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Abstract

In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Bombadil initially appears to be merely an eccentric, episodic character. Yet, upon close reading his enchanting spirit embodies moral significance throughout the trilogy when members in the war against Sauron recall his spirit in moments of hope and despair. Though he only appears to the Hobbits within the Old Forest, Bombadil represents ideals present throughout the entire story. As Tolkien wrote, "[Bombadil] represents something that I feel important, though I would not be prepared to analyze the feeling precisely. I would not, however, have left him in, if he did not have some kind of function" (Letters 178). While Bombadil's "function" may appear unclear, his presence remains essential to *The Lord of the Rings*. Because Bombadil aids but also distances himself from Rivendell, literary critics struggle to understand how Bombadil informs *The Lord of the Rings* through his role in the war against Sauron.[1]

Though they interpret him as a morally good force, most scholars suggest Bombadil unsettles Rivendell's ideals. Literary critic Gary Herbert argues Bombadil, practicing Socrates' approach to Plato's "The Ring of Gyges," discredits Rivendell's pursuit of justice. Herbert alleges *The Lord of the Rings* mirrors "The Ring of Gyges," a story of a shepherd boy who discovers a ring of unlimited power, enabling him to overthrow an evil king. Because the ring's power corrupts the shepherd boy too, Socrates concludes the pursuit of justice does not represent an inherent good, "an impotence… old Tom Bombadil" shares by declining to join Rivendell's coalition against Mordor (156). Herbert contends the rings in both tales evince "the power of speech, especially moral rhetoric and its capacity for concealing injustice," which Socrates and Bombadil repudiate by refusing "the demands of an ideal or the ideology of an era" (157, 158). Bombadil and Socrates' strategic indifference separates them from the regimes of their day, which can only be "defectively just" by relying on power to secure justice (158). Thus, Bombadil, like Socrates, rejects uses of power to undermine the moral rhetoric of Rivendell. In contrast with Herbert, other scholars posit Bombadil as a different form of good than Rivendell, though both remain allies.

In "Beorn and Bombadil: A Tale of Two Heroes," literary scholar Paul W. Lewis portrays Beorn and Bombadil as complimentary enigmas, providing natural aspects to the story's aesthetic. While Beorn and Bombadil do not contribute to *The Lord of the Rings*' plot, Lewis argues Tolkien believed "enigmas are essential to a story," because real life presents enigmas as well (157). Thus, Middle-Earth must contain enigmas which provide an intuitive understanding of truth. Despite his inability to advance the war against Sauron for failing to "understand the need for his keeping of the Ring," Bombadil displays a principled ethical code which offers "insight into reality" through the morally significant names he ascribes to various creatures and objects (155, 156). With his perception, "Tom Bombadil [highlights] a significant theme in *LotR*, that is that there is both evil in the world independent of Sauron, and good independent of the Fellowship of the Ring" (157). Through his incomprehensibility, Bombadil deconstructs the divisions of good and evil to create a more realistic Middle-earth.

Mythological scholars Michael Treschow and Mark Duckworth portray Bombadil as a complete good, unable to intermingle with evil. Though "he is not disposed to help solve the present problem" by attacking Mordor, Bombadil demonstrates his goodness by aiding the Hobbits' journey through Withywindle to "help in the fight against darkness" as much as he can without leaving his homeland (187, 188). While he aligns with Rivendell, Bombadil cannot fight Sauron because he "has no desire for power, no will to dominate" (187). Though this stance establishes Bombadil as "the moral opposite of Sauron," ultimately, Bombadil's goodwill alone cannot defeat evil (187). As Bombadil removes himself from the war on Sauron, Treschow and Duckworth understand his primary virtue as a "creature who lives outside of civilization in full

[1] Like Treschow and Duckworth, this essay uses "Rivendell" to refer to "the leadership of the coalition of free peoples" (187).

communion with the natural order, who likewise keeps to his own with a spirit of mastery thereof but not domination" (189). While "Rivendell will finally conform completely to Bombadil's renunciation of power," they must disregard his moral code for the present war with Sauron (188). While Bombadil frees himself from the Ring's temptation, he cannot defeat Sauron but relies on Rivendell to protect him. Though he represents a perfect good, Bombadil remains impotent to oppose evil.

However, these critics fail to synthesize Bombadil's fidelity to Rivendell with his role as Rivendell's moral model after the fall of Mordor. While Lewis understands the importance of Bombadil's faithful aid to Rivendell, he cannot account for Rivendell's loyalty to Bombadil's ethic at the end of story. Conversely, Herbert, Treschow, and Duckworth emphasize Bombadil's distinct moral role but minimize the effect of Bombadil on the Hobbits as well as his support for Rivendell. These interpretations either belittle or aggrandize his refusal to fight beyond the Old Forest, placing Bombadil in ideological conflict with the Hobbit's despite their affinity for each other throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. Though Bombadil and the Hobbits initially embody different ideals, Bombadil exerts moral influence on the Hobbits as they pass through Withywindle, teaching them how to engage with the Ring and the war against Mordor. The romantic theology of Charles Williams, one of Tolkien's fellow Inklings, can explain how Bombadil can simultaneously embody a moral ideal and justify Rivendell's war against Sauron. Williams' shows how coinherence, the free giving and taking of oneself in relation with others, can reveal divine elements in all beings. Through modeling perfect coinherence for the Hobbits passing through Withywindle, Bombadil shows the Hobbits the temptation of control the Ring poses which threatens to prevent free relations from forming. By introducing the Hobbits to his perfected relationships, Bombadil suggests Rivendell's quest to save Middle Earth goes beyond merely defeating Mordor but necessitates the practice of free coinherence with all other beings.

Because of Tolkien's relationship with Charles Williams during the development of the trilogy, Williams' ideas, especially about romantic theology, provide insight into *The Lord of the Rings*. Williams frequently critiqued Tolkien's writings, including *The Lord of the Rings* and "On Fairy Stories" (Handbook 224). As Tolkien accepted and implemented his input, Williams' ideas entered into Tolkien's prose and this relationship granted Williams unique access to Tolkien's work. Tolkien notes Williams' acute discernment about *The Lord of the Rings*, writing, "[Charles] Williams, who is reading [*The Lord of the Rings*], says the great thing is that its centre is not in strife and war and heroism (though they are understood and depicted) but in freedom, peace, ordinary life and good liking" (105). By applying Williams' thought, readers can similarly access his insights into *The Lord of the Rings*' meaning. While he eventually shunned Williams' theology, Tolkien valued Williams' literary insight while he composed *The Lord of the Rings*. A decade after his friends' death, in 1955, Tolkien described his relationship with Williams, writing, "I do not think we influenced one another at all!" (Letters 159).[2] Yet, Tolkien's later distaste for Williams should be minimized in contrast with their relationship during the writing of The Lord of the Rings, where Tolkien allowed Williams

to shape the story. For example, in 1944, Tolkien emphasized his agreement with Williams in the midst of the writing process, describing how about he, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams shared "a feast of reason and flow of soul, partly because we all agree so" (102). Through their conversation, Tolkien exchanged his thoughts with Williams, where their ideas connected and shaped each other. Because Williams participated within their shared literary club, "The Inklings," Tolkien regularly interacted with his romantic thought. Recognizing the permeation of romantic thought in other aspects of Tolkien's work, literary historian Colin Duriez finds romantic thought evidenced through Aragorn and Arwen in *The Lord of the Rings* as well as through Beren and Luthien in *The Silmarillion* (Oxford 143). By using Williams' thought to understand Bombadil's place in *The Lord of the Rings*, romantic theology can reveal how Bombadil accentuates the work's central concerns about the nature of conflict and peace.

For Williams, coinherence represents the "[indwelling of] one another reciprocally…abiding of every self not in itself but in another" (Newman 6). This other-centeredness, when practiced physically or spiritually, cultivates a greater consciousness between individuals. As individuals coinhere, they become increasingly cognizant of various aspects of their own and others' lives, learning to think of themselves in relation to others. Within "The Order of the Co-Inherence," Williams illustrates the ideals of coinherence through intercourse, conception, and childbirth, writing,

> "A man can have no child unless his seed is received and carried by a woman; a woman can have no child unless she receives and carries the seed of a man—literally bearing the burden. It is not only a mutual act; it is a mutual act of substitution. The child itself for nine months literally coinheres in its mother; there is no human creature that has not sprung from such period of such interior growth" (146).

Using the act of sex to portray spiritual realities, Williams exemplifies the literal and metaphorical aspects of intercourse to demonstrate how coinherence sustains life through procreation and the human interconnectedness it necessitates. This principle of mutual substitution reflects how life biologically continues alongside the search for spiritual fulfillment, as humanity can only continue through coinhering. As the father and mother participate in the "mutual act of substitution," coinherence orients people towards an other-centered consciousness where they can sustain life through relating to others.

As childbirth reflects the giving and taking of life, the immaculate conception of Jesus epitomizes coinherence by showing complete embodiment of the divine in human form. In *Outlines of Romantic Theology*, Williams describes Mary's motherhood of Jesus as the "supreme experience…that other activities are judged and ordered in relation to it" (17). Through her physical and spiritual coinherence with Jesus, Mary becomes the ideal spiritual human, because Jesus, while coinhering through her womb,

[2] Later, in 1964, Tolkien further wrote of his growing distaste for Williams, writing, "I am a man of limited sympathies (but well aware of it), and [Charles] Williams lies almost completely outside them" (Letters 349).

embodied both human and divine natures. This coinherence epitomizes Romantic Theology's central principle—"identification of love with Jesus Christ, and of marriage with His life"—showing how divine elements can be present and substituted amongst human beings (14). By identifying with Jesus, people attune themselves to the divine aspects of creation, making them more "conscious of that grace of God" evidenced through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (17). Cognizant of God's presence and substitutionary grace, practitioners of coinherence recognize God's grace throughout the world and see how they can identify with Christ, coinhering with the divine. Thus, coinherence reveals greater spiritual realities within the physical world.

With greater spiritual awareness, people can see beyond their own anthropomorphic perspectives and begin recognizing elements of the divine in others. Describing how coinherence changes lovers' perspectives through romantic experiences, Williams writes, "Lovers are manifest to each other's eyes in their original perfection" (12). This consciousness empowers lovers to see each other with the full potential for good relationships like God created them, apart from merely their relationships in their current state. Williams describes the experience of seeing a female lover through this perspective, writing, "She appears to him, as it were, archetypal, the alpha and omega of creation; without father or mother, without human ties of any sort, for she is before humanity, the first-created of God" (16). Through this vision, lovers witness each other as God does, within the original glory of creation in direct and good relation to God. Through envisioning these relationships, every person can return to their consummate form through a direct communion with God and creation. Through sexual love, creatures can rediscover the original context of creation as well.

Beyond sexual relationships, coinherence creates romantic relationships with all creation, showing the potential for all relationships to coinhere. Though epitomized through "sexual love…freely given, freely accepted," all romantic experiences represent coinherence to a degree, among these "chiefly nature and friendship" (7). By relating freely to creation, more life experiences become romantic through coinherence, as one extends the desire for a lover to other aspects of creation. This "love…demands the attention of the intellect and the spirit for its understanding and its service" (7). Through holistically engaging the person, coinherence unifies separate people, leading to perfection and resembling the original unity of Eden. Through the practice of these relationships, romantic theology represents how "[an] ordinary relationship between two people can become one that is extraordinary, one that grants…visions of perfection" (Hadfield viii). Lovers, through developing their sensitivity for redemption, begin to understand their ideal experiences as perfection and cultivate their desire for redemption as they begin to imagine life in communion with God. Yet, as desire for perfection grows, lovers realize inferior experiences as well.

Through their comprehension of perfection, lovers acutely recognize the imperfect. Explaining how lovers comprehend marred relationships through their desire for salvation, Williams writes, "Love can only see the next world by virtue of that eyesight which sees and is not afraid to see the flaws in this" (12). By desiring

salvific relationships, lovers simultaneously recognize relationships incompatible with salvation. Coinherence purposes relationships for the sake of love itself, rather than the mere construction of relationships, which erroneously focuses "on the symbol and never on the fullness of symbol and symbolized" (49). Through differentiating between relationships' symbol and meaning, people apprehend the function and purpose of relationships to ultimately become Christlike. As love represents the purpose of reality, one finds meaning through coinhering practices.

In contrast to coinherence, temptation manipulates others as a means to construct the symbol of love through control. Williams analyzes this transgression, which recalls the temptation of Christ, writing, "All…temptations are one: to hasten in some way for his own benefit the process which is Himself" (20-21). God created people in Christ's image, to become like Christ, yet, sin tempts people to save themselves through implementing control, rather than Christ's practice of loving freely. By attempting to circumvent the redemptive process, sin degenerates consciousness through a "slowly attained passivity [to] a state throbbing with deliberate choice, vibrant with the infinite moments of choice by which it is slowly induced" (21). Gradually desensitizing consciousness, sin distorts the separation between good and evil. Without this delineation, selfish relationships appear as legitimate and justified. By dominating others, control impedes coinherence, precluding any improvement of relationships.

Through developing relationships with the world, creatures choose to either dominate through control or coinhere through love that is freely given and freely received. *The Lord of the Rings* represents this conflict as Rivendell attempts to destroy the Ring, a tool of power capable of controlling all Middle-Earth. Within *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Bombadil supports Rivendell's war against Sauron through his aid to the Hobbits, guiding them through the Old Forest. After Mordor falls, Rivendell aligns with Bombadil's ethic by practicing his democratic and natural lifestyle which prioritizes the freedom of each creature. As Bombadil represents the final goal of the war on Sauron, he demonstrates the purpose Rivendell's campaign against Mordor. Demonstrating Charles Williams' romantic ideal within J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Bombadil models salvation for the Hobbits through his mastery of coinherence.

Initially during their journey through Withywindle, the Hobbits experience the effects of Tom's perfected romantic relationships. Upon entering the Old Forest, the Hobbits encounter the trees' strengthened consciousness. Merry recognizes the powerful relationships between the trees, saying, "The Forest *is* queer. Everything in it is very much more alive, more aware of what is going on, so to speak than things are in the Shire" (Fellowship 108). The Hobbits realize both a form of consciousness different than their own as well as the acute perception generated by the interrelated life forms. This consciousness escalates as the Hobbits near Withywindle, Tom Bombadil's home, when Merry says, "The Withywindle Valley is said to be the queerest part of the whole wood—the centre from which all the queerness comes, as it were" (111). The Hobbits suggest the strongest consciousness emanates from Bombadil's abode, indicating he is the source of the intense relationships. But, unable to understand the

relations between the beings, the Hobbits experience dissonance within the Old Forest, interpreting the interrelatedness of the trees as a threat. As they experience a different form of consciousness, the Hobbits conflict with the unity of the forest.

In attacking the Hobbit's, the trees' confront the danger Frodo, Sam, Pippin, and Merry pose to the Forest's coinhering relationships. Describing the Shire's history with the Old Forest, Merry explains how, after the Shire constructed the Hedge to divide themselves from the forest, the trees advanced and "leaned over" (108). In response to the trees growth, the Hobbits escalated their force against them: "the hobbits came and cut down hundreds of trees, and made a great bonfire in the Forest, and burned all the group in a long strip east of the Hedge," after which the trees became "very unfriendly" towards Hobbits (108). Because the Hobbits attempted to dominate the trees, the Hobbits and trees eliminated relation or attempt at communion between the two species. This tension causes the trees to attack Frodo, Sam, Pippin, and Merry, because the trees, while coinhering amongst themselves, do not sympathize with the Hobbits. Because the trees and Hobbits only coinhere amongst themselves, their coinherence remains unfulfilled, posing the two groups against each other. Only partially coinhering, the Hobbits and Trees still resort to attempts at controlling each other, limiting the relational potential.

However, by intervening between the trees and Hobbits and pacifying both, Tom raises their consciousness of their relationships, teaching them to better practice coinherence. Even before aiding the Hobbits, he orders Frodo and Sam to "Don't crush my lilies!" (117). Bombadil calls on the Hobbits to improve their relationship with nature before aiding Merry and Pippin. Then, to save the Hobbits, Tom simply calls to Old Man Willow, "What be you a-thinking of? You should not be waking. Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to sleep! Bombadil is talking!" (118). By ordering Old Man Willow to "Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water" and the Hobbits to respect the flowers, Bombadil suggests they should commune with nature to find peace, suggesting they should focus on improving their own relationships with the world rather than attempting to control others. In defending the weaker from the stronger creature in both these situations, Bombadil amends relationships through suggesting how they can be improved, rather than through coercing others. Tom displays his alliance to the Fellowship as well as his dedication to and understanding of goodness, extending his coinherence from the lilies to the free peoples to the ancient forests. Through stewarding relationships throughout his forest, Bombadil coinheres with all living beings.

Through his marriage to Goldberry, Bombadil models the practice of romantic relationships for the rest of Middle-earth. After rescuing the Hobbits, Tom answers their questions about him and the forest by responding, "You shall come home with me! The table is all laden with yellow cream, honeycomb, and white bread and butter. Goldberry is waiting. Time enough for questions around the supper table" (118). Rather than instructing the Hobbits, Tom introduces them to his marriage to Goldberry to help them understand himself. By prioritizing the experience above instruction, Tom reflects William's "theology of marriage as a sacrament" rather than the enforcement of laws, as the Hobbits must see the outward practice of his spirituality to understand his

ethic (Outlines 10). Tom's emphasizes his relationship with Goldberry as the ideal form of coinherence, open to all creatures to witness and to share. Approaching his home, Tom sings,

> *"Hey! Come derry dol! Hop along, my hearties!*
> *Hobbits! Ponies all! We are fond of parties.*
> *Now let the fun begin! Let us sing together!"* (Fellowship 119).

To Tom's invitation, Goldberry replies,

> *"Now let the song begin! Let us sing together*
> *Of sun, stars, moon and mist, rain and cloudy weather,*
> *Light on the budding leaf, dew on the feather,*
> *Wind on the open hill, bells on the heather,*
> *Reeds by the shady pool, lilies on the water:*
> *Old Tom Bombadil and the River-daughter!"* (120).

With their call, Tom and Goldberry invite all beings to freely share in their sacrament. The communion through parties and song shows the extent of their coinherence, as he opens his home so all of Middle-Earth can learn from their relationship. In singing of all creation, Bombadil and Goldberry praise the natural order as something inherently good and unify themselves with that order. Through their marriage, Bombadil and Goldberry embody fulfilled relations, recognizing their potential to commune with all creation.

In perfect coinherence, Bombadil and Goldberry appear archetypal to the Hobbits, introducing them to the potential for coinherence with all creation. As the Hobbits hear her call, Goldberry sounds "as young and as ancient as Spring," demonstrating her closeness with nature (119). Later, when the Hobbits come to his home, Goldberry refers to herself as the "River-daughter" and appears to the Hobbits "to be enthroned" amongst nature, further reinforcing her preeminence in the natural order (120, 121). These descriptions show Goldberry to be, as Williams writes, "without human ties of any sort, for she is before humanity" (Outlines 16). Similarly, Bombadil appears preternatural when Elrond describes him as "oldest and fatherless" to the council at Rivendell, showing Bombadil to be foremost amongst all of Middle-Earth (297). Bombadil and Goldberry, by appearing as firstborn creatures, embody the original relations in creation like Adam and Eve within Eden, introducing the Hobbits to completely united relationships.

Through their relationship, Tom and Goldberry also show the Hobbits their own incompleteness in contrast to the forest's coinherence. Welcoming the Hobbits into her home, Goldberry says, "Fear nothing! For tonight you are under the roof of Tom Bombadil" (121). Safe from all threats, Bombadil and Goldberry immerse the Hobbits within coinhering relationships, which alleviate their worries. Frodo experiences this fulfillment as he enters their home, stating, "Now the joy that was hidden in the songs we heard is made plain to me" (121). To the Hobbits, Bombadil's coinherence evinces their own incomplete relations because Frodo experiences joy, something previously obscured from him. As he becomes sensitive to joy, Frodo perceives the flaws within his own relations because his consciousness can comprehend the joy he seeks, but Frodo also begins to understand Tom's coinherence. Witnessing Tom's fulfilled practice of coinherence, Frodo apprehends the meaning of love, beyond the symbolic relations.

After Frodo asks "Who is Tom Bombadil?" Goldberry explains Tom's relationship with the forest:

> "The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves. Tom Bombadil is the Master. No one has ever caught old Tom walking in the forest, wading in the water, leaping on the hill-tops under light and shadow. He has no fear. Tom Bombadil is master" (122).

As each being belongs to itself, Goldberry shows that free relationships enable the forest to coinhere. Since each being freely acts, they can form mutual relationships, reflecting William's ideal love, "freely given, freely accepted" (Outlines 9). Belonging to itself, each being can express its desire to give itself to the others. Through seeing Tom's fulfilled relationship with the forest, Frodo learns Bombadil's relationships do not come through control but only through coinherence.

As the Hobbits commune with them, Bombadil and Goldberry provide them an experience similar to Mary's identification with Jesus Christ. As they commune with Bombadil and Goldberry, the Hobbits "became suddenly aware that they were singing merrily, as if it was easier and more natural than talking" (Fellowship 123). The Hobbit's singing reflects Mary's song, when she learned of her role as Christ's mother in Luke 1:46-55, implying the Hobbits' experience reflects Mary's "supreme experience" when she conceived Jesus (Outlines 17). Similarly, Bombadil and Goldberry symbolize Christ when Goldberry tells the Hobbits, "Come now, my merry friends, and Tom will refresh you! You shall clean grimy hands, and wash your weary faces; cast off your muddy cloaks and comb out your tangles!" and, later, tending to their "tired feet," reflecting Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet in John 13 (Fellowship 123). Reflecting Christ, Bombadil makes the Hobbits "conscious of that grace of God" as he gives his service to him (Outlines 17). Demonstrating this grace to the Hobbits, Tom elucidates the Hobbit's role in the fight against Mordor in light of their ultimate purpose for Middle Earth. In serving the Hobbits, Tom acts as Christ did after washing his disciples' feet. Jesus told his disciples, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him," showing the disciples his divinity directly through his giving himself to them (*New International Version*, 13.15-16). By showing himself to be God and yet a servant, Jesus necessitates his disciples follow his example. Similarly, Bombadil reveals his status as a means to call the Hobbits to their duty, saying,

> "Eldest, that's what I am. Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless - before the Dark Lord came from Outside" (Fellowship 129).

While Tom demonstrates his power over evil, he simultaneously portrays the Hobbits' role within the struggle. Tom reveals the options the Hobbits may follow: whether they wish to follow Bombadil's coinhering relations or the Dark Lord's domination, which inspires fear to destroy freedom. By revealing the moral challenge, Tom elucidates Rivendell's purpose in the war against Sauron within the greater spiritual conflict.

As they understand their spiritual role, the Hobbits also understand the meaning of the Ring. Delineating between master and owner, Tom shows mastery to be the fully realized process of coinhering, while the Ring only simulates coinherence through control. When Frodo asks Goldberry, "Then all this strange land belongs to him?" she replies, "No indeed! That would indeed be a burden…The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves. Tom Bombadil is the Master" (122). As "all things…belong each to themselves," the creatures freely surrender themselves to Bombadil's mastery. The Ring's control cannot offer anything more to Tom, who achieved total coinherence through becoming the master. With perfect relationships, Tom cannot be tempted by the Ring; instead, Tom "put [the Ring] to his eye and laughed," showing the Ring's impotence to tempt him whatsoever (130). Immune to the Ring, Bombadil shows the Hobbits the choices between the Ring's relationships and true coinherence. By showing the Hobbits his coinhering, Bombadil reveals relationships perfected beyond the temptation the Ring poses. As well as revealing how Frodo can be redeemed, Bombadil uncovers the evil of the Ring for Frodo to understand. Bothered by Bombadil's indifference to the Ring, Frodo puts the Ring on (131). Yet, Bombadil can still see Frodo, instructing him,

> "Take off your golden ring! Your hand's more fair without it. Come back! Leave your game and sit down beside me! We must talk a while more, and think about the morning. Tom must teach the right road, and keep your feet from wandering" (131).

With his stronger consciousness, Bombadil recognizes evil and the Ring cannot deceive him, allowing him to see Frodo with "a most seeing look in his shining eyes," undeceived by the illusion of power (131). He rebukes Frodo for wandering while revealing "the right road" to Frodo as well. Through Bombadil, the Hobbits can understand their own sins which impede coinhering relationships. From this revelation, the Hobbits understand their choice between meaningful coinherence and the manipulation proffered by the Ring.

Because of their encounter with Bombadil, the Hobbits' romantic experiences empower their struggle against evil. After leaving the forest, Frodo loses contact with his fellow Hobbits amidst the fog and sees a Barrow-wight. The encounter tempts Frodo to "put on the Ring" and flee, though abandoning Merry, and Sam, and Pippin, but escaping "free and alive himself" (138). Realizing the Ring would save himself at the expense of others, Frodo chooses to not use the Ring, risking himself to save his friends. Surrendering himself for them, Frodo begins to sing Bombadil's song to recover his strength. When Frodo begins to sing, "*Ho! Tom Bombadil!*" Bombadil appears and "together they carried out Merry, Pippin, and Sam" (138, 139). Though Frodo could have escaped using the Ring's power, he invokes the spirit of Bombadil and willingly

risks sacrificing himself to save his fellow Hobbits. Choosing Bombadil's coinhering relationships over mere survival, the Hobbits understand the purpose of the war against Sauron— to amend flawed relationships, rather than to merely survive. By choosing coinherence rather than control, Rivendell must focus not on gaining power but freedom.

After defeating Sauron, the Fellowship finds salvation in coinherence rather than control. Despite defeating Mordor, the Fellowship understands the process of love remains incomplete. To completely master coinherence, they must follow Bombadil's example. Announcing his intentions after the fall of Mordor, Gandalf states,

> "I am going to have a long talk with Bombadil: such a talk as I have not had in all my time. He is a moss-gatherer, and I have been a stone doomed to rolling. But my rolling days are ending, and now we shall have much to say to one another" (Return 974).

Because he, along with the rest of Rivendell, overcame the temptation of the Ring, Gandalf can begin to live as Bombadil does, freely practicing romantic relationships with the entire world. Similarly, Frodo finds fulfillment in Bombadil's ethic as well. When departing for the Grey Havens, Frodo imagines, "It seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise" (1007). After destroying the Ring, Frodo realizes fulfillment comes through loving relationships and, as he heads to the Grey Havens, understands how he can begin to fully coinhere with those around him, following Bombadil's example. As they pursue Bombadil's ethic, Rivendell understands the war against Sauron as a means to complete coinherence, rather than establish their dominion over Middle Earth. By following Bombadil's relational model, Rivendell pursues coinhering relations to restore Middle Earth after the war with Mordor rather than merely relying on their own control.

As Tom introduces the Hobbits to salvation within Withywindle, he endows them with an understanding of good and evil, ultimately allowing them to comprehend how they can restore their relationships in Middle Earth. Through his discipline of coinherence, Bombadil evinces the purpose of Rivendell's war against Sauron, not to control Middle-Earth, but to establish free relationships. By fulfilling Charles Williams' romantic ideal within J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Bombadil demonstrates perfect coinherence, revealing perfected relationships to the Hobbits. Eschewing the temptation to control others, Bombadil shows how unconditional love enacts the ideal of coinherence and creates fulfilling relationships.

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