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**Abstract**
Examines selected parallels between characters and events in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Aeneid*. Argues that although medieval sources are the most significant for *The Lord of the Rings*, among classical influences “the *Aeneid* shares more common elements with LotR than either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*.

**Additional Keywords**
The Influence of Vergil's *Aeneid* on *The Lord of the Rings*

by David Paul Pace

By virtue of his aristocratic education, J. R. R. Tolkien undoubtedly commanded a thorough knowledge of the great epics of classical antiquity as well as the Medieval works upon which he concentrated the majority of his scholarly pursuits. While critics such as Lin Carter have devoted, and rightly so, whole chapters to the study of Medieval and Homeric influence on *The Lord of the Rings* (hereinafter abbreviated *LOTR*), they have largely ignored the influence of *Aeneid*. After comparing Vergilian influence on *LOTR* to that of Homer and certain Medieval authors, I contend that although the Medieval influence is the strongest, the *Aeneid* shares more common elements with *LOTR* than either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*.

A complete study of the parallels between the *Aeneid* and *LOTR* demands many weeks of laborious, eclectic study, and therefore, I shall limit this paper primarily to a discussion of the similarities between characters and story events. I shall further endeavor to demonstrate, in the instances of possible dual influence, that the events of *LOTR* more closely resemble the events of the *Aeneid* than those of the Homeric epics.

The most obvious similarity between the *Aeneid* and *LOTR* is the situation shared by Aeneas, the protagonist of the *Aeneid* and Aragorn, called "unquestionably the leading man in *The Lord of the Rings*" by Paul E. Kocher in *Master of Middle Earth*. Both Aeneas and Aragorn are exiled Kings of noble lineage, who seek to recapture the homelands of their ancestors, and each is to marry a queen after his rightful ascension to the throne. Aeneas is the son of Anchises, a leading Trojan, and Venus, Goddess of Love, while Aragorn is the son of Gilraen and Arathorn, Chancellor of the Dunadan of the North, descended from Eleni of the Tal, mightiest of the ancient kings of men. Aragorn is the betrothed husband of Arwen, daughter of Elrond, while Aeneas is the future husband of Lavinia.

The major quality of both Aeneas and Aragorn which differentiates them from the Homeric heroes is each man's sense of *piaetas*, a moral duty to God, country, and family. Aeneas demonstrates his reverence by constantly paying homage to the gods and in Book VIII of the *Aeneid* utilizes against the Latins only after making sacrifices to the gods. Aragorn demonstrates his reverence most noticeably, according to Kocher, by refusing to influence Frodo's choice to go to Mordor as he feels "there are powers at work far stronger." Aragorn's willingness to accompany Frodo into Mordor implies that he considers his devotion to the "higher powers" superior to his desire to regain his kingdom. Both Aeneas and Aragorn secure their Kingdoms before marrying, thereby ranking their obligations as religious, patriotic, and familial, in order of importance. In my opinion this is the most significant trait common to both characters: a God-country-family hierarchy of obligations which stands in opposition to the sometimes opportunistic nature of the Homeric hero.

Both the *Aeneid* and *LOTR* involve, as an essential part of the story, a conflict between the protagonist and a noble, yet flawed prince, a prince who displays a fondness for war along with unbridled hubris, and overwhelming self-confidence. The prince in each case serves as a foil for the protagonist and through comparison of the *persona* of the protagonist with that of the prince one may establish the protagonist's superior moral nature. The prince in the *Aeneid*, Turnus, King of the Rutulians known he would be the likely successor to the throne of Latinus, were it not for the presence of Aeneas. Boromir, heir to the Steward of Gondor, knows that if Aragorn is really the heir of Eleni, he (Boromir) must renounce his claim to the throne. In contrast, in the homoeilocity of Aeneas, Turnus' refusal to permit the peaceful coexistence of Trojans and Rutulians reveals his warlike nature. Both Boromir's hunger for power and warlike nature become evident when he succumbs to a desire to wage war using the Ring, a desire which Aragorn successfully overcomes.

Turnus and Boromir ultimately meet with death as a result of a dream in which a "higher power" tells them of a threat to their future kingship. In an evil dream in Book VII of the *Aeneid*, Allectus, king of the Rutulians, orders Turnus to make war on the "invading Trojans". Boromir journeys into Rivendell, coming into contact with the Ring which later proves his downfall, after he hears the following poem in a recurrent dream:

*Seek for the Sword that was broken*:

In Isiladr it dwells;  
There shall be counsels taken  
Stronger than Morgul-spells.  
There shall be shown a token  
That Doom is near at hand  
For Isildur's Bane shall waken  
And the Halfling forth shall stand.

To their credit, both Boromir and Turnus admit to being wrong before dying.

In both *LOTR* and the *Aeneid* the hero meets a young woman who falls in love with him and who, after the hero's seemingly cruel rejection, attempts suicide. Dido, queen of Carthage, in Book IV of the *Aeneid* falls in love with Aeneas and later, upon rejection, kills herself with her sword. Eowyn in *LOTR* falls in love with the already betrothed Aragorn and follows his sword into battle, hoping in vain for death.

Both heroes assume a leader's role upon the death of an old man. Aeneas becomes Leader of the Trojans only after the death of Anchises, his father, in Book III of the *Aeneid*. Aragorn takes command of the fellowship only after the apparent death of Gandalf. In each case the hero, rightful leader according to protocol set by legend, is perfectly willing to follow someone wiser than himself, and becomes distraught at the old man's death. Each would prefer to have the old man back, rather than to be a leader.

A *necyia*, a voluntary communication with the spirits of the dead, appears in both the *Aeneid* and *LOTR*. Aeneas, in Book VI of the *Aeneid*, must enter the underworld in order to seek the advice of Anchises, his dead father, who resides in the Elysian fields. The event in *LOTR* which parallels Aeneas' underworld visit is Aragorn's journey through the Paths of the Dead, a journey in which Aragorn hopes to enlist the aid of deceased oathbreakers who ultimately stone for their earlier sins by helping him capture the ships of the Umbarian Corsairs.

Some critics might argue that the *necyia* in *LOTR* is a Homeric rather than a Vergilian influence. To refute such a claim one need only compare the nature of the Vergilian *necyia* to that of the Homeric *necyia*.

Odysseus, in *LOTR* of the *Odyssey*, journeys to an island at the edge of the known world and from there summons the spirits of
the dead, although never once entering their actual realm. This method is called necromancy. Aeneas, however, journeys into the actual realm of the dead, the underworld, and converses with the dead in their own environment.

This Vergilian nekrypt is known as a katakrestasis and more closely resembles the nekrypt of Aragorn, who, like Aeneas, confronts the dead in their own environment.

Aeneas and Aragorn are both aided in their quests by the lord of a river. In Book VII of the Aeneid, Father Tiber, god of the Tiber River, visits Aeneas and advises him on battle strategies. Elrond aids Aragorn by commanding the water at the Ford of Bruinen to rise and halt the advancing Ringwraiths.

The Battle at the Ford of Bruinen resembles the Homeric mache parapetosmos, a battle about a river. In Book XXII of the Iliad Achilles fights the Trojans on the banks of the river Skamandros, which, provoked by the carnage, rises to engulf the warlike hero. The river in the Iliad, however, fights against the hero, while in both the Aeneid and LOTR the river assists the hero, and I therefore feel that the river in LOTR is more a Vergilian than Homeric influence.

The Aeneid and LOTR share a similar format. Both involve a first a hero's journey and to some extent a battle to regain a promised kingdom. Hence, the famed Odyssean-Iliadic structure of the Aeneid also appears in LOTR.

The cities associated with each hero have a common numerical feature. Seven circles make up Minas Tirith, the capital of Gondor, while Rome, capital of Italy, stands upon seven hills.

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Many illustrated books on the Arthurian legend contain at least a few color reproductions of works of art assembled by the Loomises, in addition to those in black and white. One of the more useful, and beautiful, of these books is Richard Barber's King Arthur in Legend and History (Cardinal paperback edition, Sphere Books Ltd., London, 1973), with thirty colour and thirty black and white plates, many with more than one medieval or modern illustration. Barber's King Arthur is (or was) available in paperback at a comparatively low price (U.K. £1.00), given the many illustrations. Besides the selection of medieval and modern art, the book contains a fairly detailed, if somewhat dogmatic, text, a chronological list of major (and some minor) Arthurian literature from c. 550 to 1958, and an annotated select bibliography (which characterizes those who disagree with him as "not very convincing", which from his point of view is undoubtedly true...). Here one may note Agravain's double-headed eagle in black and white, and some of the shields carried by Lancelot, Gawain, and others, in color, chiefly as portrayed by artists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In this case, as in others, there is no guarantee that the color printing is absolutely faithful to the originals. (Barber's book is an expansion of his earlier Arthur of Albion, 1961, 1971, which does not have this splendid visual "apparatus", and it should not be confused with his Figure of Arthur, 1972, which attempts to locate the historical Arthur in what is now Scotland.)

Some of the by-ways of the Arthurian Legend seem more heraldically productive than others. The Quest of the Holy Grail, part of the "Vulgate Cycle" of Arthurian romances written in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, for example, includes symbolic and allegorical shields which were not at all suitable for personal use. (Translated by P. M. Matarasso, Penguin Classics, 1969; an abridged version is incorporated in Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century Morte D'Arthur, now found in many editions.)

The Tristan tradition, which is tangentially connected to the Arthurian cycle, seems to have generated an actual, if long-range, debate over the hero's coat of arms, which has been echoed by modern scholars analyzing the romances. The best brief account of these problems is to be found in A. T. Hatto's translation of Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan: With the "Tristan" of Thomas of Britain (1966, revised printing, 1967), Appendix 3, "Tristan's Angevin Escutcheon".

This is a reply to the suggestions of Roger Sherman Loomis on the subject, found in the afore-mentioned Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art and reprinted in a much more accessible volume, now available in paperback; The Romance of Tristan and Yseult, by Thomas of Britain; Translated from the Old French and Old Norse by Roger Sherman Loomis. (First published by F. P. Dutton & Co., 1923; Columbia University Press, 1931, revised edition 1951; Dutton paperback of New Revised Edition, 1967).

Loomis' rendering, in archaising English, is based on the surviving Old French fragments of Thomas of Britain's version, filled in with the Old Norse translation attributed to one "Brother Robert", as compared to the Middle English, German, and Italian retellings for some details. This edition also includes twenty-three of the best-preserved of the thirty-five known Chertsey Abbey Totes, discovered in the ruins about ten miles from Windsor Castle in 1885 and 1920, apparently dating from about 1215. There is a 12-page commentary excerpted from the Arthurian Legendes volume included (besides the interesting, but not entirely reliable, introduction).

Most of these books include bibliographies or bibliographic notes. Those interested in pursuing further investigations should be aware of a major bibliographic resource, the annual Bibliographic Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society, which has appeared for over thirty years. Articles are grouped by country of origin/language, and the indexing is usually extremely good. In addition to the annotated bibliographies, there are usually several excellent articles or essays. Sets should be available in college and university libraries.

The epic theme of nostos (a hero's return) is common to both the Aeneid and LOTR. The Returns, a poem in the epic style attributed to Homer, describes the returns of the Achaean heroes from Troy to a dangerous situation from which the hero is never fully able to recover.

Odysses, Diomedes, and Agammenon, the greatest three surviving Achaeanas, meet with treachery, exile, and death upon their respective homecomings. Only Odysses is able to regain even a fraction of his old status. Aeneas and Aragorn, in contrast to the dethroned Achaeanas, successfully return to recapture their ancient kingdoms. In both Vergil and Tolkien the hero does not enjoy a total victory as he wins his kingdom only through the deaths of many good men, yet he stands alone as the most powerful ruler in his world.

In conclusion, one can demonstrate the existence of both Homeric and Vergilian motifs in LOTR. A clever look, however, reveals that the characters and events in LOTR more closely resemble those events in the Aeneid than those of the Homeric epics. From this comparison it is evident that although the influence of Homer on The Lord of the Rings cannot be denied, the influence of Vergil's Aeneid is clearly the stronger.

1 Paul H. Kocher, Master of Middle Earth, (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1972), p. 130
2 Ibid, p. 147
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The Hyatt is located in north San Jose, at the intersection of First Street and U.S. Highway 101. The hotel offers a free shuttle bus from the San Jose airport, and the #64 bus comes from downtown.

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Mythcon X will feature all the traditional Mythcon staples: Procession, papers, Guest of Honor speeches, Lore Tourney, masquerade, art auction, music program, linguists' meetings, Bardic Circle poetry readings, Dawn Fandom...We will also be having several formal panels, and a few surprises.

Our movie program includes: *Bedazzled*, *Robin Hood* (the silent Douglas Fairbanks version), *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, and *Death Takes a Holiday*.

PAPERS

If you wish to read a paper at Mythcon, please send a short description to Eric Rauscher, 6019 Avila, El Cerrito, Cal. 94530, by July 1. If you are unable to attend and wish to have the paper read for you, send two copies to Eric by July 1.

ART SHOW AND AUCTION

All artists are encouraged to enter their work in the art show. There is a $2 entry fee per artist. Each work entered for sale is charged, in addition, a 25% hanging fee, plus 15% commission on the auction price, if sold. Write Edith Crowe, 2674 Briarfield Ave, Redwood City, Cal. 94061, for further information. If you are unable to attend, send art to the P.O. Box below.

OTHER INFORMATION

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