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This Passing Shadow: The Role of Trauma in Reforming Individual and Cultural Identity in The Lord of the Rings and Anglo-Saxon Literature

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This Passing Shadow: The Role of Trauma in Reforming Individual and Cultural Identity in *The Lord of the Rings* and Anglo-Saxon Literature

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A Thesis

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Georgia College and State University

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Introduction

In their 2009 book, *A Short History of Fantasy*, authors Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James remarked that “Despite its popularity, fantasy has been relatively neglected by scholars, and there are just over a handful of important theorists in the field” (4). The fantasy genre, according to them, is often maligned as escapist in that it allows readers a way to ignore the problems associated with the world. However, it is also one of the most popular genres in fiction, film, and television and has been for some time. The genre itself, or its influences, can be considered the ur-literature in that the most ancient of texts often deal with the interplay of gods, mortal men, mythical powers and creatures, and heroic quests of leaving and return.

Certain tropes of fantasy that readers would now ascribe to the genre have been ever present throughout history. Mendlesohn and James write that “the ancient Greek and Roman novel, the medieval romance, and early modern verse and prose texts, all commonly use what we consider to be the tropes of fantasy; magical transformations, strange monsters, sorcerers and dragons, and the existence of the supernatural world” (7). They cite well known examples such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, *Prose Edda*, and include fairy tales, medieval romances, and Gothic literature in their assessment. However, these are not typically considered in discussions surrounding the genre but are separated out into what are usually considered to be “classics,” ultimately relegating fantasy to a form of lesser literature. While these do have elements of the fantastic, the reason that they are not considered to be “fantasy” has to do with, according to Mendlesohn and James, the Enlightenment’s shifting of the world to something that can be understood and controlled (14). Literature then followed this shift in perspective. This is

what separates the modern fantasy genre from what has come before. In a time where a scientific or a reasonable understanding of the world prevails, the more fantastic forms of literature seem to be pushed aside in academic circles. Rosemary Jackson, in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, pushes against this idea in her categorization of modern fantasy: “Fantasy recombines and inverts the real but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that ‘real’ world which it finds so frustratingly finite” (20). In other words, by categorizing and understanding the world, fantasy as a genre can exist. So, while fantasy *does* exist outside of the real world it is inextricably linked to it and comments on its limits.

Time and time again mankind returns to these tropes and themes no matter the cultural contexts or geographic location whether that is through writing or purchasing these stories. According to Dimitrije Curcic, a researcher for an international data and analytics site about literature, the genre (combined with science fiction) brings in \$590.2 million in sales annually. Additionally, “fantasy audiobooks, combined with science fiction, hold the largest share of sales among all audiobook categories” and generates \$1.6 billion in revenue (Curcic). To further illustrate the point, Brandon Sanderson’s 2022 Kickstarter, “Surprise! Four Secret Novels by Brandon Sanderson,” in which he secretly wrote four additional fantasy novels along with his multitude of ongoing series, is the most funded of any kickstarter to have been created, grossing \$41,754, 153. It leads one to ask the question; if fantasy is escapist, then what is it that so many readers are escaping to? And, perhaps more importantly, what are these readers escaping from? To help answer these questions, it is important to turn to the work that has undoubtedly influenced the fantasy genre the most in modern times.

Despite Tolkien's insistence that *The Lord of the Rings* is decidedly not an allegory for the world wars, it does deal with themes and topics that other, non-fantasy writers dealt with when writing about the wars. And while there have been a number of studies connecting Tolkien with trauma studies, the vast majority of them often deal with how *The Lord of the Rings* among his other works illustrates the individual trauma that Tolkien may have experienced during World War I and World War II. These studies seem mostly concerned with the deep personal effects that war has on an individual and rarely branch out from this idea and apply Caruth's classical model of literary trauma theory. This approach to Tolkien's literature, while certainly valuable, is reductive and ignores the other ways that Tolkien illuminates ideas of loss, both personal and cultural in *LOTR*. Additionally, these studies also tend to place Tolkien's works in a modernist tradition and compare his work to other war writers of his era. But Tolkien's portrayal of loss, ruin, and trauma is furthering a Medieval tradition of loss, and his depictions of trauma are often inspired by those of Medieval and Anglo-Saxon texts such as *Beowulf*, *The Ruin*, and *The Wanderer*.

This study will focus on the cultural impacts of war that Tolkien comments on through his work, why he turned to the fantasy genre to accomplish this, and its connection to similar themes in texts like *Beowulf*, "The Ruin," and "The Wanderer." It will view the similarities between these works in an attempt to answer these questions. Specifically, these texts answer the question of why readers escape to fantasy fiction, which draws heavily from Medieval texts, in order to be part of a world where suffering is healed and good triumphs over evil while escaping from a world often torn by war and general hardship. These texts, *Beowulf*, "The Wanderer," "The Ruin," and *LOTR*, show a progression of heroes dealing with outward circumstances that must be overcome to an individual dealing with inward difficulties caused by the separation of

himself and his culture because of outward difficulties. In other words, the heroic quests within each of these works can be seen as a telling of an individual experiencing and eventually healing from external and internal trauma.

A detailed history of the theory and practice of studying trauma can be found in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, but in order to differentiate the approach of these essays from earlier studies, a brief summation will be given. The beginnings of what we now consider the concept of trauma came about in the mid nineteenth century and were the result of singularly tragic railroad events that inspired a medical diagnosis (Sutterlin 41). The classic understandings and interpretations of trauma within literature are primarily founded on these studies. In the works of Cathy Caruth, who argues in states of trauma, a self that is fragmented and pathologized, necessitates a singular experience that causes a kind of split self and ultimately results in the idea of the unspeakable in which a character can not or will not speak of their traumatic event. However, this is a reductionist and simplistic view of how trauma affects individuals and places each person into the same box without regard to an individual's personal or cultural idiosyncrasies. This model places all trauma into the same box while excluding trauma that does not express itself in those same terms. The problem, according to Balaev, is that relying on this one popular theory of trauma "fails to adequately address the complex phenomena of trauma in literature" (*Nature of Trauma* 3). In other words, the stereotypical idea of trauma being something that silences a person or replays in their mind over the course of time only further silences any other potential representation of it within literature. Balaev's work, *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, offers a number of different approaches that can be used to analyze and evaluate the presentation of trauma in specifically American novels and locate the idiosyncratic cultural influences that create traumatic circumstances rather than just the limiting

concept of the “unspeakable”. This study will use these varying forms of analysis such as the natural environment that Balaev proposes in addition to the analysis of cultural ruins and cultural stories within *The Lord of the Rings* to establish a cultural reading of trauma. However, the final chapter will seek to show that a cultural reading and influence of trauma can also contain clues and ways for a culture and individuals to heal from their trauma over time. The trauma of the protagonists, societies, and cultures of *The Lord of the Rings* show a multitude of different traumatic expressions, but they are each set right through the return, rebuilding, or transformation of a community.

Chapter 1

Ruinous Roots: Ruins as an Expression of Trauma in *The Lord of the Rings*

While there have been several connections made between the work of Tolkien and the trauma and loss resulting from war, these tend to rely on a classic model of trauma that focuses on the individual effects of trauma. Articles such as Michael Livingston's "The Shell-shocked Hobbit: The First World War and Tolkien's Trauma of the Ring," rely on a single model of trauma in literature that was popularized by Cathy Caruth, among others, that focuses almost solely on an individual strictly displaying symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to analyze the effects of trauma. There is nothing inherently wrong with this approach, but it tends to attribute a universal standard of what can be considered as "traumatic." By doing this, scholars and readers alike miss the depth in which cultures, not just individuals, are affected by trauma and loss. Additionally, these interpretations often overlook the cultural stressors that impact and inform the loss that the individual experiences. Tolkien's work, however, is much more than what these interpretations of it make it to be and, while the personal implications of trauma are important, they are not everything. By using pluralistic methods of trauma as depicted by theorists such as Michelle Balaev, a fuller and more complete vision of the way Tolkien presents trauma reveals itself. The trauma depicted in *The Lord of the Rings* is not just individualistic but borrows and adapts presentations of it from Anglo-Saxon literature such as *The Ruin* to show the cultural implications of trauma and how those are tied up and reinforce individual trauma, remembrance, and eventual healing.

Tolkien's ruminations on loss extend beyond the personal and traumatic effects that war has on individuals and carry on into the cultural ramifications that war has on a people and their culture as a whole. Primarily, Tolkien uses his ruins and their formation into the natural

landscape to illustrate this. His use of ruins and his characters' reactions to those ruins resembles the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Ruin* from the Exeter Book. In both texts, a speaker contemplates the place and purpose of a ruin while marveling at the structure and questioning the loss that has taken place that has led a once proud structure to decay and fall apart. These ruins also come to reflect the state of the people who are represented by the ruins that are being focused on. In *The Ruin* the titular ruin represents the loss of art and culture of the Anglo-Saxons while they wrestle with a sense of a lost past. This same sentiment is present throughout Tolkien's letters and shows how deeply he thought and cared about this idea that links his works thematically with Anglo-Saxon texts. He writes in a letter that "there are two quite different emotions: one that moves me supremely and I find small difficulty in evoking: the heart-wracking sense of the vanished past..." (*Letters* 110). This sense of a vanished past is clear throughout *The Lord of the Rings* in the form of ruins and in the sense of how longstanding the history of Middle-Earth and the cultures within it are. Tolkien takes the idea of ruins as a place of cultural loss and catastrophe and turns them into sites of potential growth and identity reformation.

The Ruin links a cultural loss and loss of a people to the specific location of a ruin in a way that is indicative of trauma. Michelle Balaev claims:

Novels represent this disruption between the self and others by carefully describing the place of trauma because the physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories embedded in landscapes that define the character's identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience. The primacy of place in the representations of trauma anchors the individual experience within a larger cultural context, and, in fact, organizes the memory and meaning. (150)

While Balaev is referring to the natural environment and the descriptive techniques used within American novels, her point about the careful description of the physical environment to illustrate cultural history can be seen in the Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Ruin*. While the titular ruin is a manmade and unnatural object that intrudes on the "natural" world, Heide Estes states that ruins

“also display a sense of human dwelling as embodied within the natural world, both human and natural intertwined as part of a living organism subject to its own processes beyond human activities or concerns that include natural environmental dynamics across the slow creep of time, or acts of God” (63). In other words, a ruin, because of its subjugation to the environment over time, combines the natural and the manmade, blending them into something almost indistinguishable from one another. To those who view ruins, the distinction between what is natural and what is manmade is almost nonexistent due to the ruin being a constant presence to the one who is viewing it. Because of this, Balaev’s point about environments being able to communicate both the personal and cultural impacts of trauma should be considered applicable to the depiction of ruin and landscapes within Anglo-Saxon poetry.

In his introduction to the poem, Craig Williamson identifies the poet’s focus on the structure of this ruin, but pays no heed to the very real loss that is shown in the fragment (582). However, the role of the structure and its place in the culture of the Anglo-Saxons acts as an organizer for the speaker’s severance from his culture and identity within it. The idea of place is extremely important to the poem, but the poem itself uses the place of the ruin to communicate this traumatic loss that the speaker experiences. The ruin of this structure becomes a place that organizes and houses these memories for the poet to contemplate. Estes believes this to be illustrative of how Anglo-Saxons think about ruins, “Anglo-Saxon poems about ruins from distant pasts and/or remote regions concern themselves with the Anglo-Saxons’ own anxieties about loss and displacement. The existence of ruins, whether visible in stone or imagined in poems, challenges how the Anglo-Saxons think about themselves and their relationships to dwellings and to other features of their lived environments” (63). In other words, through the contemplation of loss and displacement, the Anglo-Saxons came to have a new understanding of

their place in the world. This contemplation can be seen in the poem *The Ruin* as the speaker attempts to understand their own place in the world in light of this wondrous ruin that is seemingly beyond his people's skill to build.

On the surface, the poem is about the ruinous remains of a structure, but it is increasingly tied to the loss of a people and culture as the poem continues. The first few lines are solely focused on the crumbling structure, but remind the poet of what has been lost:

Wondrous are these ancient wall-stones/Shattered by time, foundations shaken by fate,/The old work of giants, crumbled, corrupted--/Rooftops in ruin, towers tumbled down./Gate-locks lie broken, frost chokes the lime--/Ceilings sapped with age, the high hall loftless. (Williamson 582)

Almost immediately after these lines, however, the poet begins having thoughts of people that have been lost, first as fragments in a line and then as the focus of the poem. The poet's focus on the crumbling building begins to pull a sense of loss from the depths of the poet's mind. The poet continues "The mortar is moldy, the master-builders are gone,/ Buildings and brave men in the clutch of the grave./ A hundred generations have passed away,/ Princes and peoples now forgotten," connecting the ruin's disrepair with the state of his people (Williamson 583). The poet begins connecting specific aspects of the building like "mortar" to the "master-builders" who built it in the first place and laments their passing. The poet is not content to place the lament solely on the shoulders of the individuals lost but further comments on the loss of a "hundred generations" and "peoples" suggesting a loss of culture that is symbolized and represented by the ruin.

Individual and cultural identity and loss being shown through ruins is something that has been commented on before. Julia Hell and Andreas Schonle comment on this trope of ruin gazing in the modern era and make similar claims about the modern idea of ruins, "it is one of the master tropes of modern reflexivity, precisely because it encapsulates vacuity and loss as

underlying constituents of the modern identity. It is the reflexivity of a culture that interrogates its own becoming” (6-7). Even though Hell and Schonle never use the word “trauma” their discussion of “loss,” “identity,” and “becoming” suggest that, tied up in ruins, is the very idea that loss leads to shaping identity in order to become something new. What is interesting about this is that, according to Hell and Schonle, Anglo-Saxons recognized that their identity is built upon the losses and emptiness of the past and attempted to negotiate that and understand how it influenced their modern identity. The ancient Anglo-Saxon understanding of communal identity loss and an unknown past, which is presented in *The Ruin*, is still present in the modern era according to Hell and Schonle. However, they also pose the idea that ruins also represent a metaphysical vacuum in identity that must be filled by something, but make no judgment on whether that something needs to be positive or negative.

For Tolkien, the eucatastrophe was the taking of some negative or harmful event and turning it into something that could be considered good. In Tolkien’s own words, eucatastrophe “is the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears...the highest function of fairy-stories to produce” (*Letters* 100). In practice, though, the eucatastrophe is not simply a plot device that Tolkien uses to create a “happy turn” or a good ending for a character. Instead, the eucatastrophe is a way for Tolkien to take previous stories and rewrite them in order for them to come good in a way. In her essay on Tolkien’s use of eucatastrophe in his character’s arcs, Jane Beal shows how Tolkien used this technique to “rewrite the [original legends] so that sorrow is transformed into happiness” (17). Tolkien often kept the sorrow and dark moments of a tale but, because of his disliking “aspects of the stories he encountered– especially their endings” (Beal 17), he rewrites them or extends their endings to show the hope and goodness to make those experiences worthwhile or bear fruit to something unexpected or new. For this to work,

there still needs to be a dark moment that allows the happiness to break through and accomplish what Tolkien referred to as the “true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function” (*Tree and Leaf* 68). In other words, Tolkien’s view is that at the very darkest moment in a eucatastrophic fantasy story has to turn good for it to achieve its goal and reason for existence. This is only mentioned to illuminate Tolkien’s view on what makes fantasy worth writing and ultimately what he would be trying to achieve with his writing of *The Lord of the Rings*. It is important to also understand Tolkien’s meaning of the term escapism. While many do use the term as a way to mock or disparage the fantasy genre, Tolkien writes, in a letter to his son, that he “took to ‘escapism’: or really transforming experience into another form and symbol with Morgoth and Orcs and the Eldalie (representing beauty and grace of life and artefact) and so on; and it has stood me in good stead in many hard years since” (*Letters* 85). For someone who, on numerous occasions, denied *LOTR* to have allegorical intentions or interpretations, Tolkien indicates here that he does use it in order to represent ideas and deal with these issues, not to run away from them. It is with these two ideas in mind that we can understand that Tolkien’s works, particularly *The Lord of the Rings*, are a way of transforming his experiences in life into fantasy and, by doing so, applying eucatastrophe to it. In essence, Tolkien’s experience in war seeped into this epic about war in a way that he sought to remake it into a positive outcome.

This same Anglo-Saxon understanding of a ruin becoming a cultural or personal marker for traumatic experience is also present throughout Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and his other works. However, Tolkien is not content to only contemplate those losses and the emptiness or absence that they leave behind. Tolkien takes this idea and eucatastrophizes it, making these ruins into a place not of loss and rupture, but victory and unity. While there are a number of ruins throughout Tolkien’s legendarium, the ruins of Amon-Sul and Osgiliath most closely illustrate

the ways in which traumatic events of the past have acute effects on an individual and lasting repercussions on both the larger body of a population. It is these two ruins that Tolkien chooses to eucatastrophize in order to create new meaning that is both built on the past cultural losses but also remakes them. In both instances, the two ruins tie in both the cultural damage of a former population with the distinct personal attachments, suggesting that the identity of the individual is directly tied to the loss or past loss of a former population.

Weathertop as it is presently known within the time of *The Lord of the Rings* was once the site of a “great watch-tower” that was “tall and fair” that has since fallen into disrepair and is now only “a tumbled ring, like a rough crown on the old hill’s head” (*LOTR* 185). This short history that Aragorn gives is indicative of Tolkien’s style to tie the present day to relics and events of the past, but it also draws attention to the location’s and relic’s sense of being out of time with the present day. This sense of being out of time, of being both in the present and the past, is something that is also commented on within trauma studies as a temporal rupture (Trends 163). The sight of the hill and ruin prompts Aragorn and the hobbits to search in their memory for the meaning or former significance of this place, and Aragorn goes back into cultural memory in the songs that he has been taught: “The Men of the West did not live here; though in their latter days they defended the hills for a while against the evil that came out of Angmar...in the first days of the North Kingdom” (*LOTR* 185). The Men of the West, of whom Aragorn is descended, have all but disappeared and have scattered to the outskirts of civilization, becoming displaced through war. Despite this, it is their existence and ties to this ruin that Aragorn first connects to. In much the same way as the speaker of *The Ruin* remembers the past through loss and absence, Aragorn remembers his ancestors in conjunction with their fall and scattering. His note that Amon-Sul was the site where his ancestors “defended the hills for *a while* against the

evil” suggests that they ultimately did not succeed and succumbed to the evil they defended against. This reflects Estes’ point that Anglo-Saxons show their anxiety about loss and displacement through their works of poetry or interpretation of ruins.

What is more interesting is Tolkien’s description of the ruin of Amon Sul seems to also be referencing Aragorn. Tolkien’s choice to describe the decayed structure, in the presence of Aragorn, as “a tumbled ring, like a rough crown on the old hill’s head,” ties together the personal and cultural effects of war that lead to a loss of status and the need to reformulate a place in the world. Aragorn is the rightful king of Gondor but has been roaming around the wild, leaving the kingdom of Men with a different cultural standing than in the past. The interplay here begins the process of eucatastrophe for Aragorn and where he must truly begin the process to recover his status as the rightful king of Gondor. The ruin of Amon Sul, at this point, is certainly one of a broken and scattered people, but for Tolkien, this is a view that stops looking for hope. By extending the narrative through time, Aragorn’s story ceases to be just about him and becomes more about recovering the status of a people. The broken crown of the Men of the West will need to be reforged, and the place that this truly begins is where they were ultimately scattered and defeated. The twist and inversion of this past event is even more clear when seeing that it is against the same enemy whose army defeated the Dunedain that Aragorn defeats at Amon Sul.

This history of Amon Sul that Aragorn presents is just a summation of the events that Tolkien later records in his appendices, but also foreshadows a highly symmetrical event that is shortly to take place. According to the events described in the appendices, the forces of the Witch King, the leader of the Nazgul, “surrounded Weathertop” and “The Tower of Amon Sul was burned and razed” (*LOTR* 1040). After this battle, the remains of Aragorn’s ancestors are pushed out of this land or killed. What is interesting about this event is that it seems to return

from the past and out of history to plague the fledgling Fellowship in a way that is reminiscent of traumatic abreaction. The return of the Nazgul to Weathertop then becomes symbolic of cultural trauma as they surround the very same hill that they had before in an attempt to kill Aragorn and capture the One Ring. This time, however, Tolkien chooses to not let the Nazgul win and, instead, allows Aragorn to overcome these seemingly mythic oppressors that haunt the minds and lands of Middle Earth.

There has already been a connection drawn between the Nazgul, the concept of trauma, and warfare in Janet Brennan Croft's essay "War" in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*: "Many of [shell shock's] symptoms sound like the effect of the Black Breath of the Nazgul, or like Frodo's sufferings after the attack with the Morgul-blade on Weathertop" (467). Croft's connection the effects of the Nazgul to a condition linked to trauma are astute and they substantiate a trauma reading that is compatible with Caruth's definitions of it, but Tolkien's use of the Nazgul provides a different function for Aragorn that is more in line with Balaev's suggestions about reforming identity. This other use creates an opportunity for Aragorn to confront the ancient events that placed him and his people as nomads before forming a new identity that sees him replace his old identity.

The eventual fall of Amon-Sul on Weathertop sends the watchtower into disrepair over the centuries, but this does not stop the group from finding a sense of uncanny haunting on the hill. As they approach Weathertop, Merry says, "I am not sure that I like it: it has a – well rather a barrow wightish look" (*LOTR* 185). Tolkien's choice to describe the hill and crumbling tower as "wightish" evokes the idea that this particular place is haunted by some kind of presence. Merry is showing unease at the very presence of this place. This unease that Merry feels toward the ruin is because of its resemblance to the haunted graves that they had previously encountered.

It looks like the barrow-downs of other Men of the West and suggests a cultural tie to those graves as well as to the loss that was experienced there. This is Merry's experience of the uncanny and, combined with Aragorn's remembrance and voicing of his culture's past loss, trauma. Marita Nadal believes that both "trauma and the uncanny evoke an elusive event of the past that cannot be fully remembered and keeps haunting the present," which suggests a form of temporal break that is popular within some trauma theories (181). Instead of this event "remain[ing] in the mind like an intruder or a ghost," the ruin itself remains in the world to prompt individuals to remembrance of those events that created the ruin, but even in those that do not know the history of Amon-Sul there is a recognition of something haunting it.

Weathertop later becomes the site of a traumatic experience for Frodo and remains a reminder and organizer for returning to this experience. Once they reach Weathertop and settle in for the night, Frodo begins to feel "a cold dread creeping over his heart" and Sam feels "suddenly afraid" as night falls (*LOTR* 194). While it is revealed that the Ringwraiths are coming up the hill or are at least much nearer to the group than they initially believed, the unease surrounding Weathertop is deep in each of the hobbits and began much earlier than being attacked. However, Frodo suffers an actual violent event in being stabbed through the shoulder and wounded in the ensuing battle with the wraiths (196). This event, while not causing any lasting loss for Frodo, is his initial traumatic moment that will come to haunt him past the completion of his quest while being a primary reason for his leaving Middle Earth.

When the hobbits and Gandalf are returning to the Shire, they eventually come by Weathertop once again, and Frodo remembers and feels the pain of the past once again. Before getting to the ruin, Frodo experiences some apprehension about even entering into the land in which Amon Sul was because of his memory of the place. Tolkien writes that "Frodo had been

ill at ease. When they came to the Ford of Bruinen, he had halted, and seemed loth to ride into the stream; and they noted that for a while his eyes appeared not to see them or things about him” (989). Frodo is displaying signs of dissociation here and a hesitancy toward the whole landscape that highlights his past memory associated with it. This highlights the personal effect that trauma can have on an individual, but what is interesting is that Tolkien combines the sense of individual trauma with a sense of the social and cultural elements that help the individual make sense of those events. Frodo says to Gandalf, “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,” when Gandalf asks if he is in pain (989). Importantly, Frodo does acknowledge the pain that he feels and its return, but his continued response invokes both a problem with society and with identity for him in light of this trauma. This is the importance of understanding multiple representations of trauma. It is unfortunate that Frodo is traumatized by his experiences just as it is unfortunate for soldiers to be traumatized, but Tolkien seems to be touching on a deeper issue with those who are suffering from these symptoms. For Frodo and for Tolkien, the damage of trauma lies in being separated from society and community by the experience of trauma not just in the experience of it and he uses the structures of the Shire and their destruction to show this.

The Hobbits’ journey into the Shire illustrates their journey into the depth of what was lost to their culture. Tolkien’s use of physical space to illustrate this is another way that Tolkien helps to bring to light the sense of loss that the Hobbits have not yet begun to realize until their return home. Balaev writes that, “The physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character’s identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience,” (*Nature* 38). What is interesting in the context of Tolkien is that the Hobbits, as a culture, are literally imbedded in the landscape and

are so closely intertwined that this change in their culture is indicated very strongly by their interaction with the landscape in which they live.

When they finally return to the Shire, the hobbits find that their way of life and culture has been disrupted due to the war's far reach. One of the ways that Tolkien communicates this change is through the loss of cultural structures and places of gathering for Hobbits. Before seeing the destruction and change in the Shire, when first arriving, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin are greeted with a "great spiked gate" and houses that are "two-storeyed with narrow straight-sided windows, bare and dimly lit, all very gloomy and un-Shirelike" (*LOTR* 998). The change in the normally pastoral atmosphere of the Shire is indicated first through new structures like the gate and style of houses and then through atmosphere that seems to emanate from the structures, tying these two concepts together and then using them to denote the new change as a change in the identity of the Shire. Perhaps most illuminating to this new cultural shift in the Shire is the style of the new houses that are complete inverses of the former Hobbit holes that they famously lived in. The fact that these new houses are two storeys tall show that rather than building into the earth and communing with nature, they are now building as a way to separate themselves from it. The new constructions do away with the holes and burrows and even abandoned the style of building that was common for those who didn't build into the ground. In "Concerning Hobbits", the prologue included to *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien writes that the houses that were built "were usually long, low, and comfortable. The oldest kind were, indeed, no more than built imitations of *smials*, thatched with dry grass or straw" and that "a preference for round windows, and even round doors, was the chief remaining peculiarity of hobbit-architecture" (*LOTR* 7). The low to the ground houses with the organic shapes of circles included for larger influx of light are, at the point of "The Scouring of the Shire", placed in stark contrast

with the dark two-storeyed, narrow windowed, and thin structures that are now being built upon the return of the hero Hobbits. These new structures, rather than suggesting a connection with the earth, create distance between it and the Hobbits as well as between Hobbits themselves who are now fearful and distant from each other as shown once Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin reach the entrance to the Shire.

Tolkien emphasizes the cultural shift by showing its presence in the Hobbits that guard the gate. The normally polite and friendly (if not somewhat wary of strangers) Hobbits at the gate respond to the knocks of Frodo and his companions with “Who’s that? Be off! You can’t come in. Can’t you read the notice: *No admittance between sundown and sunrise?*” (*LOTR* 998). The gate that Tolkien describes creates a physical barrier and signifier of division for the community, something to keep others out rather than the open borders that typically surround the Shire. The Hobbits now reflect that division in their response to travelers almost as if they are taking their cues from the structures in their environment and vice versa. These new structures, the gate and new style of houses in the Shire, highlight the new cultural shift in the Shire that has been taken in because of war. The old structures that combat division, however, have been removed or torn down and turned into ruins and the remains that are left are used to build structures that are antithetical to the Hobbit ethos. When the landscape begins to take on an uncanny likeness to that of Mordor, Sam draws a connection to the inhabitants becoming more like their former enemies when he says, “No welcome, no beer, no smoke, and a lot of rules and orc-talk instead” (*LOTR* 1000). In the shadow of their new way of life, the Hobbits of The Shire are becoming orc-like according to Sam. While this could just be a common phrase for Hobbits, the choice to include it here in the dismal and gloomy atmosphere seems to be more of an intentional connection to the Orcs of Mordor and how individuals or people change based on

their interaction with other cultures. To further show the change in Hobbits, Tolkien shows the destruction of nature that is taking place, which again connects their new culture to the industrial ways of Isengard and shows that a way of life and understanding of their place in the world has changed.

For the Hobbits and Tolkien, the landscape itself becomes somewhat of a ruin and illustrates the mental and emotional states of the Hobbits because of their interconnectedness. When the Hobbits see The Old Grange, they have another shock that pushes Sam to tears, as it had been “knocked down...all the chestnuts were gone. The banks and hedgerows were broken. Great wagons were standing in disorder in a field beaten bare of grass. Bagshot Row was a yawning sand and gravel quarry” (*LOTR* 1017). The descriptors here are telling of the utter destruction of the landscape, but are also indicative of the emotional and mental state in which Sam finds himself. The words “beaten bare,” “broken,” “disorder,” and “knocked down” tell of the physical state of the trees and foliage, but these words also describe Sam as he comes to the slow realization that the Party Tree “under which Bilbo had made his Farewell Speech” was “lopped and dead in the field” (*LOTR* 1017). Sam is broken and beaten at the noticing of a cultural marker filled with memories of a now past life. That time with Bilbo seems just as lopped and dead as the Party Tree in the field. It is at this point that Sam “burst into tears” (*LOTR* 1017). The sudden acknowledgement of the totality of the disruption in their way of life and culture finally sinks into Sam because of the destruction of a cultural relic where a community once gathered. The Party Tree, now lying dead in a field, becomes a ruin that organizes Sam’s memory of a community in relation to loss and death rather than life. It is devoid of life and is surrounded by death and the remains of living activity.

The importance of cultural objects to the larger culture and the way that a population acts is something that has been studied. In “The Suffering of Symbols: Giotto Frescoes and the Cultural Trauma of Objects,” Mira Debs asserts that cultural trauma can be created out of the destruction of objects” and that “there are generalizable features to the cultural trauma of objects: they are most likely to develop from building sand works of art with strong collective totemic importance, when the loss of life is relatively small and when the destruction is irreparable or of a long duration” (489). The various inns of the Shire, particularly The Green Dragon, are seen as cultural centers and gathering places that have that “totemic importance” that Debs mentions. Early on in the novel, when dark news of coming events comes to the Shire, “The conversation[s] in *The Green Dragon*...showed that even in the comfortable heart of the Shire rumours had been heard” (*LOTR* 44). By this description, The Green Dragon is not simply an inn. It is the beating heart of the Shire where others go to share stories, come together, and drink together. In short, it is a place where one can go to experience community in its fullness. This is why it is such a shock and shame that The Green Dragon, when Sam goes to see it after returning, is “lifeless and with broken windows” surrounded by “large ill-favoured Men” who then turn him away (*LOTR*1004). There is no life left in the community because there is no place where the community can gather together. The Green Dragon has been sitting there for an indeterminate amount of time and has been left intentionally as a way to reinforce that there is to be no gathering. The Green Dragon then becomes a sense of the past that constantly reminds the Hobbits of a way of life that is now no longer allowed. Because of this, a new way of life begins to descend on the Shire that seems to be completely antithetical to the Hobbit ethos.

This new attitude is influenced by those in charge who have made laws that direct the Hobbits. But these laws aren’t sufficient for curbing the cultural values and identities of Hobbits.

Instead, the cultural centers such as Inns are sent into disrepair or completely torn down in order to reinforce this new way of life. Tolkien's use of structures and ruins shows what happens when a culture builds on top of the loss or absence of places of cultural importance without a sense of a larger community. After being let into the Shire, Merry asks for lodging but makes a note about what is missing from The Shire and says "you seem to have pulled down the Bridge Inn and built this dismal place instead" (*LOTR* 999). The relationship between the places of separation and division is clearly and intentionally drawn by Tolkien here to show that for those new cultural structures to be built, the structures that promote a sense of community must be dismantled. Shortly after this, the Hobbits provide a reason for this dismantling of Inns and tie it directly to the effects of war, "It isn't allowed.... Taking in folk off-hand like, and eating extra food, and all that,' said Hob" (*LOTR* 999). The shift from the (at least on the surface) welcoming nature of the hobbits has faltered and now they are turning individuals away. Later, as the group continues to discuss the lack of food and lodging, Hob explains it further, "We do hear that waggon-loads of it went away down the old road out of the Southfarthing..." (*LOTR* 1000). Earlier in the novel, Merry and Pippin find the Shire's pipeweed after the sack of Isengard, showing the destination of the goods disappearing from The Shire was to feed the war that they themselves were not involved in. In contrast to the titular ruin of *The Ruin*, Amon Sul, and Osgiliath, the ruins of The Shire are not created through the power and destruction of warfare or time and weather, but of cultural disruption caused by it.

The returning Hobbits' journey farther into The Shire further illustrates Tolkien's use of the physical environment's power to communicate trauma. Because specific "places of traumatic experience and moments of remembering are significant indicators in describing the value of trauma in a novel because a geographic place contains personal and cultural directives that

influence the expression of loss, pain, belonging, and healing” (*Nature* 38) it is imperative to look at both the landscape and physical environment as well as the way in which a character interprets that environment. As they continue their journey, they have “their first really painful shock...they found out now that they cared about it more than any other place in the world. Many of the houses that they had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the north side of the pool were deserted and their little gardens were...rank with weeds” (*LOTR* 1004). This being the greatest shock for the Hobbits, and the things that they notice in that shock is very telling about the feeling of loss that they have experienced up to this point. The hobbits each slowly begin to truly understand just how much their place in the world has shifted. This is the moment when the loss of their former way of life sets in. It is not just the loss of inns that has given them a shock, but the loss of the community that supported those inns indicated by the abandoned and ruined homes well on their way to becoming ruins. Additionally, the detail that the untended gardens are “rank with weeds” further suggests just how important the care of nature is to Hobbits and the interconnectedness of it with their culture. The separation of the two is the final straw for the Hobbits as they then rally their countrymen to ward off those that have come in and caused a traumatic reaction to The Shire. It is this moment that finally wakes them up to the loss that they have experienced and allows them to see what their culture has become. Only then can they fight against this and help them regain this lost identity or restructure it.

Finally, after seeing all of the cultural effects that the War of the Ring has had on The Shire, Sam makes an explicit connection between trauma, his own personal experience of Mordor, and the loss of culture. Tolkien makes no mention of seeing Hobbits laying in the streets of the Shire or evidence of profound violence done to individuals throughout this chapter, but the

change in atmosphere and the presence of ruins leads Sam to exclaim, “This is worse than Mordor!...Much worse in a way. It comes home to you, as they say; because it is home, and you remember it before it was all ruined” (*LOTR* 1018). Sam’s statement that “it comes home to you” is specifically linking the idea that Mordor is present in the minds of those that have experienced it and are seeing it without it being physically present. This is the idea of trauma from an event returning with the individual, the memories of Mordor are now woven together with how the Shire once was and, however positively, how it moves forward. The memory of the Hobbits’ past is now tainted by the changes that have happened within their culture and carries with it the reminders of the traumatic events that have happened. This sentiment is present in Saruman’s words to the Hobbits after they discover him in the Shire, “Still I have already done much that you will find it hard to mend or undo in your lives” (*LOTR* 1018). While it is possible that Saruman is speaking only of the structural and physical damage to the Shire here, these words certainly also apply to the mental anguish that the Hobbits, especially Frodo as the Ring-bearer, will experience as life continues for them.

Understanding the cultural component of their trauma as illustrated by their viewing of ruins now allows the reader to see the Hobbits’ heroism in its best light. Because of their time in Mordor and the trauma the Hobbits experienced on their travels, they come to have a new understanding of their place in the world and how they relate to it. A substantial determinant in more recent understandings and evaluations of trauma relies on a new perception or understanding of where one fits into the world or culture they are a part of: “A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world” (“Trends” 150). However, for a communal

trauma to occur, the community affected will also necessarily have to reshape its identity and be changed. The hobbit heroes recognize this and their role in holding the community together. For Tolkien, this is exactly how he presents his characters being affected by trauma. When confronted with the Mordor-like state of the Shire, the Hobbits do fall into a despair and do recall their past experience in Mordor, but they use this past as a foundation to put their new found identities as heroes to the test by bringing their community back together rather than allowing it to remain fractured and broken. After clearing out Saruman and the rest of his henchmen, the Hobbits of the Shire set to work at clearing out the effects of the war and the devastation it has caused. The ways that they heal from these events revolve around a sense of community and togetherness and a pastoral way of life as opposed to the mechanical way that had begun to creep in.

In his letters, Tolkien connects the depiction of the Shire with his own personal life and the life of the modern age, suggesting that the Shire is representative of his view of what England was turning into post-War. He writes that,

This charming house has become uninhabitable—unsleepable-in, rocked, racked with noise, and drenched with fumes. Such is modern life. Mordor in our midst. And I regret to note that the billowing cloud recently pictured did not mark the fall of Barad-dur, but was produced by its allies-or at least by persons who have decided to use the Ring for their own (of course most excellent) purposes. (*Letters* 165)

The fumes that he writes about drenching his home call to mind the “unusual amount of burning going on” and the “smoke [rising] from many points round about” (*LOTR* 1000). Additionally, the phrase “Mordor in our midst” recalls the exclamation by Sam Gamgee that this new depiction of the Shire is “worse than Mordor...because it comes home to you” (*LOTR* 1018). The depiction of Sam’s emotional outburst is a marker of shock and loss of a previous way of life that is indicative of a traumatic experience, should this letter be taken as any less heart-

racking? The time that Tolkien was writing was one in which he was watching his very own way of life slowly (and in some cases not so slowly) disappear. Indeed, the way that he speaks of the loss of natural environments is reminiscent of the shock of Sam and the other Hobbits at the realization of the Shire being decimated and its natural environments being razed in favor of shacks and mills. His love of trees specifically has been well-documented and written upon, but it is his sense of loss for them that is important here “nothing [the Forestry Commission] has done that...compares with the destruction, torture and murder of trees perpetrated by private individuals and minor official bodies. The savage sound of the electric saw is never silent wherever trees are still found growing” (*Letters* 420). It is difficult not to see the “Scouring of The Shire” in these lines. The very words that Tolkien uses hint at his distress of losing natural spaces. Trees are not simply chopped down but tortured to create pain and murdered. Even the electric saw is personified as some evil and barbaric force in the presence of the natural environment.

The adoption of the use of ruins from Medieval texts such as *The Ruin* allows Tolkien to comment on the loss of culture that England experienced through war and other disasters while also allowing him to connect a loss of natural environment to this idea of ruins. However, Tolkien does not simply rely on the past in *The Lord of the Rings* but places the ruins in context of the present in which a new war begins to threaten the culture of Middle Earth. This allows Tolkien’s work, despite his dislike of allegory, to highlight the threat of cultural loss through war. As Amon Sul and the ruins of the Shire demonstrate, ruins serve as constant reminders of the past and the former majesty of past eras that cannot be connected to in much the same way as *The Ruin* depicts the Roman structure of Bath. However, unlike the poet of *The Ruin*, Tolkien is not content merely to contemplate the past but uses it as a foundation to launch his characters

into a new and better future for their people. Motivated by his own views about the loss of natural environments and the industrial direction that England was heading in, Tolkien applies eucatastrophe to his world by turning to fantasy in order to return to a more pastoral way of life in the Shire. By doing this, Tolkien is saying that, yes, wars do cause disconnect between a people and their collective pasts through the destruction of cultural sites, but those sites and reminders of what has been lost can also serve as motivators to fight on, confront the past, and reclaim a heritage or history. His hope then becomes that, like the Hobbits of the Shire, perhaps people can come together to turn away the industrial destruction of nature and return to a more healing way of life in the pastoral.

Chapter 2

The Trauma of Leaders: The Need for Community in Those Who are Isolated in Leadership

Denethor and Theoden

Comparisons between the characters of Denethor and Theoden have been drawn repeatedly, and Tolkien seems to invite this connection through several similarities. They are both the leaders of their respective peoples, they are both somewhat advanced in age, both have lost a son, and both experience a form of mental anguish. However, their anguish and despair are not solely inspired by the loss of their sons but of the impending loss of their culture through war and death. The losses that both face send them into a traumatic spiral, but the difference in their ability to heal reveals Tolkien's beliefs on the way that an individual may heal from their past traumas whether that be personal or cultural. When first encountering both characters, there is a similarity to their halls and their relationship to their people that show their distance and isolation. Tolkien's use of physical space surrounding each of these characters reflects Anglo-Saxon traditions surrounding a communal culture and suggests that the acceptance of that communal culture creates a resilience to trauma while rejecting it leads to isolation and a reinforcement of a broken identity.

The connection between Rohan and the Anglo-Saxons has already been explained by Tolkien scholar, Tom Shippey. In his work *The Road to Middle-Earth*, Shippey outlines the ways in which history, both factual and literary, contributed to the creation of Tolkien's legendarium. Shippey shows that certain plots or chapters of *The Lord of the Rings* are calqued and reconstructed from specific plots or sections from ancient Germanic and Anglo-Saxon texts

in order to either make a new point or translate customs to the modern reader. Tolkien's chapter, "The King of the Golden Hall," is of particular importance to Shippey. And he states that it "is straightforwardly calqued on *Beowulf*" in its use of customs in approaching kings (Shippey 141). Shippey's primary focus is on the structures of Rohan, the customs of the Rohirrim, and the way in which their "heroic way of life preoccupies men with death" (143). However, a reading of "The King of the Golden Hall" shows that Shippey's view that their heroic way of life creates a cultural preoccupation with the death of the individual or of others is not the sole reason for the king's mourning, it is the impending loss of their very way of life and this is also a theme brought over from *Beowulf*. This loss of culture in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* leads to a crisis of identity for those that experience it. Shippey's belief that the "heroic way of life preoccupies men with death" may be true for the literary Anglo-Saxons, but it is incomplete for Tolkien in that the constant threat of death prompts individuals in these works to recalibrate their identities and cultures into a more heroic way of life.

Beowulf begins by describing a funeral and the lifestyle of Hrothgar's people; from this description one can infer their cultural values surrounding loss. Balaev states that novels "often demonstrate that how the protagonist views the self before and after the traumatic event depends upon the type of traumatic event as well as the available narrative formulations and social values that are provided by the protagonist's society in the world of the novel" (38). In other words, a narrative must show enough of the society in which the primary characters exist along with their cultural values before the traumatic event occurs, and it must show how those characters change their view of themselves and their societal values after the event. While the poem is not overly concerned with how each individual Dane perceives themselves, the poet does not ignore that there is a shift in their demeanor before and after the attacks from Grendel. Before the attacks,

the poet writes that “it came into [Hrothgar’s] mind that he would command a royal building...which the sons of men should hear of forever” and that, when it was finished, “He, whose word had power everywhere, said its name...he broke no promises” (Chickering 53). These details that the poet includes serve to build up the level of expectation and the importance for Hrothgar to complete this task and hint at the importance and value of this work to his people. There are two values here that should be noted and remembered moving forward. The first is that Hrothgar is known as someone who keeps his word. If Hrothgar’s “word had power everywhere,” then he must have a recognition as someone who is trustworthy to do what he says. Additionally, it is specifically noted that he “broke no promises.” This inclusion highlights a marker of identity. This is something that others know him as, which establishes a form of cultural identity, but Hrothgar also thinks of himself in this way, establishing a connection between cultural and individual identities. The poet also set up the contextual value of the building of Heorot as different than any other building, this was a symbol for the might and power of their culture in addition to being a gathering place for their culture to develop and be remembered.

Grendel’s attacks on Heorot are repetitive and target a space of cultural importance to Hrothgar’s people and forces them to question their own cultural values and beliefs, leading them to question their own cultural identity. Because of this forced separation from a center of cultural importance, Hrothgar himself descends into his own darkness that is consistent with traumatic descriptors. *Beowulf* depicts the cultural context of Hrothgar and how their views of their culture changes through loss which again reflects the environment reflecting characters’ inner trauma. This questioning of their cultural identity and loss of the mead hall, Heorot, is a

traumatic experience that leads the Anglo-Saxons in *Beowulf* to “[contemplate] new ways of knowing the self and world” (*Nature* 37).

In *The Wanderer*, another Anglo-Saxon text filled with loss and the trauma of being separated from community, the mead hall as a symbol of cultural belonging makes another appearance. The questioning of the passing of cultural elements leads to the breaking of a communal feeling between the speaker and his people and lord. The speaker questions the loss of individuals, presumably after some battle, but slowly begins to question how those individual losses change his place in the world: “Where has the horse gone? Where is the rider?/ Where is the giver of gifts?/ Where is the seat of feasting?/ Where is the hall-joy?...The only thing left is traces of the tribe” (Williamson 457). The loss that the questions eventually reference is for a collective space in which culture happens and connects the loss of this space to the speaker’s trauma. The mead hall, while a physical space for the Anglo-Saxon culture to take place, becomes a symbol for the culture as a whole, and the loss of this is representative of the speaker in *The Wanderer* being left adrift without a communal space or community in which to exist in.

The use of the physical space that characters occupy is often used by Tolkien, among many other authors, to convey the emotional and mental state of his characters. Tolkien describes Theoden's hall as “dark and warm...filled with shadows and half lights...But here and there bright sunbeams fell in glimmering shafts” and “pillars were richly carved, gleaming dully with gold and half-seen colours” (*LOTR* 512). This falls short of the title of “The Golden Hall” that is bestowed upon it, but it does show a majesty that is just below the surface that is being overshadowed by the darkness and despair of Theoden. Descriptors like “dark,” “shadows and half lights,” “dully,” and “half-seen” all suggest that there is something that is thinly veiled within the walls of the hall. Even more important is that there are “woven cloths ...of ancient legend,

some dim with years, some darkling in the shade,” which suggests that it is the slow disappearance of the very culture of Rohan that is causing this darkness (*LOTR* 512). Tolkien describes all of this before meeting Theoden in order to contextualize his condition and the nature of his situation. By foregrounding the cultural tapestries, Tolkien links the condition of Theoden and his hall with the fall of Rohan and not much else. Theoden himself even links his dire state to a potential loss of culture and living under the threat of that destruction rather than the loss of his son. After being brought out from Wormtongue’s spell, Theoden, speaking to Gandalf, explicitly links his state with his culture’s and remarks that “I fear that already you have come too late, only to see the last days of my house” (*LOTR* 516). Theoden has only been brought out of his despair momentarily, but is able to voice his chief worry as the impending loss of his culture.

In addition to the built structure of Meduseld, the landscape here is also woven into the culture of Rohan. Legolas comments on the language of the Rohirrim as Aragorn chants, saying “it is like to this land itself; rich and rolling in part, and else hard and stern as the mountains. But I cannot guess what it means, save that it is laden with the sadness of Mortal Men” (*LOTR* 508). Tolkien explicitly connects a major cultural aspect of Rohan, the language, to its landscape while also indicating a strong sense of loss. Even the *words* of Aragorn’s song tie loss and the natural world together:

Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?
 Where is the helm and the hauberk, and the bright hair flowing?
 Where is the hand on the harpstring, and the red fire glowing?
 Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?
 They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow;
 The days have gone down in the West behind the hills into shadow.
 Who shall gather the smoke of the dead wood burning,
 Or behold the flowing years from the Sea returning? (*LOTR* 508)

In the lament of the Rohirrim, the first three lines speak of Men and their passing, the subjects “rider,” “helm,” “hair,” and “hand” all reflect parts of mankind and, in each of these lines, are part of mankind that has disappeared. However, the existence of this song is evidence that the entire race of the Rohirrim has not disappeared, but aspects of their culture may have and the song is lamenting that loss. The “horse and rider” are clear ties to the culture of the Rohirrim who are also known as “horse lords” because of their mastery of horses and the centrality of the animal to their economy and way they conduct war. After the first three lines, however, the song uses natural phenomena to characterize the loss felt by the speaker rather than explicit mentions of Man. In this song, the wind, the stream, the rain, the burning wood, and the setting of the sun all come to remind those that know the poem of the loss of the rider, the blower of the horn, the harp player. Aragorn then ties this poem to the specific loss of a single person, but one who also represents the culture as a whole. “Thus spoke a forgotten poet long ago in Rohan, recalling how tall and fair was Eorl the Young” (*LOTR* 508). Even recalling the tall and fair Eorl is tinged with the sadness of loss of him and what he represented in the Rohirrim culture. This has been memorialized for the people of Rohan in much the same way that it was for Anglo-Saxons.

Tolkien’s choice to include a line from *The Wanderer* connects the poems in their show of the effects that the loss of a leader can have on individuals and the culture as a whole. Throughout *The Wanderer*, the speaker laments on his separation from community through the loss of friends and his lord: “Cut off from kinsmen after I covered/My gold-lord in the dark hold of ground./I went winter-sad with the weight of years/Over the winding eaves, seeking some lord/Who might heal my history, hold my heart” (Williamson 455). What is particularly revealing here is that the speaker is looking for something or someone that will give him some new role or understanding of his role in the world and community. This does not indicate that the

losses are somehow less damaging than they are but reveals just how important having a direction and a place can be in recovering from these events. Yes, the violence of the loss is something that could be traumatic, but the violence of war does not seem to be the cause of most of the trauma the speaker experiences, rather it is the separation and loss from his culture. The speaker is “winter-sad” or bitterly sad with the memory and the “weight of years” that have passed with his kinsmen and lord and is now “seeking some lord” who will heal that emptiness by “holding his heart” in giving him a new community to be a part of. It is clear that the role of community within Anglo-Saxon culture is important, as it is to all cultures, but the “lord” is perhaps more important than the “kinsmen” in allowing the speaker to find that sense of community and a new identity within it.

The concepts of remembrance of loss and growth out of that loss is illustrated in more than just the culture and songs of Rohan, but in their interpretation and use of nature. Before entering Edoras, the fractured fellowship finds a small white flower growing outside of its walls. Tolkien takes a moment out of their journey to shed some light on these flowers as Gandalf says, “Evermind they are called *simbelmynë* in this land of Men, for they blossom in all the seasons of the year, and grow where dead men rest. Behold! We are come to the great barrows where the sires of Theoden sleep” (*LOTR* 507). Tom Shippey says the name of these flowers means “evermind” and Gandalf says, but also “ever-memory”, “forget-me-not” (Shippey 142). Similarly to the Hobbits of the Shire, Rohan ties its culture and memory into the landscape in order to remember the individuals of the past since they only grow “where dead men rest.” Shippey claims that the *simbelmynë* “stands for the preservation of memory of ancient deeds and heroes in the expanse of years” (142), but this is an incomplete analysis of the purpose of these flowers. They do not just stand for the remembrance of the lost, but the growth that can still come from it.

Because there is new life that comes specifically from those past heroes that are lost, it prevents the viewer of these barrows from solely focusing on the loss of these individuals and their deeds and reminds the viewer that there is life after these dark events. In the flowers remains the promise and hope that there is a continuation of the culture of Rohan.

In contrast to the barrows of Rohan, the barrows that Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin encounter on their way to Bree are filled with the remains of those *not* remembered but haunt the landscape nonetheless. Where the Rohan barrows have a thriving community nearby and flowers specifically growing out of the burial mounds, the barrow-downs are almost devoid of life. The sight of the barrow-downs is “somehow disquieting” to the hobbits as they make their way through “(*LOTR* 137). The air is “silent, heavy, and chill” (*LOTR* 137). The description that Tolkien uses is more reminiscent of a tomb than an open vista. Yes, the barrow-downs are tombs, but the landscape takes on characteristics and aspects of death and serves as a reminder that the death that is memorialized there is larger than just individual members of a culture that is now forgotten. The barrow-downs, then, become a stark foil to Rohan. The lack of a continued culture surrounding the barrow-downs leads to a dark disquiet that suffuses the land. Because there is no continuation of the culture of the barrow-downs as in Rohan, the burial mounds cease to have any hope associated with the loss. Instead, the loss becomes eternal, and any life that comes into contact with these is infected by the loss. This connection between the landscape and loss becomes even more clear once Frodo is trapped in a barrow. The voice of the barrow-wight that begins to chant is “sometimes high in the air and thin, sometimes like a low moan from the ground. Out of the formless stream of sad and horrible sounds...” (*LOTR* 141). The language that Tolkien uses here is filled with connections to the landscape. The voices are compared to natural events or formations like “air,” “ground,” and “stream,” suggesting that even the

landscape is bearing witness to this loss and has been infected or molded by it. The haunting and memory of these barrows is something that has lain dormant until the specter of war returns to this land.

In *Unfinished Tales*, the collected unfinished narratives surrounding the texts of Tolkien often contain more context for events of *LOTR* that were unpublished in the original work, but nonetheless give insight into Tolkien's own thoughts behind these events. In "The Hunt for the Ring" chapter in this collection, Tolkien provides more context and explanation surrounding the events of the barrow-wights and how they came to become active: "In notes on the movements of the Black Riders at that time it is said that the Black Captain stayed there for some days, and the Barrow-wights were roused, and all things of evil spirit, hostile to Elves and Men, were on the watch with malice in the Old Forest and on the Barrow-downs" (*Unfinished* 369). As symbols for war and its effects, the ring-wraiths' appearance here becomes the catalyst for the land to take on the dark and seemingly personified trauma that the barrow-wights represent. In other words, this cultural destruction is remembered only in the context in which it was first encountered. The wraiths' appearance in the land is precisely what raises the dead barrow-wights just as the experience of war raises the memory of personal and cultural loss in those that have experienced it before. Here, unlike the barrows of Rohan, the loss was total and the culture that was once present has been buried with those that lived in it. Unlike the barrows of Rohan, there is no hope to counteract these memories of loss that persist to infect others.

The hope that persists throughout the Rohirrim culture is precisely what allows them to both recover and push on to fight against Sauron for Middle-Earth—it need only to be reawakened. The Lament of the Rohirrim, according to Michael Cunningham's interpretation, is "a call to arms" that "seeks for a new dawn" for those that hear it (28). It is a lament in which

“great deeds and courage may linger in word, stone or the rising of the earth...expressed in heroic terms” (Cunningham 28) that reminds the audience of a past in which there were heroes and that they are now called to become heroes in the likeness of those who have passed. This interpretation is, for Cunningham, a key aspect of Rohan’s culture that carries on a storied history of their past. Its value, however, lies in its use for those who *need* to be exhorted to heroism, whether that is to regain an old, forgotten identity of a hero or for those who may have never considered heroism as part of their identity in the first place. In other words, its transformative power for identity lies in some aspect of cultural or individual identity that is interrupted in one form or another. These aspects of Rohirrim culture, the *simbelmynë*, songs, and stories, instill a resilience to trauma within the people of their culture, but not an immunity to it and it is precisely why Theoden is able to, with some help, come out of the dark in Meduseld as a changed man and reconstruct an interrupted or lost identity of a king leading his people to battle.

When traveling into Rohan, Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli, first come upon a land “still dim and dark, untouched by the light of dawn” but with a “glint in the rising sun, a glimmer of gold” still present deep within it (*LOTR* 506). This description comes to reflect the earlier mentioned description of Meduseld, a place shrouded in shadow but with hints of light that still peek through in the darkness, again tying the land with the cultural center of Rohan and Theoden’s despair. While this darkness does pervade the land at present, Tolkien places a high focus on the coming day. Gandalf states that they “come with the rising of the day” (*LOTR* 507), connecting their presence with bringing light to this dark land and Theoden . Gandalf specifically links their company with bringing light to this land and dismissing the shadows that pervade it. Theoden himself is also like the land in that there is clearly a hint of majesty about him, but

when first looking at him, he is “so bent with age that he seemed almost a dwarf” (*LOTR* 512). It is only upon continued inspection that Tolkien reveals the more majestic qualities about him in the same way that Legolas looks deeper into Rohan to see Meduseld. Similar to the “glint” of Meduseld, Theoden’s eyes are described as “[burning] with a bright light, glinting as he gazed” further deepening the connection between the culture and the man himself (*LOTR* 512). Clearly, this is a man of intelligence and majesty, but something is woefully wrong. When Theoden eventually stands, Tolkien draws a connection to the man’s past and his slow decay into what he is now to bring to light how Rohan has steadily declined to the point it is at now when faced with impending doom. As Theoden stands, Tolkien describes him as “old man,” “leaning heavily upon a short black staff with a handle of white bone” and “bent” (*LOTR* 512). However, it is clear that there is a former strength to him but that his being has somewhat shifted of late. Gandalf calls attention to Theoden’s shift in personality when he admonishes Theoden’s lack of hospitality.

The role of community in bringing Theoden out of his despair cannot be understated. When Gandalf suggests that “the courtesy of [Theoden’s] hall is somewhat lessened of late” (*LOTR* 513), he is calling to attention not just how he has changed, but that his change has influenced the proceedings of his culture and how it is affecting those that come to offer aid. Community and friendship is something that Gandalf is keenly aware will aid in the pushing back of the shadow of loss and despair. When he first speaks, he tells Theoden “behold! The storm comes, and now all friends should gather together, lest each be singly destroyed” (*LOTR* 512). Gandalf’s coming is an attempt to draw together those that would fight against the darkness, but on arrival, he sees that he must also bring Theoden out of his own personal darkness before he is able to pull his people out of theirs. In order to do this, Gandalf refers to

Theoden's cultural status and his identity within that. In one of the rare sections where magic is indisputably used, "the darkness seemed to clear, and through the opening could be seen, high and far, a patch of shining sky" (*LOTR* 514) as Gandalf attempts to call Theoden back to his former self that, while affected by his losses, is not controlled by them. During this, Gandalf ceases to refer to him by his cultural title as "Lord of the Mark" (*LOTR* 514), something that he has not done until this moment. He does this once more as Theoden walks to the doors of his hall as "a faint light grew in the hall again" (*LOTR* 515). By treating Theoden this way, he is giving him strength and a returned identity that he, through "twisted tales and crooked promptings" had abandoned (*LOTR* 514).

Theoden's recovered identity is also directly tied to the restoration of the land. Just like the faint light in the hall, outside Theoden now sees that the "storm that had come out of the East was receding...suddenly through a rent in the clouds behind them a shaft of sun stabbed down" (*LOTR* 515). In much the same way, Gandalf and the company of Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas have pushed aside Theoden's own personal darkness, so when he says "It is not so dark here" (*LOTR* 515), it is not simply a remark about the physical darkness of Rohan only but the realization of hope stabbing through his own darkness. It is only now, in the company of friends, that Theoden can express what has been eating away at his inner self. His words illuminate his inner turmoil, its causes, and his connection with his ancestral and cultural past: "Dark have been my dreams of late...but I feel as one new-awakened...For I fear that already you have come too late, only to see the last days of my house. Not long now shall stand the high hall which Brego son of Eorl built. Fire shall devour the high seat" (*LOTR* 515-516). While it is important to note that trauma does not *always* produce the same symptoms in individuals, it is important to acknowledge that Theoden does show some of the traditional symptoms that the classic model of

understanding trauma popularized. Theoden does find it difficult to speak about what is ailing him, not because of some inherent fragmentation caused by his trauma, but by the cultural elements of Rohan. It should not go unnoticed that Theoden does not mention these issues until he is alone with others who are not under his care as subjects. He instead speaks to Gandalf whom he has a longstanding familiarity with and those that may share a somewhat equal standing in their respective cultures. What this highlights is that trauma, for Tolkien, is not something that always forces someone into submission or silence, but it is enhanced through cultural roles and the implications of that role. This unspeakability that is so common in trauma studies is something that “should not be taken as an irrefutable fact or as the inherent quality of traumatic experience” (*Nature* 10), and Theoden’s eventual speaking of this shows that it is a burden placed on him due to his role rather than any fragmentation or “dissociation” that may have occurred because of traumatic events.

However, instead of a dissociative response within oneself, Tolkien illustrates trauma through a disconnection between his characters and their community members to show the larger effects on a culture through the individual. Theoden’s admission to Gandalf shows the characteristic emotions that the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychology* associates with trauma: “intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation” (Sadock, Sadock, and Ruiz 918). If Theoden were to divulge these feelings to those under his rule, it would spread that despair to the citizens and warriors of Rohan. As the figurehead of his culture, Theoden comes to represent the culture at large and it is his job to reflect strength or, at the very least, bravery in these times of war.. It is no small wonder that he holed himself up in Meduseld away from the vast majority of his people once his despair became too much. In addition to his “inability” to

communicate his trauma, Theoden speaks about his fears as if they have been manifesting in dreams, another traditional marker for trauma:

Dark have been my dreams of late...but I feel as one new-awakened...I would now that you had come before, Gandalf. I fear that already you have come too late, only to see the last days of my house. Not long now shall stand the high hall which Brego son of Eorl built. Fire shall devour the high seat. (*LOTR* 515-516)

These dreams that Theoden brings up are each associated with the end of his line and the end of Rohan. The loss of Theoden's son is clearly weighing on him when he says that these are "the last days of my house," speaking of his family's lineage, but this line, specifically, should also be seen as commenting on the loss of the entirety of Rohan. The connection to the historical and cultural past of Brego and Eorl suggests that this individual loss runs deeper than the potential loss of his own family line and extends to the death of the House of Eorl as a whole in the destruction of Rohan. These dreams and the fear that he feels substantiates the loss of control and threat of annihilation that he must feel.

In order to express these feelings, Theoden must have someone that is both close to him but separated from the culture of Rohan for him to let down his guard. Comparing *The Wanderer* to Theoden's own plight reveals that Tolkien seems to be creating an inverse situation where it is not the soldier or citizen cut off from his culture in need of a new one, but one in which the lord is cut off and needs someone "Who might heal [his] history, hold [his] heart" (Williamson 455). Theoden has cut off himself from his kinsmen in an effort to maintain their identity, while simultaneously taking and holding onto the despair without being able to voice it. It is the taking in of these allies that Theoden finds a sense of community and someone to hold his heart to return him to a former identity. In a sense, Theoden's history is healed in that he is connected back to it by community. In this case, the "unspeakable" quality, if it can be called that, is culturally motivated just as the trauma itself is culturally defined. Interestingly, Theoden is able

to communicate his despair and trauma in a way that allows him to recover with the aid of friends and a sense of community, and this speaks to Tolkien's views on how military leaders *should* behave.

In "The Morality of Military Leadership," Janet Brennan Croft suggests that the characters of Theoden and Denethor represent Tolkien's views on the style of leadership within the military, but this also has implications as to the effects and causes trauma has on leaders. Specifically, Croft refers to the styles of leadership found on Theoden and Denethor respectively as "front-line warriors and 'chateau generals'" (Croft 47). When first meeting Theoden, he is the very picture of a chateau general in that he has locked himself within Meduseld and is sending the Riders of the Mark out to cull any intruders into their lands. This is clearly depicted as a faulty way of leadership by Tolkien as Theoden is exhorted by companions to change to a front-line warrior. However, Denethor sees no such change because of his rejection of the aid of companions and allies, and instead relies on his use of tainted knowledge he receives from the palantir that he privately gazes into.

The first sighting of Denethor and Theoden in their respective halls are remarkably similar and serve as an invitation to compare the two. Denethor, like Theoden, is seated in a "long solemn hall" with "dull gold" that is obscured "in shadow" (*LOTR* 754). However, Denethor's hall seems to be more majestic in its opulence, with "black marble" pillars and floors "of polished stone, white gleaming, inset with flowering trceries of many colours" and, "silent company of tall images graven in cold stone" (*LOTR* 754). Two important things that are missing from Denethor's hall that are present in Theoden's are that there are "no hangings nor storied webs, nor any things of woven stuff out of wood" and there are no other people save for those servants that are not to be seen (*LOTR* 754). Denethor is utterly isolated from others, especially

those that do not specifically serve him. Despite the darkness of Theoden's hall, it does seem to be somewhat warmer in regards to being open to community and the past. The company of tall images are representative of the past, but the way that they are described seems to invoke a sense of death and judgment rather than the majesty that the woven tapestry of Eorl the Young in Meduseld displays. As a philologist and creator of languages, Tolkien would most certainly cognizant of the closeness of the word "graven" to "grave" invoking a sense of death, given Denethor's words shortly after this, this choice of word seems to be intentional. Additionally, the "cold stone" that the images of the past are graven in evokes a sense of silence and judgment for those that view it. They are cold in that there is no life to them, they stand resolute as reminders of past glory and sit in judgment, looking down over those in the hall, and this seeps into Denethor.

This connection is made by Pippin in his description of the Steward. Similarly to his hall, Denethor has a "carven face with its proud bones and skin like ivory," and "deep dark eyes" (*LOTR* 754). The carven face of Denethor is meant to draw a connection with the graven images of stone, linking Denethor's present with the past of Gondor's leaders that surround the hall. His ivory skin reflects the "white gleaming" of the polished stone floor, and his "dark deep eyes" seem to similarly reflect the gold ceiling shrouded in shadow. Once again, Tolkien is using the physical environment of the halls to set up the individual who inhabits them. If the environment of Denethor's hall is reflective of him, so too is the lack of community and the stark isolation of it. For Denethor, unlike Theoden, his own descent into despair extends explicitly from the loss of his son, Boromir. As he is sitting, he has been staring at the two halves of "a great horn cloven through the middle: a wild-ox horn bound with silver," (*LOTR* 755) a symbol that became so closely tied with Boromir that it is akin to Denethor looking at the broken body of his son. This

is a traumatic loss, not just because Boromir is Denethor's son, but because this represents the breaking and slow death of the past and the cultural ties with it. His statement about the horn, that he "bore it, and so did each eldest son of our house, far back into the vanished years before the failing of kings, since Vorondil father of Mardil hunted the wild kine of Araw in the far fields of Rhún...it will wind no more" (*LOTR* 755) ties together the loss of Boromir, the future of Gondor, to the loss of the past of Gondor as well. It is precisely this that leads Denethor, mirroring the "dark dreams" and "last days of my house" that Theoden speaks of, to say "but though all the signs forbode that the doom of Gondor is drawing nigh, less now to me is that darkness than my own darkness" (*LOTR* 754). But, judging by his words, these two darkneses seem to be one in the same. At the very least, the intensity of one is influenced and made greater by the other as he does admit to experiencing both at the same time. The death of Boromir is not just the death of Boromir, but the death of the line and role of Stewards as well.

In addition to his darkness, Tolkien uses the palantir's visions that Denethor obsesses over to simulate the recurring dreams that are often considered indicative of trauma. The visions of the palantir, corrupted by Sauron, were the portents that "forebode that the doom of Gondor is drawing nigh," as Denethor had said. Gandalf says that

[Denethor's] wisdom failed; and I fear that as the peril of his realm grew he looked in the Stone and was deceived: far too often, I guess, since Boromir departed...he saw nonetheless only those things which that Power permitted him to see...the vision of the great might of Mordor that was shown to him fed the despair of his heart until it overthrew his mind. (*LOTR* 856)

A clear connection is drawn from the visions of the power of Mordor's forces that Denethor saw to the eventual madness that he takes on from them. These visions, like Theoden's dreams, repeatedly foretell the end of Gondor through the strength of its enemy. By being constantly subjected to these visions of the slow downfall of Gondor and living through defeats by Mordor,

Denethor, just as Theoden does, slowly sinks into despair as he realizes or begins to believe that his way of life, his culture, his family line, and his cultural role is coming to an end. Just like Theoden's own despair being exacerbated by the loss of his son, Denethor's own cultural trauma is intensified by the loss of his favored son and what he represented for Gondor. The dreams or visions alone are likely not something that would substantiate a trauma reading, but Denethor is repeatedly seen or spoken of as dealing with them in isolation.

After this explanation of Denethor's death from Gandalf, Pippin remarks that he saw Denethor disappear and return worse off than before. Pippin states that while he was in the room with Faramir "The Lord went away from the room...and it was only when he returned that I first thought he was changed, old and broken" (*LOTR* 856). This is quickly followed by Beregond mentioning that "we have seen that light before, and it has long been rumoured in the City that the Lord would at times wrestle in thought with his Enemy" (*LOTR* 856). One thing to note here is the repeated nature of his viewing these visions. The City is aware that this is happening as they can see the evidence of these viewings in the "light" that the palantir emits when being used. It is also important to note that these visions specifically lead him to being seen as "changed, old and broken" because of their nature. He is spoken of as if he has already been defeated, "broken" here likely does not mean physically but mentally. It is as if the defeat has already happened and Denethor repeatedly lives it again through the visions forced upon him by Sauron and his return to the Palantir. He compulsively returns in hopes to rectify these visions, to see a victory and is met only with another defeat. Finally, and perhaps the most important part of Pippin's and Beregond's observations, Denethor is isolated and alone for these viewings and continues to remain isolated because of his choice to not divulge these secrets.

In a similar vein to the loss of the future of Gondor in the death of Boromir, Denethor fails to adapt to his upcoming new role in the culture of Gondor, leaving him adrift in his own identity that is defined by his culture and a need for a future identity. Ultimately, Denethor rejects the changing world and refuses to adapt to a potential new role and identity within it. In fact, in one of his last moments before his self-immolation, Denethor says as much: “I would have things as they were in all the days of my life...and in the days of my longfathers before me: to be the Lord of this City in peace, and leave my chair to a son after me, who would be his own master and no wizard’s pupil. But if doom denies this to me, then I will have *naught*...” (*LOTR* 854). If trauma is an event that leaves one in need of forming a new way of seeing the world and self, then Denethor’s speech certainly is indicative of trauma. He, as Shippey writes, represents “an arch-conservative” (Shippey 195) mindset and one that is wholly resistant to change and in need of a world in which he does not have to reevaluate his place in it. The Steward also wants to keep the status quo and his line uninterrupted, but the death of Boromir has ruined his chance at that and the perceived alliance between Gandalf and Faramir has only made that worse. Denethor’s desire to “leave my chair to a son after me, who would be his own master and no wizard’s pupil” is indicative of one who is disowning his son or, at the very least, considers him lost and ignorant of all he has tried to teach him. In this, Denethor sees himself as having failed as a father in addition to failing to keep Gondor safe. In order for him to have succeeded, in Denethor’s mind, Faramir would need to be his own master just as Denethor sees himself as his own.

Denethor’s desire for Faramir to be “his own master,” his strict isolation in his viewings of the palantir, and the physical setting of the Great Hall he is sitting in when the reader first meets him all point to a significant lack of community in Denethor’s life. In contrast to Theoden,

while there are a number of similarities between the two, Denethor has pushed all meaningful relationships aside and refuses to accept the aid of others in overcoming his own darkness.

Theoden, on the other hand, accepts help from his community and is able to quite literally come out of his darkness and into the light. With the line in *The Wanderer*, “Over the winding eaves, seeking some lord/Who might heal my history, hold my heart,” in mind, reading the stories of Theoden and Denethor requires one to ask a very pointed question about leadership, community, and trauma. For the titular wanderer who has lost his lord, he needs to find someone else that will accept him into community in order to heal, but for the lord who faces the threat of losing his community or, in some ways, has lost his community, what is to be done? Tolkien’s response and inversion of *The Wanderer*, seems to ask this question and provides two compelling situations to show his answer to it. Denethor serves as an illustration of the dangers of leading without community, especially in dark and trying times, while Theoden shows the ideal progression of leadership and recovery according to Tolkien.

Including Denethor’s use of the palantir after his death places a disproportionate focus on his use of the object and suggests a shift away from the more traditional culture of Rohan.

Tolkien made many references to his dislike of what he called “the Machine” (*Letters*) and its uses in the modern world. The clearest description of this concept comes in a letter to one of

Tolkien’s editors:

to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents — or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognised. (*Letters*)

While the traditional example of this used in *LOTR* is the One Ring, Denethor’s use of the palantir reflects this passage in a more tangible way while showing the effects of an overreliance

on this “Machine” can have on an individual. The use of the palantir, a stone ball that allows individuals to use it to see far away events, is the very definition of a magic, external device used instead of inherent powers. Instead of using and developing these “inner powers or talents” or, if appropriate, even using and developing the relationships and allies that he has, Denethor attempts to find a shortcut to success in his fight against the forces of Mordor but finds only constant defeat through the manipulation of the visions shown to him. This eventually leads Denethor to a constant grief at the impending loss of his country, but it also highlights another difference between Denethor and Theoden. Theoden, when confronted with the coming doom of Rohan, accepts aid from allies and fights on the frontlines to defend his and others’ livelihoods. Denethor, however, fits Tolkien’s assessment of those that use these Machines in the real world: “the first War of the Machines seems to be drawing to its final inconclusive chapter – leaving, alas, everyone the poorer, many bereaved or maimed and millions dead, and only one thing triumphant: the Machines. As the servants of the Machines are becoming a privileged class” (*Letters*). As Denethor sits in his tower gazing at the palantir in despair, he continues to send Gondorians, and even his own son, out to die. This is the chateau general that Croft believes Tolkien is critiquing, but it is also a critique on modern leadership and the loss that comes with it. Tolkien’s critique of the misuse of “Machines” in war and the increasingly modern world is cleverly illustrated through Denethor and his seemingly uncaring attitude to the losses that he is creating.

The vast amounts of cultural reminders of loss, recovery, and the continuation that are present in Rohan speak to a cultural belief and resilience to trauma, but this is replaced by cold stone engravings in Gondor. For all of the similarities that Tolkien employed between the two rulers, this must be seen as an intentional component to be left out. This is not to say that

Gondor, and Denethor more specifically, does not have cultural resilience to draw on, but more that Denethor does not draw on it if it is available and sees the end of his line as the total end of Gondor. Instead of turning to the more traditional ways of leadership and taking on allies and community, Denethor relies on more modern and seemingly civilized ways of carrying out war. He remains isolated whereas Theoden fights shoulder to shoulder with those around him before finally falling to the Witch King. While they do both ultimately come to the same end, one is remembered much more favorably because he is able to move through his trauma and regain a sense of his old identity and fight in a war that has caused so much loss. The cultural icons that Rohan has established a way of dealing with loss that allows the entire society of Rohan and the individuals within it to recover from loss, but this also requires the aid of companions and a sense of community to walk with others through their own shadows in order to bring recovery to another. For a hero to be born, according to Tolkien, they must be broken or dealing with their own senses of trauma first.

Chapter 3: Broken Heroes, Reforged

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king. (*LOTR* 170)

Throughout *LOTR*, there are a number of symbols that are broken but remade. The most obvious one is Narsil that becomes Anduril, the Flame of the West, Aragorn's sword. While the reforging of the sword is important to the development of Aragorn as a character and leader, it serves a larger purpose to the work as a whole, especially in the form of a trauma reading. The poem that Bilbo writes to accompany Aragorn should serve as the distillation of the theme of Tolkien's work as it relates to his understanding of mental wounds and cultural trauma. Previous chapters have broken down the ways in which Tolkien used cultural characteristics in order to convey the trauma that war and the threat of war can have on cultural identity as well as an individual's place within that identity, but this final chapter will show how this poem serves as the overall theme in how others recover from their trauma through cultural means in order to become something more than they once were.

Anduril, the "blade that was broken" in the poem, is both a cultural relic and a personal indicator of an individual's status within *LOTR*. When speaking of the Battle of Dagorlad, as the combined armies of Elves and Men met Mordor, Elrond identifies two specifically named weapons that are indicative of the race or people from which they come, "for the Spear of Gil-

Galad and the Sword of Elendil, Aeglos and Narsil, none could withstand. I beheld the last combat on the slopes of Orodruin, where Gil-Galad died, and Elendil fell, and Narsil broke beneath him...and Isildur cut the Ring from his hand with the hilt-shard of his father's sword" (*LOTR* 243). While this somewhat lengthy explanation gives the ancient background of the Ring, it also serves to show the beginning of the fall of the race of Man. Narsil is tied directly to the race of Man and specifically tied to a historical individual that represented the race of Men. When Narsil broke as Elendil died, a stronger connection between the race and sword was formed. One cannot think of Narsil without Elendil and vice versa. However, to further the symbolism, Isildur, Elendil's son, takes up the now broken sword and uses it to cut the Ring from Sauron's hand. The sword, while broken, is still functional but not in the shape that it once was until it is reforged and given a new name and identity for a descendant of this race.

The Shards of Narsil, as the sword becomes known as, is reflective of the state of the race of Men after their battle with Sauron. It is true that Elrond does not have the most favorable view of Men, but his paired statements that "Narsil was broken and its light extinguished, and it has not yet been forged again" and "the race of Numenor has decayed, and the span of their years has lessened" (*LOTR* 244), can hardly be argued against. The parallels between these two statements also continue the connection between the two subjects. Additionally, the other cultural symbols such as the White Tree of Gondor have "withered" and the "blood of the Numenoreans has mingled with that of lesser men" (*LOTR* 244). However, what sets Narsil apart is the role that it seems to carry in the redemption of the world and the race of Men. When Boromir's dream reveals to him that he should "Seek for the Sword that was broken," the voice that calls this out to him is raising the Sword to an object of such importance that its appearance changes the fate of the world by gathering the one member of the Fellowship besides Aragorn that is of the race

of Men. The artifact of Narsil becomes a symbol for the reunification of the race of Men by uniting the Men of Gondor with the Numenoreans in the form of Boromir and Aragorn.

It is only after the sword is reforged into Anduril that the race of Men, through a representative, begins to reclaim a sense of unity to combat the fragmentation of the race that the Shards represent. After the Council of Elrond and before the Fellowship sets out on their quest proper, Aragorn has the sword reforged and it is described as having “seven stars set between the crescent Moon and the rayed Sun...for Aragorn son of Arathorn was going to war upon the marches of Mordor. Very bright was that sword when it was made whole again...Aragorn gave it a new name and called it Anduril, Flame of the West” (*LOTR* 277). The seven stars and the Moon and Sun represent the old Numenor and are tied to Gondor’s history through songs and rhymes throughout the work. The reforging of the sword, now inlaid with the symbols of Gondor and Numenor, symbolically represents the reforging of Gondor and Numenor. The reforging of the sword also rewrites the story and narrative of the sword in that it is no longer the “Shards” of Narsil but is given a new name and identity that is created out of the reforging. The association to its old breaking and fragmenting at the hand of Sauron is not left behind, but influences the way it is seen going forward. Its purpose and identity become one in the same, and the sword is given a new identity because its purpose is to now “war upon the marches of Mordor” in the way that it did before as Narsil.

Anduril’s new purpose after being reforged is to bring a sense of unification among the free peoples of Middle-Earth, specifically the race of Man. Throughout the rest of *LOTR* after its reforging, Anduril is repeatedly used as a tool of unification and drawing together of the cultures of Man. When Aragorn encounters the Rohirrim among the plains of Rohan, he draws his sword and calls, “Here is the Sword that was Broken and is forged again. Will you aid me or thwart

me?” (*LOTR* 433). After this, Gandalf tells Aragorn “you must go to Edoras and seek out Theoden in his hall... The light of Anduril must now be uncovered in the battle for which it has so long waited” (*LOTR* 500). At Helm’s Deep, when laid under siege, Aragorn says to Eomer, “This is the hour when we draw swords together” (*LOTR* 533). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields as the large and varied host rides in all directions to route the enemy forces, the image that Tolkien concludes the description with is, “But before all went Aragorn with the Flame of the West, Anduril like a new fire kindled, Narsil re-forged as deadly as of old” (*LOTR* 848). In each of these examples, Aragorn uses Anduril as a way to bring new peoples into a sense of community in the battle against darkness. Specifically, the race of Men in Rohan, Gondor, and the Dunedain are fighting alongside each other for the first time in generations. They are estranged no more and stand shoulder to shoulder in order to help each other withstand the darkness of Sauron.

This, in part, mimics stages of recovery from mental trauma. In “Help for Heroes: PTSD, Warrior Recovery, and the Liturgy,” Karen O’Donnell describes the three stages of traumatic recovery and, while she takes her information from Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*, her description of the three phases are most helpful in making connections to Tolkien’s presentation of traumatic recovery in individuals, cultures, and in objects. O’Donnell states that:

Stage one is the establishment of safety and bodily integrity. In order to recover from any trauma, the sufferer of PTSD must feel like they are safe and have control over their own body. Stage two of this recovery is focused on constructing a trauma narrative. The victim must both remember the traumatic event and mourn what has been lost in the experience. A trauma narrative not only begins to articulate their experience, but also to shape its ongoing influence in their life. Finally, stage three is focused on giving the trauma value—making, of it, a gift (2393-4)

Narsil being reforged is giving it back its safety in a single unified piece rather than leaving it broken. The “trauma narrative” then becomes the sword’s reflection of the past majesty of

Numenoreans and the memory that it provokes in those that know and understand its history. Finally, the last stage is in giving value to the trauma suffered in the past. At risk of echoing Boromir's "it is a gift" line when referring to the One Ring, Tolkien's view or presentation of trauma is that, over time, it has the capability of revealing a gift while the trauma's value then becomes its ability to reforge a broken past into a new and heroic future. By tracing Narsil's path from broken and shattered blade to a symbol of reunification of peoples, Tolkien's distillation of the process of traumatic recovery into one object is seen. Applying this same line of thinking to the various characters or cultures mentioned in previous chapters shows that it works in much the same way for both cultures and individuals alike.

Back Again: Returning to the Shire

Returning to the Shire may seem to be a bit of an anticlimax, but this is where Tolkien does much of his work in healing trauma of the individual and the trauma of a culture. In Chapter 1, Sam is shown to have an incredibly deep reaction to the loss of the landscape and various buildings of the Shire. Sam, while having an individual reaction to this loss, also serves to represent the total loss of the way of life for Hobbits as a whole. While it could possibly be argued that he is reacting to the loss of life that surely must have come with the loss of the landscape and cultural centers, this is certainly not the case. A loss of Hobbit life is not shown or even spoken about until the Battle of Bywater that "happily cost very few lives" (*LOTR* 1016). This is not to say that the loss of life isn't important or didn't have an effect, but this does not happen until Sam, Frodo, Merry, and Pippin return and have already had these reactions to the landscape and buildings of the Shire. Additionally, returning to Debs' point, cultural trauma from the destruction of objects more readily happens when there is a "relatively small" loss of life (489). Debs continues that the repeated, real world destruction of cultural centers "suggest the

symbolic power of iconic buildings in establishing and maintaining collective identity” but that “unlike human tragedies, the cultural traumas of objects both mourn for what has been lost but also allow for the tantalizing possibility of what might be rebuilt” (489-90). However, in the case of the Shire (and, it should be assumed, in the real world) the loss of cultural centers *is* a human tragedy because there would be no cultural centers without culture and no culture without humans. As shown in the case of Sam, Denethor, and Theoden, the individual’s identity is linked with their cultural identity and, in Tolkien’s creations, there cannot be one without the other. Ultimately, for the Shire, the fulfillment of the stages of recovery begins by rebuilding the structures that foster community and culture before there can be any individual healing on a meaningful scale.

For the Hobbits, the cultural and individual healing comes from a combination of restoring cultural values like their connectedness to the natural world and the establishment of new cultural centers, but what helps their healing is that they do this rebuilding as a community. After finally clearing the last of the invaders out and establishing a sense of security, safety, and control of themselves, the Hobbits began the process of recovering their culture: “clearing of the Hill and Bag End, and the restoration of Bagshot Row. The front of the new sand-pit was all levelled and made into a large sheltered garden, and new holes were dug in the southward face, back into the Hill (*LOTR* 1022). Even though they are rebuilding their homes back into the new gardens and hills, judging by Sam’s reaction, they have not healed or simply moved on. Sam, while in the process of rebuilding, notices that the “trees were the worst loss and damage, for Sharkey’s bidding they had been cut down recklessly far and wide over the Shire; and Sam grieved over this more than anything else. For one thing, this hurt would take long to heal” (*LOTR* 1022). Even in their rebuilding, there is still mourning over the losses that they suffered

in the form of their culture. However, this mourning is what sparks the formation of a kind of trauma narrative that ends with giving value to the loss.

Once Sam remembers the box of dust given to him by Galadriel, he uses it to better the entire community of the Shire by bringing back the landscape and the Hobbits' association with it. His journey away from the Shire, into Mordor, and finally back again has brought a gift that Sam now uses for the betterment of the people of the Shire, not just himself. When Merry and Pippin ask him to use it for his own garden, Sam replies "I'm sure the Lady would not like me to keep it all for my own garden, now so many folks have suffered" (*LOTR* 1023). Sam is using his own experience to better his own community and restore their cultural relation to nature. He sees the same suffering of the many folks of the Shire that he feels toward the loss of the natural landscape and works to bring it back. In a sense, their loss is something that opens the door for new growth of the community into something better and different. As Sam uses his gift to "[plant] saplings in all the places where specially beautiful or beloved trees had been destroyed" (*LOTR* 1023), he is making intentional use to turn the specific destroyed places into a space of beauty and growth. The ruins of those trees and gardens are still there, but the symbol and marker of those places are places of new growth, symbolizing the way that their culture can still grow from this tragic loss. Finally, his last act of planting is to rectify the destruction of the Party Tree, the most visible natural symbol of community experience, "in the Party Field a beautiful young sapling leaped up...and it was a wonder of the neighbourhood...it was known far and wide and people would come long journeys to see it" (*LOTR* 1023). Not only have Sam's efforts restored a cultural landmark and place of community, he has made it better in the sense that it is not just for the neighborhood but also those that travel to see it. Its growth creates a connection between Hobbits and the rest of the world, something that had not existed before this. This

planting and gardening does help Sam, but it also helps the Shire to grow and heal from the trauma as a whole.

It seems that Tolkien espouses the view that the Gaffer says during the reconstruction of the Shire, “All’s well as ends Better” (*LOTR* 1022). The following year after the replanting of the Shire is called “a marvellous year” for various reasons, including good harvests and new children (*LOTR* 1023). In “Resilience, Trauma, Context, and Culture,” Michael Ungar writes that, within traumatized communities, “Predictions of morbidity had as much to do with trust in one’s neighbors, informal social ties, social control, and a shared sense of purpose (a social construction shared through participation in a discourse of nationalism) as it did individual personality differences” (258). Ungar’s point is that the lack of those characteristics (shared sense of purpose, social ties, trust in neighbors, and social controls) leads to a greater risk of failing to heal from traumatic events, but that the presence of these things leads to a much better outcome. Tolkien’s work in “The Scouring of The Shire” shows this in action. Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, having gone through their own journeys that are filled with the trauma of war, come home to see their own society ravaged by the very things they were fighting against in the first place. They are able to take their own gifts or qualities that they have developed and save the Shire and rectify the damage done. They instill a trust in their neighbors between them and others in order to finally fight off the ruffians who have taken over the Shire where they had been too afraid to try before, creating social ties and a sense of control over the Shire after killing Saruman and routing the rest of the ruffians out. They give a shared sense of purpose to those in the Shire to rebuild it as there were “thousands of willing hands of all ages” (*LOTR* 1022) that assisted with the work of dismantling the structures of trauma and rebuilding the Shire’s markers of community. The overwhelming sense that Tolkien leaves the reader with is that, despite the

burning and ruined state of the Shire when the hobbits first return to it, the Shire is now better off because of their shared sense of purpose.

The Burial and Remembrance of Theoden

When Theoden dies and his body has been brought back to Edoras, the funeral rituals and the poem that is composed for the funeral narrativize both Theoden's trauma and the loss of him to the whole of Rohan culture, which then gives meaning to his death. The poem for his funeral is filled with images of returning from darkness:

Out of doubt, out of dark, to the day's rising
 he rode singing in the sun, sword unsheathing.
 Hope he rekindled, and in hope ended;
 over death, over dread, over doom lifted
 out of loss, out of life, unto long glory. (*LOTR* 976)

This short poem bears a thematic resemblance to the poem written at the beginning of this chapter. Instead of a blade that was broken, there is a person who was in the throes of "darkness," and "doubt" who then overcame them and went riding at the forefront of his people to overcome both his own personal "death," "dread," and "doom" as well as Rohan's. This elegiac poem does mourn the loss of Theoden, but it celebrates his story in a way that will be passed down through the years and generations of the Rohirrim for them to remember. Shippey argues that the "whole of [Rohirrim] culture is based on song" and that "The Riders are fascinated by memorial verse and oblivion, by deaths and by epitaphs" (142). It is clear, then, that the song that has memorialized Theoden will be remembered by the descendants of Rohan. However, Shippey's belief that they are obsessed with the oblivion and deaths of the past is incomplete in that it is not the death that they are obsessed with, but the whole of their story. The poem is not solely memorializing Theoden's death and his final moments, but the whole of what led to them. When Theoden is first seen, he is sitting in both a literal and figurative darkness. His

own despair at the coming doom of Rohan and the loss of his son creates the doubt and dark that he “comes out of,” while his seat in Meduseld is only half-lit before he comes out to “the day’s rising” with Gandalf. If this poem is any indication of what Rohan’s funeral poems and songs are like, it is more about overcoming one’s own darkness in the “rekindled hope” of serving the larger community and lifting their doom. The value ascribed to his loss is that his story can be used by subsequent generations to spur their own resilience to trauma, not an immunity to it, but a way to rise above and overcome it.

When Theoden walks out of Meduseld after being healed, he gazes over the landscape. It is fitting to think that as he gazes over the landscape, he catches sight of the burial mounds of his ancestors and sees the *simbelmynë* that then brings to mind their own stories of triumph over loss. As custom dictates, when Theoden is buried “over him was raised a great mound , covered with green turves of grass and of white evermind” so that he will be remembered in the specific way that Rohan remembers kings (*LOTR* 976). The landscape of the field surrounding Edoras is forever changed by Theoden’s death and burial because of his funeral mound and the flowers that will now only grow there. The citizens of Rohan now have three distinct cultural methods to remember the stories of kings and the narratives of their lives: songs, flowers, and landscape. In the case of Theoden and likely others, this remembrance is steeped in overcoming trauma, creating narratives for the descendants who will undoubtedly face their own at some point. These elements are “Embedded in culture expectations regarding appropriate ways to cope with adversity that influence Environment x Individual interactions” (Ungar 260). In other words, Ungar shows that cultural elements create expectations within a culture on how to deal with potentially traumatic events and these influence an individual’s interactions with their social group. For the Rohirrim, these stories, songs, mounds, and flowers instill a resilience to trauma

throughout their culture by allowing them to remember that their current place and state as a society is built on the backs of heroes who have overcome their own traumas as well as their culture's. This creates a cultural responsibility to sing these songs of remembrance as a communal act, creating a sense of community and unity that spreads through the ages. However, the role of a community in creating trauma resilience or trauma recovery is only prompted and triggered by the intervention of a more immediate community of friends and confidants.

When Gandalf speaks to Theoden to draw him out from his dark despair, he does so using relational and supportive language. As he walks toward Theoden, he refers to himself and his group as "friends" and urges him to "gather together, lest each singly be destroyed" (*LOTR* 512). Additionally, when trying to convince Theoden to see reason, Gandalf says that they have each passed "through the shadows of great perils to your hall" (*LOTR* 513), suggesting that they have each faced dark moments in order to be with Theoden to give or receive aid. Gandalf is attempting to establish some sense of community between him, his companions, and Theoden himself by using language like this in order to create a safe space for Theoden to acknowledge the grief and despair rather than hide from it. After establishing a safe community for Theoden, Gandalf then prompts him to reject the "twisted tales and crooked promptings" (*LOTR* 514) before eventually encouraging him to "look out upon [his] land" and "Breathe the free air again" (*LOTR* 515). This is encouraging Theoden to escape the narratives that are being forced upon him through the whispered words of Wormtongue and to create his own narrative around his experience and once more be free from the darkness that has so bewitched him. Gandalf, in this short scene, walks Theoden through the first two stages of recovery from PTSD before Theoden is able to give his experience a sense of value.

The Failure of the Shire

Tolkien uses both the Hobbits and the Rohirrim to show the effectiveness of community in creating healing from trauma and also to show its ability to instill a resilience to it, but he also shows what can happen when a community fails to support those experiencing trauma. Frodo has the most unique trauma among the returning hobbits, and perhaps the most unique of all the characters within *The Lord of the Rings*, and it is partly because of this that he is unable to recover. Even after all of the work put into the community by the Hobbits of the Shire, Frodo still displays the signs of trauma, but these are presented as appearing only after Sam moved into the New Row. Tolkien writes that, when Sam had gone away for some time, “Farmer Cotton found Frodo lying on his bed; he was clutching a white gem that hung on a chain about his neck and he seemed half in a dream,” after Frodo recovers “he [says] nothing about himself (*LOTR* 1024). After Sam, his closest friend and the only other ring-bearer in existence other than Bilbo, moves out and is gone for some time, Frodo begins to experience the traditional markers of PTSD that have been expounded on by Michael Livingston in his article “The Shell-Shocked Hobbit: The First World War and Tolkien’s Trauma of the Ring.” However, Livingston focuses on the trauma as possibly caused by a loss of a way of life as well: “Most critics have assumed that what is gone forever here is the One Ring, but this is not explicit in the text: we are not told what exactly “it” is. Might we also here understand a loss of innocence, or of hope?” (86). Even in the application of the classic or traditional model of trauma has some opening for things that it cannot quite explain away. In this case, given the context that it is only after Sam leaves, could this feeling of loss come from the lack of comradery and community experienced in having him around? In any case, Livingston ultimately comes to the point that “knowing precisely what Frodo believes he has lost does not matter so much as the fact that it was something entirely vital to him” (87). Livingston may be right that not knowing what caused this trauma is helpful in

proving that he has PTSD because he is certainly showing the symptoms of it, but it is paramount to understanding the inability of Frodo to heal.

A number of competing perspectives on Frodo's isolation have been written, but again, these seem to focus solely on the individual and the *cause* of his isolation and separation from community rather than how he may have been able to heal. Devin Brown argues that Frodo's isolation is because of his "tendency towards" it meaning that it was merely a personal preference (168). While there is some truth that Frodo is introverted and seems to prefer going off by himself, the isolation from before the Ring took hold of him and the isolation of after he begins bearing that burden are completely different things. Gina Wilkerson expounds on this idea to show Frodo's isolation while carrying the Ring is imposed from "the outside, from a most powerful and unrelenting source—the Ring itself," (83) meaning that what is driving him toward isolation is not an innate quality of personality, but an experience that he has that gets more difficult over time. Wilkerson continues to explain the isolation as a sign of PTSD and "psychological abuse" (90) that the Ring causes which leads to Frodo withdrawing into himself. Wilkerson is right that Frodo has a much deeper issue than a personality trait and is suffering from a form of PTSD, but where she fails in assessing Frodo's ability to reintegrate in society is her assertion that it is *Frodo's* responsibility to reintegrate: "In the final chapters of *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo finds it impossible to integrate *himself* back into his former life in the Shire" (90, emphasis mine). Yes, at a point, there is a level of personal responsibility that is required for those recovering from traumatic circumstances to heal. Ultimately, it is in their hands to seek help and counsel, but is it not also the community's responsibility to move them to that and encourage them? In every other instance examined here and the multitude of others throughout *LOTR*, there is a high responsibility placed on the larger community of friends or allies to move

the traumatized individual back into wellness, whatever that may look like. Wilkerson's belief that Frodo should be able to integrate himself back "into his former life in the Shire" is also a curious assertion in that it is not leveled at any of the other returning Hobbits. The life that Merry, Pippin, and Sam return to is not the one from which they left; they are given much more respect. The blame for the failure of Frodo to integrate back into society in some fashion should not be laid on his shoulders but the community of the Shire who have left him abandoned.

The returning Hobbits who seem to have the most obvious heroic qualities from their journey and have done the most obviously heroic deeds find themselves the center of attention in the Shire, but Frodo is shown to have none of this acclaim or care shown to him. After things have settled in the Shire, Frodo finds himself terribly alone. Bilbo has gone, Sam "was as busy and as full of delight as even a hobbit could wish," Merry and Pippin are both not spoken of other than to say that the hobbits' "admiration and respect were given mostly" to them rather than Sam or Frodo, suggesting that they were also not around much (*LOTR* 1025). It should be no surprise that "Frodo dropped quietly out of all the doings of the Shire" but perhaps it should be considered that the society of the Shire dropped him rather than the other way around (*LOTR* 1025). Frodo is clearly suffering from the memory and effects of his journeys judging by Farmer Cotton's discovery. The jewel that he grasps onto during these episodes was given to him specifically for "when the memory of the fear and darkness troubles [him]" (*LOTR* 975), but even this seems to not be enough because it is only a part of what Frodo needs to recover. A study over the effects of community on trauma-exposed individuals concludes that

Individuals have great potential to adapt in the face of adversity. However, this adaptation requires the functioning of many interacting systems within and around the individual...Effective interventions will need to focus on a wide range of factors, including promotion of social support and social networks through supportive caregivers, family units, organizations, and communities. (Sippel et. al 6)

The promotion of social support and social networks, family units, organizations, and communities of the Shire all seem to fail Frodo in his time of greatest need. The reason, of course, is that essentially all of the Shire is consumed with rebuilding their country and society. There is nothing wrong with that, but it does show that simply rebuilding society and a cultural identity is not always effective in rebuilding individual identity. Sam, as much as he is a hero in the story, doesn't realize that Frodo is suffering from a wound that he was present for. Because of his occupation with the work of rebuilding the Shire, his care for Frodo falters just enough for him to forget that "two years before on that day it was dark in the dell under Weathertop" (*LOTR* 1025). Sam's forgetfulness of the anniversary of a wound that Frodo has been troubled with along with the general apathy toward Frodo's condition from the Hobbits of the Shire seems a strange way to end things with Frodo before he leaves for the Grey Havens. This only reinforces the importance of a sense of community in the recovery process of trauma.

For Tolkien, he found this sense in his relationship with his family as he explained to his son, Christopher, in a letter after the death of Edith:

someone close in heart to me should know something about things that records do not record: the dreadful sufferings of our childhoods, from which we rescued one another, but could not wholly heal the wounds that later often proved disabling; the sufferings that we endured after our love began – all of which (over and above our personal weaknesses) might help to make pardonable, or understandable, the lapses and darkneses which at times marred our lives — and to explain how these never touched our depths nor dimmed our memories of our youthful love. (*Letters* 463)

The "wounds that later often proved disabling: the sufferings" that Tolkien is speaking of here undoubtedly concerned losses whether through familial or wartime losses of friends, however the important part for the purposes of this argument is in how Tolkien himself regards his relationship with Edith in terms of healing from these losses. The fact that these are also wounds that "could not wholly heal" and that would prove to be "disabling" speaks to traumatic wounds

rather than just small shocks. It was the connection that he had to Edith that allowed them to push through these wounds perhaps because of the memory of their better times in their younger years. In short, Tolkien's sense of community with his family is what allows him to develop his own resilience to his personal trauma from wars and life in general. While Tolkien has this relationship with his wife, this feeling and sense of security can be extrapolated to other relationships as well. The important thing is that Tolkien is aware that a relationship, in its depth, can have a lasting effect on how individuals deal with and respond to trauma that mar their lives.

By examining the important role and responsibility that Tolkien gives community in the aid and recovery of other war veterans traumatized from their experience, the failure of the Shire to provide that aid seems to stand out in stark contrast and reveal Tolkien's concerns about the way that returning veterans were being treated after World War I. Tolkien's own son seemed to suffer from PTSD or shell-shock. In a letter to his editor at the time, Tolkien writes that he "has another son, a much damaged soldier, at Trinity trying to do some work and recover a shadow of his old health" (*Letters*) a later footnote includes that his son had "been judged unfit for military service as a result of 'severe shock to nervous system due to prolonged exposure to military action'" (*Letters*), so he was certainly aware of the issues surrounding shell-shock and the reception of those that dealt with it. Certainly, Tolkien would not have liked the general opinion of society that those with PTSD after WWI were suffering from "simply cowardice or malingering" (Jones).

Conclusion

So, why fantasy? Returning to the statistics and data posed in the introduction will help to outline and perhaps highlight the answers to the questions of why people are turning to fantasy. According to Curcic, “Fantasy book sales grew by 45.3% in 2021 compared to 2020, which was the largest increase among all sales aside from graphic novels” and “in the UK, sales of fantasy books increased by 23% in 2021 compared to pre-pandemic years” (Wordsrated). There is a key phrase contained in Curcic’s statistics: “pre-pandemic years.” While this is only one statistic and one instance of this phenomenon, people have begun turning to fantasy literature in droves after the pandemic of Covid-19. This is not to draw a direct line of causation from Covid-19 to the rise of popularity of fantasy literature, but it does open a wider window into why people may be turning to it.

John Clute’s *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* attempts to define fantasy based on its movements in storytelling. These movements, “wrongness, thinning, recognition, and healing (although more recently [Clute] has substituted “return” for “healing,”” while existing in some form or another throughout literature, are paramount to fantasy (Mendlesohn and James 4). Of particular interest is the word and concept of thinning. Described in Clute’s own words, “in the structurally complete fantasy, thinning can be seen as a reduction of the healthy Land to a Parody of itself, and the thinning agent – ultimately, in most instances, the Dark Lord – can be seen as inflicting this damage upon the land out of envy” (2). In essence, it is the loss of a particular way that things are and the lessening of the world that then needs to be recognized and healed through the journey of the heroes or heroines of the story. In *LOTR*, the thinning of the world takes on a number of different forms. In the case of the Shire, Rohan, Theoden, and Gondor, thinning comes into play when the ways of life in these cultures or individuals are threatened. They are

recognized and then healed through a return to community and, more importantly, their connection to stories as a form of meta-fantasy.

Clute's characteristics of fantasy mimic Tolkien's own words about the power of literature and story. While writing to his son Christopher about some of the chapters he had been writing for *LOTR*, Tolkien writes:

But if lit. teaches us anything at all, it is this: that we have in us an eternal element, free from care and fear, which can survey the things that in 'life' we call evil with serenity (that is not without appreciating their quality, but without any disturbance of our spiritual equilibrium). Not in the same way, but in some such way, we shall all doubtless survey our own story when we know it (and a great deal more of the Whole Story).

It is the connection that Tolkien draws between literature, time, and personal evaluation of disturbances of a person's life that is so interesting and helps to evaluate the way that trauma is depicted in *LOTR* and in fantasy works that take inspiration from it. Tolkien wrote this letter in 1944, just before the end of the second World War. The "things that in life that we call 'evil'" most assuredly contain the global catastrophe that the war was in addition to the personal devastation that it brought. However, these evils only remain evil insofar as individuals focus on them and see them as events without meaning. This is not to say that traumas, loss, war, and all other such dark events shouldn't be seen as such. When Tolkien writes that "we shall all doubtless survey our own story when we know it," he is speaking of narrativizing these issues and being able to see what can come out of these events. In essence, to tell the story of the events is to give them meaning and see that those events are not the end and that one can come through them.

Tolkien narratively illustrates this through a conversation between Sam and Frodo in the *LOTR* chapter, "The Stairs of Cirith Ungol," and blatantly points to this idea as a major theme of the work. In this conversation, both Sam and Frodo call on the remembrance of tales and stories

of heroes facing larger than life odds and use this to help construct a narrative around their own darkness and traumatic experiences. The conversation that the pair invents culminates with this exchange between Frodo and Sam: “You and I, Sam, are still stuck in the worst places of the story, and it is all too likely that some will say at this point: ‘Shut the book now, dad...’” to which Sam replies, “Things done and over and into part of the great tales are different...” (*LOTR* 713). What this exchange does so well is illustrate the importance of story to working through traumatic experiences, but it also shows the importance of other narratives to the development of resilience. By turning their adventure into a hypothetical story for future generations, Sam and Frodo are able to give meaning to the events of their past and the darkness they have faced. Sam’s final point that things that are “done and over” are different at the end of story suggests that, while they may not be something good, they are seen as something that allows for good to happen. The point that Sam is making is the point of *LOTR*, that stories can help individuals get through dark times and give meaning to past events. In trauma studies, this is referred to as narrative and often is a key factor in recovering identity. However, where Tolkien and *LOTR* differ from the normal narrative process of personal traumatic recovery is that Tolkien and his heroes rely on the narratives of others in similar situations in order to recover from their own traumas. The heroic figures of the past create a model for the characters to structure their own struggles with trauma and allow them to become more resilient to it. Their decision to create stories or, in the case of Sam and Frodo, place themselves inside of a larger story, allows them to see that the present darkness or trauma is not the end but will have meaning in the end. By creating fictional and fantastical narratives out of his own experiences, Tolkien shows the power of story in healing from individual and cultural trauma. Tolkien’s choice to do this in the genre of fantasy does have strong ties to his particular scholarship in Medieval texts, but it also

suggests that there may just not have been a suitable alternative in Tolkien's mind for addressing his experiences in a way that adds meaning to them.

The tradition of addressing real world concerns in fantasy continues today. Instead of a global war, however, Brandon Sanderson addresses a global pandemic. The first of Sanderson's novels that he wrote as part of his Kickstarter campaign describes a world that is covered in spores that, if inhaled, cause devastating effects or death to the individual. Additionally, the world that this novel takes place on bears a striking resemblance to the popular pictures of the Covid-19 virus that were circulated on various news media. Clearly this is a work that is not divorced from the very real and trying time that produced it but married to it. Fantasy novels should not be considered escapist in the way that some would use the word. The stories are in another world, but in the case of Tolkien among others, the created world is often plagued by the same struggles that our own world is. The difference is that fantasy's highest goal is the working through those larger traumas and eucatastrophizing them in order to make a larger point about what is needed in our world. For Tolkien, the solution to cultural and individual trauma is the drawing together of a community and the responsibility that individuals have to each other in providing care in the wake of dark times and traumatic experiences.

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