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Library Award for Undergraduate Research: Application
Bibliography
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Wainwright, Edmund. *Tolkien's Mythology for England*. Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2004

Works by J. R. R. Tolkien:

The Fellowship of the Ring

The Two Towers

The Return of the King

On Fairy-Stories. In "The Tolkien Reader." New York: Ballantine Books, 1966.

Works by Peter Jackson (in-text citations contain names of scenes):

The Fellowship of the Ring. Directed by Peter Jackson. 2001. New Line Productions, Inc, 2002. DVD.

The Two Towers. Directed by Peter Jackson. 2002. New Line Productions, Inc, 2003. DVD.

The Return of the King. Directed by Peter Jackson. 2003. New Line Productions, Inc, 2004. DVD.

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Annotated Bibliography

Topic: Aragorn

Flieger, Verlyn. "Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of the Hero." In *Green Suns and Faërie: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Verlyn Flieger, 141-158. Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2012.

In this essay, Dr. Flieger presents the inherent contrast between Frodo and Aragorn's realization of the "hero" concept. She shows that Aragorn is an example of an epic hero, while Frodo is a fairy-tale hero, the ordinary character with whom the reader identifies. Although she presents Aragorn in particular as a classic example of the hero motif, she is careful to distinguish him as uniquely Tolkien's, and shows how his connection with other heroes in literature is present but hidden, thereby strengthening Tolkien's narrative as a whole. She also discusses Frodo's connection with mythic hero motifs, but shows how Frodo's role as the fairy-tale hero, the common man, places the story within the realm of modern literature.

I first encountered this essay as an assigned class reading in a different book, but rediscovered it after checking out *Green Suns and Faërie* from McKeldin Library with the intention of reading more of Dr. Flieger's work. This essay is an extremely well-written and highly organized criticism of two of

Tolkien's most prominent characters. Focusing on Aragorn specifically, it clearly connects him to his counterparts in medieval and mythic literature throughout history and provides a convincing summary of his role as epic hero and rightful King. Dr. Flieger is known as a leading Tolkien scholar, and her thesis, what she calls Tolkien's "modern medievalism", is evident in this essay, when she shows how Frodo and Aragorn complement each other with elements of modernism and medievalism (156). Having also heard Dr. Flieger speak about this subject, it is clear that she strives to link her ideas to many aspects of *The Lord of the Rings*, using support from other Tolkien works such as his Beowulf criticism. This definitely strengthens her Tolkien scholarship as a whole.

Aragorn's heroic characteristics are clearly identified in this essay. He represents the disguised hero, who spends his developing years in obscurity, but whose destiny for greatness is foreshadowed (143). His half-elven ancestry fulfills the quality of a supernatural origination, in line with heroes like Arthur, Galahad, Sigmund, and Sigend (144). His sword Andúril possesses legendary characteristics, just as did Arthur's sword Excalibur (147). His romantic love for Arwen and his role as a skilled healer complete the hero/King motif (148-149). Dr. Flieger not only identifies these characteristics, but validates them by reminding us that motifs are what "move readers and put them in touch with what is timeless", and showing how Aragorn's role, in contrast with Frodo's, makes *The Lord of the Rings* more meaningful (141).

This source would be relevant to a paper focusing on Aragorn as a source of information on Aragorn's connection with other mythologies. The description of Frodo's role as fairy-tale hero is also helpful because it helps the reader set Aragorn and his role apart. Dr. Flieger presents Aragorn and Frodo's contrasting journeys, but perhaps a paper could use this example to study Aragorn's role alongside other characters'.

Robertson, Robin. "Seven Paths of the Hero in The Lord of the Rings: The Path of the King." *Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought* 51, no. 2 (2008): 316-339.

This article explains Aragorn's archetypal transformation from obscurity into King, and argues that his journey mirrors the common person's journey to self-realization and individuation. It is part of a series of articles in this publication on the different Paths taken by different characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. The article has unique organization. Robin Robertson has chosen to trace Aragorn's journey throughout the narrative by summarizing the events of the story, and intersperses his own criticism throughout the article, physically separated by indentations. In the beginning of his journey, he is the Ranger Strider, but already indicates an awareness of his own upcoming journey through his knowledge of the Ring, Mordor, and Sauron (321). His ability to elucidate meaning from the most ambiguous of symbols, such as his recognition of Gandalf's presence at Weathertop, shows that he is equally able to read signs in his own unconscious that will lead him to self-realization (322). As the journey progresses, we learn of his love for Arwen and recognize that he must fulfill his destiny before he can win her as his heart's desire, much as ordinary people must fulfill their true and complete purpose before finding real happiness (325). We also see his wisdom and humility in contrast to Boromir's arrogance, and see him confront even Sauron indirectly through the Palantir, representing the everyday confrontation of moral conflict and the subsequent recognition that some powers are "beyond our own" (332). As Aragorn completes his journey, he symbolizes the claiming of his destiny by flying the banner of Isildur from the

pirate ships of Umbar as he enters the Battle of Pelennor Fields (334). When the battle is over, he demonstrates his improved ability to heal, signaling that he has progressed far enough into self-discovery that he can heal wounds that he himself has experienced (336). Finally, Aragorn plants the new tree of Gondor, which is consistent with the “traditional symbol of the fully developed personality” (338). The roots are grounded in unconscious instincts, the living tree exists “in the everyday world”, and its branches reaching upwards and beyond (338). Aragorn has completed the challenge and realized his full potential.

This article provides an interesting analysis from an experienced Jungian scholar and author. I found it by searching the McKeldin library database using the keywords “Aragorn”, “hero”, and “king.” The notes following the article indicate Robertson’s status as a published author and frequent contributor to this particular journal. But unfortunately, this article has some glaring weaknesses. The elucidation of Aragorn’s Jungian journey is an interesting topic, and the connection with an everyday person’s individuation is even more unexpected and intriguing, considering Aragorn’s obvious role as a traditional epic hero, meant to be inaccessible to the everyman. However, neither of these topics are presented strongly enough. The summary aspect of the article follows the logical path of chronology, but the criticism aspect leaps from individuation analysis to analysis of particular qualities such as leadership (321, 328). Criticism also diverts from Aragorn’s path, the supposed focus of the article, to make Jungian points. For example, the author uses the appearance of the Black Riders at Weathertop to segue into a point claiming that Sauron’s indirect presence shows ultimate evil’s incompatibility with the subconscious (323). Another weakness is evident in tenuous connections to *The Lord of the Rings* employed to emphasize presupposed ideas about individuation. For example, the author attempts to argue that Aragorn has fully integrated his masculine and feminine attributes, and that Arwen’s love for him signals this, but the connection is unclear (326).

The connection between Aragorn’s journey and our own journey to self-discovery is also present in the article, but weakly supported. Robertson presents the relevance of Aragorn’s journey to our own as a guide for “what we need to do to become a king” (318). This seems at odds with the rest of the article’s focus on the fully developed personality; the reader wonders why it is relevant to become a king, and favors simply realizing their own, individual destiny and happiness. Robertson also emphasizes that we all have “majesty” within us, and that we can follow Aragorn’s example to realize it. But so many qualities that Aragorn possesses are beyond the ordinary person’s capacity, instead identifying with great medieval and mythic heroes. We feel much more in common with Frodo. I do not doubt that Aragorn’s journey mirrors the common journey into self-discovery in some ways, but I feel that Robertson could have taken a different approach to making that connection.

Despite the weaknesses, this article could definitely have relevance in a paper exploring Aragorn’s character. There are definite connections with Jungian psychology that could be included. There are also a few things that Robertson mentions that I feel could be further explored in a new paper. For example, Frodo’s recognition of Aragorn’s quality at their first meeting is not sufficiently addressed here, but could be significant in terms of one hero recognizing another (322). Additionally, the parallel between Boromir and Aragorn is recognized here and is important, and a paper could expand on this relationship. Why and how does Boromir lack the kingly qualities that Aragorn has? Finally, Robertson reminds us that “Tolkien was not even sure yet whether [Strider] was friend or foe. The unconscious produced this image for him, and in the unconscious Strider was already a king.” This is

probably true, but where is the support for this statement? And what does that say about Aragorn's journey, or about Tolkien's own personality and self-discovery?

Flieger, Verlyn. "Tolkien's Wild Men From Medieval to Modern." In *Green Suns and Faërie: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Verlyn Flieger, 115-126. Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2012.

In this essay, Dr. Flieger explores how Tolkien places a modern spin on the medieval archetype Wild Man of the Woods. She first describes the classic characteristics of a Wild Man, as someone who lives in the woods on the edge of civilization, often huge and hairy in stature and carrying a club. She shows how medieval literature has produced variations on this type, such as the psychological Wild Man who has descended into madness and thus runs on the edge of civilization, and the outlaw type, who has committed an actual crime and is now on the run (119-120). She presents three examples where Tolkien has invoked one of these types, but given it "modern overtones" (124). Strider, Aragorn's Ranger identity, is presented as a variation of the outlaw type. Dr. Flieger argues that Strider's presentation as dark, separate, and untrustworthy is deliberate, so as to make his transition to king more effective (122). Her other two examples are Túrin and Gollum as variants of the psychological type, and unexpectedly, Frodo, who displays elements of the Wild Man in his descent into madness. Her ultimate argument is that Tolkien's treatment of his Wild Men is modern because it allows readers to empathize, seeing "something of ourselves" within this medieval and previously inaccessible archetype (126).

I searched the table of contents in *Green Suns and Faërie* to find this essay, the title being the clue that there would be some mention of Strider. The essay is not fully focused on Strider/Aragorn, but it does contain an interesting analysis of him from an unlikely perspective. He is so obviously the epic hero that it is difficult to think of him as anything but; however, Flieger's argument for his initial Wild Man portrayal is sound. And ultimately, she argues that this portrayal serves to strengthen his true identity as King.

This essay, like "The Concept of the Hero" serves to reinforce Dr. Flieger's "modern medievalism" hypothesis, and succeeds especially in her discussion of Gollum (and subsequently Frodo) as Wild Man. She shows that Gollum is indeed mad and thus exiled from civilization, but his madness is presented in a modern way: as a "textbook example" of schizophrenia, whereas a medieval treatment of a similar madness would include an allegorical split into Soul and Body (125). Unfortunately, Strider/Aragorn's connections with the Wild Man are too tenuous to extend into the modern medievalist criticism that Dr. Flieger presents with her other examples.

Despite the brief treatment of Aragorn in this essay, it would still be a useful source in a paper exploring this character. The Wild Man perspective is an unconventional spin on a character that is otherwise fairly straightforward. And despite this divergent perspective, it still ultimately serves to reinforce the transition that Aragorn experiences, by making this transition even more pronounced.

Flieger, Verlyn. "Missing Person." In *Green Suns and Faërie: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Verlyn Flieger, 223-231. Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2012.

Judeo-Christian influence on Tolkien's mythology is the subject of this essay, as Dr. Flieger explores the implications of invoking, but not retelling, the Christian myth. As the essay's title suggests,

Dr. Flieger argues that the absence of a true Christ figure, who is both savior and redeemer, allows Tolkien's narrative to stand apart as "dynamic", giving readers a space to apply the story to their own individual experience (231). Dr. Flieger focuses on the many different savior figures present in Tolkien's work, including Aragorn. Aragorn's role as savior fits into the Christ type, and also into the role of sacral kingship, in that his crowning brings peace and fertility to the land (228). Frodo is also discussed, and we realize that he too echoes the role of Christ, but does not mirror it exactly (229). Once again, he and Aragorn are complements whose contrasting roles bring about the common healing of Middle-earth (230).

Unlike Flieger's other essays, this one in particular does not attempt to connect its thesis with her larger thesis of modern medievalism. Still, we are introduced to yet another example of how Tolkien uses recurring elements of literature in an unconventional way, turning his mythology into one of the most resonant stories of our time. The discussion of Aragorn as savior is consistent with her previous discussion of Aragorn as hero, even mentioning some of the same characteristics that were drawn upon in portraying him as hero: his supernatural (Half-elven) origins, and his capacity to heal (227).

I found this source by perusing the index of the *Green Suns and Faërie* essay compilation, as I have a special interest in the Judeo-Christian elements of Tolkien's work and am eager to understand more about where he stays true to this pattern and where he diverges from it into a suggestion of his own theology. Thus, reading about Aragorn as a savior was intriguing, and I was surprised by Dr. Flieger's second connection drawn between Aragorn and Frodo, as two components of a Christ figure that together seem to fulfill the role of Christ in its absence within Tolkien's mythology.

In a paper focusing on Aragorn's character, this essay could support yet another interpretation of his actions and characteristics into a new motif, separate and also linked to the epic hero. This essay would also provide support for the idea of Aragorn and Frodo as complements in all aspects of Tolkien's work.

Wainwright, Edmund. *Tolkien's Mythology for England*. Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2004

This book was written in order to elucidate the reasons why so many scholars have grappled very seriously with Tolkien's works, and have continued to do so for sixty years, ever since *The Lord of the Rings* was published. Edmund Wainwright has created an index of Tolkien's life and work in order to understand his sources and influences. This structure is meant to make clear to the reader how Tolkien's scholarship as a philologist and medievalist allowed him to create a timeless and engaging mythology where real-world values are explored. In six chapters, Wainwright explores Tolkien's biography, the use of myth historically, specific elements of his narrative that correspond to cultural and historical motifs, languages of Middle-earth and their relationships to ancient languages, the reaction to the narrative in England, and the reaction to it worldwide.

The book is a fairly comprehensive consideration of Tolkien's scholarship and how it has influenced his work. In particular, the third chapter that lists characters, places, and other elements that have roots in Northern European mythology is extensive, comprising over half of the book's pages. This chapter in particular is what makes the book useful as a type of encyclopedia for the reader interested in understanding where Tolkien drew influence for his many beloved narrative elements. The book also contains a helpful, if brief, consideration of mythologies in general and what their meaning and

significance is to the modern reader of Tolkien. Namely, Wainwright explains that mythology is explanatory in nature, in order to give order to observations about the surrounding world, and different from legend which is concerned with deeds of specific people and places (17). Wainwright argues that Tolkien paired his philology and medieval scholarship with his creative writing abilities to create a “unique and consistent effect” in his secondary world (19).

Some arguments in the book are made hastily and without sufficient support, making them interesting but not fully convincing. For example, when discussing Middle-earth mythology’s relevance to modern English people and their place within the narrative, Wainwright postulates that Middle-earth houses the three degrees of medieval society as outlined by King Alfred the Great, a medieval king of Wessex. Wizards play the role of priests or kings, acting as leaders to the lesser peoples of Middle-earth (98). The Rohirrim are the warriors or defenders of Middle-earth, and the hobbits represent the rural working class (98). This argument does not sit well with me because it does not include an accurate consideration of Elves and Men, two prevalent races in Tolkien’s world. Tolkien has created some very strong leaders in his world that are Men, and I do not think it is accurate to brush aside their role and declare the wizards as the leaders and counselors of the world.

I found this book in McKeldin Library after searching its database again for the keywords “Aragorn”, “hero”, and “king.” The book would be useful in a paper discussing Aragorn because it shows influences for Aragorn in some historical figures and tales. Specifically, King Alfred the Great of Wessex is cited as an influence on Tolkien for Aragorn’s character. Both kings grew up in the wilderness, born into royalty but with no hope of ever claiming their kingship due to extenuating circumstances (29). Despite odds, both kings defeat their foes and secure their borders, and enjoy a period of renaissance in their kingdoms (29). Wainwright also identifies some new hero motifs that Aragorn possesses, namely the star diadem that he wears, which was a symbol of royal heritage in many Northern European folktales, and his name Elessar, meaning Elf-stone, which echoes many historical kings who also had variations of the words “elf” and “stone” in their names (30). Finally, there is an interesting consideration of Aragorn’s ride through the Paths of the Dead: in mythology, characters often must confront their fears underground, and emerge successfully with some token that will aid them on the rest of their journey. Aragorn’s ride and return with his army follows this pattern, which may also correspond with a psychological analysis of problem resolution through dreams (24).

Auden, W.H. “The Quest Hero.” In *Understanding the Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*, edited by Rose A. Zimbardo and Neil D. Isaacs, 31-51. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.

Auden’s essay takes the reader through the elements of a classic “Quest Tale”, variants of which are prevalent throughout literary history. Auden then goes on to consider *The Lord of the Rings* as a Quest Tale with Frodo as its fairy tale hero. The main point of the essay is to show that Tolkien has written a traditional Quest Tale, but has infused it with a careful consideration of “social-historical realities” that is the reason for its resonance with readers (51). Auden shows that Tolkien has done this by creating a convincing and consistent imaginary world as the setting of his Quest, which obeys laws, notions of history, and moral experience just like the real world does (40). This convincing world makes the correspondence of the Quest to the reader’s subjective life experience all the more real.

This essay, published in 1961, appeared in the very first wave of Tolkien criticism, quickly after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* and at a time when scholarly consideration of the work was still few and far between. I came upon it because it was an assigned reading for our class, and because I was interested in focusing on Aragorn's fulfillment of the heroic model. It is well organized, beginning with Auden's "general observations" about the Quest Tale in literature, and how they parallel to the subjective experience of life. Auden then goes on to apply elements of the Quest Tale to *The Lord of the Rings* in the second section of the essay. His observations about Middle-earth as a convincing imaginary world are consistent with many later Tolkien scholars, earning him a place as one of the first to understand the breadth and depth of Tolkien's achievement in secondary creation.

Despite the strengths of the essay, Auden's obvious admiration for Tolkien's writing ability occasionally impairs his thoughtful criticism of the work. For example, his tendency to quote long stretches of Tolkien's narrative often leave the reader caught up in the story and forgetting exactly what point Auden was trying to make. Auden seems to believe that the narrative does a well enough job proving his points that he lets passages stand alone, keeping his commentary to himself. This leaves the reader speculating about his points, rather than understanding them.

This essay has a few interesting parts to play in a potential paper about Aragorn and his fulfillment of the heroic model. Because the essay focuses on Frodo as the hero of the Quest Tale, it provides a blank slate for insertion of Aragorn's role in this model, in contrast to his role in his own journey, the quest for his kingdom and for Arwen's love. Auden acknowledges Aragorn's role as one of Frodo's helpers and guides by stating that his vocation as a heroic figure is to lead the forces of Gondor against Sauron's attack (44). But I would like to explore Aragorn's role in the Quest more deeply. Another way this essay could be used in a paper would be to disprove one of Auden's points about the Quest Tale as a genre. Auden says that the "Quest tale is ill adapted to subtle portrayals of character; its personages are almost bound to be archetypes" (40). I do not think that Auden believes this convention to be true in *The Lord of the Rings*, but nevertheless I would like to delineate the ways in which Aragorn's character is definitely nuanced, far from just an archetype. This argument would easily be supported by Dr. Flieger's essay on "The Concept of the Hero."

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. "Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship." In *Understanding the Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*, edited by Rose A. Zimbardo and Neil D. Isaacs, 76-92. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.

This essay focuses on the role of love in Tolkien's narrative, particularly the love of fellowship, existing between family or friends as love of one man for another (77). Through exploration of different relationships in the story, Bradley shows that love is the dominant emotion in the story (76). She discusses love as hero-worship, showing how almost every character relinquishes leadership to Aragorn, and looks to him in times of crisis. Even Éowyn's love for Aragorn is a form of hero-worship, as Éowyn is yearning for battle and looks to Aragorn as her general. Bradley also discusses familial love, portraying the members of the Fellowship as a kind of nuclear family. Aragorn is the eldest brother, in closest council with Gandalf, the wise, protective, stern but loving father (78). Pippin is the spoilt youngest child, always getting into trouble but forgiven for his transgressions because of his youth (78). Merry is the middle child, quiet but helpful, and indeed is often called upon by Aragorn (80). Eventually Merry is the

one who recognizes Aragorn's "real stature" rather than regarding him simply as Strider, a friend (82). Finally, Bradley analyzes the relationship between Sam and Frodo, showing how the fellowship between the two fundamentally influenced both of their journeys.

Bradley's essay came to me once again through a class reading assignment, but was so deeply moving that I felt it begged inclusion in any paper discussing Tolkien's narrative. The emotional reaction I felt after reading this essay signaled to me that considering the role of love, both heroic and brotherly, is vital to analysis of Aragorn, or indeed any character in *The Lord of the Rings*. Bradley's portrayal of the Fellowship as a family seems absolutely natural when considering the jealousy Boromir feels towards Aragorn, Gandalf's counsel and protection of Pippin, and the slight resentment Merry feels towards Pippin when he is not punished for his transgressions. Her discussion of Sam and Frodo's love is truly insightful, showing how Sam becomes a hero only by love for Frodo, and endures the same trials as Frodo willfully, rather than being driven by corruption from the Ring (90).

This essay is also successful because of the number of characters Bradley manages to analyze carefully in such a small amount of space. Intelligent discussion of Aragorn, Gandalf, Boromir, Merry, Pippin, Gollum, Frodo, and especially Sam are all present here. Bradley's success as an author of fantasy novels is evident in her writing here: it reads like its own story, with its own beautiful yet poignant final image of Sam, forever changed by his passage through the Heroic Age and by his choice to accept Frodo's sacrifice and separate from him (92).

The idea of love manifest as hero worship definitely belongs in an analysis of Aragorn as the epic hero of the story. Bradley's point that even Frodo, who is arguably the story's central hero, looks to Aragorn for leadership is surely significant (77). This is also the third source that I have seen supporting Aragorn and Frodo's opposing role as heroes: the former as the epic hero, the latter as the fairy-tale hero (83). Bradley also echoes Dr. Flieger in saying that Frodo's Quest is opposite of Aragorn's Quest (85). Finally, Bradley makes an interesting point that Sam chooses to pass through the Heroic Age, instead returning to an ordinary life, whereas Aragorn is not even close to making such a choice, since he so clearly belongs in the realm of heroes and kings (91). In my paper, I would like to further explore the implications and conditions of this choice.

Croft, Janet Brennan. "Jackson's Aragorn and the American Superhero Monomyth." In *Picturing Tolkien: Essays on Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings Film Trilogy*, edited by Janice M. Bogstad and Philip E. Kaveny, 216-226. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011.

This essay compares the movie version of Aragorn, as envisioned by Peter Jackson and his screenwriters and brought to life by actor Viggo Mortensen, to the book version of Aragorn as originally conceptualized by Tolkien. Croft argues that movie Aragorn follows the "American superhero monomyth" pattern, which dominates modern film due to the prevalence and domination of American entertainment culture worldwide. The superhero monomyth tells of a peaceful community being threatened beyond their capability by some evil force. The superhero appears from elsewhere to carry out their salvation, and after securing the community, "recedes into obscurity" (217). He is not a part of the community and never will be: he operates outside of democracy and counsel and instead trusts his own instincts. While he is saving the community, he must renounce romantic and sexual love until the task is completed (219). Croft uses examples from American films like *Superman* and *Star Trek* to

illustrate this pattern: Clark Kent rejects Lois Lane for fear of losing his power, Captain Kirk insists repeatedly that he is “married to his ship” (220). Croft argues that Aragorn’s conformity with this pattern is an example of Jackson’s reduction of Tolkien’s characters to “low mimetic modes.” (223). In layman’s terms, this means that all characters are presented as flawed in order to identify more closely with the common, modern individual (223). Ultimately, she argues, this reduces the effectiveness of the story because the audience is no longer challenged to think beyond themselves to greater deeds and timelessness (224).

This essay effectively connects the superhero monomyth pattern with Jackson’s realization of the character Aragorn. Croft presents this pattern as originated by John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett in contrast with Joseph Campbell’s more classic notion of the heroic monomyth, and uses examples from American pop culture to support her point. She also echoes many other sources in this bibliography in affirming both Frodo and Aragorn’s roles as heroes. However, this essay was the first to make clearest to me the swap of roles between the two: traditionally, epic heroes suffer catastrophe, but in Tolkien, it is Frodo the fairy tale hero that is defeated while Aragorn wins, and keeps, his kingdom and his princess. Finally, the essay contains equal consideration of both movie and book in order to accurately compare the two, and cites reasons for why both artists (Jackson and Tolkien) made the choices that they did in characterizing Aragorn.

Croft’s essay does contain a few weaknesses that prevent it from reading as smoothly as some of the other sources in this bibliography. For example, her argument that Jackson’s films are a “hybrid” of the superhero monomyth is not entirely clear. She suggests the Shire as the “harmonious community,” but is not careful enough to distinguish that Frodo’s flee from the Shire is an element of the classic hero story hybridized with Aragorn’s role as the outsider hero who sweeps in to save the threatened idyllic community. Another idiosyncrasy is some of her descriptions of elements of the movie. For example, in her argument that movie Aragorn treats Éowyn harshly, she uses the adjective “blunt” to describe his rejection of her advances (220). I would argue that Mortensen’s acting does not deserve this characterization; I always thought this particular scene to be quite gentle. These are small flaws, but as they impeded my full understanding of the essay, I thought they were worth mentioning.

A paper exploring Aragorn’s role as the hero would do well to consider a wide range of interpretations, whether from different perspectives of literary criticism, or from transformations of medium, such as that from page to screen. With this in mind, I decided to search McKeldin Library for books that consider the onscreen portrayal of Aragorn, and in doing so found this essay compilation that included a full chapter dedicated to screen Aragorn’s fulfillment of the American superhero monomyth. I especially was interested in Croft’s claims concerning how the two versions of Aragorn treat women, especially Arwen his betrothed. She states that book Aragorn has not renounced love, contrary to the movie Aragorn who, consistent with the superhero monomyth, must reject all romantic or sexual advances until his task has been completed (219). In the movie, Aragorn treats both Arwen and Éowyn as temptresses rather than capable and nuanced figures (220). I would like to explore more examples of this contrast, as it is one that I never noticed before.