enduring hope.

The Absurd Hero is one who recognizes the bleakness and hopelessness of the world, but *embraces* it, not only to spite it, but blankly because there is nothing else he can do; "suicide" is unthinkable and implausible. Camus's concept of absurdity is based upon the idea that the imperfect world is so chaotic that it is essentially reduced to the level of the tragically comic. According to Frank Magill's summary of another of Camus's assertions concerning the Absurd titled *The Rebel*, "when a person who is slave to the absurd conditions about him declares that there is a limit to what he will endure or approve, he becomes a man, he exists. [...] Those who attempt to rebel by becoming nihilists or utopians fail to achieve authentic rebellion" (1127). Nihilism and utopianism are results of a broad sweep that precludes any recognition of the absurd world and the ability to cope with it; essentially, Gothic Villains are nihilists, Byronic Heroes are utopians. The idea of rebelling by means of embracing the very thing against which one rebels is illustrated in Camus's later essay "The Myth of Sisyphus." A difference between the Absurd and the Byronic Heroes is that the Byronic rejects both objective Good and Evil; the Absurd has only the subjective "Good" to reject. The Absurd hero is not beset on both sides by two opposing tides, but is either the leader or the sole member of the confederate faction: Prometheus, Milton's Satan, and Sisyphus.

Milton's Satan can be read as an example of the Absurd Hero, even on a par with Sisyphus, for because he resolves to "make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (*PL* I.255), he adopts the essential principle of Camus's proposition. His first step is to abandon hope; up to this pivotal moment, he is still Byronic: self-

pitying and nostalgic, brooding against the future he now knows is hopeless. But the instant he banishes all ideas of recreating the past in the future, he takes up his own boulder and begins to roll. The entire universe then becomes the moment, the present, the immediate; it therefore becomes tolerable. Hell loses all of its horror when nothing exists but Hell. There is no past or future anymore. For the Absurd Hero, neither past nor future even exist; Sisyphus and Satan have nothing to remember, and nothing to look forward to. Yet they persist in fruitless (and in a sense, *masturbatory*) preoccupations and are therefore infinitely more heroic than the Byronic Hero, whose dreams are shattered and who destroys himself as a consequence. As Camus so fittingly states, "There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (121).

The Byronic Hero dwells in the past (Túrin carries with him Beleg's sword, Anglachel, re-forged and renamed, as a token of guilt—like Cain's firebrand—as well as the Helm of Hador, which represents his filial duties and his life's purpose); the Absurd Hero dwells in the present. For the Byronic Hero there is no such realistic thing as the present, but an infinitesimal and constant overlap of past and future: the past prods him to achieve a future, which is in no situation better exemplified than the phenomena of Túrin's menagerie of names: none of them reflect his current state of being, but rather a grudge of the recent past, or an attempt to keep a leash on the future. To return again to Broadwell's insights, Túrin's only impetus for action is to rectify wrongs of the past, whether slights against his vanity, or serious injustices visited upon him and those for whom he cares; "In a world filled with people trying to get somewhere in order to do something, Túrin stands out by continually redefining himself in terms of the place he just left, regardless of where he is headed. His desultory movement through the narrative space lends itself to episodic, almost disjunctive, treatment: the story of Túrin is overshadowed by the *stories* of Neithan, Gorthol, Agarwaen, and so on" (42).

The Absurd Hero is alone, and though the Byronic Hero is frequently depicted as a solitary figure, his solitude is largely metaphorical. Whereas the Absurd truly has no allies, the Byronic is blind to the allies he has. No matter where he is, Túrin is never alone, for he keeps such intimate company as Sador, Nellas, Beleg, Mím, and Finduilas. His solitude is predicated upon his single-mindedness of purpose, not anti-sociality. Túrin always strives for the success of a community, not just of himself: whether the Outlaws, the entire spectrum of mortal men (*Children* 161), the downtrodden people of Dor-lómin, or the inhabitants of Brethil. If there is one flaw to this outlook on community, it is the fact that he has fantasies about community and strives toward the creation of one while he already has one in which to participate, such as Doriath, Talath Dirnen, or Nargothrond. By considering Túrin's nobility as a predisposition to the desire to sacrifice himself for the good of others, it is useful also to consider the true

motives behind that desire: that he *is* the House of Hador. Although dispossessed royalty, Túrin is royalty nonetheless: the incarnate representation of Dor-lómin, and therefore self-preservation is tantamount to the preservation of his homeland. As long as he lives, Dor-lómin survives.

In the end, the only enduring similarity shared by both Byronic and Absurd Heroes is their respective hubris. The margin of distinction between them is again to be found in the hero's outlook. The Byronic Hero is working *toward* something; the tragedy lies in the fact that he almost universally fails. Túrin is a failure, not because of his lack of success, but because of his decision to erase himself when he recognizes that his accomplishments are utterly negligible, and because he still believes in the absoluteness of Morgoth's curse. The Absurd Hero, on the other hand, entertains no notions of success, but still he persists. His hubris is less spiteful than the Byronic Hero's and more resolute, thereby more powerful. The reason he persists is that, in a manner of speaking, he hypnotizes himself with the inescapability of his sentence; in the words of James Goldman's Henry II in *The Lion in Winter*, "There's no sense asking if the air's good when there's nothing else to breathe" (I.iv).

Both types are faced with hopelessness and both are clearly distinguished by Autonomy of Will, but the Absurd Hero alone sees hope of necessary practicality within the parameters of hopelessness: there is nothing better in the universe. Death, then, has no threat, nor is it as enticing an alternative to him as it is to the Byronic Hero, who slays himself only after the blinding and devastating realization hits him all at once that he can only fail. The Byronic Hero is reactionary when it comes to this epiphany; the Absurd Hero sees the outcome from the beginning, and defies it, embraces it, and relishes in it—all as a means of conquering it. His death may be inevitable, but it is also largely incidental. The Byronic Hero's hubris and death are a means to an unachievable end; the Absurd Hero's hubris and death are the means and the end in one.

In conclusion, my inference is that Túrin is solidly a Byronic Hero; he fails utterly to attain Absurdity. *Turambar* is an Absurd Hero, for like Sisyphus, he truly is Master of Doom and Master of Self. Unfortunately, the persona of *Turambar* sloughs away upon the revelation that *Túrin's* past has resurfaced in the form of Glaurung's spell; the re-creation of self is undermined by the consequences of the former persona's past. At different points of the story, Túrin is at least once a Hero of Sensibility, a Noble Outlaw, and a Child of Nature. The reasons for Túrin's Byronism are threefold: first, his relationships with women are undeniably Byronic; second, Morgoth is not all-powerful; and third, unlike Sisyphus, Túrin takes no delight in his suffering.

Byronic chivalry is a constant theme in *The Children of Húrin*. Túrin's unwavering consideration for and protection of women is a key delineation

between whether or not he has any redeeming qualities at all. To women, and women alone, does Túrin concede without coercion his irascibility and hot-headedness. The brooding sympathy he bears all of those who suffer is a key component to his chivalry; "he was quick to pity, and the hurts or sadness of living things might move him to tears" (*Children* 39). Túrin's pity and tenderness towards the suffering of others echoes the Romantic Hero of Sensibility. Aside from Beleg, only the *women* in Túrin's life manage to draw from him all of the endearing and redeemable traits, for as Thorslev states, "the typical Byronic Hero, with the possible exception of Manfred, is a man of courtesy and sensibility toward women [...]. Fatal the Byronic Hero may be; cruel he most decidedly is not" (8). It is Nellas's testimony that acquits Túrin of any blame in Saeros's death (*Children* 94); Túrin's chivalry is aroused when he comes to the aid of Larnach's daughter, killing one of his own men rather than tolerate her to be raped (103-4); he refuses to presume reciprocity of Finduilas's love for him due to the fact that he has no right to her (165-6). The passivity with which Túrin deals with the tension of the love triangle between himself, Finduilas, and Gwindor is a glaring example of one of Thorslev's criteria of Byronic Heroism, illustrated by "his innate gentleness of nature, shown especially in his courteous treatment of women" (22).

Aside from echoing Kullervo's story, Túrin and Niënor (Níniel) also bear Byronic connotations to Cain and Adah; the love the hero has is concentrated in two capacities in one person. Incest is a paramount issue in many Byronic situations: Manfred and Astarte; Cain and Adah. The symbolic connection from Kullervo to Manfred to Túrin is undeniably clear. The death of the sister anticipates that of the brother. Incest occurs in three separate, but very similar situations: Manfred's doom is sealed when the apparition of Astarte's ghost declaims, "Manfred! Tomorrow ends thine earthly ills. / Farewell!" (II.iv.151); Kullervo's self-reproaching diatribe describes the disgust with which he realizes that he had carried out an incestuous tryst with his sister (*Kalevala* 35:330-40). In spite of his misreading of Túrin's character, it is to Richard West's credit that he is careful to make a clear distinction between the *Kalevala* original and the Tolkien version: "Nienor is much more fully characterized than her rather sparsely drawn prototype in the *Kalevala*, but she also ends by drowning herself in remorse" (291). The Byronic implications, however, are solid enough to overshadow the disparity of depth of character.

The second testament to Túrin's Byronism is his over-inflation of Morgoth's curse. For one thing, an omnipotent being knows nothing of fear, nor still has he anything of a blind-spot. Morgoth actually fears Túrin in a martial sense: "Report of the Dragon-helm in the land west of Sirion came swiftly to the ear of Morgoth, and he laughed, for now Túrin was revealed to him again, who had long been lost in the shadows and under the veils of Melian. Yet he began to

fear that Túrin would grow to such a power that the curse that he had laid upon him would become void, and he would escape the doom that had been designed for him" (*Children* 147). The curse is thereby illustrated as one of malevolent sentiment, not of binding covenant. Had the curse been an eternal and unassailable sentence, Morgoth would have had nothing to fear from Túrin, whose death would have been a mere matter of course (thereby making him Absurd): by slaying himself Túrin would simply have been doing exactly what was expected of him. But Túrin's death is not actually what Morgoth had designed; he had cursed him to a life of sustained misery, not death (63, 65). Concerning the two featured curses in *The Children of Húrin*, Morgoth's is realistically less powerful than Mím's; for the Petty-dwarf's curse actually results in what he had intended (Andróg's death). Morgoth's curse amounts to little more than an expression of spite. By Camus's rationale, therefore, Túrin's death is in the end suicide, an act of willful self-destruction that violates his natural and innate instinct to exist. The parameters of the curse are specious, which makes Túrin solely accountable for his self- destruction:

At that last crossroad where thought hesitates, many men have arrived and even some of the humblest. They then abdicated what was most precious to them, their life. Others, princes of the mind, abdicated likewise, but they initiated the suicide of their thought in its purest revolt. The real effort is to stay there, rather, in so far as that is possible, and to examine closely the odd vegetation of those distant regions. Tenacity and acumen are privileged spectators in this inhuman show in which absurdity, hope, and death carry on their dialogue. (Camus 9-10)

The Absurd Hero—namely Sisyphus, a “prince of the mind”—is perfectly aware of his predicament, and moreover of the ridiculous (absurd) tragedy of it.

Túrin's failure of Absurdity and consequent relegation to Byronism are also rooted in the fact that he never takes relish in his plight. He might have attained Absurdity had he given himself a moment of pause to resolve himself to hopelessness, as both Sisyphus and Milton's Satan do. He approaches the threshold whereat he might well undergo the eucatastrophic transcendence from the Byronic to the Absurd, but at that moment, instead of taking that step, he chooses darkness. At the point at which Túrin draws Gurthang to implore it to slay him dutifully (*Children* 256), Túrin has stepped away from Byronism and stands on the threshold of Absurdism; he is in a heroic limbo wherein his mania eclipses his integrity. The crossroads he faces leads in two directions: the one labeled *Absurd* leads toward fruitless, hopeless toil; the other labeled *Byronic* leads toward death. In his mania, he projects the agency of the violent act onto the “character” of Gurthang, whose response “I will slay you swiftly” (256)

symbolically affirms (for the moment, at least) that Túrin is not killing himself, and therefore he manages to maintain his Byronic integrity.

The certainty that Túrin falls short of Camus's model rests in the maniacal manner in which he ends his life, choking on his despair as the culmination of all of his follies, mistakes, and unwitting accomplishment of everything he had striven to avoid. Camus's Sisyphus labors under no such delusion, for, to his mind, he has made no mistakes and therefore has no source of guilt. He is calm and lucid. He takes pause to reflect, not upon the past or the future, but upon the microcosmic present. Therein he finds eucatastrophic peace:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (Camus 123)

Sisyphus relishes his torment as a way of depriving the sadistic gods of their pleasure at his expense: if the gods are evil, let them be, for the victim of their injustice is vindicated, even if he is the only one who knows it. Their curse upon him is no curse at all; he turns it into a paradise born of spite. Nor is Morgoth's curse a curse, but Túrin fights against an entity that he mistakenly believes to be omnipotent, thereby precluding any semblance of ultimate hope. The god against whom Túrin revolts is certainly evil, which means that his suicide is an admission of despair stemming from the realization of his own inability to overcome that evil. By Tolkien's own definition of eucatastrophe, Túrin's naïve acquiescence to despair is the single factor that decides that his story will end tragically; by losing hope and letting fall the reins of his struggle, Túrin inadvertently defeats himself whereas the wiser madman, Sisyphus, blithely rolls his rock happily ever after.

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