

A Thesis Presented to

The Faculty of Alfred University

Frodo's Possible Selves: A Psychoanalytical Study of

*The Lord of the Rings*

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for

The Alfred University Honors Program

May 2015

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“There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same, for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?” (*Return* 290). For Frodo Baggins, in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the quest he sets out on is not simply about destroying the One Ring and ridding Middle Earth of Sauron, but also discovering who he truly is and what he will become in the end. Will he be a hero, a villain, or neither? To better understand Frodo's journey of self-discovery, we can read the novel through the lens of Markus' and Nurius' theory on possible selves where Frodo's adventurous Uncle Bilbo would represent the “ideal self” he wishes to achieve, but knows he never will making him idealize Bilbo as something he is not: a great adventurer who has no imperfections. On the opposite end of the spectrum is Gollum who would represent the “feared self” that Frodo will try to resist as much as he possibly can. What the ring bearer is left with in the end, however, is neither an ideal nor a feared self, but an altered “actual self”.

### **Self-Concept**

“Self-concept research has revealed the great diversity and complexity of self-knowledge and its importance in regulating behavior” (Markus, Nurius 1985).

Self-concept is a general term commonly used to refer to how people perceive themselves; in other words, do people perceive who they are negatively or positively? Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo Baggins is constantly trying to figure out who he is: is he more like Gollum and the creature's split self Sméagol, or is he more like his eccentric Uncle Bilbo who he is initially striving to emulate?

Tolkien repeatedly makes it clear that Frodo wants to follow his uncle's path and constantly models himself in his image: "But half unknown to himself the regret that he had not gone with Bilbo was steadily growing. He found himself wondering at times, especially in the autumn, about the wild lands, and strange visions of mountains that he had never seen came into his dreams" (*Fellowship* 46). Gollum, on the other hand, is an even greater possibility of what Frodo might eventually become if he remains under the influence of the ring. Although he fears becoming like Gollum, he still pities him and allows him to remain by his side and lead him to the Black Gate. Even when others, like his faithful Sam and Faramir, advise him to cast Gollum aside because Gollum is wicked and a villain who will eventually kill Frodo and take the ring, Frodo will not: "No, not altogether wicked" (*Two Towers* 338). Though many readers may perceive Frodo's refusal to be rid of Gollum altogether as idealistic stubbornness that could cost him his life in the end, this refusal illustrates how one has to have both an ideal and a feared self in order to have a healthy, balanced self-concept.

Social psychologist Roy Baumeister describes this idea of a self-concept as "the individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is" (McLeod 2008). For Frodo, he does not know who he is without comparing himself to others, and though he is not the only one trying to figure out who he is; the fact that Tolkien makes him the hero of the story is intriguing. Usually what one expects when reading an epic tale today is the "chosen one" character that is chosen by some higher power to fight evil on the behalf of good. A contemporary example of this particular character would be J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter who is destined to defeat Lord Voldemort and rid the wizarding world of his evil. Frodo, however, does not fit the chosen one trope. He is not chosen by a higher force; instead, he chooses to take the ring to Mount Doom when he could have let someone else carry the burden

and gone back to his comfortable hobbit hole. This, arguably, is Frodo's actual self: a selfless hobbit who is willing to risk everything in order to protect those he cares about and the peaceful home he left behind.

In order to fully understand the development of a self-concept, Lewis lays out two aspects: the Existential Self and the Categorical Self (McLeod 2008). The Existential Self is the most basic part of a self-concept in which from a young age people realize they are a separate entity from everyone else around them; whereas the Categorical Self is the moment when people not only realize they are a separate entity but an object in this world (McLeod 2008). In the beginning of *Fellowship*, Frodo perceives himself in terms of who he is in comparison to the rest of the Shire. While Bilbo feels an overwhelming desire to leave his home and go traveling, he realizes that his nephew is still in love with his pastoral home: "He would come with me, of course, if I asked him. In fact he offered to once, just before the party. But he does not really want to, yet. I want to see the wild country again before I die, and the Mountains; but he is still in love with the Shire, with woods and fields and little rivers" (*Fellowship* 35). This does not mean that young Frodo views the Shire as the entire world; clearly he knows about larger world outside of its borders which he learns from what Bilbo and Gandalf tell him. However, it is not until Frodo physically leaves his home that he begins to identify himself with the world as a whole.

To take this concept even further, social psychologists consider terms such as self-image and self-esteem in order to understand how people perceive themselves. Similar to self-concept, self-image is a term used to describe how people describe who they are which does not always reflect reality; some people will perceive themselves as fat when they are in fact malnourished and vice versa (McLeod 2008). For Frodo, his self-image is one of weakness and reliance, for if

it were not for the people around him, he would have fallen. He almost does fall at the end of *Return of the King* when he stands literally at a precipice where he has two choices: to throw the Ring into the fire, destroying it once and for all, or to take the Ring for himself and leave what happens to everyone else up to Sauron. In other words, he could resist the will of the Ring and become the ideal self he's always wanted to be or surrender to the corruption of the Ring and become his feared self. In the end, Frodo does succumb to the Ring but is saved by Sam and, oddly enough, his feared self Gollum. Needless to say, if he had been alone, Frodo would have not only succumbed to the Ring, but to his feared self as well when he should have been fighting the Ring's power and discovering who he truly is.

As with self-concept, one's self-image is influenced by many factors, usually personal traits and outside influences for younger people and social roles for older people (McLeod 2008). For Frodo, he is constantly comparing and contrasting himself to those around him which cause him to perceive himself more negatively as a result. Frodo does not make a single decision without thinking about what others would do in his situation and what his role as the ring bearer truly means. Even when agreeing to take the Ring to Mount Doom, Frodo feels that some other force is choosing for him: "At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice" (*Fellowship* 303). Thus it could be argued that Frodo did not choose on his own to go on an all-important quest from which he might not return from, but that everything had been predetermined from the beginning.

Self-concept, however, is not merely evaluating people's present selves, but their past and future selves as well: "A well-functioning self-concept helps make sense of one's present, preserves positive self-feelings, makes predictions about the future, and guides motivation" (Lee 2009). Before he sets out from his home, Frodo does not know who he is without defining

himself in comparison to his uncle. Even when he is journeying to Mount Doom, he is still defining himself by those around him. It is not until the Ring is destroyed that Frodo begins to make decisions for himself, decisions such as how to handle Saruman after they save the Shire from his influence: ““I will not have him slain. It is useless to meet revenge with revenge: it will heal nothing”” (*Return* 325). In the end, it is Frodo’s decision to leave the Shire and journey to the Grey Havens with Bilbo, Gandalf, and the elves because he feels that he is no longer a part of the Shire due to his altered actual self.

### **Possible Selves**

“An individual’s repertoire of possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats” (Markus, Nurius 1985).

Possible selves are a vital aspect of self-concept and help people perceive their selves in multiple ways. This term was first coined by Markus and Nurius in their theory in which they define possible selves as “the contents of the future-oriented component of self-concept...the selves one believes one might become in the near and the more distal future and are therefore important in goal setting and motivation” (Lee 2009). For Frodo, the future selves that he has the potential to become are either his Uncle Bilbo or Gollum. Instead of becoming one or the other, however, in the end Frodo retains pieces of all of his possible selves which culminate into an actual self that has been altered during his quest to destroy the Ring. Thus a crucial thing to keep in mind while looking at Frodo’s journey is that possible selves are not the selves we are now, but a fusion of our past and future selves (Markus, Nurius 1985).

In other words, “possible selves are valenced; that is, each individual has both positive images of the selves he or she desires and expects to become and negative images of the selves he or she wishes to avoid becoming” (Lee 2009). As a result, possible selves are able to reveal

the “inventive and constructive nature of the self” while simultaneously reflecting the extent to which the self is defined and limited by the society and time the people live in (Markus, Nurius 1985). Interestingly enough, though people are free to choose and develop their possible selves, “By focusing on the future, possible selves allow for self-improvement, malleability, and personal growth” (Markus, Nurius 1985); people seem to prefer to be defined by the people, time, and society they are living in instead of acting on this rare opportunity where they can define who they are for themselves.

This appears particularly true for Frodo who allows others such as Gandalf or Sam to define who he is instead of figuring it out for himself. A specific example of this that Tolkien uses repeatedly throughout his tale, albeit with slightly different variations, is when Lord Elrond introduces Frodo to the council: ““here, my friends, is the hobbit, Frodo son of Drogo. Few have ever come hither through greater peril or an errand more urgent”” (*Fellowship* 269). Although he is supposed to be the hero of the story, Frodo rarely speaks for himself leaving the reader to often have to rely on his actions and thoughts to decide on who he is. One thing to keep in mind, though, is that Frodo’s silence is usually true when Frodo is around other characters besides Sam.

It is only when Frodo is alone with Sam after they break off from the group that the reader gets to hear Frodo speak his mind. While Frodo was still a part of the Fellowship, he would look to Gandalf or Aragorn to lead them. With Sam, however, Frodo is the one who must now make the hard decisions for he is “Master”; also the fact that they are both hobbits who have travelled many miles from home and are friends around the same age make Frodo more comfortable than when he had been around Gandalf or Aragorn. Thus Samwise acts more like a

psychiatrist whom Frodo can speak more openly to and helps bridge the gap between his potential selves instead of becoming another possible self for Frodo.

### **Frodo's Actual Self in the Beginning of *Fellowship***

“Theorists believe that possible selves are important because they help people to evaluate their current selves and because they serve to motivate people to behave in ways that will help them to attain or avoid their hoped-for or feared possible selves” (Dunkel 2006).

The actual, or current self, is the self we are at this very moment who has the potential to become either the ideal or the feared self. At this point in trying to realize who we are and what defines us, we are clueless and lost like a child who looks to his mother on how to behave and react; otherwise he does not know what to say or to do on his own. It is ultimately up to the person which self he will become as he encounters different situations as well as people. This is the stage where the reader finds Frodo Baggins stuck on the road to discovering who he truly is when Tolkien first introduces him in *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Before the Fellowship heads out from Rivendell on their quest, Frodo initially appears to the reader as a simple hobbit who shared a birthday with his eccentric uncle who had taken him in as, not only a companion, but successor. After inheriting Bag End from his uncle, Frodo seems to change as he “at once began to carry on Bilbo’s reputation for oddity” (*Fellowship* 45), and soon begins to feel restless around his fiftieth birthday, the same age Bilbo had set off in *The Hobbit* (*Fellowship* 46). He finds himself wanting to see the world and is no longer satisfied with the Shire’s monotonous, pastoral lifestyle where nothing really changes, but that does not mean that Frodo desires to leave the Shire permanently.

In fact, Frodo did not feel negatively about his home or leaving it as long as it is under peaceful circumstances like it was for Bilbo, but now he finds himself forced to leave under the



threat of attack. With the Ring in his possession, Frodo is the only one who can lead the Ringwraiths away from the Shire. By taking up this task somewhat willingly, the hobbit will be bringing himself and anyone who tries to help him closer to danger: “I have sometimes thought of going away, but I imagined that as a kind of holiday, a series of adventures like Bilbo’s or better, ending in peace. But this would mean exile, a flight from danger into danger, drawing it after me...I feel very small, and very uprooted, and well-desperate” (*Fellowship* 69). This reaction is understandable of anyone found in a situation in which the lives of the entire world are in his hands. For Frodo, at least at this point in the story, his entire world consists of the Shire and all the hobbits that live in it, and he will do everything in his power to protect them.

Even though Frodo is outwardly admitting that he is afraid to Gandalf, inwardly the hobbit begins to feel an overwhelming desire to follow his uncle out into the big world, “to follow Bilbo, and even perhaps to find him again” (*Fellowship* 69). This longing becomes so powerful that it overcomes Frodo’s fear as he nearly runs out the door without his hat on (*Fellowship* 69). Unfortunately, its power quickly fades as Frodo finds he is unwilling to start on his journey and continuously lengthens his time in Bag End using his uncle’s birthday as a constant excuse: “it seemed somehow the proper day on which to set out and follow him. Following Bilbo was utmost on his mind, and the one thing that made the thought of leaving bearable” (*Fellowship* 72). Thus Frodo constantly defines himself by what he believes Bilbo would do or say, never truly taking a moment to decide what he wants, what he would do if he was on his own and didn’t have his loving, adventurous uncle as a role model to shape himself after. For readers this idealization can be endearing, but when they examine it through the lens of possible selves, they will discover that when one holds something to a high standard, they often ignore their idol’s imperfections as Frodo ignores Bilbo’s.

### Uncle Bilbo: Frodo's Ideal Self

The ideal self is the possible self people want to be, the one that people wish to become but most likely never will making them idealize it and hold it up to a higher standard than your actual self. This self often includes the successful self, the creative self, or the loved and admired self. For Frodo, his ideal self is his Uncle Bilbo who he loves and admires more than anyone as a great adventurer and an incredible story teller who experienced many things, both wonderful and horrible, when he was a part of Thorin Oakenshield's company. Ever since hearing about Bilbo's unexpected journey and listening to all of the places he saw, the people he encountered, and the adventures he had, Frodo wanted to follow in his uncle's footsteps.

When Frodo embarks on his own journey, however, the hobbit realizes that it is different in some ways from Bilbo's and that he is not like his uncle who for the past sixty years had a nagging desire to run out his door once more: "I want to see mountains again, Gandalf—*mountains*; and then find somewhere where I can *rest*. In peace and quiet, without a lot of relatives prying around, and a string of confounded visitors hanging on the bell. I must find somewhere where I can finish my book" (*Fellowship* 34). Though he was reluctant at first to join Thorin's quest to reclaim Erebor, Bilbo discovered that his Took blood, the blood of curiosity and adventure, was boiling up inside of him to the point that he found himself running out his door.

One major difference between his nephew and him, however, is while Bilbo was given the choice to join Thorin's company as their burglar, Frodo was not. In order to save the Shire, Frodo is forced to leave his home and take the Ring with him for it is his destiny as the new ring bearer: "Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the ring, and *not* by its maker.

In which case you were also *meant* to find the ring” (*Fellowship* 61). Even though Gandalf tells Frodo that Frodo has a choice, he cannot take the burden from him for the Ring would use his powers for malicious purposes: ““With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly”” (*Fellowship* 67). As was the case in *The Hobbit*, it is up to the small statured to direct the course of the world, for their hearts are not so easily corrupted.

Though Frodo does want to destroy the Ring, he does not feel that he can be the adventurer that his uncle was: ““I do really wish to destroy it! Or, well, to have it destroyed. I am not made for perilous quests. I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?”” (*Fellowship* 67). Even before the Council of Elrond, Frodo wishes to go home, no longer wanting to take part in any grand adventures which Bilbo could put into his book: ““So far my only thought has been to get here; and I hope I shan’t have to go any further. It is very pleasant just to rest. I have had a month of exile and adventure, and I find that has been as much as I want”” (*Fellowship* 247). Thus his experience at Weathertop has shown Frodo that he is not the idealized adventurer, or “hero” type character that Bilbo was and therefore knows that though he sees his uncle as a role model, he will never achieve his goal of becoming his uncle.

Bilbo had already noted the difference between Frodo and himself to Gandalf before he starts off on his journey: ““He would come with me, of course, if I asked him. In fact he offered to once, just before the party. But he does not really want to, yet”” (*Fellowship* 35). It is clear from statements like this that Bilbo also loves his nephew dearly and feels guilty that he found the Ring and passed it to him, not understanding the true nature of the burden he was bestowing on his adopted heir: ““I am sorry: sorry you have come in for this burden: sorry about everything. Don’t adventures ever have an end?”” (*Fellowship* 260). Though Frodo likes to think that his

uncle is great and perfect in every way, Tolkien shows us through snippets of dialogue such as this one that our idealized self is imperfect just as our actual self is.

An interesting thing to note when establishing Bilbo as Frodo's ideal self then is his close proximity to Frodo's feared self after being corrupted by the Ring for sixty years:

Slowly he drew it out. Bilbo put out his hand. But Frodo quickly drew back the Ring. To his distress and amazement he found that he was no longer looking at Bilbo; a shadow seemed to have fallen between them, and through it he found himself eyeing a little wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony groping hands. He felt a desire to strike him. (*Fellowship* 260)

Thus the ideal self and the feared self are not as separate and different as we would like to believe. We could easily slip from one to the other and that makes us nervous. Why is this transition between our possible selves so easy? It's because our set of possible selves are not just a collection of random roles that we could play. They are a specific set of states of being that represent specific hopes, fears, and fantasies that are unique to that particular person. Often these states are connected more than they are divided by similar themes.

### **Gollum: Frodo's Feared Self**

The feared self, on the other hand, is the possible self that people are afraid of becoming. This self often includes the alone self, the depressed self, or the incompetent self. For Frodo, his feared self is the murderous Gollum who was held under the Ring's influence much longer than Bilbo was. Now that Frodo is carrying the Ring, he also has the potential of becoming a shriveled creature that will do anything to protect the one thing that is most precious to him in all of Middle Earth.

Gollum was once part of a ““clever-handed and quiet-footed little people”” who were in some ways like hobbits except that ““they loved the River, and often swam in it, or made little boats of reeds”” (*Fellowship* 57). He lived his life with his friend Déagol much like Frodo does with Sam, that is until Déagol finds the Ring and Gollum kills him, taking the treasure for himself:

No one ever found out what had become of Déagol; he was murdered far from home, and his body was cunningly hidden. But Sméagol returned alone; and he found that none of his family could see him, when he was wearing the ring. He was very pleased with his discovery and he concealed it; and he used it to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful. (*Fellowship* 58)

Gollum’s closeness to hobbits and his murderous act of a dear friend makes Frodo even more uncomfortable: ““I can’t believe that Gollum was connected with hobbits, however distantly...what an abominable notion”” (*Fellowship* 59). Perhaps the truly terrifying thing about the feared self is that people tend to be more likely to become their feared self than their ideal self (Markus, Nurius 1985). The natural response to this would be to kill that possible self, but as Markus and Nurius noted in their theory, our self is a combination of our possible selves. They cannot be rid of completely despite our best efforts.

Before he meets Gollum, Frodo describes him, much like Sam does later, as a villain: ““Gollum meant to cheat all the time. He was just trying to put poor Bilbo off his guard. And I daresay it amused his wickedness to start a game which might end in providing him with an easy victim, but if he lost would not hurt him”” (*Fellowship* 60). Gandalf, however, urges him to not be so harsh of the creature for he should know the effects the Ring has on whoever carries it:

““You ought to begin to understand, Frodo, after all you have heard...He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter””

(*Fellowship* 60). Frodo does not truly understand Gandalf until he actually comes into contact with Gollum and witnesses for himself what the ring has done to him. It is only then that he realizes why Bilbo stayed his hand.

While Frodo pities Gollum and spares his life, he fears becoming just like him. What truly makes Gollum so fearful to Frodo, besides his murderous nature, is his split persona that he gained after obtaining the Ring and spending centuries alone in a dark cave brooding over it:

““He took to thieving and muttering to himself, and gurgling in his throat. So they called him *Gollum*, and cursed him, and told him to go far away”” (*Fellowship* 58-59). Originally Gollum was known as Sméagol, but after killing Déagol and taking the Ring for his own, something inside him “snapped” and a more aggressive nature took over. Perhaps as a result of his fear and pity of the creature, Frodo tries to reason with him by calling him Sméagol and treating him fairly. For a time, his efforts seem to work. He stays true to his role as a guide and seems to truly respect Frodo, that is until his encounter with Faramir after entering the Forbidden Pool once again displaying how possible selves can alternate between the “ideal” self and the “feared” self.

### **The Forbidden Pool**

As was noted previously, when Gandalf first tells Frodo about Gollum’s past, Frodo viewed the creature as a wretched villain who Bilbo should have killed when he had the chance:

““Oh Gandalf, best of friends, what am I to do? For now I am really afraid. What am I to do? What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance”” (*Fellowship* 65).

To which Gandalf replies that it was because of pity that Bilbo didn’t kill Gollum: ““Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he had been well

rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity”” (*Fellowship* 65). Frodo, however, remains unconvinced and declares that Gollum deserved death to which Gandalf urges him not to deal out who should live and who should die, for it is not up to him. There are bigger forces at work in Middle Earth that make such decisions and that shouldn’t be questioned.

This conversation comes in handy when analyzing the Forbidden Pool scene where Frodo pleads with Faramir to let Gollum go:

The creature is wretched and hungry and is unaware of his danger. And Gandalf, your Mithrandir, he would have bidden you to not slay him for that reason, and for others. He forbade the Elves to do so. I do not know clearly why, and of what I guess I cannot speak openly out here. But this creature is in some way bound up with my errand. Until you found us and took us, he was my guide. (*Towers* 331)

Even though Frodo himself does not fully understand what part Gollum has in all of this, he has come to realize that he cannot get rid of his feared self as easily as Faramir, and Sam, seem to think he can: ““Frodo, I think you do very unwisely in this...I do not think you should go with this creature. It is wicked”” (*Towers* 338). Though he appreciates his friends’ concern, Frodo replies, ““No, not altogether wicked”” (*Towers* 338). Frodo sees himself in Gollum or at least what he could become if he continues to be subjected to the will of the Ring as Sméagol had. It is because of this commonality that Frodo feels pity for the wretch and goes to great lengths to revert him back to the way he was before he killed Déagol.

Markus and Nurius would argue for Frodo keeping Gollum at his side because they understood that one cannot get rid of his feared self and still have a healthy self-concept. As stated previously, our future self is composed of both our feared and ideal self. We cannot exist

with one and not the other: “An individual’s repertoire of possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats” (Markus, Nurius 1985).

In trying to help Gollum, Frodo is trying to change his feared self into a positive one in order to better his possible future: ““Imagining what is possible for one’s future can increase optimism, but articulating a possible self is not enough to produce sustained effort and behavioral change...possible selves need to be linked with specific strategies”” (Oysermen, Fryberg 2006). According to psychologists Oysermen and Fryberg, these strategies are “concrete behaviors” that “help one to focus on goals while anticipating and planning for setbacks by developing plans of action and fall back plans.” To further illustrate their point, they employ a timeless strategy, the carrot and the stick where people focus on their positive and negative selves in order to improve their focus and outcomes.

Though Oysermen and Fryberg use a modern example, a student in school, their emphasis on maintaining balance between one’s possible selves is still relevant to Frodo and his selves: “Having both images serves as a carrot and a stick, simultaneously reminding the student of the goal (the carrot) and or where the student may end up if effort is not sustained.” In the case of possible selves, the carrot is the ideal self and the stick is the feared self: “the presence of balance in possible selves may be particularly important in social contexts in which one is likely to encounter obstacles to achieving one’s goals” (Oysermen, Fryberg 2006). Thus in order for Frodo to truly realize his actual self, he must achieve balance between his ideal self (Bilbo) and his feared self (Gollum).

## **Mount Doom**



This balance is threatened when Frodo finally reaches Mount Doom and is about to cast the Ring into the fire: “The light sprang up again, and there on the brink of the chasm at the very Crack of Doom, stood Frodo, black against the glare, tense, erect, but still as if he had been turned to stone” (*Return* 239). Yet instead of destroying it, Frodo decides to take the Ring for himself: “‘I have come, but I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!’ And suddenly, as he set it on his finger, he vanished from Sam’s sight” (*Return* 239). It is at this moment that Frodo appears to have completely succumbed to his feared self and is casting his actual and ideal selves from him but, as Markus and Nurius noted in their dissertation, one cannot get rid of his selves so easily.

Interestingly enough, Frodo appears to be on the verge of completely becoming his feared self, it is Gollum, along with Sam, who snatches him back, ultimately saving Frodo and the rest of Middle Earth in the process:

Sam got up. He was dazed, and blood streaming from his head dripped in his eyes. He groped forward, and then he saw a strange and terrible thing. Gollum on the edge of the abyss was fighting like a mad thing with an unseen foe. To and fro he swayed, now so near the brink that he almost tumbled in, now dragging back, falling to the ground, rising, and falling again. And all the while he hissed but spoke no words. (*Return* 240)

Now one could argue that Gollum jumping on Frodo and wrestling with him, not to mention biting off the finger which wore the Ring isn’t saving Frodo, but if Gollum hadn’t intervened, Frodo would have disappeared with the Ring and Sauron would have realized his goal of conquering Middle Earth: “‘But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him’” (*Return* 241). This

statement is reminiscent of Frodo's actual self that readers had met in the Shire, back when he was more carefree and ignorant of worldly affairs. It is particularly amazing that even after all the horrors he witnesses and suffers that Frodo returns back to his altered self or, more accurately, an altered actual self. In other words, Frodo reaches the end of his journey as the self he had started out on, but he has become worldly and all that he has witnessed has left marks on his self, resulting in an altered actual self.

One thing to keep in mind, however, is that even after Gollum is consumed by the fire and is physically destroyed; Frodo's feared self isn't entirely gone. Frodo can still feel his possible self years later demonstrating that one cannot completely get rid of his possible selves no matter how much they may want to. Even at the end, after Gollum and the Ring are destroyed allowing Frodo to return to his actual self, "And there was Frodo, pale and worn, and yet himself again; and in his eyes there was peace now, neither strain of will, nor madness, nor any fear. His burden was taken away" (*Return* 241), he is still affected by his possible selves. In their theory, Markus and Nurius note that even though possible selves are "different and separate from the current or now selves", they are "intimately connected" to them. In other words, our possible selves are a part of us and cannot be so easily cast aside as Frodo will soon realize.

### **The Scouring of the Shire**

Even after the Ring is destroyed and Frodo is finally able to return home, he still feels the overwhelming effects of his ordeal and the darkness he encountered: "'Are you in pain, Frodo?' said Gandalf quietly as he rode by Frodo's side. 'Well, yes I am,' said Frodo. 'It is my shoulder. The wound aches, and the memory of darkness is heavy on me'" (*Return* 290). Here Tolkien once again balances the effects of physical and mental pain as he illustrates the extent of Frodo's pain: "'There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same,

for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with the knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?’” (*Return* 290). In other words, Frodo is not the same hobbit he had been when he left home over a year ago and is now discovering who he truly is.

Though Frodo still frequently feels the effects of his ordeal on his mind and body, he manages to remain the self he had been before he began on his quest: “To the discomfiture of the Shirriffs Frodo and his companions all roared with laughter. ‘Don’t be absurd!’ said Frodo. ‘I am going where I please, and in my own time. I happen to be going to Bag End on business, but if you insist on going to, well that is your affair’” (*Return* 304). In this specific case, Frodo is returning to the self that had idealized his uncle by acting as Bilbo would have when faced with the situation. In fact, Bilbo does face a similar, less violent, situation when he returns from his journey and finds his belongings being sold away to the highest bidder. In both cases the hobbits handle themselves in a dignifying manner in which they are too proud to take orders from anyone.

Another way in which Frodo behaves similar to Bilbo is that although Frodo was slowly being corrupted by the Ring and retained a part of his actual self, he still retained a somber attitude: “Merry, Pippin, and Sam sat at their ease laughing and talking and singing, while the Shirriffs stumped along trying to look stern and important. Frodo, however, was silent and looked rather sad and thoughtful” (*Return* 306).

Even after all that he had witnessed, Frodo still does not wish to use violence to solve disputes:

‘Fight?’ said Frodo. ‘Well, I suppose it may to come that. But remember: there is to be no slaying of hobbits, not even if they have gone over to the other side. Really gone over, I mean; not just obeying ruffians’ orders because they are

frightened. No hobbit has ever killed another person in the Shire, and it is not to begin now. And nobody is to be killed at all, if it can be helped. Keep your tempers and hold your hands to the last possible moment!’ (*Return* 310)

This hope to settle disputes without violence may be seen as ignorance, but the mere fact that Frodo recognizes they may have to fight, shows that he knows more about the ways of the world than he had before. That is why he urges his companions to not shed blood: “‘I wish for no killing; not even of the ruffians, unless it must be done, to prevent them from hurting hobbits’” (*Return* 310). After all, Frodo had seen first-hand how murder could corrupt the soul of a creature that had been something like a hobbit once turning Sméagol into the feared self Frodo was afraid of becoming. Thus it is understandable why Frodo is so weary of shedding blood under any circumstances.

Even when the hobbits discover that Saruman is behind the Scouring of the Shire, Frodo urges them not to kill the fallen wizard: “‘No, Sam!’ said Frodo. ‘Do not kill him even now. For he has not hurt me. And in any case I do not wish him to be slain in this evil mood. He was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hands against. He is fallen, and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him, in the hope that he may find it’” (*Return* 325). Frodo knows personally how tempting power can be and how it can alter one’s personality, in some cases, it will flip a person’s nature completely. Frodo recognizes as Gandalf had urged him when they talked about Gollum that though Saruman is evil and twisted, he was once a noble wizard whose main concern was protecting the world and the people who lived in it. Thus, as his ideal self was, Frodo is merciful and decides to stay his hand when ruling Saruman’s fate in the hopes that he would someday return to his old self.

### **Grey Havens**

Perhaps when rendering Saruman's judgement, Frodo is trying to give himself a sense of hope that he too will one day return to his old self. By doing so, Frodo is projecting neither his ideal self nor his feared self, but his original actual self onto the wizard. Although Saruman could have returned to his actual if he hadn't been killed by Wormtongue, Frodo never does return to that original state as he finds himself redefining who he is through his interactions with his ideal and feared selves:

One evening Sam came into the study and found his master looking very strange. He was very pale and his eyes seemed to see things far away. 'What's the matter, Mr. Frodo?' said Sam. 'I am wounded,' he answered, 'wounded; it will never really heal.' But then he got up, and he was quite himself the next day. It was not until afterwards that Sam recalled that the date was October the sixth. Two years before on that day it was dark in the dell under Weathertop. (*Return* 333)

This once again illustrates Markus and Nurius's notion of malleable possible selves where both people's ideal and feared selves come together to produce an altered version of our actual selves. This process does not happen automatically as Frodo soon discovers: "Time went on, and 1421 came in. Frodo was ill again in March" (*Return* 334). As he completes his transition internally, Frodo comes to realize that he cannot stay in the home he had left in order to protect.

Once again Frodo finds himself having to leave the Shire to relieve it of the influence of the Ring thus Frodo makes one final journey. This time, however, he finds himself traveling with his uncle like he had always wanted to, demonstrating how people's selves cannot be complete if they do not have both their ideal and feared selves: "'Yes, I am coming,' said Frodo. 'The Ring-bearers should go together'" (*Return* 337). The fact that Frodo goes with Bilbo and leaves Sam behind even though he too had been a Ring-bearer for a while, further illustrates how Bilbo is

Frodo's ideal self: "“No, Sam. Not yet anyway, not further than the Havens. Though you too were a Ring-bearer, if only for a little while. Your time may come. Do not be too sad, Sam. You cannot be always torn in two. You will have to be one and whole, for many years. You have so much to enjoy and to be, and to do”" (*Return* 337). Thus, even Tolkien recognized that in order for people to be as healthy as they possibly could be, our possible selves have to remain in constant balance.

Another thing to remember is that Frodo is not the actual self of his youth, of the life Sam was a vital part of, is still a vital part of. Frodo is no longer a part of that world and must now leave:

‘But,’ said Sam, and tears started in his eyes, ‘I thought you were going to enjoy the Shire, too, for years and years, after all you have done.’ ‘So I thought too, once. But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them. But you are my heir: all that I had and might have had I leave to you.’ (*Return* 337-338)

While Frodo no longer has a role to play in Middle Earth, Samwise does and until his role is complete, he must remain in the Shire as Frodo's heir. As Bilbo was for Frodo, Frodo becomes Sam's ideal self who Sam yearns to go on an adventure with but cannot because of his duty to the Shire and his loved ones.

## **Conclusion**

Through Markus and Nurius' Possible Selves theory, readers will be able to appreciate Tolkien choosing Frodo as the hero of his story. Over the years, readers and critics have brooded over why Tolkien would choose as his hero a sheltered, passive country boy when he could have

chosen a character like Aragorn who is brave and strong with a prodigal son kind of complex. The reason Tolkien chose Frodo, however, is because unlike Aragorn, Frodo is more complex due to the possible selves that are not only raging inside of him but that he physically encounters making him exceedingly more interesting. While Aragorn is battling with his fear of turning into his ancestor, he does not face an actual manifestation of that fear fashioning him that typical hero readers are used to seeing such as King Arthur. Tolkien must have realized this and decided that his story would center on a character his readers could relate to, for everyone has their own possible selves within them and, like Frodo, they have to find balance in order to have a truly healthy self. Thus the Quest is not just for Frodo to learn and grow from, but the readers who follow him as well. These multiple selves are also needed for the completion of the quest.

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