

The Concept of Fellowship in Malory and Tolkien

Készítette:

Ambrus Marcell

angol-történelem szak, osztatlan tanárképzés

Miskolci Egyetem, Bölcsész- és Társadalomtudományi Kar

Modern Filológiai Intézet

Konzulens:

Dr. Dósa Attila

egyetemi docens

Miskolci Egyetem, Bölcsész- és Társadalomtudományi Kar

Modern Filológiai Intézet

Abstract

It is common knowledge that Tolkien drew inspiration from Old Germanic and Celtic mythology in *The Lord of the Rings* to describe the history and conflicts of Middle-Earth. That he also drew on the Middle-English tales of the Knights of the Round Table is also well known, but it is a less often analysed aspect in Tolkien Studies. In my paper, I will explore the conceptual connections between Sir Thomas Malory's Arthurian legend and the first part of Tolkien's trilogy through the notion of "fellowship" and related concepts (comradeship, companionship, friendship, etc.). My hypothesis is that while Tolkien adopted and rewrote several motifs and characters from the chivalric world of Arthur, he simplified and changed Malory's concept of fellowship. I will do a comparative reading of relevant passages in Malory and Tolkien and trace the contextual changes in the meaning of the term. While in Malory fellowship refers to both a superficial bond (friendship in adventure) and a common fate (a lasting bond between individual knights), I will conclude that in Tolkien it is a form of friendship that refers to a necessary alliance formed to overcome a common enemy. In Tolkien, the characters who embark on the quest are "as different as peas and apples", but difference can be overcome through friendship, perseverance and loyalty. The conscious act of overriding (i.e., accepting or temporarily negating) difference is necessary to achieve the common goal in Tolkien. Therefore, the masculine bond of the individual knights, organised in Malory within the framework of the permanent order of knights with Arthur at the centre, is transformed in Tolkien into a fluid, shifting, volatile and temporary alliance, necessary to defeat a common evil and lasting only until the first stage of the quest is reached.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Aims and Hypothesis

It is generally known that J.R.R. Tolkien drew inspiration from Old Germanic and Celtic mythology in *The Lord of the Rings* to describe the history and conflicts of Middle-earth. That he also drew on the Middle English tales of the Knights of the Round Table is also obvious, but much less often analysed aspect of his work. In my study, I will examine the connections and conceptual relationships between *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory (1485) and *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first volume of Tolkien's trilogy entitled *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), through a comparative analysis of the term "fellowship", paying attention to its close synonyms, such as "company".

My hypothesis is that while Tolkien freely adopted and rewrote several concepts, motifs and characters from the mediaeval textual corpus representing the chivalric world of King Arthur, including the term "fellowship" (a term widely used in the romances written at the time), Tolkien significantly altered this central concept of Malory in both emphasis and meaning in *The Lord of the Rings*. In my paper, I will argue that the concept of "company" takes on in Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* the medieval understanding of comradeship and companionship, which Malory originally associated with "fellowship" in his *Morte d'Arthur*.

To examine the validity of my assumption, I will focus on two questions: (1) What are the contextual and semantic differences between the terms "fellowship" and "company" in *Morte d'Arthur* and *The Fellowship of the Ring*?; and: (2) What changes in meaning does the term "fellowship" undergo from Malory to Tolkien?

In my analysis of these questions, I aim to demonstrate that while the concepts of "fellowship" and "company" hold pivotal significance in both Malory's and Tolkien's works, in Tolkien's interpretation these concepts transcend into a dynamic and inclusive relationship of temporary allies characterized by friendship and inter-species reconciliation as a result of his deep engagement with Middle English literature, both in terms of literary inspiration and ethical worldview.

1.2 Justification, Methods and Sources

Several scholars have explored the connection between Old and Middle English (henceforth: OE and ME) literature and Tolkien's works. Regarding OE literature, as Tolkien was a major scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature, the connections between *The Lord of the Rings* and *Beowulf* are widely acknowledged and have been extensively studied in philology; scholars such as Charles A. Huttar, George Clark and Jane Chance have made comparisons between the two works. As far as ME literature is concerned, Marjorie Burns and Verlyn Flieger for example, have drawn comparisons between episodes in *The Hobbit* (1937) and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late-14th century). However, the connections between Tolkien and other ME literary sources, such as Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* in particular, have received comparatively less attention. In Stuart D. Lee and Elizabeth Solopova's definitive study *The Keys of Middle-earth: Discovering Medieval Literature through the Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2005), Malory's name is mentioned only once, while the poem *Beowulf* is mentioned over 250 times and the poem *Sir Gawain* exactly 100 times.

The *Middle English Reader* Tolkien co-edited with Kenneth Sisam in 1922-23 signals his interest in ME literature: he explicitly referred to *Beowulf* as one of his "most valued sources" (*Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien: A Selection* 39). This focus by Tolkien on OE literature makes the less obvious connections between Tolkien's work and the ME romances even more elusive. I would therefore like to contribute to the study of Tolkien's works by paying attention to a small but, in my opinion, important aspect that strengthens the link between Tolkien and ME literature—Malory in particular. My research is justified by the remarkable detail that "fellowship", a key concept in Malory, also appears in the title of the first volume of Tolkien's trilogy: *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The fact that he included the word "fellowship" in his title suggests that it plays an important role in his work, albeit with a surprising change of emphasis, as I will argue.

In order to find an answer to the questions raised above (the contextual differences and the transformation of the meaning of the terms in focus), I will carry out a comparative analysis of the meanings of "fellowship" and "company". First, I will compare the meanings of "fellowship" and the related term "company" in relevant passages from *Morte d'Arthur* and *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Then, by comparing my textual examples, I will trace the overlaps, differences and changes in meaning of the terms "fellowship" and "company". I will also discuss the changes in meaning of a related (though in Tolkien less central) term, "chivalry". I

hope that by the end of my discussion I can confirm my assumption that in Tolkien Malory's concepts undergo a significant transformation, such as when the word "company" takes on in Tolkien the meaning that Malory originally associated with the word "fellowship".

One of my main critical sources is the journal article "Malory's Ideal of Fellowship" by Elizabeth Archibald. Archibald examines the meanings of the terms "fellowship" and "company" using the *Middle English Dictionary*¹ and gives examples of how these meanings appear in ME poetry and prose, for example in *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400) by Geoffrey Chaucer and *Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Malory. Another important source I use is "Arthur and Aragorn: Arthurian Influence in *The Lord of the Rings*" by Richard J. Finn, which highlights thematic parallels, similarities in word choice and parallels between the characters (e.g., between Arthur and Aragorn), underpinning the relevance and direction of my investigation. Relevant sources I have consulted on the medieval contexts and backgrounds of Tolkien's work include the aforementioned study by Elizabeth Solopova and Stuart D. Lee, Jane Chance's volumes on Tolkien the medievalist and on Tolkien's art, Jay Rudd's companion to Tolkien's life and work, and Michael D. C. Drout's *Tolkien Encyclopedia*. Harold Bloom's critical companions to *The Lord of the Rings* and Tolkien also offer helpful insights into Tolkien's themes, characters, narrative techniques and, of course, his life and ideas. Tolkien's collected letters and his *Middle English Reader and Vocabulary* (1922-23) and Douglas Harper's *Online Etymology Dictionary* also provided invaluable information on the meaning, etymology and connotations of the terms studied. These sources shed light on Tolkien's literary interests and their influence on his writing, including his attitude to late-medieval romances.

¹ Hans Kurath ed., *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958-60). Henceforth: MED.

2 “Fellowship” and “Company”: A Comparative Analysis

2.1 Context: Tolkien and Late-medieval Romances

Tolkien drew much of his inspiration for *The Lord of the Rings* from OE and Old Germanic sources, such as *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon* and the *Eddas* (Hutter 3). Tolkien’s lifelong interest in medieval romance extended to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as outlined by Jay Rudd, who traces this interest back to Tolkien’s student days in Birmingham (413). During his time at Leeds, Tolkien collaborated with E.V. Gordon and produced a textbook edition of *Sir Gawain* in 1925. This volume established his reputation among scholars of medieval English literature and secured him his first post at Oxford (Rudd 413; Lee and Solopova 237). A revised second edition followed in 1967, and Tolkien’s fascination with *Sir Gawain* led to his modern English translation of the poem, broadcast by the BBC in 1953 and published posthumously by his son in 1975 (Christopher Tolkien, “Foreword” 2). In 1953, Tolkien gave a memorial lecture at the University of Glasgow in which he discussed *Sir Gawain*. Christopher Tolkien notes in his “Foreword” to *Monsters and the Critics* that his father had intended to publish the essay based on the lecture (2), though it was not published until after Tolkien’s death. Rudd, in particular, has analysed in detail certain aspects of the poem, such as the episode with Sir Bertilak, which captivated Tolkien (412).

Tolkien’s deep interest in *Sir Gawain* not only permeated his scholarly work, but also found its way into his creative work, most notably in *The Hobbit*. According to Verlyn Flieger, the medieval archetype of the Wild Man, referred to in *Sir Gawain* as “wodwo” or, in modern English, “wood-troll,” served as inspiration for the shape-shifting character Beorn in Tolkien’s tale (Burns 133). However, the influence of *Sir Gawain* extends beyond *The Hobbit*. It is also perceptible in *The Lord of the Rings*, where motifs of the ideal knight and the themes of temptation and failure drawn from *Sir Gawain* are embodied in characters such as Aragorn and Sméagol/Gollum, respectively.

Tolkien’s interest in *Sir Gawain*, however, was not driven by its romance elements, but in its almost archaeological significance, as can be seen from these lines from his essay on the poem:

It belongs to that literary kind which has deep roots in the past, deeper even than its author was aware. It is made of tales often told before and elsewhere, and of elements that derive from remote times. (“Sir Gawain” 72)

Tolkien was also of course familiar with Malory. In her chapter “Tolkien and the Idea of a Book,” Flieger describes the discovery of the only known manuscript of Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* in 1934 at Winchester College, Oxford, which was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Times* (135-36). Eugene Vinaver, then a tutor in French at Lincoln College, Oxford, gave a lecture in Oxford in 1935 on the discovery of the manuscript. C.S. Lewis and probably also Tolkien attended his lecture. Vinaver later moved to Manchester and, together with Tolkien’s friend E.V. Gordon (with whom Tolkien had produced the edition of *Sir Gawain* for a university textbook in Oxford in 1925) he published a three-volume edition of *Morte d’Arthur* in 1947.

Tolkien included Malory’s tales of King Arthur in his courses when he taught at Oxford and even worked on a long poem entitled “The Fall of Arthur” in 1955, which he left unfinished and which was published posthumously in 2013. However, Tolkien held *Morte d’Arthur* in much lower esteem than *Beowulf* or *Sir Gawain* for some very specific reasons. As he wrote in an undated letter (probably written at the end of 1951):

Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing. For one thing its “faerie” is too lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. For another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion. (Tolkien, *Letters* 167)

In general, Tolkien made disparaging remarks to his friend and fellow tutor C.S. Lewis at Oxford about Malory’s work in relation to the English curriculum—“You can (if you wish) shove in ‘Arthur’ on some other date”—and “actively disliked” his friend’s “Arthurian-Byzantine mythology” (Tolkien, *Letters* 69 and 368).

Lyman-Thomas has identified Tolkien’s unfinished poem “The Fall of Arthur” as his *only work* which borrows directly from Malory and, drawing on other scholars, emphasised further thematic similarities between Malory and Tolkien (282).

However, others have noticed the traces of Malory's influence that are clearly visible on many levels in *The Lord of the Rings*. I will mention some of them here by way of illustration, but only briefly, as the focus of my enquiry is on the terminology used by the two authors rather than on the shared plot elements or character types.

At the level of characters, there are clear allusions to Malory among Tolkien's characters, including Aragorn, Gandalf and Galadriel, as summarised by Richard J. Finn (24-25). Aragorn's character parallels Arthur's, as both are powerful figures who ascend the throne wielding enchanted swords, and Aragorn's journey mirrors Arthur's, as he claims his kingship with the help of the wizard Gandalf, much as Arthur did with Merlin. Jay Rudd also describes Aragorn, like King Arthur, as a "conventional medieval epic or romance hero" (292). And while Arthur had the magical sword called Caliburn (later replaced by Excalibur), Aragorn has Andúril: in both cases the sword symbolises delineation as well as renewal (Finn 24). The connection between Gandalf and Merlin is equally obvious. Both are powerful wizards who, despite following their own paths, help the protagonist without seeking personal power; a similar connection to magic exists between the female characters Galadriel and Morgan Le Fay (Finn 25).

On the level of plot, there are numerous similar elements between Malory and Tolkien, as Jay Rudd lists, such as the accidental killing of a friend, the enchantment of mortals by fairies, or that both authors represent battle as an ennobling struggle (61, 381 and 277).

At the narrative level, Rudd argues, Tolkien learnt the narrative composition of what he calls "interlacing" in *The Lord of the Rings* from Malory and Malory's French sources: "In these complex narratives [. . .] the narrator would move back and forth between separate strands of the story, telling the different tales simultaneously" (241). Andrew Lynch calls the same narrative process in which the narrator in Tolkien moves back and forth between the time levels of different adventures a "paratactic structure" and identifies it as Malory's "standard narrative method," though he notes that Tolkien's combination of paratactic narration with lyrical imagery and utterances evokes the King James Bible much rather than it does Malory (104).

Given the nearly half a millennium that separates Malory and Tolkien, divergent interpretations of these medieval concepts are inevitable due to the very different historical contexts. Tolkien, in the "Foreword" to the second edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, explicitly distinguishes the War of the Rings from any historical parallels, rejecting allegory

and emphasizing that many fail to make a distinction between allegory and applicability (xxviii). In his letters, Tolkien repeatedly mentions how his studies were interrupted by the war and draws analogies between literature and the reality of war, for example in a letter to his son Christopher dated 25 May 1944:

For “romance” has grown out of “allegory”, and its wars are still derived from the “inner war” of allegory in which good is on one side and various modes of badness on the other. In real (exterior) life men are on both sides: which means a motley alliance of ores, beasts, demons, plain naturally honest men, and angels. But it does make some difference who are your captains and whether they are orelike per se! And what it is all about (or thought to be). It is even in this world possible to be (more or less) in the wrong or in the right. (*Letters* 95)

While in all these sources there is a clear rejection of the senseless horrors of modern wars in favour of the cultivation of literary scholarship and the recognition that life in this sense is not a mirror of literature, this letter may provide a key to that Tolkien still believed in the clear binary between evil and good so often portrayed in romances. Moreover, the legitimacy of investigating *The Fellowship of the Ring* in this changing historical context of the romance is clearly supported by C.S. Lewis’s opinion on Tolkien’s work. In his review published on 14 August 1954, only a few days after the book came out, Lewis emphasized that Tolkien’s tale was a continuation and extension of the romance genre: “But in the history of Romance itself—a history which stretches back to the Odyssey and beyond—it makes not a return but an advance or revolution: the conquest of new territory” (Carpenter 213).

2.2 Terminology

Critics widely acknowledge that Malory emphasises a sense of idealised of unity, termed “fellowship”, as central to his work, because he regarded unity as the essence of chivalry. Elizabeth Archibald examines this unity in her “Malory’s Ideal of Fellowship” through Malory’s understanding of the term “fellowship”. Archibald claims that scholars have not commented on the frequency and consistency with which Malory uses this term to describe his idea of chivalry, and she aims to address this problem in her essay (311). In the main body of my paper, I will rely on her interpretations of “fellowship” and its related terms (“company”

and “chivalry”) in Malory to conduct my comparative analysis of these terms in Malory and Tolkien.

I agree with Archibald about this surprising oversight because upon running a check on word frequency in Malory’s text, I found that the word “fellowship” occurs just under 200 times and the word “company” about 30 times in *Morte d’Arthur*. I carried out the same frequency check in Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Given that the word “fellowship” forms an important part of the title, we may be surprised to find that the word occurs only 6 times in the text: only 4 times in the narrative, once in the book title and once in a chapter heading. In contrast, “company” occurs over 130 times (twice in chapter headings and the rest in the narrative), which may lead us to assume that in Tolkien “company” occupies a much more central position than “fellowship”.

According to both Harper’s *Online Etymology Dictionary* and the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the word “fellowship” dates back to around 1200 and originally meant “companionship” (Harper and Merriam-Webster). According to Harper, its later meaning, “a body of companions”, dates from the late thirteenth century. In ME usage, it was also used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, for example in the collocation “carnal fellowship” (Harper).

The word “company” also dates back to the mid-twelfth century, with the original meaning “large group of people” (Harper). Its meaning “companionship” or “familiar association” dates from the late thirteenth century (Harper). Its modern meaning, “persons united to do something together,” dates from the late fourteenth century and developed the meaning “business association” in the mid-sixteenth century (Harper). As this modern meaning of the word developed after Malory, it is not relevant to my discussion, and nor is it a relevant aspect in Tolkien. One would think that another modern meaning—“person or persons with whom one voluntary associates” (Harper)—, which the word took on after Malory’s age, is also irrelevant to *Morte d’Arthur*. However, as we shall see, both Malory and Tolkien seem to include this latter meaning in their respective interpretations of the word.

Elizabeth Archibald explains that the word “fellowship” in Malory refers to a collective body, the knightly order of the Round Table (317). For King Arthur, fellowship is always collective and public, whereas for his knights there is not only the public and collective fellowship of the Round Table, but also a private and individual fellowship based on camaraderie and companionship (Archibald 326). She argues that in Malory, the dual meaning

of fellowship (i.e., the bond between the members of the Round Table and the individual friendships between the knights) takes on greater significance than the term “company”. The word “company” is used in Malory’s French sources to describe both the relationships between Arthur and his body of knights and the relationships between the individual knights (317).

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the word “company” seems to take on the function and meaning of “fellowship” in this second sense of the term “fellowship,” but closer inspection reveals a situation that is much more complex than that.

2.3 The Concept of Fellowship

As is generally known, Tolkien was not only interested in medieval literature and legends, he was also an outstanding linguist. In 1922-23, together with Kenneth Sisam, his former professor at Merton College, he published a two-volume reader of ME literature. Volume one, edited by Sisam, contains a selection of texts and extracts from ME prose, drama and poetry, including *The Pearl* and *Sir Gawain*, Tolkien’s favourite long poems from this period. Volume two, edited by Tolkien, consists of a ME glossary, which of course includes the word “fellowship” (spelt variously as “Fela3scip” or “Felaschipe” in the 12th century).

In the glossary, Tolkien attributes the following meanings to the word “fellowship”:

- (1) “community” (12th c.)
 - (2) “company” (e.g., *bear fellowship* = “keep company”) (12th c.)
 - (3) “friendship” (17th c.)
- (Sisam and Tolkien, n.p.)

This will do for a student of medieval literature. However, Kurath’s MED lists several more meanings. Archibald cites the following eight meanings attached to the term “fellowship” identified in MED:

- (1) Casual or temporary companionship
- (2) Intimate companionships
- (3) Relationship or behaviour of boon companions (“revelry”)
- (4) The spirit that binds companions together (“charity”, “camaraderie”)
- (5) Band of associates, followers, fighting men

- (6) Organised society (e.g., *the knightly order*)
 - (7) Christian communion (e.g., *a heavenly company of angels*)
 - (8) Relationship between things
- (Archibald 311-12)

Archibald points out that the term “fellowship” in Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* takes on five of the eight meanings mentioned above, namely: (1), (2), (4), (5) and (6) (312). In my discussion, I will compare these meanings that Malory ascribes to the word “fellowship” with how the same word is understood by Tolkien. I will refer to the aspects introduced by Archibald when examining its meanings in Malory and Tolkien. Rather than a linear exploration of each meaning, Archibald organises her investigation in line with her central argument, claiming that “fellowship” in Malory can denote both the permanent, collective body of the Round Table as an organised society and the temporary, individual bonds between knights on their quests. I will therefore select some of her key points on which to base my comparison.

Firstly, Archibald argues that the meaning of “fellowship” includes “a sense of personal bond” or “brotherhood” between individual knights (Archibald 316). In my search of Malory’s work, I found that the following example of “fellowship” expands to include the meaning of “personal bond” or “brotherhood” when Sir Gareth says to Sir Lancelot: “I have come to bear you company for the fellowship you have showed me” (XVIII. 23).² It is clear from the textual context that the primary meaning of “fellowship” here is “short-term companionship”.

However, I suggest that while for King Arthur’s knights, the meaning more often than not implies temporary companionship, for Arthur himself, the idea of fellowship primarily refers to the permanent order of the Round Table, which is probably closest to definition (4) above. For example, Arthur interprets Gareth’s act of joining Lancelot, described above, as motivated by the sense of collectivity that Arthur associates with the ideal of chivalry: “For ever [. . .] it is a worshipful knight’s deed to help another worshipful knight when he seeth him in a great danger” (XVIII. 24). It is clear that here Arthur associates his own sense of collective duty with the word “fellowship” used in a different sense earlier by Sir Gareth, even though Arthur

² I used the searchable e-book version publicly available on Project Gutenberg, derived from Pollard’s standard 1903 edition, which Tolkien also used (*Le Morte D’Arthur*, by Sir Thomas Malory). However, due to the disparity in pagination of the e-book version, I will reference the books (in Roman numerals) and the chapters (in Arabic numerals) in parentheses. In that I will follow the standard referencing to Malory, also adopted by Archibald.

does not use the word in his response. Interestingly, there is a misunderstanding between Arthur and his knight, Sir Gareth, in this situation. They seem to have a radically different interpretation of this term, which is so central to the ideal of chivalry that they both share.

In contrast, Tolkien's notion of "fellowship" is never singular in the sense that it can never be divorced from the common cause. For Tolkien, "fellowship" is collective by nature, and it is always intertwined with a common purpose. For example, in Book 1 of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the small fellowship of four hobbits expands in Book 2 to include various races: Hobbits, Wizard, Elves, Dwarves, and Men. An exception to Tolkien's idea of collective fellowship might be the unique bond between Frodo and Sam. Yet, even in this temporary companionship following the dissolution of the questing company, Sam exhibits a sense of subordinate loyalty rather than a camaraderie between equals. His loyalty may seem like the singular fellowship between the knights of the Round Table, which, as Archibald suggests, may represent in Malory an even closer bond than that between knights and their ladies (320-21). However, it is essentially different because Sam serves the common cause indirectly as much as he serves his beloved master directly. He cannot take on the mission of destroying the ring, but he recognises that by helping Frodo—the chosen one—to destroy the ring, he can help to advance the common cause.

Secondly, Archibald argues that there are two interpretations of the term "fellowship" at play in Malory: (1) a horizontal sense of fellowship among knights who are equal to each other (and, in theory, to Arthur), and (2) a vertical aspect of fellowship that involves a sense of rivalry among individual knights and a hierarchical relationship between the knights and Arthur, who holds the Round Table together (326). In Malory, King Arthur acts more as an overseer of the Fellowship of the Round Table and never joins his knights on a mission. However, in Tolkien Aragorn (Arthur's equivalent in terms of function and authority) glues different races in the Fellowship of the Ring together as he actively participates in adventures alongside his comrades.

What Malory's and Tolkien's understanding of the term "fellowship" have in common, I suggest, is a sense of fidelity. Arthur is fervently supported by his knights, and loyalty is also a bonding force in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In *Morte d'Arthur*, however, the loyalty of the Knights of the Round Table is directed towards a single person, King Arthur. As Archibald summarises: "the fellowship depends on Arthur" (324).

In contrast, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, it is a “chain of love” (Chance 150) that binds the fellowship together. On the one hand, this quasi-Christian chain of love that holds the temporary and voluntary association against a common evil together makes a contrast with the “chain of enslavement”, which is represented by Sauron and the One Ring (Chance 150). On the other hand, the chain of love binds one individual to the other and overrides the different motivations and behaviours of the members of the fellowship.

Moreover, this chain of love can be horizontal in Tolkien. On the one hand, the small Fellowship of the Hobbits in the Book 1 unites in love four hobbits from four different hobbit families, which could be an equivalent of the horizontal loyalty (i.e., a sense of camaraderie or brotherhood) among the individual knights in Malory. On the other hand, the large Fellowship in Book 2 brings together representatives of five different species inhabiting Middle-earth. As Michael D. C. Drout notes, “[t]he racial diversity of the Fellowship could not be overlooked: Legolas and Gimli conquer prejudice and become lifelong best friends” [14].

The chain of love can also be vertical, with Aragorn the “Christ-like true king” positioned at the top: he reciprocates the love of his people and returns to them to embrace the responsibility that comes with leadership (Chance 172). This is similar to the vertical loyalty in Malory centred on Arthur. However, Tolkien adds a sense of reciprocity that is not as pronounced between Arthur and his knights in Malory.

Thirdly, as Archibald notes, “fellowship” was one of the five virtues of chivalry (315).³ The five virtues of chivalry are invariably referenced in ME, including in the following lines that I found in *Sir Gawain*:

þe fyft fyue þat I finde þat þe frek vsed
Watz fraunchyse and *felaȝschyp* forbe al þyng,
His clannes and his cortaysye croked were neuer,
And pite, þat passez alle poyntez, þyse pure fyue
Were harder happed on þat habel þen on any oþer.
(Tolkien and Gordon 19, lines 651-52; emphasis added)

³ The five virtues of chivalry are: prowess, loyalty (=fidelity, friendship), courage, generosity and courtesy (Hodges 2). Various other sources include chastity and piety among the five virtues of chivalry.

In their glossary, Tolkien and Gordon glossed this occurrence of the word “fellowship” as “love of fellow men” (180). However, in his modern translation of the poem, published posthumously by his son Christopher Tolkien, Tolkien translates the word as “friendliness”:

The fifth five that was used, as I find, by this knight
was free-giving and *friendliness* first before all,
and chastity and chivalry ever changeless and straight,
and piety surpassing all points: these perfect five
were hasped upon him harder than on any man else.

(C. Tolkien, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; Pearl; and Sir Orfeo* 39; emphasis added)

Fourthly, Archibald notes in a footnote that most editors of *Sir Gawain* interpret the usage of “fellowship” in a religious context rather than a secular one (315). She observes that the majority of instances of this word are found in religious texts, corresponding to the sense listed as item no. (8) above (Archibald 315). Notably, she emphasizes the absence of this specific sense of the word in Malory (Archibald 318). This absence is particularly noteworthy since adventure in Malory invariably carries a spiritual dimension, which is specifically Christian, as Tolkien dismissively remarked in the letter quoted above. Archibald also points out that chivalry in Malory is “a lonely business”, and deliberately so, as it represents a rite of passage, making assistance from other knights inappropriate (315-16).

In contrast, George Clark emphasises that, despite Tolkien’s devout Catholicism, *The Lord of the Rings* embodies a Christian worldview without explicit Christian references (44). (However, one might disagree with this view when considering the Christ-like attributes of Aragorn or the theme of death and resurrection associated with Gandalf.) Jorge J. E. Gracia argues that *The Fellowship of the Ring* represents a quest for happiness rather than a quest for salvation and that this quest is based on love of kin and family rather than love of God (84). Even in this elevated sense, fellowship is presented as a communal rather than a solipsistic affair. As Gracia notes, Sam, much like Aragorn, is a wanderer who returns to his homeland and finds his quest answered by the fellowship of family and friends (84). The pursuit of happiness necessitates fellowship with others in *The Lord of the Rings*: for Sam, happiness involves fellowship with the other hobbits of the Shire, but whether Gollum retains any fellow-feeling to overcome temptation, it remains unknown (Gracia 85 and 87).

Finally, in *Morte d'Arthur*, fellowship may also include the meaning of heterosexual love or sexual intercourse. A relevant example I found is when the hermit makes Lancelot promise that he “will never come in that queen’s fellowship” (Malory XIII. 20).

In contrast, such a meaning of the word “fellowship” is absent in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, mainly because of the lack of love interests in this epic tale. In a letter to his son Michael, Tolkien expressed scepticism about the permanence of true love, fidelity and happy marriage in this “fallen world”. He doubted the authenticity of these sentiments between men and women, even though he lived in a long and contented marriage, as mentioned in his biography. Tolkien referred in the same letter to sex as the “devil’s favourite subject” (*Letters* 55), which may explain why the relationship between men and women is overlooked in his epic tale.

2.4 The Concept of Company

Archibald notes that Malory uses the word “company” only 30 times, compared to the nearly 200 examples of “fellowship”, and always in the sense of a short-term companionship through chivalry (314). She points out that Malory never uses the term “company” in *Morte d'Arthur* to refer to the collective body of the Knights of the Round Table or as a synonym for “fellowship” (Archibald 314).

I found that, occasionally, Malory uses the word “company” in the sense of “companionship”, for example when Sir Brandilas wants to recruit Tristram into the Knights of the Round Table:

In good time, said Sir Brandiles, and well be ye found, and wit ye well that we be right glad that we have found you, and we be of a *fellowship* that would be right glad of your *company*. For ye are the knight in the world that the noble *fellowship* of the Round Table most desireth to have the company of. God thank them said Sir Tristram, of their great goodness, but as yet I feel well that I am unable to be of their *fellowship*, for I was never yet of such deeds of worthiness to be in the *company* of such a *fellowship*. (Malory IX. 15; emphases added).

According to Archibald, the term “fellowship” in such utterances denotes the order of the Knights of the Round Table, while “company” signifies the more or less temporary association or companionship with some or all of them (314). In Malory’s context, then,

“company” is never interchangeable with “fellowship”. The former always implies a temporary connection, while the latter denotes a permanent and unchanging bond.

In a surprising contrast to the title of the first part of his trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Tolkien never uses the term “fellowship” to refer to the collective and relatively stable entity formed with the aim of destroying the One Ring. Instead, he uses the word “company” for this purpose and consistently capitalises it when referring to the formal body made up of representatives of the five races taking part in the mission. The first instance of such usage occurs when the party sets out from Rivendell for Mount Doom in Mordor and Elrond declares: “The Company of the Ring shall be Nine” (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 359).

Tolkien also uses the term “company” to refer to a group of individuals gathered together, such as for Bilbo’s 111th birthday celebrations (*The Fellowship of the Ring* 37). In such cases, where “company” refers to “companionship” or a person with whom one shares company, the term is always written in lower case. Another example is when Gandalf says to Frodo: “I think after all you may need my company on the Road” (*The Fellowship of the Ring* 88); or when he refers to the informal group of the four hobbits: “Good! That’s settled. Three cheers for Captain Frodo and company!” (*The Fellowship of the Ring* 138); or when the band of elves refers to themselves as such and they invite the four hobbits to join them: “Come now with your friends [Frodo] and join our company” (*The Fellowship of the Ring* 104-105). This choice emphasises its importance to friendship, which is characterised by a horizontal dynamic (goodwill, cheerfulness, shared values and a temporary camaraderie) and which is distinct from a formal unit, such as a company of warriors.

Tolkien’s consistent separation of lower and upper case spelling serves to maintain clarity between the two meanings of the word “company”. Written in lower case, “company” in Tolkien’s work denotes a temporary association of individuals or an informal relationship based on companionship, friendship, or camaraderie. This mirrors the use of “fellowship” by King Arthur’s knights in informal situations and refers to the temporary, casual and freely associated gathering of individuals. In contrast, when spelled in upper case, Tolkien uses the word “Company” in a similar way to King Arthur and the individual knights in formal situations in Malory. In this context, it refers to a more formal, long-lasting (though not permanent) fellowship bound together by a common and important purpose.

2.5 The Concept of Chivalry

In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, the term "chivalry" is mentioned 21 times and the word "knight" appears nearly 5,000 times, while in Tolkien neither term appears even once. Although the concept of chivalry and knightly characters are evident in Middle-earth (e.g., Boromir, Faramir, the Knights of Gondor, and the Riders of Rohan), these chivalric ideals are not at the focus of the plot or the world Tolkien created (Reinhard 177).

In Malory's, there is an overwhelming sense of permanence that signals membership of the Round Table. It is this shared sense of permanence that ensures cohesion or "fellowship" among the individual knights. This sense of collectivity and permanence is balanced by an equally strong sense of individualism and transience among the knights. Both the present and the future knights of the Round Table experience chivalry as a solitary affair because each adventure is a rite of passage that initiates the worthy knight into the honour of serving King Arthur or expels the unworthy knight from it (Archibald 311).

For Tolkien, however, the motivation comes from within and is not enforced by peers or society. The symbolic value of friendship and a sense of community among members of the Fellowship of the Ring and camaraderie is emphasised over the solipsistic virtue of chivalry.

3 Conclusions

To summarise, the terms “fellowship” and its near-synonym “company” play central roles in both Malory and Tolkien. In Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, “fellowship” can denote a casual, masculine bond between individual knights who set out on their adventures. But mainly it signifies one of the virtues that unites the formal and collective entity known as the Round Table. In Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring*, “fellowship” is never used in this sense. Instead, Tolkien uses the word “Company” (capitalized) to describe a gathering of individuals united by the necessity to overcome a common enemy. This assembly of individuals is more temporary, dynamic, and seemingly random, which is in contrast with the structured and permanent Order of the Round Table. Moreover, the Fellowship of the Ring is united by a chain of love and transcends the differences between the representatives of the various races. While the Knights of the Round Table share a common destiny and are similar in their abilities, the members of the Fellowship of the Ring are described as being “as different as peas and apples” (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 308). Yet, their differences can be bridged through fellow-feeling, perseverance and loyalty. Thus, Malory’s notion of a formal fellowship within the permanent order of knights with King Arthur at the centre is transformed in Tolkien into a fluid, diverse and temporal fellowship sustained by friendship and a desire for reconciliation between different species. How the understanding of the concept of fellowship deepens over the course of the trilogy will be the subject of further investigation.

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