

Túrin and Aragorn: Evading and Embracing Fate

Janet Brennan Croft

J.R.R. Tolkien's works can be described, among many other ways, as fractal. Like artworks generated by fractal equations, the same themes repeat over and over again, level after level; any place you slice through, you find the same structure, the same motifs, reinforced through repetition and variation, down to the very heart of the work. One subject we find treated this way in Tolkien is the complex one of fate and free will; the ultimate hopeless futility of fighting one's *wyrd* and the *tao* of the world are contrasted with the virtues of willingly working in harmony with the destiny of the wider universe. We find this theme repeated at many levels, from overarching concepts common to Tolkien's entire *oeuvre* to the level of genre, plot, character, setting, and recurring motif; from the cosmic conflicts of the Valar down to the mortal affairs of Men.

Aragorn and Túrin, two of the greatest warriors and most important protagonists in Tolkien's legendarium, represent these opposing reactions to destiny, doom, hope, and the forces of fate. Aragorn, descendant of kings, exhibits a willing and unwavering acceptance of the decades of hard work and self-denial he will have to undertake to claim his foretold place as the king who will unite the free people of Middle-earth. Túrin, heir to a great House of Men in the First Age of Middle-earth, is also heir to Morgoth's curse on his father, and he attempts to escape, by almost any means possible, the tragedy which always dogs his footsteps.

The deeper we go, the more we find these themes embedded in their lives and characters, and in their similarities and differences, just as in fractal images. There are a number of parallel incidents in the lives of these heroes; for example, both are humans foster-fathered by elven-lords who rule hidden kingdoms, both inherit a famous sword that is reforged and renamed, and both are loved by elf-women. There are also great differences that are reflected in both their characters and the genres of their stories—a form of repetition with variation. Because Túrin's story is a tragic and episodic romance and Túrin's character is hot-tempered and hubristic, he betrays the trust of Thingol by causing the death of one of his trusted advisors, and his counsels of aggression lead to the fall of Nargothrond to the dragon Glaurung. And because his ego is so centered on himself, his wrongs, and his antagonism towards the world at

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large, he is unaware of the love of both Nellas and Finduilas, in the latter case with tragic results. Because Aragorn's story is an epic quest with a clear goal and Aragorn's character is steady, confident, and not over-proud, he treats the women who love him with great sensitivity, listens closely to the advice of his friends and military advisors, maintains an attitude of stewardship towards the world, and understands and honors Elrond's conditions for his marriage to Arwen. Undergirding these basic differences, as Jesse Mitchell points out, are their differing styles of heroic ethos: Christian, living by "principles of enduring hope" for Aragorn, and pagan for Túrin, "preoccupied with aspirations of immediate *lof* and *dom*," or fame and reputation (90).

To pull back to the level of motif, we find that both characters are also notable for accumulating a great number of different names in the course of their careers. In keeping with the fractal nature of Tolkien's art, this is not merely a shallow coincidence—names are important signifiers of character, plot, social position, and relative power—and additionally, as we peel back the fractal layers, we will see that their relationships to their multiple names also tell the stories of their relationships to fate. At yet another level, that of source-study, we find that in Tolkien's source literature, especially medieval romances and folklore, name-giving, name-changing, polyonomy (having multiple names), and namelessness are all deeply meaningful. In this paper I want to look closely at how the name-stories of these two heroes both echo and drive the stories of their relationships with fate.

Túrin's Name-Story

The most fully integrated version of Túrin's story is that assembled by Christopher Tolkien in *The Children of Húrin* (*CoH*), and I will be using this as the basis for this discussion, with an occasional excursion into other variations as warranted. Túrin is the eldest child and only son of Húrin, leader of the House of Hador, and his wife, Morwen. In the naming-pattern of his tribe, the derivation of his name from his father's through repetition of an element of Húrin's name indicates a familial relationship and possibly his first-born status. His first sister dies young, and is an early example of the motifs of polyonomy and playing on name-meanings that run through this story: her given name is Urwen, but she is nicknamed Lalaith, which means laughter. When she dies in an epidemic, Túrin is told "Urwen is dead, and laughter is stilled in this house" (*CoH* 40).

Túrin first seems to become aware of the power of alternate names to grant a new identity when Húrin calls him "Heir of the House of Hador" on his eighth birthday (*CoH* 48). He repeats the name to himself, savoring it, proud of what it means, and he calls himself this when he gives his birthday present to Sador (49). Húrin presents him to his men by this title before riding to the battle of Nirnaeth Arnoediad (51), where he is captured by Morgoth and cursed to be a

tormented witness of every ill that Morgoth visits on his family. Túrin's proud new identity turns to ashes; not only is he far too young to succeed his father, the title reinforces the fact that he is stuck fast in the liminal and ineffective state of being the heir of his house rather than its leader for as long as Morgoth holds Húrin captive. Túrin also calls himself "Heir of the House of Hador" when he tries to persuade his mother to let him stay with her. But he lacks authority to override her desire to send him to safety in Doriath while she awaits the birth of his younger sister. Elizabeth Broadwell conjectures that his life-long inability to become a fully integrated personality stems from this unresolved "crisis of identity" (38): how can he be the Heir of Hador if he is sent away from his home? Is he in fact still the heir if he cannot stay to defend his people? He is "an exile from his identity as well as his homeland" (39). Túrin, as Mitchell argues, is also limited by his obsession with Morgoth as "the ultimate power in Middle-earth" (97) and the only source of his people's sorrows; he cannot see beyond this to any greater pattern or higher power in the universe that might offer him hope beyond the walls of the world, but remains locked in his fruitless struggle with his adversary.

Túrin's position in Doriath as the foster-son of Thingol and Melian has similarities to Aragorn's fostering in Rivendell (as well as to that of the young Arthur with Sir Ector), but with several key differences. Túrin is much older when he arrives, around nine, and well aware of both his birth name and his heritage, as opposed to Aragorn, who was fostered at the age of two. Aragorn's mother goes to Rivendell with him, in contrast to Túrin who is sent off with just a few guards and no family members. But both are being fostered to keep them hidden from enemies and spies, and the heirlooms of their houses (the Dragon-helm of Hador for Túrin, and in Aragorn's case the Ring of Barahir, the shards of Narsil, and the Scepter of Annúminas) are held in trust for them by their foster-fathers.

Not long after Túrin claims the Helm of Hador at the age of eighteen and starts fighting orcs alongside the elves of Doriath, he becomes embroiled in a conflict with the king's advisor Saeros, which in part hinges on Saeros giving him the mocking name Woodwose, or wild man of the woods (*CoH* 88). When Túrin is falsely accused of killing Saeros and goes into self-imposed exile, he chooses his first true alias; asked his name by the outlaw band he encounters, he says "Neithan, the Wronged, I call myself" (101). It is obvious to them that this is a *nom de guerre*, or perhaps in this case *nom de crime* would be more accurate; for although these outlaws are remnants of the people of Hador, Túrin at this point seems to have no plan, or even interest in, either returning to Doriath and proving himself innocent or reforming this group and using them to re-claim the House of Hador. He wishes only to "fare free" (116). Taking a name that means "the wronged" positions him as guiltless, sympathetic to fellow-outlaws, and

forced by circumstances rather than choice into a life of crime. It is a form of *logizomai*, or giving a new name in the hope of changing the recipient to match; a positive example of *logizomai* would be Frodo addressing Gollum as *Sméagol*, and a negative one would be Saruman calling Gríma *Worm* when urging him to further crimes against the hobbits, but both are a sort of sympathetic magic attempting to make a change on one level effect a similar change on another. Here Túrin wants to see himself, and be seen as, an innocent unjustly charged with a crime and passively waiting for justice.

An interesting point about this name: the narrator quite clearly treats it as a pseudonym, because Túrin is referred to in the narration as Túrin, not Neithan. He has not actually changed his inner identity, as he will try to do later when he takes the name Turambar. During this period Túrin also acquires the nickname Dragon-helm (*CoH* 107); this is the first in a series of names based on *synecdoche*, or using the name of a part to refer to the whole, in which Túrin is given a name referring to a weapon or piece of armor he wears.

Túrin's close friend Beleg Strongbow, one of the elves of Doriath, finds him and tries to persuade him to return, saying that the name *Neithan* is "unfit" (*CoH* 114) because he has been pardoned, but Túrin refuses. He seems, as Mitchell points out, "determined to learn everything the hard way" (92). Some time later his outlaw band takes up residence in the caves belonging to Mím the Petty-dwarf, and as his followers increase and his power grows, Túrin takes on a new *nom de guerre*: the Dread Helm (*CoH* 146)—yet another synecdoche based on the Helm of Hador, but one he uses for only a short while. Their base of operations is betrayed and Túrin captured, and in the attempt to rescue him, Túrin mistakes his friend Beleg for an orc and kills him (154). Here, in a parallel to what we will later see with his sister Niënor when she is overcome by the dragon, he becomes mute and unresponsive for months as Beleg's friend Gwindor tries to lead him to safety. A subtle reference is made to his lost sister Urwen/Lalaith when he is healed by drinking from a lake whose waters echo with "endless laughter" (157).[1]

When Gwindor brings him safely to Nargothrond at last, Túrin insists on another new name, saying: "I am Agarwaen, the son of Úmarth (which is the Blood-stained, son of Ill-fate)" (*CoH* 159). This is again marked as a pseudonym by the fact that the narrator continues to refer to him as Túrin throughout this section. This variation of the *nom de crime* might be called a "guilt-name"; in this

[1] This parallels multiple incidents in medieval romance where a knight, through great shame or love-madness, forgets his own name yet is still called by that name by the narrator; for example, "Malory's Lancelot goes mad after Guinevere, having discovered his affaire with Elaine, drives him angrily out of her sight […]. His long sickness ('in hys wytte they cowde nat brynge hym […] to know hymselff' […]) can be healed only by the Grail" (Bliss 66).

case it shows Túrin overtly admitting to guilt, but hiding the particulars of what he is actually guilty of.[2] And as Broadwell points out, this name also hides his social identity; Agarwaen is accepted simply as the friend of Gwindor rather than the son of Húrin and Heir of Hador he is later revealed to be: "The alias, in effect, tells somebody else's story" (35). The sword Anglachel, which Beleg bore and with which Túrin killed his friend, is reforged for him and renamed Gurthang, Iron of Death. He also earns a new *nom de guerre*: Mormegil, the Black Sword (160), yet another instance of synecdoche based on his distinctive war-gear.

There are two more nicknames yet to come in this chapter of Túrin's life; first the Elves begin calling him Adanedhel, the Elf-man, because of his elvish looks and bearing (*CoH* 164), and then the elf-maiden Finduilas falls in love with him and gives him another nickname: Thurin, the Secret (165). So during his stay in Nargothrond we find Túrin at his most polyonomous, overly blessed with four names in addition to his hidden birth-name: one given by himself, one by his enemies, one by the people he lives with, and one (uncomfortably close to his true name) by the woman who loves him. In trying to leave behind the Túrin who killed his best friend, has he strayed too far from himself?

What happens next is the collapse of this structure of false names as his underlying identity is exposed. Gwindor, who has long loved Finduilas, reveals Túrin's true name to her; she in turn tells Túrin that she now knows his name (*CoH* 169). Túrin confronts Gwindor in a rage for betraying his "right name" and bringing down his doom, from which he hoped to "lie hid" (170). Gwindor is wise enough to see, and to say to Túrin, "The doom lies in yourself, not in your name" (170). Any alias which Túrin adopts or accepts does no good; it is not his name Morgoth has cursed, but himself.

But Túrin cannot accept this lesson, and it is true that his name is the easiest way for Morgoth to track him down. When elf messengers from Círdan the Shipwright ask if he is "of the House of Hador," Túrin answers "Here I am named Agarwaen, the Black Sword of Nargothrond" and "A man's name is his own" and threatens them if they betray him to Morgoth (*CoH* 174). However, a man's name is not really his own—unless he renames himself at the deepest level of his being rather than just using an alias, his name as given to him is an indication of a place in a social network, and therefore it is not just his own but in a way belongs to all who are related to him in some fashion through that name: his kin, his servants, his friends and followers, and even his enemies.

[2] This is another parallel with Lancelot; after his recovery, Lancelot takes the name Le Shyvalere Ill Mafeet (Bliss 66), or The Ill-Made Knight, as T.H. White translated it in *The Once and Future King*.

The messenger Arminas rebukes Túrin for his haughty lack of courtesy and warns him that if he continues to reject the counsel of wiser heads, "other shall be your doom than one of the Houses of Hador and Bëor might look for" (*CoH* 175). Similarly Gwindor's prophetic death-speech warns Túrin to take heed and listen to something besides his own will: "Haste you to Nargothrond, and save Finduilas. And this last I say to you: she alone stands between you and your doom. If you fail her, it shall not fail to find you" (*CoH* 177). But Túrin takes his own counsel, and instead heeds the dragon's taunts about Morwen and Niënor and seeks them rather than following the captured Finduilas. Demonstrating again the fractality of Tolkien's themes as shown by repeated motifs, this hubristic self-reliance on his own "masterful heart" (Broadwell 35) is reminiscent of another of Tolkien's great heroes of the first age—Fëanor.

In her intriguing recent paper on fate and free will in Middle-earth, Verlyn Flieger points out an easily-overlooked passage in *The Silmarillion*. Fëanor is asked by Yavanna if he will give her the Silmarils in order to bring the Two Trees back to life. He replies: "This thing I will not do of free will" (*Silm.* 79). The interesting part is what the narrator goes on to say: "[A]ll one it may seem whether Fëanor had said yea or nay to Yavanna; yet had he said yea at the first, before the tidings came from Formenos [that Melkor had stolen the Silmarils], it may be that his after deeds would have been other than they were" (*Silm*. 79). As Flieger explains, "the editorial addendum implies that his answer to Yavanna, regardless of whether he could act on it, would affect his subsequent actions" (Flieger 166); or, rephrased, "if Fëanor's response had been different, that difference might have affected his subsequent deeds" (167). The fuller version of the passage given in *Morgoth's Ring* bears out this interpretation; there it reads "if he had said yea at the first, and so cleansed his heart ere the dreadful tidings came, his after deeds would have been other than they proved" (*Morgoth* 295). In other words, Fëanor's willing acquiescence to Yavanna's request would have placed him in a less defiant, more generous, one might even say shriven or blessed frame of mind, and while his fruitless pursuit of the thief Morgoth might still have been fated, he would have undertaken the quest with a clear conscience and a pure motive (that is, the return of the light of the Trees to Middle-earth rather than the recovery of his stolen personal property), and perhaps not have done the criminally disastrous things he did.[3] For Túrin, less stubborn pride and willfulness in his dealings with men and elves alike might have led to a less tragic and more eucatastrophic version of the fate in store for him.

[3] A parallel can be seen with the Grail Quest—only the purest knights with the holiest of motives and most unstained souls may successfully undertake the quest. Like Lancelot's adultery with Guinevere, or Perceval's lack of compassion in failing to ask the Fisher King what ails him, Fëanor's refusal stains his character and dooms his quest.

Whether or not Morgoth has tracked Túrin down by his name is a moot question; in the following sack of Nargothrond the dragon Glaurung recognizes him and addresses him by the title "son of Húrin" (*CoH* 178) and by a series of epithets casting his actions to this point in the worst possible light:

> Evil have been all your ways, son of Húrin […] Thankless fosterling, outlaw, slayer of your friend, thief of love, usurper of Nargothrond, captain foolhardy, and deserter of your kin. (*CoH* 179)

These epithets are "potential names" (Broadwell 37) in themselves, similar in construction to some of Túrin's own aliases; here the dragon is practicing negative *logizomai*, reducing Túrin's life to a series of crimes and building on his innate tendency to hopelessness and despair in order to bring him to self-loathing and "[denial of] the potential for positive action" (37). And note that he also does all this without using his victim's actual given name—a subtle denial of Túrin's existence outside of the net of his ancestry and his deeds.

The next major phase of Túrin's life begins some time after this encounter. After returning to his home, seeking news of his mother and sister and bringing disaster in his wake, he finally obeys Gwindor's dying command and begins hunting for Finduilas. He briefly uses an alias hearkening back to the nickname Saeros gave him, calling himself Wildman of the Woods (*CoH* 194), but the woodmen who find him and lead him to her grave soon work out that he is the warrior Mormegil.

But when he is taken to their stronghold of Ephel Brandir, he resolves to "stay at peace, and renounce name and kin; and so I will put my shadow behind me, or at the least not lay it upon those that I love" (*CoH* 196). He chooses the name *Turambar*, which means Master of Doom, and "charged them to forget his name of old, and to count him as one born in Brethil. Yet [as the narrator is at pains to point out] with the change of name he could not wholly change his temper" (*CoH* 196). But note that there is an alternate version of this story, told in "Turambar and the Foalókë," in *The Book of Lost Tales*. In this version Túrin takes the name Turambar at the gates of Nargothrond during his confrontation with the dragon. But it is no more successful; Glorund (the dragon's name in this version) simply laughs at it (Broadwell 39). However he acquires this name, it is a name that tempts and defies fate; one might accuse Túrin of symbolically flying a kite in a thunderstorm, not only through the meaning of the name but also through the fact that the repetition of the initial syllable, in the naming patterns of his tribe, hints far too broadly at Turambar's close kinship with Túrin, even though he also sets aside his black sword so he will not be revealed as Mormegil, whom rumor had long connected with the son of Húrin. As he adds later, "Turambar indeed I will be, and by my own will and prowess I will surmount

my doom—or fall" (*CoH* 223). The name is another example of self-applied *logizomai,* or as Broadwell interprets it, "proleptic naming" (37); by taking this name proactively, he hopes to truly become master of his own fate in the future. It is, in fact, the only name he takes that looks forward rather than back, as Mitchell notes (106). And it is not a mere adoption of a pseudonym as earlier name changes have been. The narrator now calls him *Turambar* when telling his story, while he is still called *Túrin* when we are following characters who do not know of the name change. But here we see another danger of polyonomy; in this case his changed identity prevents friends from finding him as well as enemies, and contributes to the next great tragedy in his life.

This is where his sister Niënor, who was born after he left home, enters the tale and begins to have a name-story of her own. When she insists on riding out with her mother to seek Túrin, she plays on her own name: "Mourning you named me, but I will not mourn alone" (*CoH* 202). But she too encounters Glaurung, and in her case the dragon takes away all memory of her past, of language, and even of her own name. When Túrin (now known as Turambar) finds Niënor asleep on the grave of Finduilas, he gives her the name Níniel, which means Maid of Tears (*CoH* 216). After slowly learning to speak again, she eventually asks Túrin's name, and he calls himself Turambar, which he says means *Master of the Dark Shadow* (*CoH* 217-18). As Broadwell points out, everywhere else in the narrative *ambar* is translated as *fate* or *doom*, far more neutral words than *Dark Shadow* (36), underscoring Túrin's feeling of ceaseless persecution and hopelessness. They fall in love, and though Níniel is told he is the son of Húrin, this has no significance for her (*CoH* 219) and they marry and are soon expecting a child.

The tale finally reaches the climax it has been building towards when Túrin kills the dragon Glaurung. Níniel comes upon the dying dragon and unconscious Túrin, and in a final act of malice, the dragon hails her by her true name and restores her memory, using yet more "potential names" for Túrin in the process:

> Hail, Niënor, daughter of Húrin. We meet again ere we end. I give you joy that you have found your brother at last. And now you shall know him: a stabber in the dark, treacherous to foes, faithless to friends, and a curse unto his kin, Túrin son of Húrin! But the worst of all his deeds you shall feel in yourself. (243)

Devastated, Niënor cries out a play on Túrin's name: "*A Túrin Turambar turún' ambartanen*: master of doom by doom mastered!" (*CoH* 243-4), and when she leaps to her death similarly plays on her own name: "Take now Níniel Niënor daughter of Húrin; Mourning, Mourning daughter of Morwen!" (*CoH* 244).

All that is left to fulfill Glaurung's curse is for Túrin to awaken and learn of Níniel's suicide and her true name. After one last rash deed, killing Brandir after accusing him of revealing his name to Níniel, he falls on his sword. A monument marks both their true names and the names by which they knew each other: "Túrin Turambar Dagnir Glaurunga, and beneath […] Niënor Níniel" (257). Yet in the end, Túrin is destined to truly be Turambar, master of his fate, and no longer blind to the *tao* behind the visible world of Arda; in the Second Prophecy of Mandos, included in *The Lost Road and Other Writings*, during the final battle of the gods Melkor will be destroyed by Túrin wielding the Black Sword, Mormegil (*LR* 367-8).

Aragorn's Name-story

Before we take a similar look at Aragorn's name-story and eventually relate both stories to fate, hope, and the fractal nature of Tolkien's writing, it may be useful to place the composition of these tales in chronological relation to each other. Parts of Túrin's story, specifically the earlier version in which he gave himself the name *Turambar* during his confrontation with the dragon, were in existence in prose form by 1919 (*CoH* 9), and Tolkien worked some additional segments into alliterative verse in the early 1920s while at Leeds but abandoned the effort by early 1925. More details were added in the 1926 "Sketch of the Mythology" letter, and then in the 1930s Tolkien included the tale in the *Quenta Silmarillion*. But labor on this project came to a halt with the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937, not to be resumed until the mid-1950s, after the completion of *The Lord of the Rings* (*CoH* 272-281). Then, as Christopher Tolkien says, after this "'intrusion' and departure" (*CoH* 280), the *Children of Húrin* became "the chief narrative fiction of Middle-earth" (*CoH* 281); in fact most of the text from the return to Dor-lómin to Túrin's death was written or extensively revised after *The Lord of the Rings* was published. Tolkien never returned to Aragorn except for some fragmentary references in some of his *Letters*, and there the story is treated as complete as it was written in *The Lord of the Rings*. So the story of Túrin, in the chronology of its writing, forms a fractal surround for the story of Aragorn, who originally walked into the tale as a mysterious hobbit named Trotter (Bratman 23-25).

In an echo of Tolkien not knowing his own character's true name at first, Aragorn did not know his birth name until he was twenty years old. He was named Aragorn at birth, but when he was two years old his father was killed in a raid against the orcs, and his mother took him to Rivendell, where Elrond took on the role of foster-father. There he was renamed Estel, meaning Hope, in an effort to hide him from enemies seeking the heir of Isildur, although this deeply meaningful name was perhaps not the best disguise possible (*LotR* App.A.1032). His very name, as opposed to Túrin's which means something

along the lines of power or mastery (*Silm*. 365), signals that Aragorn/Estel has a different relationship with fate and destiny. At the age of twenty Elrond tells him his true name and heritage, and the next day he meets Arwen for the first time. At their meeting he says "Estel I was called […] but I am Aragorn" (1033); he has very quickly adapted to the fact that his earlier name was an alias and has fully adopted his true name. Shortly after this meeting he goes out on errantry, to begin the task of becoming the hero who would be worthy of the crown and Arwen's hand.

As the tale continues, "he went in many guises, and won renown under many names" (*LotR* App.A.1035), which was a common tactic of the chivalrous knight in medieval and Arthurian romance. One of these names is known: he was called *Thorongil*, meaning Eagle of the Star, in Rohan and Gondor (1064). It is interesting to compare this name choice to some of the *noms de guerre* employed by Túrin. Túrin's names—Gorthol, Dragon-helm, Mormegil, The Black Sword—all refer to a distinctive heirloom weapon or piece of armor that could identify him to someone who knows the object's history. Aragorn's name also refers to an heirloom object—the silver eagle brooch set with a green gem, passed down from Galadriel to Celebrían to Arwen and destined for Aragorn. But Aragorn does not have this object yet—Galadriel later gives it to him as a parting gift when the company of the Ringbearer leaves Lórien—so it is more of an aspirational or proleptic name, referring to a future role he hopes to fill.

When he meets the hobbits in Bree, he is using the nickname given to him by the locals—Strider—but soon reveals his "right name" to the hobbits as a test of his identity. Then on the road to Rivendell, Glorfindel calls him Dúnadan (I.xii.204), as does Bilbo later (II.ii.225, 226). Aragorn's reaction to being confronted with his growing number of names is quite a contrast to Túrin's; he laughs and makes no effort to deny any of them (II.i.226); even Stick-at-naught Strider "and other names not so pretty" seem to leave him unfazed (I.xi.177).

Also in stark contrast to the problems Túrin has in Nargothrond when the difficulty of concealing his true name behind so many aliases becomes overwhelming, at the Council of Elrond we instead see several examples of how the collapse of polyonomy can clear away confusion and reveal the truth. In quick succession we find out that Moria is the same as Khazad-dûm (II.ii.234); Minas Ithil is now Minas Morgul and Minas Anor is now Minas Tirith (238); Imladris is an older name for Rivendell (240); the Sword that Was Broken is Narsil (240); Aragorn is Isildur's Heir, and the Chief of the Dúnedain (240), *and* The Dúnadan (241), *and* Strider (242); the Ring is Isildur's Bane (241); the hobbits are Halflings (242); the Necromancer was Sauron (244); Sméagol is Gollum (248, though the reader already knows this from the early chapter "Riddles in the Dark"); and Tom Bombadil has also been called Iarwain Ben-adar and Forn and Orald (258). In a way, we are drilling down through fractal layers of naming to

find the same equation at the heart of these alternate names. But here too we see a misuse of polyonomy—another hubristic and self-centered character, Saruman the White, reportedly trying to change his place in the world by renaming himself: "Saruman the Wise, Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colours" (252).

In Lórien, Aragorn collects yet another name. When Galadriel gives Aragorn the eagle brooch, she says: "In this hour take the name that was foretold for you, Elessar, the Elfstone of the house of Elendil!" (II.viii.366)—thus fulfilling his earlier aspirational use of the name Thorongil. This marks a change for Aragorn—he is described as looking immediately taller and more kingly. And in contrast to the fairly simple way he gave his name to the hobbits in Bree—"I am Aragorn son of Arathorn" (I.x.168)—several times over the next few chapters he rattles off his whole list of names and titles. When passing the statues of the Argonath, he names himself "Elessar, the Elfstone son of Arathorn of the House of Valandil Isildur's son, heir of Elendil" (II.ix.384). And in the chapter "The Riders of Rohan," at the climax of tense and formal series of name exchanges, he declares "I am Aragorn son of Arathorn, and am called Elessar, the Elfstone, Dúnadan, the heir of Isildur Elendil's son of Gondor" (III.ii.423). After this exchange, he receives yet another name from Éomer—Wingfoot—though he never actually uses it (426), and reveals that before Éomer's time he had ridden with the Rohirrim under a different name (428).

All these names position him at the center of a web of associations; they proclaim his line of direct descent from Númenor, his friendship with the elves, his former connection with Rohan, his experience as the leader of the Dúnedain, and his intent to be seen as the true heir of Gondor. Rather than fragmenting his character, as Túrin's names do, they pull him together and draw all the free peoples of Middle-earth into his orbit. Aragorn himself says something along these lines when sharing a pipe with his friends on the edge of the ruin of Orthanc:

> He wrapped his grey cloak about him, hiding his mail-shirt, and stretched out his long legs. Then he lay back and sent from his lips a thin stream of smoke.
>
> "Look!" said Pippin. "Strider the Ranger has come back!"
>
> "He has never been away," said Aragorn. "I am Strider and Dúnadan too, and I belong both to Gondor and the North."(III.ix.549)

The chapter "The Houses of Healing" is another important one for its exploration of several naming issues: Aragorn's name-story, the centrality of one's name to personal identity, and the dangers and advantages of polyonomy. As we saw in "The Council of Elrond," multiple names for the same thing or person can be dangerous when coupled with ignorance, and here this lesson is

reinforced by the incident of Aragorn's request for *athelas*. The wise-woman Ioreth knows it only by the name *kingsfoil*, and has faith in the legend that the hands of the king are the hands of a healer, but lacks the knowledge to tie this information together (V.iii.845-6). The herb-master knows the various names and legends of *athelas*, but lacks faith in the wisdom of old wives' tales (846-7). Aragorn brings together both book-learning and folk wisdom, which are incomplete and can even be dangerous without each other. The crisis past, when Merry asks for pipe-weed, Aragorn makes gentle mock of the herb-master's superficial knowledge of names and the fact that he can recite "a few half-forgotten rhymes that he does not understand" and probably has none in the house (851). Pippin too has a little of Aragorn's skill in handling polyonomy; when he is trying to get help for Merry, he is careful to tell Bergil that he should inform the Healers there is a sick *perian*, not just a hobbit, in order to avoid any delay (841). Personal identity tied to one's name is also highlighted in this chapter. In each case of healing (of Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry), Tolkien specifically notes that Aragorn calls the victim back by name, usually repeatedly, and in the case of Éowyn instructs Éomer to keep calling her name after he leaves the room (847-851).

But to return to Aragorn's name-story, this is a chapter in which he gains yet more names and skillfully uses his polyonomous nature to both defuse potential trouble and cement alliances. Before entering the city he asks to be known only as the Captain of the Dúnedain, in order to avoid offending Denethor by appearing too ready to depose him (843, 844). When Merry calls him Strider in front of Imrahil and Éomer, Aragorn translates the name into Elvish and says *Telcontar* will be the name of his house (845). He also reveals another name we have not heard before: *Envinyatar*, the Renewer (845). And his regnal name—the name in which he will wear the crown—will not be Aragorn but *Elessar*. Taking a regnal name was a common practice of the Númenórean kings, and not uncommon in our own world; popes take papal names, the Emperor of Japan takes the name of his era, and in 1901 in England, Prince Albert took the throne under his middle name, Edward, to avoid confusion with his father, the consort of Queen Victoria. At the end of the chapter, rumors start to swirl through the town:

> And word went through the City: 'The King is come again indeed.' And they named him Elfstone, because of the green stone that he wore, and so the name which it was foretold at his birth that he should bear was chosen for him by his own people. (853)

In spite of Tolkien's well-known initial difficulty in figuring out who and what this intrusive hobbit named Trotter actually needed to be, the finished character Aragorn always knows himself, no matter how many names he acquires—and always seems to be saying "I am Strider and Dúnadan too, and I belong both to Gondor and the North." Every level simplifies to the same equation.

What, after all, *is* in a name?

Tracing out this pattern of polyonomy is an interesting exercise, but what, after all, do these multiple names and name changes mean for each character? What does this accumulation of names say about his attitudes towards his fated role? And climbing up to the next fractal layer, what does the attitude of the character towards fate, and the fate he eventually faces, tell us about how Tolkien feels *we* should face fate?

Túrin tends to drop each old alias when he picks up a new one, and he never accepts a name change at a deep level of his being until the final one, when he takes the name Turambar. His reasons for changing his name are widely various; he takes up *noms de guerre* and *noms de crime*, marks tragedies by taking a guilt-name, tries to go incognito, and finally attempts to start his life over. But as Mitchell says, out of all these names, "none of them reflect his current state of being, but rather a grudge of the recent past, or an attempt to keep a leash on the future" (109). What all these changes come down to is an attempt to escape his destiny, trying to deflect Morgoth's curse by abandoning the cursed name of Túrin. However, as Broadwell points out, "Túrin never manages to leave his old self behind when he takes a new appellation […]. [T]he (magical) futility of adopting a mere alias [becomes] doubly clear: it promises Túrin no protection against whatever malevolent forces cling to his given name" (37). To use an example from another author, it backfired for J.K. Rowling's Voldemort too when he tried to do something similar—because he only rearranged the letters of his name to create his new identity, his old name and self were not truly eradicated (Croft 158).

To be fair, operating as he does under a hopeless heroic ethos where this world is all there is and Morgoth is the ultimate power in it, Túrin has one very good reason for never truly eradicating his old name—if he does, then it means he has given up all chance of *being* Túrin in this world, that is, being the heir and next chieftain of his people. Morgoth has him on the horns of a dilemma; if he keeps his name and core identity, the curse will follow him; if he gives up his name and all it implies, his very reason for being—"the continued existence of Dor-lómin" (Mitchell 110)—dies with it and Morgoth wins. As Mitchell argues, changing his name to Turambar *should* be his "quitclaim to the lordship of Dor-lómin" (103)—but that betraying repeated element of *Tur-* shows

an inability to completely eradicate Túrin from his being. In his final moments, at Mablung's revelation, "Turambar crumbles away and Túrin reappears" (Mitchell 105).

Aragorn, however, accumulates names rather than discarding them after they've served their purpose. With the exception of the *nom de guerre* Thorongil he never totally abandons a name once he uses it, and it could be argued that since Thorongil is merely another translation of Elfstone and Elessar, even it is not truly abandoned. He still even answers to *Estel*, his childhood name, when his mother or Arwen use it. Each name he adds seems to become another facet of his integrated personality or signifies another responsibility added; for example, translating the name Strider, by which he is known to the hobbits, as *Telcontar* signifies an acceptance that his role of protector to the hobbits continues. Aragorn does not deny his fate—the closest he comes is a modest and cautious refusal to take his name as king too early after healing the wounded in Minas Tirith. The theme of polyonomy coalescing (as opposed to collapsing) runs through his story—he is all of his names at the same time. As he says, "I am Strider and Dúnadan too." Even Bilbo's rhyme is a sort of riddling list of titles which all refer to the same person; he is the gold that does not glitter, the wanderer who is not lost, the crownless king (I.x.167 and II.ii.241).

It is worth noting that we do not see any attempts by the enemy to master Aragorn through name-magic, as we do with Túrin and Niënor, the closest thing perhaps being the Mouth of Sauron refusing to address him by name and insulting his brooch as "a piece of elvish glass" (V.x.870), and by extension diminishing the name *Elessar*. Aragorn's mastery of polyonomy as a tactic of unification and integration gives name-magic little to latch onto—he is all of his names at once and seems always willing to add more, so attacking one name would have little effect. Aragorn also does not strive for total control over his name, as Túrin does; rather, he is perfectly willing to accept and claim almost any name given to him. He is in tune with what Broadwell terms "the polyphonic shape of [Tolkien's] universe" (43); the great multi-noted chords of Eru's creation are echoed in Aragorn's multiple names, in contrast to the single braying notes of Melkor's theme.

Túrin is fragmented, shattered, and chaotic; he is a collection of mismatched roles and unrelated aliases that are never and can never be fully integrated with each other. There is a thread called Túrin connecting them all, but we never feel that Túrin truly knows and accepts all these aliases as part of himself—that they never, all at the same time, are part of him, or that he accepts and adds these variations to his inner being. Aragorn shows himself the more harmonious character by actually *being*, more or less, a fractal set—the same at any magnification at which you view him—or in an analogy that would perhaps

be more suitable to Tolkien, he is a faceted gem where each facet, faceted again, may have its own name but is still inseparable from the whole.

Interestingly, the Aragorn of the Peter Jackson movies is more like Túrin in his half-hearted efforts to evade destiny. The Aragorn of the books sees the title "Isildur's Heir" as something he must earn and hopes to live up to (II.ii.248), accepting that while Isildur was flawed and not strong enough to overcome the lure of the Ring, this did not obviate the good in him that is Aragorn's heritage. In contrast, Túrin does not see being the Heir of Hador as anything he has to work to achieve but just something that he is, and that this title is ultimately and inescapably doomed by Morgoth's curse. Movie-Aragorn also sees the "Heir of Isildur" as something he just *is*, but like Túrin, it is something he interprets as more of a liability. In his conversation with Arwen, he speaks of his fear that "the same weakness" is in his blood (scene 25). This Aragorn is in denial about his fate, creating an obstacle where there is none, and denying his destiny contributes to difficulties in his relationships with Arwen and Elrond. So the genre of the movies, which becomes more tragic than epic through their closer focus on Aragorn and Arwen's relationship (Chance 177), seems to inexorably pull Aragorn's character closer into alignment with that of Túrin.

More interesting, and more important, is what each character has to show about Tolkien's understanding of the way fate and free will operate in Middle-earth. And this may help explain why, apart from the writing challenge, Tolkien returned to the overly dramatic, not very likeable Túrin after concluding things so tidily with the almost-too-perfect Aragorn. It could be that Tolkien was still, using the character of Túrin, wrestling with the thorny issue of how fate, hope, and free will work together in Middle-earth and how to incorporate this conundrum at the level of character and motif. Túrin graphically demonstrates the dangers of resisting one's *wyrd*, and Aragorn the benefits of willing and hopeful acceptance. Flieger makes the broad overall assertion that according to the terms of Eru's creation, Men operate with full free will (*Silm*. 41-2) while Elves, the older creation, are fated. The reader may or may not be convinced that it is that cut and dried, and in these two characters we do see a sort of shading between the two concepts: Aragorn and Túrin are both quite obviously fated, even though fully human, but equally obviously it is the exercise of their free wills that determines how their fates will play out.

Aragorn is in some ways the anti-Túrin—Túrin as he might have been without the blight of his response to Morgoth's curse, able to live in hope for this world and simultaneously for the higher plane beyond it rather than in Túrin's despairing state of world-bound hopelessness. At a deeper fractal level, Morgoth's curse is a working-out in story form of the dangers of willful resistance to fate—the curse serves as a projection or manifestation of Túrin's

unwillingness to accept the operation of *wyrd* in the world, to enter with open eyes and hopeful heart into the great dance of fate and free will, and as a result of his own resistance, to have to wait until the final battle to come into harmony with his role beyond the Circles of the World.

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About the Author

Janet Brennan Croft is Head of Access Services at the University of Oklahoma libraries. She is the author of *War in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Praeger, 2004; winner of the Mythopoeic Society Award for Inklings Studies), has published articles on Tolkien in *Mythlore*, *Mallorn*, *Tolkien Studies*, and *Seven*, and is editor of two collections of essays: *Tolkien on Film: Essays on Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings* (Mythopoeic Press, 2004) and *Tolkien and Shakespeare: Essays on Shared Themes and Language* (McFarland, 2006). She also writes on library issues, particularly concerning copyright. She is currently the editor of *Mythlore* and book review editor of *Oklahoma Librarian*, and serves on the board of the Mythopoeic Press.