

Putting Down Roots:
A Tolkienian Conception of Place

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Chapter One: At the Root of It: An Introduction to Placed-ness in Tolkien's Fiction

Over the years, the image of the tree has served as a symbol for J.R.R. Tolkien's life and work. The image adorns many book covers by and about Tolkien. Humphrey Carpenter's authorized biography of Tolkien famously pictures the man causally reclined against a tree. Tolkien's *Mythopoeia* pictures an artistic sketch of an enchanted tree drawn by Tolkien himself. In *Roots and Branches*, Tom Shippey uses the tree as a metaphor for Tolkien's literary work, establishing language and ancient Norse mythology as the grounding and life-sustaining force for the great body of literary works produced by Tolkien. Tolkien, too, uses trees in his mythology to serve as the original light-bearing force in Arda.¹ And, of course, Tolkien famously personifies trees with his Ents, who are frequently used to depict the environmental strand of his work. There are, perhaps, many reasons that the tree serves as an apt symbol for representing Tolkien's life and work; yet, the most significant reason is that trees have roots.

Tolkien undoubtedly maintained a high view of nature, which shaped both his life and work. However, the tree stands apart as a representation of that estimation largely because trees are connected to earth, literally grounded in the place from which they draw life. Moreover, trees share a reciprocally beneficial relationship with their surroundings: they are nourished by the soil and the climate of the place they call home, and, in turn, they nourish the life of that home through their presence. In this respect, trees depend upon the health of their home for life, reflect that health in their life, and contribute to the continued health of their home through their life. For Tolkien the man and the author, this idea of rootedness—the idea of connecting oneself to a place—serves as a central theme in throughout his fiction.

¹ Dickerson and Evans explain that “the Two Trees are the most mythically significant symbols in all of Tolkien's writings about Middle-earth” (7).

Born in the late nineteenth century, Tolkien came into a world on the cusp of change. The early twentieth century was largely defined by the promise and hope of continued scientific progress and the universal benefits offered through that progress. However, these hopes were quickly shattered for many when World War I began in Europe in 1914, and then again with onset of World War II in 1939. Tolkien, like many of the other young men and women of this era, had grown up with a promise and had been prepared for a future that ceased to exist after the Wars. Soldiers returning home found the soil less hospitable to the roots they had set before the war, leaving many feeling displaced. This sense of displacement prominent after the War became a leitmotif in many of the works published in the mid-twentieth century. Tolkien and many of his peers were dubbed members of the “Lost Generation” (Garth 9) because this sense of displacement characterized their transition from youth to adulthood. Not only had this generation lost much—friends, homes, loved ones—but this generation was, in many ways, lost: they were cut off from the future they planned before Wars and were often left (aimlessly) wandering, homeless.

Though it is nearly impossible to overestimate the effects of WWI on Tolkien’s generation, the war was not the only source of Tolkien’s perceived homelessness. Tolkien’s own sense of displacement pre-existed the war and was fertilized by it. Since the 1977 publication of Humphrey Carpenter’s authorized biography of J.R.R. Tolkien, scholars and critics alike have discussed what Carpenter calls the “sense of rootlessness” that characterized much of Tolkien’s childhood after the untimely and unexpected death of his father cut him off from establishing a fixed place—a home (27). Frequently moving throughout England as his mother tried to make ends-meet, Tolkien began to establish roots for himself in the familiar language and dialects of his mother’s family in the English countryside. Over the years, many scholars have explored the

way in which language served as grounding force for Tolkien, even in the midst of his many moves and his mother's death when he was just twelve; however, recently, more critical attention has been focused specifically on the way in which Tolkien's love of language took root and began to germinate alongside his love of nature. Carpenter writes, "The effect of the move on Ronald was deep and permanent. Just at the age when his imagination was opening out, he found himself in the English countryside" (27). For this reason, it is not surprising to find Tolkien's sense of place as revealed through his fiction emanates from the fertile soil cultivated by his imaginative engagement with the natural world.

In his fiction, Tolkien presents "place" as both metaphysical and geographical, encompassing both human relationships to one another and human relationships to the natural, physical world. These relationships are mythically informed and frequently function on multiple-levels, allowing Tolkien to explore both the natural and the supernatural aspects of what I will call *placed-ness*. Placed-ness, in this sense, incorporates both how people relate to their environment and how they relate to the people in that environment. In many respects, placed-ness is synonymous with *belonging* in that it appeals to the concept of community, which is formed both by proximity and relationship.

Furthermore, Tolkien's conception of place operates within both the local and the global spheres. The local communities contribute to and are part of the global economy; yet, they maintain their own distinctive places within that global economy. In other words, the local economy is centrifugal: it draws its life from its center and emanates out from that center to the economy at large. Thus, as Tolkien develops this sense of place throughout his fiction, he acknowledges and affirms the interconnectedness of all of creation while still affirming the importance of diverse local communities for the health of the global community.

In Tolkien's fiction, health stems from and is rooted in the proper understanding of placed-ness that begins with the local and extends to the global. Much like a tree's life both emanates from and contributes to the health of the soil, the global economy both depends on and contributes to the health of each local economy. This point is pivotal in an examination of Tolkien's literature in that many of his primary characters progress toward a more holistic conception of how their own sense of local placed-ness contributes to the overall health of Middle-earth. More specifically, Tolkien's stories illuminate the way in which healthy local economies are put at risk of "dis-ease," meaning disruption or infection,² when the people fail to understand their place or simply refuse to embrace it responsibly. For example, when Saruman refuses to embrace the metaphysical limitations of his place in Middle-earth, Isengard experiences a metaphysical fall,³ leaving all of Middle-earth exposed to the disease of Mordor, which spreads quickly throughout Middle-earth. Tolkien's stories demonstrate that this disease is healed only through the re-placing each of the distinct communities in Middle-earth.

This project of re-placing depends heavily upon the health of each diverse community in order to promote the health of the global economy. Moreover, the success of the project depends largely upon the agency of people who take on the task of uprooting the disease and re-placing themselves within their communities. In Tolkien's fiction, this project begins at the local level with local communities and emanates out from there, rather than operating centripetally. More specifically, Tolkien's sense of place as expressed through his fiction prioritizes diverse local

² Wendell Berry uses "dis-ease" to function in a dual manner in his essay "Health Is Membership," where disease is contrasted with health while "dis-ease" is simultaneously contrasted with the dualistic division of the self and the natural world. When I use the term disease throughout this thesis, I do so with this nuanced definition in mind.

³ There are many excellent articles addressing the theological issues surrounding the "falls" in Tolkien's fiction. Often, this topic is discussed within the larger conversation of the tension between fate and providence in Tolkien's sub-created world. Although this topic will not be addressed in any depth in this thesis, Verlyn Flieger's essay "'The Music and the Task: Fate and Free Will in Middle-earth'" provides the reader with a helpful introduction to the topic.

communities as a means for promoting healthy global economies and resists the forceful centralization of power.

As Tolkien develops the economy of Middle-earth in his fiction, he draws from G.K. Chesterton's Distributist principles to inform that economy, thus defining more fully his sense of place. Stratford Caldecott notes that while Tolkien never explicitly mentions Distributism, the ideas are implicit throughout his stories (*Secret Fire* 125). In her 2009 book, Alison Milbank demonstrates the extent to which "G.K. Chesterton was an important influence both on Tolkien's fiction and his literary criticism of fairy tale" (viii). Citing Tolkien's letters, essays, and even his own daughter's verbal confirmation, A. Milbank thoroughly demonstrates Tolkien's familiarity with and deep admiration for the work of G.K. Chesterton (xiii). Though Milbank specifically focuses on the theological and aesthetic influences Chesterton had on Tolkien's literary work, the implications of her research allow me to explore further how Tolkien might have drawn upon some of Chesterton's other ideas—namely, Chesterton's political, economic, and, ultimately, agrarian ideas as encapsulated in his Distributist views.

Distributism emerged out of an encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII in May of 1891, just eight months before Tolkien was born in South Africa (in January of 1892). Although richly rooted in Catholic theology and social philosophy, Distributism remains notoriously difficult to define. *The Distributist Review* defines Distributism this way,

Distributism is an economic system compliant with the principles of these [Catholic social encyclicals], and is centered on the widest possible ownership of property as the best guarantee of political and economic freedom. A family that owns its own land or its own tools can make its own way in the world without being dependent on someone else for a "job." Thus, Distributism seeks to extend

property ownership to as many as possible, and end the concentration of ownership by few capitalists or state officials.

Most basically (though debatably), Distributism served as an alternative to both socialism and capitalism, two of the predominant economic systems in the twentieth century. As such, Distributism largely rejected centralization: it argued that both capitalism and socialism centralize the means of production under the administration of a few people, thus exchanging the power of the many for the power of the few.

This rejection of centralization—and, by extension, the unified system of production and management—further obscures the precise definition of Distributism. The process of systemizing a single, unified means of production relies heavily upon the centralization of power to define and enforce that system, making clear definitions easy to delineate while simultaneously destroying the ideal he promoted. According to Charles McDaniel,

Distributism was not so much a social philosophy as a negation of much social theory that existed during the turbulent period of the Industrial Revolution. The principle objects of its critiques were the dehumanizing concentrations of power in English industrialism and the utopian schemes of socialists who imagined the socialization of property a panacea for all ills. (519)

In 1928, Chesterton famously participated in a debate with Bernard Shaw (moderated by Hilaire Belloc), in which Chesterton essentially argues that the Distributist ideals are predicated upon the idea that “the means of production should be owned by the community” (*Do We Agree?* 19). Thus, Chesterton’s own expression of Distributism expresses the belief that the community should operate as the defining feature for the Distributist model. In other words, Chesterton upheld a Distributist ideal apart from a particularized model to be implemented wholesale. In so

doing, Chesterton rejected the centralization of power that he identified as necessary components of the practical socialist and capitalist models.⁴

In many respects, this centralization of power was a symptom of the Modern Age which is fragmented, individualistic, and cut off from the ideal picture of a healthy world. In *What's Wrong with the World*, Chesterton asserts that the primary problem of the Modern Age is that while people agree that something is wrong in the world, those same people fail to agree regarding what specifically is wrong and what the remedy would be to cure the ailment once it was identified. Echoing Chesterton's ideas, Caldecott explains, "Distributists saw the family as the only solid basis for civil society and of any sustainable civilization. They believed in a society of households, and were suspicious of top-down government. Power, they held, should be devolved to the lowest level compatible with a reasonable degree of order" (*Secret Fire* 125). In other words, Distributism embraced the home as the proper seat of social and economic power. Ultimately, the Distributists resisted the centralization of power that they believed was the inevitable result of both capitalism and socialism.

Tolkien shared many of Chesterton's fears regarding the dominant social, political, and economic structures of the Modern Age. Many of these fears were realized with the onset of the Great War. In the twentieth century, war became industrialized, increasingly relying on machinery to expand the power and reach of an army giving it the power to draw the entire world into its destruction. The result was an overwhelming sense of homelessness. Joseph Pearce explains that in the modern world, "the machine was becoming the master and not the servant of man, severing him from his natural environment and encasing him in an increasingly artificial world" (50). In other words, the abuses that became prominent in an industrialized society led

⁴ Chesterton's own ideas on this topic are documented in his works *What's Wrong with the World* and *The Outline of Sanity* as well as in his newsletter *G.K.'s Weekly*.

man to exchange nature for artifice, to trade a home for a prison. As a soldier and member of the Lost Generation, Tolkien was intimately familiar with the pain wrought by this thoughtless form of economics.

It is important to note that much scholarship has focused attention on how Tolkien portrays war throughout his stories, specifically focusing on areas of comparison between Tolkien's fictional war and the two world wars. This thematic exploration is only natural considering the era in which Tolkien lived and wrote; yet, in his foreword to the second edition of the *LOTR* trilogy, Tolkien distances his fictional war from the real wars, explaining,

The real war does not resemble the legendary war in its process or in its conclusion. If it had inspired or directed the development of the legend, then certainly the Ring would have been seized and used against Sauron; he would not have been annihilated but enslaved, and Barad-dûr would not have been destroyed but occupied. Saruman, failing to get possession of the Ring, would in the confusion and treacheries of the time have found in Mordor the missing links in his own researches into the Ring-lore, and before long he would have made a Great Ring of his own with which to challenge the self-styled Ruler of Middle-earth. In that conflict both sides would have held hobbits in hatred and contempt: they would not have long survived even as slaves. (*Fellowship xv*).

While Tolkien himself explains that the real wars that occurred in his own lifetime are not analogous with the War of the Ring, the significance of the War in the story undoubtedly contributes to the Tolkien's development of placed-ness within the story. More simply stated, the War of the Ring does not mirror the Great War; however, the Great War undoubtedly affected Tolkien and served as a catalyst for the conception trilogy as a whole, even if it did not serve as a

specific source of inspiration for the fictional War. As Tolkien's statement above makes clear, the War of the Ring concluded with the restoration of Hobbits (and all that they represent) in Middle-earth; however, had the Great War been the factual source for the story, the fictional war would have brought about the ultimate oppression and destruction of the Hobbits.

The distinction between the results of the real and fictional wars might be traced back to those Distributist principles that Chesterton championed and that Tolkien embraced. In his fiction, Tolkien concludes the war with a picture of the restoration. Ultimately, Tolkien's fiction preserves the diversity of the local economies and establishes that as the root for the health of the global economy in Middle-earth. These diverse local economies and their place in Middle-earth are essentially the focus of this thesis as they bring together the various aspects of Tolkien's philosophical interests and theological values in order cast the vision of restoration (or, to borrow from Tolkien, "recovery"⁵) in the Modern Age. Each chapter of this thesis draws upon the historical, political, and theological anchor briefly touched upon in this introduction by focusing on the various main human communities developed in *The Hobbit* and the *LOTR* trilogy, committing one chapter to Elves, Men, and Hobbits respectively. As stated above, *The Hobbit* and the *LOTR* trilogy serve as the primary source material for this thesis. Of course, I draw upon vast body of *The Silmarillion* (especially in the chapters on Elves) and other works by Tolkien as needed throughout this thesis to help support the analysis of the primary source material.

One particular challenge we face in our discussion of Tolkien's fiction is establishing appropriate labels that allow us to identify the human-like characters in the stories as distinct

⁵ Recovery is a term used by Tolkien in his essay "On Fairy Stories" to describe the ameliorating effects of the escape into Faerë.

from, yet related to, humans in the Primary World.⁶ Throughout the critical discourse on Tolkien's fiction, there is great variety in the application of the term "human" to the various character groups. In fact, many of these sources cited throughout this thesis apply the term in different (though not necessarily contradictory) manners. For this reason, it is necessary for me to clarify what I mean when I refer to "human" throughout this thesis. Although the race of Men is the most physically human character group in Middle-earth, it is not the only race for which the term "human" is applicable. In his fiction, Tolkien attributes human-ness to several character groups by endowing those groups with various metaphysically human qualities. In his book *J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion*, Richard Purtill classifies this metaphysical layering of human characters as "facets," noting that "each individual and to some extent each race, represents one aspect of a complete human being" (59). As a result of this layering, in Tolkien's stories, Men are no more human than Hobbits or Elves; rather, each community represents particular aspects of human nature and thereby functions distinctly within the human economy. Thus, when I use the term "human" throughout this thesis, I am drawing upon the metaphysical qualities of humans in the Primary World. When I refer specifically to the community labels (e.g., Elves, Men, and Hobbits), I am referring to the *places* of each group within the structure of Middle-earth.

In this thesis, Elves, Men, and Hobbits serve as the primary focus for the discussion of placed-ness, with each group being discussed at length in a chapter. Although other character groups (e.g., Dwarves, Ents, Valar, and Maiar) obviously serve particular functions in Middle-earth, these characters groups are not discussed in distinct chapters. Instead, I discuss several of

⁶ "Primary World" is a phrase used by Tolkien in "On Fairië Stories" to refer to the physical world that we inhabit. This phrase allows him—and, by extension me—to distinguish between the world we inhabit and the world the characters inhabit without using the phrases "real world" and "pretend world," labels which carry connotations that inherently oppose Tolkien's belief about the realm of Fairië.

these character groups (or specific characters from within those groups) within the contexts of other chapters in order to help demonstrate the placed-ness or displacement of primary character groups. By selecting this organizational structure, I do not intend to diminish the importance of these other characters within the stories, nor am I implying that these characters do not help to uphold the holistic integrity of economy of Middle-earth. Rather, due to the natural limitations of this thesis, I have narrowed in on the three primary groups that best contribute to the overall discussion of placed-ness in Tolkien's fiction.

As already noted, Tolkien's sense of place is intimately bound up with his own philological interests. Thus, language frequently serves as a unique identifier for various communities within Middle-earth and frequently points to the places of those communities. For this reason, Tolkien's own philological philosophy is naturally woven into this thesis, primarily in the analysis of the Elves in chapter two. In many respects, the Elves most naturally represent the aesthetic and artistic aspects of humanity and their linguistic heritage reflects both their nature and their place in Middle-earth. Many notable scholars, including Tom Shippey and Verlyn Flieger, have contributed scholarship in the area of Tolkien's philological ideas and their relationship to his stories. However, even within the chapter on the Elves, I do not offer a full exploration of Tolkien's philological ideas. Rather, the philological elements contribute to the development of a fuller understanding of the metaphysical place of the Elves and their relationship to the land.

In a similar manner, Tolkien deeply connects his sense of place to the environment—to geographical spaces. The Distributist principles implicit in Tolkien's fiction serve to emphasize the agrarian elements in the economy of Middle-earth. For this reason, it is not surprising that Tolkien's fiction, especially the *LOTR* trilogy, has been interpreted through the ecocritical lens in

recent years, with particular emphasis given to Tolkien's Ents and Hobbits. With the 2006 publication of *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Dickerson and Evans grounded the agrarian elements of Tolkien's fiction in a loosely structural interpretation by analyzing three primary manifestations of agrarianism in the stories: the sustainable agriculture of the Hobbits, the horticulture of the Elves, and the feraculture of the wild as depicted primarily by the Ents. While my project makes use of Dickerson and Evans's work, it does not mirror its focus nor its conclusion. Where Dickerson and Evans focus their project through the agricultural lens, my project focuses more broadly through the ecological lens, which allows me to draw from the theologically rich economic and political principles of Distributism.

Although Tolkien lived and wrote long before the ecocritical movements became popularized and commercialized, his lifetime did not predate the relevance of the ideas expressed through these movements. In fact, if anything, his lifetime saw the onset of the dramatic changes that makes the ecocritical movement so relevant today. Thus, though it takes some work to sift through the aspects of the ecocritical model that accurately represent and reflect Tolkien's own cultural and historical milieu, I do believe that it can be done ethically and literarily, using Chesterton's essays as a guide. More importantly, I believe that particular aspects of the ecocritical model, specifically the ecological focus, helps to frame the discussion of placed-ness in a relevant and theologically rich manner. Since the ecocritical model is still rather new in terms of its use as a model for literary criticism, there is still a lack of unity within the approach. For my purposes, I emphasize the ecological aspects of the theory. In other words, since the focus of my project is place or placed-ness, I focus on how the social structures—namely,

communities—relate to one another and to their environment and how this relationship fits within and contributes to the global economy of Middle-earth.

Additionally, by incorporating the biographical-historical criticism surrounding Tolkien, I demonstrate not only *how* Tolkien's fiction incorporates the deep-rooted agrarian themes, but also *why* it incorporates them. Tolkien's own beliefs about nature and man's relationship to and responsibility for nature are rooted in his rich theological views; thus, as his stories deal with human's relationships to one another and to nature, they reveal what Tolkien believes about how man ought to relate to creation and why he ought to relate to it in that manner. In the forward to the second edition of the *LOTR* trilogy, Tolkien explains his own intentions and desires regarding his work, saying,

The prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them. As a guide I had only my own feelings for what is appealing or moving...As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical. As the story grew it put down roots (into the past) and threw out unexpected branches: but its main theme was settled from the outset by the inevitable choice of the Ring as the link between it and *The Hobbit*. (*Fellowship* xiv)

Admittedly, Tolkien's primary goal for the trilogy was simply to compose a delightful story, but his values inevitably seep through flavoring the entire work to suit his own tastes.

Over the years, scholars and critics have discerned many of these distinct themes that flavor Tolkien's stories, recognizing the powerful way in which story—and especially “fairy

story”—has the power to transform the vision of its readers and move them to action. It is the tightly woven relationship of the *how* (the form) and *why* (the message) that continues to give Tolkien’s literary works real significance, for he not only sub-created a detailed and mythical world, but he used it as a means to treat and to heal the wounds of his particular time and place. Although Tolkien zealously denies the allegorical interpretation of his stories, stating that “many confuse ‘applicability’ with ‘allegory,’” he encourages the reader to exercise freedom to explore the world he sub-creates within his stories and apply the truths learned therein to the Primary World that the reader inhabits (xv). In this sense, Tolkien’s fiction, though otherworldly on the surface, demonstrates a deep concern for the world in which Tolkien found himself living.

Finally, I employ close reading to Tolkien’s major literary works in order draw out the various aspects of his stories that demonstrate Tolkien’s conception of place and placed-ness. While I occasionally comment on Tolkien’s style and his literariness, my primary goal for employing close-reading is to re-focus both the ecocritical and the biographical historical lenses on the literature itself. I believe that, through his primary body of literature, Tolkien provides a remedy for the dis-ease he saw and felt in the Modern Age, and for this reason, I look largely to his stories to discover it, using my biographical-historical knowledge of Tolkien and the Distributist principles as a guide.

Chapter Two—“To Order All the Lands and Heal Their Hurts”: The Aesthetic of the Elves as a Governing Agent in Middle-earth

Placing the Elves—both metaphysically and geographically—within Tolkien’s Middle-earth economy is no simple task. The Elves, as Tolkien presents them in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, impress upon us their sense of rootlessness in Middle-earth, perhaps more so than any of the other human communities we encounter there. Although many of the Elves have well-established homes within Middle-earth—namely, Lothlórien, Rivendell, and Mirkwood—those places which they inhabit are largely separated from the economy of Middle-earth; they are clandestine safe havens, beautiful islands of rest and recovery floating in a sea of turmoil. More importantly, however, those places are fading from Middle-earth as many of the Elves are departing from Middle-earth into West. Much critical work has been written in attempt to situate the Elves within Middle-earth, with a large portion of that critical mass focusing on the Elves’ language,⁷ their relationship to sea,⁸ their relationship to fate,⁹ their immortality,¹⁰ and even their aesthetic relationship to the land.¹¹ Yet, for all the scholarship attempting to address the complex nature of the Elves and their position in economy of Middle-earth, surprisingly little has been

⁷ There are countless resources devoted to the language of the Elves and Tolkien’s philological work expressed through the language of the Elves. The best of these works include Tom Shippey’s *The Road to Middle Earth* and Verlyn Flieger’s *Splintered Light: Language and Logos in Tolkien’s World*, both of which are referenced in this chapter.

⁸ See Patrick Curry, “The Sea: Spirituality and Ethics.” *Defending Middle-earth*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

⁹ See Richard Purtill, “Frodo, Fëanor, and Free Will.” *J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion*. San Francisco: Ignatius P, 1984.; Thomas Fernet-Ponse, “Strange and Free”—On Some Aspects of the Nature of the Elves and Men.” *Tolkien Studies* 7 (2010): 67–89.

¹⁰ See Linda Greenwood, “Love: ‘The Gift of Death’.” *Tolkien Studies* 2 (2005): 171–95.

¹¹ See Matthey Dickerson and Jonathan Evans, *Ents, Elves and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2006.

written to account for the significance of their final departure from it, an event which is shrouded in ambiguity as well as in metaphysical and environmental significance.

Next to the beloved Tom Bombadil character and the Ents, the Elves present the strongest attachment to and memory of the past. Their immortality endows them with the ability to embody the past, and their love of music and lore provides an artistic outlet for recounting that past. This affinity for the past manifests itself in many ways throughout elven history, most evidently through the particular expressions of the Elves' aesthetic which praises beauty and seeks to cultivate it in both the natural world and in their art. Discussing the significance of the Elves' aesthetic—or, more specifically, their *poiesis* (making)—in Tolkien's fiction, Alison Milbank explains, "Humans in Tolkien's world are primarily men of action, involved in public projects, government and defence; it is the elves who are the makers, following the example of the Ainur such as Aulë whose 'delight and pride' were 'in the deed of making, and in the thing made'" (21). Of course, by "human" here, Milbank refers to the race of Men in Middle-earth. The specific function of Men is addressed at length in chapter three of this thesis; however, it is necessary to introduce this distinction between Men and Elves here so as to situate the Elves more fully in the economy of Middle-earth.

As Milbank rightly explains, Elves are the makers: they are the artists who cherish the art for the beauty of the thing made. As such, Elves represent an important facet of the economy of Middle-earth. Art—and especially the art of the Elves—has powerful and practical significance in that it offers protection, sustenance, healing, and memory for Middle-earth; however, art, when produced without consideration for the inherent limitations of sub-creation (to borrow Tolkien's term)—when produced without concern for one's neighbors—breeds isolation, domination, and despotism. Thus, through the departure of the Elves, Tolkien suggests that

though the Elves' aesthetic has the capacity for healing the wounds of Middle-earth, the Elves' preoccupation with recreating their conception of the perfect past—that is, Valinor—in Middle-earth results in their isolation in Middle-earth and necessary departure from it.

In order to understand the ramifications of the departure of the Elves, we must first situate them within the historical economy of Middle-Earth, which is no simple task as the Elves are, perhaps, the most dynamic characters in Tolkien's fictional repertoire. As the first¹² Middle-earth characters that Tolkien sub-created (to use his own term), the Elves bear much of the historical weight for the development of Tolkien's story. Commenting on the depth and realism of the world Tolkien sub-created, C.S. Lewis suggests that Middle-earth is infused with its own "theology, myths, geography, history, palaeography, languages, and orders of being" (Lewis qtd in Pearce 83) much of which develops out of the nature and character of the Elves as revealed in the mythological body of lore contained in Tolkien's posthumously published work, *The Silmarillion*.¹³ In his seminal work *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*, John Garth powerfully reveals how Tolkien began cultivating his formal habit of developing invented languages in the trenches of World War I, eventually composing Elven poetry in those languages that evolved into the lore of the Elves.

As this elven lore evolved, so, too, did the essence of Middle-earth. In the process of recording the history of the Elves through their lore, Tolkien also began to grapple with the relationship between "human variety" and "geography," and thereby, (perhaps unconsciously) began developing "the spirit of place" that would eventually become Middle-earth, the land

¹² John Garth's *Tolkien and the Great War* provides a detailed and helpful exploration of the development of this people group and their lore.

¹³ *The Silmarillion* in its published form was, of course, never completed by J.R.R. Tolkien. Tolkien worked on from around 1917 until his death in 1973. The vast body of mythology was then compiled, edited, and published by Christopher Tolkien.

cohabited by Elves, Dwarves, Ents, Men, Wizards, and Hobbits (Garth 35).¹⁴ Emerging out of this collected body of lore is Tolkien's "intense awareness of the vast histories inscribed within a landscape" (60). In other words, the cultural and mythological history of the Elves contains within it a record of the landscape of Middle-earth and the Elves' relationship to that landscape and its other inhabitants. This record is the seed for *The Silmarillion*, the root mythology that eventually birthed¹⁵ *The Hobbit* and the *LOTR* trilogy. In many respects, *The Silmarillion* provides the mythological undercurrents that flow beneath the surface of *The Hobbit* and *LOTR*, and properly understood, helps us to contextualize the Elves as we encounter them in these later stories.

Perhaps one of the strongest narrative undercurrents in *The Silmarillion* is the sundering of the Elves, an event which provides the context to explain the diversity of the Elves as depicted by Tolkien in *The Hobbit* and the *LOTR*. As we learn in *The Silmarillion*, the Elves are divided into two main elven subgroups: the Eldar and the Avari. The Eldar are those Elves who responded to the Valar's summoning to Aman in the West (also known as Valinor). By contrast, the Avari refused the summons, and chose rather to remain under the stars of Cuiviénen in Middle-earth, where they first awoke. This refusal to travel to Aman resulted in the first division of the Elves. Of the Eldar, not all travelled the full distance to Aman, resulting in a further division among those Elves. The Calaquendi (also known as the "High Elves") are comprised of the Eldar who traveled the full distance to Aman and saw the light of the two trees. By contrast,

¹⁴ As both Tom Shippey and Humphrey Carpenter (along with several others following in their footsteps) explain, Tolkien had a deeply rooted appreciation for ancient languages and for the stories those languages told. In many respects, Tolkien's appreciation of language pollinated his own literary work. For Tolkien, the development of the *The Silmarillion*, the story, did not begin as a separate process from the development of the languages. Rather, the languages and the story grew alongside one another, developing one another in their growth. Shippey explains that "the major root" of *The Silmarillion* was the invention of the various branches of elvish languages, or, to be more precise, the relationship between the developing languages and the history of the Elves (Shippey, *Author* 231).

¹⁵ In *Tolkien: Man and Myth*, Joseph Pearce refers to *The Silmarillion* as "the womb" in which Tolkien conceived both *the Hobbit* and the *LOTR* (84).

the Moriquendi (also known as the “Dark Elves”) are those who never saw the light of the two trees of Aman because they either stopped their journey and settled somewhere along the way or turned back after beginning the journey. Of these elven subgroups, we encounter two types in *the Hobbit* and the *LOTR*: the Calaquendi, which includes the Elves of Lothlórien and Rivendell, and the Moriquendi, which includes the Elves of Mirkwood (including Legolas). After the summoning of the Elves, the Avari play little to no recorded role in Arda, and we do not encounter them in either *The Hobbit* or the *LOTR*.

This historical sundering of the Elves contributes to the Elves’ sense of rootlessness in Middle-earth. Developing his own understanding of nature and ecology in Middle-earth, Patrick Curry writes, “The Elves are a special case, having as it were one foot in the glades of Middle-earth and one foot in their ancient home over the Sea; but that very division for them had tragic consequences for them, in the various conflicts it caused” (51). Among the conflicts that Curry suggests is the disintegration of the Elves, which manifests itself in elven diversity that extends to the Elves’ language, geographical habitation, and even their specific aesthetic relationship to the land. Although each of the elven subgroups originates from the same geographical place—that is, Cuiviénen—the diverse groups we encounter in the *LOTR* and *The Hobbit* do not necessarily belong to the same place, nor do they even relate to their geographical spaces in the same manner. In many respects, the Calaquendi belong to Valinor while the Moriquendi belong to Beleriand in Middle-earth. The Calaquendi’s sense of belonging to Valinor becomes increasingly pronounced among the High Elves in the Third Age of Middle-earth, a point which is further explored later in this chapter.

Despite the disintegration of the elven unity, however, remnants of the high Elvish aesthetic are preserved through the Eldar, the “High Elves.” Moreover, because of the intimate

relationship between language and nature, the Eldar maintain a more natural, holistic aesthetic. According to Richard Purtill, the Elves represent “the artistic, aesthetic and purely scientific aspects of human nature” (60) in Middle-earth. This classification is undoubtedly true; however, the word “purely” might better be used to describe each of those features of the Elves. In other words, the High Elves represent the *purely* artistic, aesthetic, and scientific aspects of human nature in that they (generally) love beauty apart from considerations of utility, a fact that is certainly evidenced by their earnest love for the Silmarils that Fëanor sub-creates in the early days of Arda when the Elves lived among the Valar in Aman. The Silmarils undoubtedly serve a purpose—namely, to preserve the light of the Two Trees before their destruction—but this is not why Fëanor originally sub-creates them. Rather, he sub-creates them primarily because he loves the beauty of the light of the Two Trees and wishes to represent that beauty in his own work of art. With this artistic endeavor, Fëanor seeks, perhaps unwisely, to capture and contain the beauty of nature in art. Through the turmoil that ensues as a result of this sub-creative act Tolkien suggests that art produced apart from the thoughtful consideration of its effects on the community is destructive.

In his own conception and depiction of the role of art in society, Tolkien seemingly rejects the notion of “art for art’s sake” in the strict sense. Tolkien provides us with the clearest picture of his own aesthetic vision in “Leaf by Niggle,” which provides a concretizing narrative for the ideas that Tolkien expresses abstractly in his essay “On Fairy Stories.” Speaking of the incarnational nature of the work of art in “Leaf by Niggle,” Milbank explains that Niggle’s painting is restorative for those who enter into the completed work. Milbank further discusses the societal value of art in Tolkien’s conception, saying, “[In Niggle’s work of art] prudence has not been sacrificed to art as Maritain (and Chesterton) claimed happened at the Renaissance, but

there has been a return to an earlier medieval conception of art as serving society, which was being revived in communities” (22). As a Catholic artist, and more specifically as a Thomist, Tolkien esteems beauty (and by extension art) while simultaneously expressing his own belief that beauty by its very nature is beneficial to society. For Tolkien, the benefits are part of the mystery and splendor of beauty, and as such, should not be despised or neglected. Michael Milburn explains that “the dichotomy between beauty and social justice assumed by aestheticist and utilitarian alike is a false one” for true beauty grows out of the same soil as the righteous pursuit of social justice—that is, virtue (57). In other words, the benefits are part of the beauty.

The question of utility becomes increasingly important for the Elves when faced with the evil at work in Middle-earth. While Tolkien obviously esteems the Elves as wise and beautiful beings, he also suggests that their aesthetic is not above the perversion or corruption usually associated with a lack of concern for the effects of the object made. Though immortal and immensely wise, the Elves do not possess omnipotence or omniscience; rather, they are finite beings, meaning they subscribe to the limitations inherent in humans. As finite beings, the Elves are fallible and remain susceptible to corruption, a fact which is most clearly evidenced through the Elves’ creation of the Rings, an action which stems from the Elves’ desire recapture the essence of Valinor in Middle-earth through artifice. Describing the unsettled nature of the High Elves in Middle-earth, Tolkien writes, “The Noldor desired ever to increase the skill and subtlety of their works. Moreover they were not at peace in their hearts, since they had refused to return to the West, and they desired both to stay in Middle-earth, which indeed they loved, and yet to enjoy the bliss of those that had departed” (*Silmarillion* 287). Promising the Elves that he would be able to enhance their skill so that they might mimic the unparalleled beauty of Valinor in Middle-earth, Sauron was able to convince the Noldor to sub-create the Rings, which serve as

the primary source of turmoil throughout the *LOTR* and the cause of the Elven isolation and eventual departure.

Up to this point, we have largely examined the Elves through their own lore as recorded in *The Silmarillion*, and thus through their own perspective. This perspective has largely focused on the Elves' position in Arda. However, the Hobbits, too, give us a perspective of the Elves, a perspective which is tied specifically to Middle-earth. *The Hobbit* and the *LOTR* trilogy are the Hobbits' tales, and as such they are narrated primarily through the Hobbits' perspective.

Generally speaking, Hobbits are much earthier, and as such, with the shift in perspective,¹⁶ we also find a shift in tone and emphasis. Whereas in *The Silmarillion*, the Elves' aesthetic is primarily represented through their linguistic development and their own artistic endeavors, *The Hobbit* and the *LOTR* present the Elves' aesthetic largely through the Elves' explicit relationship to nature, through the societal benefits that their aesthetic offers to other communities in Middle-earth, and through the lens of the corrupted aesthetic.

Throughout *The Hobbit* and the *LOTR*, Hobbits encounter Elves in four primary settings: in Rivendell, in Lothlorien, at the elven haven in Mirkwood, and nomadic elves heading for the sea. Each of these encounters provides a distinct picture of the Elves in Middle-earth and reveals something specific about the Elves' place in the economy of Middle-earth. In what remains of this chapter, I explore each of these encounters drawing from the Elves' history, showing how the Elves fit within the economy of Middle-earth and what their impending departure signifies for that economy.

¹⁶ Milbank explains how the Hobbits' perspective in the stories affects a sense of defamiliarization within the story, which serves both to "render [the Hobbits] fictional" or legendary with the story and to confirm the reality of their story and of the characters within the story (41). In other words, "We believe in the ents, dwarves, etc., because we experience them through the hobbit eyes; we believe in the hobbits partly because they are our focalizers—our point of view on events" (41).

If we are to start a discussion about elven places in Middle-earth, it seems most natural to start where both Bilbo and Frodo start: with the house of Elrond in Rivendell. Rivendell is, of course, the first elven stronghold Tolkien depicts in Middle-earth when Bilbo rests there in *The Hobbit*; it is the place where Bilbo finds rest on his journey there and back again, and it is the place he finds his ultimate rest in Middle-earth before departing into the West. In *The Hobbit*, we learn very little about Rivendell; however, what we do learn is essential to understanding what Rivendell (and, more importantly, what the Elves) offer in Middle-earth.

Rivendell is place of rest and restoration for weary souls. Bilbo's first experience of Rivendell is significant for it is the first picture an elven stronghold in Middle-earth that Tolkien publishes:

They saw a valley far below. They could hear the voice of hurrying water in a rocky bed at the bottom; the scent of trees was in the air; and there was light on the valley-side across the water. Bilbo never forgot the way they slithered and slipped in the dusk down the steep zig-zag path into the secret valley of Rivendell. The air grew warmer as they got lower, and the smell of pine-trees made him drowsy, so that every now and again he nodded and nearly fell off, or bumped his nose on the pony's neck. Their spirits rose as they went down and down. The trees changed to beech and oak, and there was a comfortable feeling in the twilight. The last green had almost faded out of the grass when they came at length to an open glade not far above the banks of the stream. "Hmmm! It smells like elves" thought Bilbo. (*Hobbit* 45)

Bilbo's first experience in Rivendell captures the essence of the place: Rivendell is a place of healing and of rest. As Bilbo descends into Rivendell, his spirits rise, and he is refreshed.

Throughout his journey, Bilbo longs for the comfort of his hobbit hole in the Shire except when he is in Rivendell. Before coming to Rivendell, Bilbo frequently dreams of returning to his hobbit hole, which he associates with food and comfort; yet, after a fortnight in the Last Homely House in Rivendell, Bilbo believes that “he would gladly have stopped there for ever and ever—even supposing a wish would have taken him right back to his hobbit-hole without trouble” (48).

The essence of Rivendell—namely, the restorative powers of the place—which Tolkien establishes in *The Hobbit* is maintained in the *LOTR*, though the tone and significance is measurably more serious in the latter. Having inherited the ring from Bilbo, Frodo also inherits the task of destroying the ring. When, at Gandalf’s urging, Frodo determines to leave the Shire, he asks Gandalf which direction he should take. Gandalf’s response casts a foreboding picture of the road ahead for Frodo: “‘Towards danger; but not too rashly, nor too straight,’ answered the wizard. ‘If you want my advice, make for Rivendell. That journey should not prove too perilous, though the Road is less easy than it was, and it will grow worse as the year fails’” (*Fellowship* 65). Gandalf’s exhortation invokes this response from Frodo: “‘Rivendell!’ said Frodo. ‘Very good: I will go east, and I will make for Rivendell. I will take to visit the Elves; he will be delighted.’ He spoke lightly; but his heart was moved suddenly with a desire to see the house of Elrond Halfelven, and breathe the air of that deep valley where many fair folk still dwelt in peace” (65). As war is brooding in Mordor in the East, Rivendell remains a stronghold in Middle-earth; it is an island of rest floating between Mordor and the Shire. However, as Gandalf indicates, Rivendell’s power to withstand is waning as Mordor expands its borders outward and draws all places, including both Rivendell and the Shire, into itself.

When Frodo finally arrives in Rivendell, his situation is precarious. Having been struck by the poisoned sword of a Ringwraith, Frodo is “beginning to fade” (*Fellowship* 213). Rather

than being a reference to a literal physical death, this fading points to a metaphysical displacement of the soul, whereby Frodo would “become a wraith under the dominion of the Dark Lord” (216). Through this wound, Tolkien reveals the power that the Elves exercise in Middle-earth. “Elrond is a master of healing,” Gandalf tells the recovering Frodo, “but the weapons of our Enemy are deadly” (215). Although the work of Elrond takes place off-stage in the story, Gandalf’s statement implies a battle between two powerful forces. On the one hand, we have the healing aesthetic of Elrond represented in his place. On the other hand, we have the poisoned craft of the Dark Lord embodied in the sword. Gandalf explains that these Elves—namely, the High Elves—“do not fear the Ringwraiths, for those who have dwelt in the Blessed Realm live at once in Both worlds, and against both the Seen and the Unseen they have great power” (216).

This depiction of the Elves as healers harkens back to the original summoning of the Elves in *The Silmarillion*. When the Elves first came into Arda, Melkor was destroying the land and corrupting its inhabitants with the lies of his sweet tongue. Among those he corrupted were some of the Elves, who become Orcs for his armies. The Valar, desiring to protect the Elves from Melkor’s schemes and to enjoy the beauty of the Elves and fellowship with them, summoned the Elves into Valinor (or Aman). Yet, some of the Valar opposed the summoning of the Elves, believing that they should remain in Middle-earth and “with their gifts of skill” be left “to order all the lands and heal their hurts” (*Silmarillion* 52). Of course, as already discussed, the Valar do summon the Elves into Aman, but many of Elves, including the Eldar of Rivendell, return to Middle-earth after having seen the light of the two trees. Although the summoning of Elves also resulted in “many woes” (including the sundering of the Elves) (52), the High Elves

who return to Middle-earth bring with them a remembrance of the beauty of Aman which they seek to re-capture in their elven-strongholds.

This beauty is manifested through their ability to make great works of artistry which embody both the physical and metaphysical, the natural and the supernatural, at once. In Middle-earth this artistry extends beyond mere artifice—meaning, simple craftsmanship of efficient devices—to the cultivation and restoration of the physical and metaphysical aspects of nature. To this point, Dickerson and Evan appropriately recognize in the Elves a close association with horticulture, or, with “the cultivation of plant life and the landscapes that support it for purely aesthetic purposes” (99). In other words, Dickerson and Evans associate the Elves with the beauty of the natural world that is represented through the well-ordered garden. This association with gardens is distinct from the agricultural aspect of gardening that we experience with the Hobbits, a point which explored more fully in chapter four, in that it is not concerned with production. Rather, the Elves’ cultivation of the natural world is primarily concerned with beauty (98). Yet, as is evidenced by the healing powers of the Elves’ and their home, this appreciation of beauty is not fully disassociated from the benefits of that beauty.

I say “fully” here because there is a very real sense in which the Elves and their work is separated from the economy of Middle-earth as a whole. In *Defending Middle-earth*, Patrick Curry identifies the Elves as being, perhaps, the most radically nostalgic in that they have a pronounced “sense of yearning for the past” and seek “to maintain that past now, in places like Lothlorien and Rivendell” (43). This past that the Elves yearn for is tied to their desire for Aman, for the light of the two trees. There is a very real sense in which the High Elves, and thereby their ability to heal the wounds of Middle-earth, were enriched through the summoning; yet, the High Elves are also largely displaced as a result of it. This displacement is evidenced in Rivendell as

Gandalf acknowledges, saying, “Indeed there is a power in Rivendell to withstand the might of Mordor, for a while: and elsewhere other powers still dwell. There is power, too, of another kind in the Shire. But all such places will soon become islands under siege, if things go on as they are going. The Dark Lord is putting forth all his strength” (*Fellowship* 217). Gandalf’s reference to “other powers” very likely anticipates Lothlórien, which is arguably the most powerful—and undoubtedly, the most secretive—Elven stronghold in Middle-earth.

The healing quality of Lothlórien is appropriately distinct from that of Rivendell in that the artistry of the Elves of Lothlórien is reflected through the natural environment in which they establish their homes in Middle-earth. Both Elrond and Galadriel—along with Gandalf—are ring bearers. Each of these three characters bears one of the three elven-made rings: Gandalf bears the Ring of Fire, Elrond bears the Ring of Air, and Galadriel bears the Ring of Water. For the Elves, the healing qualities of their place reflect the elements of their rings. As he is descending into Rivendell, Bilbo spirits are refreshed as he inhales the air surrounding the place. Likewise, before entering Lothlorien, the weary travelers find refreshment in the streams that through the forest. Frodo, exhausted and injured, wades through the water of the Nimrodel (the stream), and finds that “the stain of travel and all weariness was washed from his limbs” (*Fellowship* 330). In both cases, we see the aesthetic of the Elves manifested in both the thing made—namely, the ring—and the natural environment in which they establish their places. Gandalf, too, manifests the elements of his ring in his own artistry in that he is a wielder of fire, or more appropriately, fireworks; however, Gandalf’s abilities and his use of the ring is not the focus of this chapter, and thus, will not be fully explored here.

The communion that the Galadhrim (or, “Tree-people”) share with their place is further reflected in their specific natural environment. Rather than buildings (like the Last Homely

House of Rivendell), the high Elves of Lothlórien have trees for their home, or to be more precise, mallorn-trees. Curry explains that “enchantment is the art of the elves; and as such, it has a special affinity with nature both as its principle inspiration and as the object of its enhancement” (62). Reflecting the stature of the Elves, the mallorn-trees in Lothlórien are tall, majestic trees endowed with a deep sense of mystery and longevity and contributing to the enchantment of the place. Borrowing a phrase from the stories, Curry calls Lothlórien “the heart of Elvendom on earth” (51). This label seems fitting in that Lothlórien is depicted as the most natural of all of the elven strongholds in Middle-earth. Sam, too, recognizes Galadhrim’s distinctive union with their natural environment when he says,

And I reckon there’s Elves and Elves. They’re all elvish enough, but they’re not all the same. Now these folk aren’t wanderers or homeless, and seem a bit nearer to the likes of us: they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they’ve made the land, or the land’s made them, it’s hard to say, if you take my meaning. It’s wonderfully quiet here. Nothing seems to be going on, and nobody seems to want it to. If there’s any magic about, it’s right down deep, where I can’t lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking. (*Fellowship* 351)

What Sam is tapping into here is the history of the Elves, a history which binds the Elves to the land and explains their separation from it. Without fully understanding the implications of his statement, Sam recalls the sundering of the Elves that resulted in the divisions among the Elves. Moreover, Sam understands that the Galadhrim embody a rich sense of placed-ness within Lothlórien.

Despite their sense of belonging in Lothlórien, the Galadhrim exist almost utterly in isolation from the rest of Middle-earth. Even more so than Rivendell, Lothlórien remains sealed

off and secluded from Middle-earth. For both Lothlórien and Rivendell, the secrecy is imperative. As already mentioned, both Lothlórien and Rivendell house the elven rings which are under the control of the One Ring. In order to protect the rings and to keep them from evil, the Elves must keep them secret. In this respect, Tolkien reveals the susceptibility of the Elves' aesthetic to perversion. The rings, sources of both power and of beauty, can be corrupted and used as devices for control. Thus, in some sense, Tolkien suggests that art (or sub-creation) apart from the considerations of utility (or societal benefit) and humanity is not entirely safe or wise in that art thus set apart is susceptible to corruption.

Moreover, the isolation of both of these places adds to the sense of otherworldliness they project to visitors and isolates the power of their aesthetic from Middle-earth at large. In other words, although the Elves are meant "to order all the lands and heal their hurts," their affection for beauty and their desire to sub-create and possess those sub-created works leaves them unable to fully enact their gifts within Middle-earth. Reflecting the nature of the High Elves and their desire to return to Aman, their homes have become like islands floating in Middle-earth, but disconnected from it. Gandalf fears this disconnectedness provides opportunity for the Dark Lord to siege these places individually. By their segregation, each place is made weaker. Haldir, one of the Galadhrim, too, echoes this sentiment, saying,

Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him. Yet so little faith and trust do we find now in the world beyond Lothlórien, unless maybe in Rivendell, that that we dare not by our own trust endanger our land. We live now upon an island amid many perils, and our hands are more often upon the bowstring than upon the harp. (*Fellowship* 339)

Fearing the evil at work in Middle-earth and desiring to protect their own land, the Galadhrim cut themselves off from the outer world. In many respects, Lothlórien represents the very embodiment of those ancient things that are simply remembered in Rivendell. Frodo feels the presence of the living past in Lothlórien, leading him to conclude, “In Rivendell there was a memory of ancient things; in Lórien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world” (340). In both places, however, the Elves manifest a desperate desire to return to Aman and to re-enter the world of the past. For this reason, Curry labels these elves “radically nostalgic” in their longing for the past and the desire to re-make that past—or, at least to retain some of it—in the homes that they build in Middle-earth (43).

There is, however, still another distinct group of Elves in Middle-earth that the Hobbits come to know: the Moriquendi (or Dark Elves) of Mirkwood of which Legolas is one. Naturally, Legolas is the Dark Elf to which we receive the most consistent and thorough exposure as he is part of the Fellowship. Comparatively speaking, Legolas, though he is knowledgeable of the ways of the High Elves, does not manifest nearly the same degree of power as the High Elves. This point is clearly manifested when Frodo and Sam are injured during the journey through Moria. In this situation, it is Aragorn rather than Legolas who practices the art of healing and tends to the wounds of these hobbits. This art of healing is part of Aragorn’s inheritance rightful King of Gondor and as a descendant of the Númenorean race, but it is also an art that he has honed under the instruction of the High Elves of Rivendell. While it would be only natural for Legolas to act as healer (after all, he is an Elf whose natural gifts predispose him toward healing), in this particular case, Legolas’s healing abilities are subordinate to Aragorn’s.

Moreover, the same experience holds true for Bilbo when he enters the realm of the Mirkwood Elves on his journey to the Lonely Mountain. The home of these woodland Elves is

far less majestic or restorative than either Rivendell or Lothlorien. Even the High Elves that the four hobbits—namely, Frodo, Sam, Pippin, and Merry—encounter in the woods just outside the Shire carry with them a more pronounced aesthetic that lends itself toward healing and restoration. This distinction among the Elves is due to the fact that Moriquendi never travelled to Aman, so their knowledge is greatly diminished in comparison. Having never seen the two trees, the Elves of Mirkwood never experienced the full weight of enlightenment offered in Aman. However, this diminishment does not entirely negate their natural evlish-ness. Legolas, too, is skilled in the art of lore and of music-making. Likewise, Legolas longs for the Sea as the High Elves do.

This expression of longing for the Sea is the ultimate manifestation of the Elves' desire to go at last into Aman. There is much speculation about what this ultimate return to Aman symbolizes for the High Elves. While Dickerson and Evans interpret Aman to be a representation of the Christian heaven (116), Joseph Pearce explains that others have equated Aman with Eden (162). In some respects, the Edenic interpretation is more consistent with other aspects of the Elves' nature, including their own immortality. Yet, regardless of the Christian significance of Aman, within the context of the story, it is clear that the High Elves' return to Aman represents their final reclamation of their place. The beauty and artistry that they manifest in Middle-earth no longer belongs there.

As has already been noted, when the Hobbits first encounter the Elves in the *LOTR*, they are departing from Middle-earth, making their way into the West. This image bookends our encounters with the Elves in Middle-earth. Throughout the story, we find the Elves continually diminishing in Middle-earth. In many respects, Tolkien suggests that the purely aesthetic, artistic, and scientific mind of the Elves belongs to the past and cannot continue to exist in

Middle-earth after the final destruction of the Ring, which was both made by the Elves and was reflected in the natural environment of the Elves. In his 1930 agrarian essay “A Mirror for Artist,” Donald Davidson writes,

More completely, the making of an industrialized society will extinguish the meaning of the arts, as humanity has known them in the past by changing the conditions of life that have given art a meaning. For they have been produced in societies which were for the most part stable, religious, and agrarian; where the goodness of life was measured by a scale of values having little to do with the material values of industrialism; where men were never too far removed from nature to forget that the chief subject of art, in the final sense, is nature (29).

Although Tolkien does not promote nor preserve the fully industrialized society in Middle-earth, there is a sense in which the War of the Ring ushers in a new reality in which industrialization is a very real factor. As such, the Eldar, whose aesthetic reflects the ancient “mythic mind” of the past, no longer have a place in Middle-earth.

While the departure of the Elves and the ancient mind that they represent is imminent and necessary, it is not absolute in that remnants of their aesthetic are preserved in the other communities who remain. In their own ways, Hobbits and Men each maintain some aspects of the Elven aesthetic in their own localized manners. Donaldson concludes his essay, saying,

The artist should not forget that in those times he is called on to play the part both of a person and of an artist. Of the two, that of a person is more immediately important. As an artist he will do best to flee the infection of our times...But he cannot wage this fight by remaining on his perch as artist. He must be a person first of all, even though for the time being he may become less of an artist. He

must enter the common arena and become a citizen. Whether he chooses, as a citizen-person, to be a farmer or run for Congress is a matter of individual choice; but in that general direction his duty lies (60).

The Elves are *purely* artists first, perching on their aesthetic islands while the war rages around them. In the end, the Elves surrender their role as the artists, the healers, and the orders of Middle-earth, leaving those functions primarily to Men and Hobbits and in Middle-earth.

Chapter Three—"Not All Who Wander Are Lost": The King's Place as Defender and Healer

In many respects, Men are the most familiar characters in Tolkien's Middle-earth economy in that, on the surface, they most closely reflect our own physical attributes and social structures. They live in organized and established cities with commerce. They have Kings who govern, exercise authority, and execute justice. And, unlike Elves and Hobbits, Men share a physical resemblance with humans in the Primary World, making them feel, in many ways, less strange than Tolkien's more obviously fantastic characters. In other words, we see Tolkien's race of Men as more closely related to our own race; thus, it is easy for us to de-fantasize and demystify them, assuming that their race shares a simple one-to-one correlation with our own. This demystification of Men in Tolkien's stories has perhaps contributed to the disproportionately low critical attention given to the role that Men play in Tolkien's stories.¹⁷ Yet, like Elves and Hobbits, Men, too, are "faceted," to borrow a phrase from Richard Purtill, in that they, too, represent "one aspect of a complete human being" (59),¹⁸ and thus merit focused critical analysis of precisely where and how Men fit in Tolkien's Middle-earth economy.

Men, though not particularly concerned with aesthetic or agrarian values as a race, fill a pivotal role in the economy of Middle-earth, a role which, when properly performed, promotes health in Middle-earth. Throughout Tolkien's fiction, the race of Men as a whole offers very

¹⁷ Although I have not directly encountered the claim that Men receive less critical attention Tolkien's other primary characters, Paul Kocher does make a similar claim that he applies more narrowly to Aragorn as representative of the race of Men when he says that Aragorn is "probably the least written about, least valued, and most misunderstood of all its major characters" (128). My claim here is further supported quantifiably by basic queries in the MLA International database, which turn up 54 results for basic keyword searches with "Tolkien" and "Hobbits" as keyword delimitations, but turn up merely 2 results with "Tolkien" and "Men" as keyword delimitations or 5 with "Tolkien" and "Aragorn."

¹⁸ To clarify, I am not arguing that Men, Hobbits, and Elves each function in only one capacity in Tolkien's stories, nor am I arguing that they each represent *only* one aspect of human nature. Rather, I use the word "one" here loosely, as I believe Purtill does also, to signify Tolkien's method of layering humanity in the variety of "races" in Middle-earth.

little for us to admire or emulate. Elves attract us through their beauty, their aesthetic, their transcendence; they appeal to our sense of wonder. Similarly, the simplicity and earthiness of the Hobbits appeals to our innate levity and our capacity for deriving pleasure from the fruits of the earth. However, the race of Men frequently appears corruptible, concerned with the practical (as opposed to the beautiful), and generally in need of rebuke and admonishment. As noted in chapter two of this thesis, Alison Milbank contrasts the *poiesis* of the Elves with the *praxis* of Men, stating, “Humans in Tolkien’s world are primarily men of action, involved in public projects, government and defence; it is the elves who are the makers” (21). While the Elves and Hobbits engage themselves in transcendent acts of creation and cultivation, Men, by contrast, concern themselves with practical projects such as defending and extending their borders, a project which, when justly and prudently executed, promotes health in Middle-earth, and when neglected or poorly stewarded, promotes disease. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Tolkien largely presents the work assigned to the realm of Men as being poorly stewarded, a flaw which he largely attributes to the displacement of rightful king of the realm, Aragorn. For this reason, Aragorn’s journey from displacement to kingship—or, the return of the king—serves as a pivotal role in re-establishing health in Middle-earth in that his re-placement on the throne signifies the return of just and prudent stewardship and government in Middle-earth.

In *LOTR* trilogy, the volatility of the realm of Men and the resulting displacement of Men is introduced early in the narrative and serves as a leitmotif throughout the stories. In fact, although peaceable times are intimated on several occasions throughout the stories, it is not until the very end of the *LOTR* trilogy that Tolkien finally presents the realm of Men establishing a state of peace and health within their own realm. In *The Hobbit*, the once “rich and prosperous” ancient town of Dale is reduced to a mere shadow of its former glory with “rotting piles of a

greater town” still lining the waterway (173). Likewise, in the *LOTR*, when Men are introduced into the narrative, they are depicted as already being displaced. Whereas there are only faint whispers of danger in the Shire at the opening of the trilogy, the realm of Men has long been in a state of violent turmoil. The Hobbits learn of the turmoil at the Prancing Pony Inn in Bree, where Men and Dwarves frequently stop as they flee war in their own realm. Describing the atmosphere at the inn, the narrator explains, “The Men and Dwarves were mostly talking of distant events and telling news of a kind that was becoming only too familiar. There was trouble away in the South, and it seemed that the Men who had come up the Greenway were on the move, looking for lands where they could find some peace” (*Fellowship* 152). Unbeknownst to the reader at this point, Gondor has already been infected by the evil of Saruman and Sauron so that Orcs and deceivers move unrestrained throughout Gondor and Rohan, threatening the continued existence of the realm of Men.

Men in the Third Age of Middle-earth stand as the primary defense against evil in Middle-earth, a fact which is evidenced most plainly by their geographical positioning. Situated directly between Eriador, the home of both the Hobbits and the Elves, to the northeast and Mordor to the southwest, the realm of Men functions as the fulcrum between good and evil—between balance and imbalance, peace and turmoil, placed-ness and displacement—in Middle-earth’s economy. In other words, Tolkien places Men geographically between that which he esteems and desires to preserve and that which he detests and desires to defeat, and Tolkien suggests that Men, ungoverned and left to their own devices, might be swayed in either direction. Moreover, the realm of Men is sandwiched between the evil forces of Saruman in Isengard in the northwest corridor of Rohan and Sauron in Mordor to the southeast of Gondor. Because the realm of Men is positioned between these two evil forces, Men face the fear of war and the

resulting displacement more fiercely than the Elves and Hobbits do. Thus, when war erupts in Middle-earth, it does so first and most fiercely within the realm of Men. Commenting on the geographical position of Men within the narrative, Gimli states, “It is a pity that our friends lie in between. If no land divided Isengard and Mordor, then they could fight while we watched and waited” (*Towers* 486). Gimli’s sentiment, though understandable, fails to account for the necessary interdependency between the realm of Men and the rest of Middle-earth. Correcting Gimli on this point, Gandalf suggests the position of Men between Saruman and Sauron is necessary, explaining that should Saruman and Sauron engage in an unmediated battle, “The victor would emerge stronger than either, and free from doubt” (486). In other words, their geographical position in Middle-earth, though tumultuous for Men, allows Men to serve as a shield for Eriador and to maintain balance in Middle-earth.

This geographical positioning of Men in Middle-earth also signifies an important aspect of the metaphysical nature of race of Men. As Milbank notes, the race of men are “men of action” (21), and as such, they are often susceptible to manipulation and corruption. Although *The Silmarillion* depicts the ancient legendarium of Arda (and, by extension, Middle-earth) primarily through the lore of the Elves, it also reveals much about the nature of Men, the second-born Children of Illúvatar. Most importantly, *The Silmarillion* reveals the incertitude of the character of Men, a characteristic which Sauron uses greatly to his advantage since he finds men “the easiest to sway” (*Silmarillion* 287). Because Sauron finds men most malleable for his purposes, he originally chose to elevate their status in Middle-earth by bestowing upon them the largest number of elven rings—nine to be precise. Sauron’s faith in Men was not misplaced since “Men proved in this matter as in others the readiest to his will” (288). These nine ring bearers,

utterly perverted by Sauron, became the Ringwraiths, who “obtained glory and great wealth” and were granted “unending life” (289).

The immortality bestowed upon the Ringwraiths through the rings highlights a significant aspect of the nature of Men. That is, Men, unlike Elves, are mortal. Tolkien suggests that their mortality—at once a blessing and a curse—contributes to their volatility in that it leads Men to pursue immortality—or, at least to extend their mortal days—often without consideration for justice, truth, beauty, and goodness. In his essay “Over the Chasm of Fire,” Stratford Caldecott explains the distinction between immortality of the Elves and mortality of Men, saying, “The Elves can hope for nothing higher than memory: a frozen image of perfect beauty in the Far West...But Men are not Elves, and the hope of Men transcends time” (26–7). In “Love: The Gift of Death,” Linda Greenwood explains that hope—and, more specifically, in Tolkien’s words, “[h]ope without guarantees” —is “the only absolute in [Tolkien’s] great epic” (173). In death, Men find hope through transience, through the mystery of something that lies beyond the realm of Arda. Whereas Elves are bound within the circles of Arda and find their resting place in Mandos within the circles of Arda, Men escape Arda through death into a realm yet unknown, a concept that mirrors the Christian idea of heaven. In other words, the Elves never escape their memory and their loss, but through death, Men are released from their trials and failures into a mysterious realm beyond Arda. In that escape, Men find hope.

The hope offered through their mortality is powerful, but so, too, is the fear of death and the loss that death represents. *The Silmarillion* recounts how the Númenóreans, blessed with extended but not unending life, were tempted by the desire for immortality, saying,

[And] the Númenóreans began to hunger for the undying city that they saw from afar, and the desire of everlasting life, to escape from death and the ending of

delight, grew strong upon them; and ever as their power and glory grew greater their unquiet increased. For though the Valar had rewarded the Dúnedain with long life, they could not take from them the weariness of the world that comes at last, and they died, even their kings of the seed of Eärendil; and the span of their lives was brief in the eyes of the Eldar. (263–4)

As is evidenced from this passage, death represents not just a loss of life, but the loss of what is achieved in life. As the Númenóreans increase their power, they also increase their desire to eternally possess that power, leading them to pursue recklessly (and, often violently) power in Middle-earth by aligning themselves with evil. Recalling the fall of Númenor recorded in *The Silmarillion*, Paul Kocher suggests that “Man’s hunger for more and more life gave Sauron a fatal argument with which to drive Númenor into disobedience (122). In other words, Men’s mortality is, at least in part, a source of their corruptibility.

Of course, the Ringwraiths provide the most extreme example of this desire for immortality and the accumulation of power represented by it, but they are not the only example. Boromir also succumbs to the power of the ring in that he, too, exerts his will and attempts to claim the ring for his own purposes. Yet, in his weakness, Boromir’s character elicits sympathy and, to some degree, even honor in that he presents a realistic picture of Man’s struggle to accept his own physical and metaphysical limitations. Boromir’s desire to protect his realm by the power of his own hand is innate within him, and, though he temporarily resists the temptation to exert his will, he eventually succumbs to the temptation of the ring. Reflecting on Boromir’s character, C. S. Lewis concludes that Boromir depicts Tolkien’s intimate awareness of the paradoxical nature of humankind in that Boromir is a dynamic character who openly wrestles with the choice between good and evil (“The Dethronement of Power” 11). When Boromir

follows Frodo into the woods, he faces the temptation of the ring,¹⁹ and finds that, despite his claims to strength and resolve, he is weak and irresolute. When Frodo references the Ring, Boromir's demeanor changes, and he exclaims, "The Ring! Is it not a strange fate that we should suffer so much fear and doubt for so small a thing? So small a thing!" (*Fellowship* 389). Ignoring Frodo's reminders regarding the power of the ring to corrupt, Boromir asserts the certitude of his character and his claim to power, saying,

These elves and half-elves and wizards, they would come to grief perhaps. Yet often I doubt if they are wise and not merely timid. But each to his own kind. True-hearted Men, they will not be corrupted. We of Minas Tirith have been staunch through long years of trial. We do not desire the power of wizard-lords, only strength to defend ourselves strength is a just cause. And behold! in our need chance brings to light the Ring of Power. It is a gift, I say; a gift to the foes of Mordor. It is mad not to use it, to use the power of the Enemy against him. The fearless, the ruthless, these alone will achieve victory. What could not a warrior do in this hour, a great leader? What could not Aragorn do? Or if he refuses, why not Boromir? The Ring would give me power of Command. How I would drive the hosts of Mordor, and all men would flock to my banner! (389)

Boromir's speech here is laden with paradox that bears fleshing out.

In her Derridean analysis of the relationship between death and love in Tolkien's fiction, Linda Greenwood insightfully and faithfully explores the paradoxes embedded within Tolkien's fiction, especially focusing in on Boromir's character. According to Greenwood, "Within Tolkien's mythic structure there lies a world of paradox and ambiguity. His world is not divided

¹⁹ Sam, too, faces the temptation to use the Ring for good purposes, but unlike Boromir, he refrains. I explore Sam's temptation at length in chapter four, and so do not explore the comparison here.

into simple black and white. Good and evil are not always sharply distinguished... Instead of figures that embody totally good or totally evil traits, he develops the characters of Saruman, Boromir, and Denethor” (176). In other words, Tolkien gives us characters who are human, who are endowed with the capacity for both good and evil, faithfulness and deceit. Discerning the paradox in Boromir, Greenwood explains,

Unlike Aragorn, [Boromir] is unable to humble himself and become a servant for the good of the people who serve his father in Minas Tirith. Boromir feels the Ring should come to him in order that, with its power, he might protect and save Gondor against Sauron. He chafes under the leadership of Aragorn and is unable to see that only through service is true mastery (over oneself) achieved. Humility, not pride, achieves victory. In his desire to take the Ring and master it for the good, his thoughts and inclinations become evil. (181)

Greenwood’s analysis of Boromir’s inability to see the paradoxical reality and to participate in it is evidenced in Boromir’s own speech. Boromir calls the Ring a “gift,” just as Gollum did,²⁰ and denies the burden of responsibility inherent in the Ring. He claims that he is “true-hearted,” while he confesses his unfaithfulness to Council, to the Fellowship, and to Frodo. He simultaneously denies his desire for power and expresses his desire to usurp Aragorn’s leadership and gather power under himself. It is this final paradox that points to the crux of Boromir’s own disease (or, “dis-ease” to recall Wendell Berry’s use of the word), and, more broadly speaking, to the disease of the realm of Men.

²⁰ The reference to the Ring being a “gift” here is packed with significance within the context of the story. Gollum, of course, acquired the Ring as a birthday present (though one for which he had to murder), and Bilbo, too, claimed that the Ring was a gift at one point. I explore the history of the Ring as a gift in chapter four, since its history as a gift is most significant within the Hobbit history.

Boromir's susceptibility to the temptation of the ring and the volatility in the realm of Men in general is further exaggerated by the displacement of Gondor's rightful king, Aragorn. In Aragorn's absence, Gondor has been governed under the stewardship of Denethor, Boromir's father. Through the contrast between Aragorn's rightful kingship and Denethor's stewardship, Tolkien emphasizes the inherent connection between placed-ness and health. When Tolkien introduces Aragorn in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, he is a wandering Ranger called "Strider," whose primary function in Middle-earth is to roam about the wilderlands, seeking out evil forces at work and uprooting them. Though by heritage Aragorn has a people and a home—namely, Gondor—he cannot fully return to that home and resume his rightful place until peace has been won and re-established for Middle-earth. In a very real sense, the entire trilogy is moving Aragorn back toward his place, and the final re-placing of Aragorn signals the re-establishing of order in Middle-earth.

Aragorn's service as a Ranger, though depicted only briefly in the stories during the journey from Bree to Rivendell, serves an integral piece in the narrative in that it reveals the full extent of the displacement in Middle-earth. Aragorn's displacement is so severe that his very identity is altered, a fact which is evidenced through his renaming. When the Hobbits first encounter Strider at Butterbur's inn in Bree, he is cloaked in a mystery that produces fear in those whom Strider protects as friends. This mystery creates a sense of isolation for Strider, paradoxically diminishing him where he ought to be exalted.

In the story, Strider's homelessness fails to sufficiently startle us as readers (as it does the Hobbits) because Strider wears a mask of obscurity. Since the story unfolds through the Hobbit's perspective, we, as readers, discover Strider's true character with them. In fact, for the first leg of our journey with Strider, we, like the Hobbits, are uncertain of his character; thus, as Strider

convinces the Hobbits that he is trustworthy and good, he convinces the readers as well.

Although his work as a Ranger is noble, it is not praised or widely recognized. Sam's response to Strider's offer to assist them on their journey demonstrates precisely how diminished Strider is:

“With your leave, Mr. Frodo, I'd say *no*! This Strider here, he warns and he says take care; and I say *yes* to that, and let's begin with him. He comes out of the Wild, and I never heard no good of such folk” (*Fellowship* 162). With this warning, Sam dismisses Strider because of his nomadic lifestyle, because of his displacement,²¹ failing to recognize his lifestyle as a sacrifice for the benefit of others. Paul Kocher describes Strider's duties as a Ranger, saying, “All of his life he has been making arduous journeys far east and south to learn of those regions and peoples at first hand and to spy on Sauron. Under false names he has fought for both Rohan and Minas Tirith. Chief of the Dúnedain, he has quietly led them in patrols that have slipped along the borders of the Shire to guard it and the Ring it holds. They are homeless solitary men, these Rangers, as their work demands, and he has become as grim and stern as any of them” (130). In other words, Strider not only looks like a Ranger; he is a Ranger, and as such, he is not yet King.

Strider's nomadic, thankless patrolling of the borders makes him appear, at first, as a marginal (at best) or malicious (at worst) character. Analyzing the importance of margins in Middle-earth as narrative transitional markers, Dickerson and Evans state, “The forests, fields, and farms of Middle-earth are all part of a total environment, a larger whole. More important, they are dependent on and commingle with one another in the comprehensive ecology of Middle-earth” (145). Dickerson and Evans go on to discuss how the act of crossing over limits into

²¹ There are certainly some parallels between Rangers in Middle-earth and soldiers in England. Both are displaced in order to protect the placed-ness of others. This specific a parallel will not be explored in any depth here. In her article “At Home and Abroad: Eowyn's Two-Fold Figuring as War Bride in *The Lord of the Rings*,” Melissa Smith uses historical analyses of women in war to analyze the displacement of Men through the war and the effects of that displacements on their realm. More broadly and in much more depth, both John Garth and Janet Brennan Croft explore the parallels between Tolkien's fiction and the World Wars.

margins in Middle-earth serve as pivotal elements in the plot. Noting the distinguished moment when the Hobbits cross the invisible line leaving the Shire to enter the Old Forest, the Dickerson and Evans demonstrate how the crossing of margins signals dramatic action in the story (152). This analysis of the margins in Middle-earth becomes increasingly important for an analysis of Strider's character as representative of Men in that Strider is defined by his marginal existence, living in the Wild, outside the realms of Hobbits, Elves, and even Men. Since the margins in Tolkien's fiction act as pivotal plot transitions throughout the story, Strider's own marginal existence suggests his own coming transition.

Strider initiates his transition into Aragorn at the Inn in Bree through Gandalf's revelation of "his true name" and recitation of Aragorn's poem (*Fellowship* 167). The poem bears repeating here as it both reflects and predicts Strider's transition:

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 ashes a fire shall be woken,
 A light from the shadows will spring;
 Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
 The crownless again shall be king. (167)

Strider's deceptively humble appearance and seemingly obscure existence prefigures his transition into kingship, a connection which Strider himself makes explicit to the Hobbits in response to Frodo's claim that "You have frightened me several times tonight, but never in the way that servants of the Enemy would, or so I imagine. I think one of his spies would—well,

seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand” (168). As a Ranger, Strider does not glitter, but he is royalty; he does wander, but he is not lost.

Although he is revealed as Aragorn, the Hobbits are incapable of associating that name with its full meaning because they are largely divorced from the history and lore of other the peoples in Middle-earth. Therefore, Strider’s character takes on a new shroud of mystery, one that confirms his trustworthiness through not yet his kingship. Discerning the enhanced mystery surrounding Strider/Aragorn, Verlyn Flieger explains that “in the transition from Strider to Aragorn,” Aragorn’s character becomes at once more familiar and less familiar (43). She goes on to explain that the obscurity of Strider’s original position is a necessary component for establishing his heroism later in that “Strider the ranger is looked on with suspicion by even so good-hearted a man as Butterbur, the innkeeper at Bree. His true identity is concealed from all but a few until the time comes for him to reveal himself” (45). Thus, although Strider’s true name has been revealed, the weighty implications of that name are not fully realized until his final coronation as Aragorn, King of Gondor. Readers, however, experience that transition alongside the Hobbits, and thereby progressively discover Aragorn’s true nature.

Through his transition from Strider to Aragorn, Tolkien reveals Aragorn’s heroism, and more specifically, how Aragorn’s heroism reflects the best aspects of Man’s nature. Paul Kocher interestingly explains that Aragorn, though certainly one of the most important characters in Tolkien’s fiction, is “probably the least written about, least valued, and most misunderstood of all its major characters” (128). The lack of critical attention focused on Aragorn is representative of the lack of critical attention paid to the nature and function of Men in general in Middle-earth. When Men are given critical attention, however, that attention is largely focused on Aragorn, and, more specifically, Aragorn’s heroism. Similar to the way in which the realm of Men shields

Eriador from evil as a result of its geographical location, as a Ranger, Strider shields Eriador, and more specifically the Shire, without recognition or praise, and he is often met with skepticism as a result; yet, Strider patiently continues to deny his claim to the throne and protects the realm nonetheless, suggesting both his humility and his temperance, two characteristics which are rarely displayed among Men.

Aragorn's first act of humility comes when he, as Strider, willingly subjects himself to the scrutiny of the Hobbits. This seemingly simple act of allowing the Hobbits to judge him (even wrongly at first) and to discover his identity through the words of another person (specifically, Gandalf's letter) suggests that Aragorn does not treat his heritage or birthright as a power to be exerted in order to control others. Explaining the significance of this point, Kocher writes, "By confiding to the hobbits his true identity [Aragorn] puts his life in their hands. And by his pledge of help he subordinates his own ambitions to their safety as bearers of the Ring" (134). Moreover, through his subordination to the Hobbits as Ringbearers, Aragorn continues to deny his own claim to his birthright. According to Flieger, "In the historical framework of Middle-earth, Aragorn is the lineal descendant of Elendil, founder of the kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor, and of Elendil's son Isildur, who took the Ring from Sauron after defeating him in the Second Age. Aragorn is therefore not only the rightful king of Gondor, but the rightful owner of the Ring" (47). Yet, unlike Boromir, Aragorn does not lay claim to the ring, even though, by right, he might do so.

Aragorn's humility and temperance provides a stark contrast to both Boromir and Denethor, who hastily lay claim to that which is not rightfully theirs. Citing William Ready, Kocher explains that Aragorn is often seen as a character that "has no weakness, suffers no limitation" (128). I, like Kocher, disagree with Ready's conclusion. More importantly, I believe

that the conclusion misses the point of Aragorn's story—and more broadly, of Tolkien's story—entirely. To elevate Aragorn above his limitations, as Ready does, is to deprive him of the very thing that elevates him. Men in Tolkien's world are notorious for their desperate attempts to eradicate their limitations, a point which is evidenced by their reckless pursuit of immortality and their frequent unmerited assertions of ownership and power. Aragorn willingly defies this characteristic of Men, not out of ignorance, but out of knowledge acceptance of his own metaphysical limitations. Kocher explains this point quite poetically when he states, "But in Tolkien's world as in ours it is not required of a man that he always love his burden or be patient under it—only that he continue to bear it" (134). Aragorn is distinguished from Boromir and Denethor precisely because he knows his limits and he embraces those limits. In so doing, Aragorn reveals his temperance and justice, two characteristics which Tolkien suggests are valuable in a monarch or in any governing body. Kocher writes, "Aragorn is a man who, as later developments will show, has a strong sense of the importance of authority, propriety, law. It is by these principles that he governs when he himself becomes king in the end" (136). By contrast, when asked to protect and serve Frodo as the Ringbearer, Boromir rebels and attempts to assert his power over those he believes are weaker than he. Even though his rebellion is not absolute since he ultimately dies protecting Frodo, his pride leads him to rebel nonetheless and exert his claim to something he merely believes should be his. With this action, Boromir reveals that pride, the metaphysical rejection of place, is consumptive in that it seeks to control and own rather than to submit and surrender.

Similarly, although Denethor attempts to be faithful in his stewardship, he grows accustomed to the power and authority bestowed upon him as the steward king. In his hunger for continued power, Denethor loses sight of what is good. Dickerson and Evans explain that

according to medieval law and social custom, “the steward had authority in the king’s name until the king returned, but ultimately he was accountable to the rightful king for all his actions” (41).

When confronted with visions of defeat and with the return of Aragorn as the rightful king, Denethor elects to kill himself rather than to relinquish his stewardship. In short, Denethor’s pride causes him to lose sight of his place and to forget what his stewardship entails.

Understanding the metaphysical aspect of place in an economy provides the foundation for responsible stewardship by providing a sense of clear identity for the stewards. Gandalf reminds Denethor of this when he says, “To me it would not seem that a Steward who faithfully surrenders his charge is diminished in love or in honor” (*Return* 836). Yet, Denethor rejects the honor of a steward because he desires the glory of a king.

Aragorn, by contrast, temporarily surrenders his rightful kingship in the service of Frodo as Ringbearer specifically, and in service of Middle-earth generally. In fact, Aragorn rarely asserts his own kingship, but rather allows others to recognize him as the rightful king, and, in so doing, Aragorn earns respect and confidence rather than demanding it. By acknowledging his own limitations and by not demanding submission from his compatriots, Aragorn bears out the Chestertonian sentiment that “[s]ubmission to a weak man is discipline. Submission to a strong man only servility” (50). Although Aragorn is strong, he does not demand submission, but rather commands it through his faithfulness and justice. Sauron and Saruman, and, to some extent, Denethor govern by capitalizing on the servility of their subjects, but Aragorn’s government is disciplined and initiates from the bottom up. For this reason, when Aragorn casts down the “Sword that was Broken” at the Council of Elrond, he rejects the Ring when Frodo offers it to him, saying to Frodo, “It does not belong to either of us, but it has been ordained that you should hold it for a while” (*Fellowship* 240). Flieger identifies the Council of Elrond as the narrative

event whereby Strider completes his transition to Aragorn, and, by extension, begins his heroic journey toward kingship. Recounting that moment, Flieger explains, “With the casting of the sword upon the table Aragorn publicly puts off Strider, assuming his rightful identity and all that it implies” (48). Yet, while Aragorn’s assumes his true identity here, he does not exert his will as king; rather, he allows Bilbo, a mere Hobbit, to defend his kingship to Boromir on his behalf.

Because of Aragorn’s humble subordination to the Hobbits, the nature of Aragorn’s kingship is revealed through his relationship with the Hobbits, a relationship which is predicated upon the mutual respect for the distinct roles that each race must play. The Hobbits, and especially Frodo, become increasingly aware of their mutually distinct roles as their journey carries them closer to Aragorn’s rightful home. As the Fellowship approaches Gondor and passes through the ancient gates of Argonath, Aragorn reassures the cowering Hobbits. The narrator notes that as they pass under the shadow of the sentinels of Númenor, “Frodo turned and saw Strider, and yet not Strider; for the weatherworn Ranger was no longer there. In the stern sat Aragorn son of Arathorn, proud and erect, guiding the boat with skillful strokes; his hood was cast back, and his dark hair was blowing in the wind, a light was in his eyes: a king returning from exile to his own land” (*Fellowship* 384). In this moment, Frodo recognizes the distinct roles that both he and Aragorn must play in Middle-earth. Shortly after this recognition, Frodo abandons the Fellowship (excepting Sam, of course) in order to complete his heroic journey to return the ring to its place.

Aragorn, by contrast, must continue his journey to his rightful place to defeat Sauron, reclaim his throne, and lay the foundation for health to be re-established in Middle-earth. Contrasting the heroism of Frodo with the heroism of Aragorn, Flieger explains that while Frodo is the common hero, “Aragorn is a traditional epic/romance hero, larger than life, a leader,

fighter, lover, healer. He is an extraordinary hero who combines Northrop Frye's romance and high mimetic modes. He is above the common herd. We expect him to be equal to any situation. We are not like him, and we know it. We admire him, but we do not identify with him" (41). I disagree with Flieger's assessment of Frodo²² and Aragorn's heroism on many accounts; however, her recognition of Aragorn's elevated, transcendental (though not necessarily supernatural) nature is quite perceptive. Yet, even in this particular aspect of her analysis, Flieger fails to account for the narrative perspective through Tolkien gives us the story. In many respects, we relate to Frodo and Sam because the story is told through a Hobbit's perspective. Through their agrarian eyes, the king does appear transcendental; yet, Tolkien suggests that Aragorn's journey is no more or less important than the Hobbits' journey.

These two journeys, though distinct, bear reciprocal responsibility for restoring health in Middle-earth, for it is equally important that the ring be destroyed, that Aragorn return to the throne, and that Sam return to the Shire to tend to the land. Caldecott explains, "The Lord of the Rings therefore reaches two distinct climaxes. The first of these is the destruction of the Dark Lord in Mordor and the coronation of Aragorn as King Elessar in Gondor. The second climax, however, is in a way more important: Tolkien calls it the 'scouring of the Shire'" (28). While I agree with Caldecott that the second climax bears great significance (a point which I explore more fully in chapter four), I think it is unwise to overlook Aragorn's coronation as King. In fact, I believe that Aragorn's coronation is a necessary precursor to the restoration of the Shire, just as the destruction of the ring is a necessary precursor to the defeat of Mordor. In other words, determining which is greater is difficult, if not impossible, because these acts are contingent.

²² In chapter four, I assert that it is Sam Gamgee who emerges as the true common hero in the story. Of course, I do admit that Frodo's quest is heroic; however, Sam's ultimate triumph over the ring and return home elevates him above Frodo. I am not the only person to make this assertion regarding Sam's heroism; however, I do explore the heroism of Sam and Aragon from a distinct angle—namely, through their placed-ness.

The Shire could not be restored apart from Aragorn being restored, and Tolkien suggests that a holistic view of interdependency and contingency is necessary for health in both Middle-earth and in the Primary World. In the narrative, Tolkien portrays Théoden, King of the Rohirrim, as a kind and compassionate king and generally a good man, but poor king and poor steward who embraces insularity and fails to effectively govern his realm. To this point, Dickerson and Evans explain, “It is clear that the Rohirrim are wonderful caretakers of their horses and grasslands. However, they have not always acknowledged the value of adjacent forests. At the start of the story, Théoden in particular has lost sight of the far-reaching impact of his decisions and of the fact that he has allies. He seems to have forgotten that he is part of a community—not just a local or regional one in his kingdom of Rohan, but also what be called the ‘international’ community of Middle-earth, or even the ‘global’ one of Arda” (47). The Rohirrim are focused solely on their local economy, and they fail to recognize how they fit within the global economy, a fact which leaves them vulnerable to manipulation and corruption.²³

For this reason, Tolkien emphasizes the importance of holistic stewardship (and, by extension, government) that seeks the health of the whole economy. As already noted, in Aragorn’s absence, the realm of Men has not been governed well. According to Dickerson and Evans, “One of the most significant aspects of Tolkien’s environmental vision, and one informing all areas of his ecology, is his clarification of the real role of a steward”(39). Dickerson and Evans go on to analyze the stewardship of Men, saying, “Unlike among the Hobbits, Ents, and Elves, there are few models of good environmental stewardship among Men in Middle-earth. In Aragorn, however, as in Faramir, the depressing picture of Men is

²³ In Rohan, Wormtongue is the master manipulator who, in the service of Saruman, seeks to deceive Théoden and to promote insularity, skepticism, and division among Men.

considerably ameliorated. Illúvatar's prophetic suggestion that Men might ultimately 'use their gifts in harmony' and contribute to 'the glory of my work' is exemplified in Aragorn, fulfilling Tolkien's hopeful statement concerning Man's assistance in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation" (237). With Aragorn's reinstatement to the throne, the foundations for just government and prudent stewardship are laid, allowing for re-establishment of health in the realm of Men and in Middle-earth as a whole.

Descendent of the ancient Númenorean kings, Aragorn embodies the healing benefits of a good and just King. This idea is theologically packed as it directly connects the return of the King—namely, Aragorn—to the health of the land.²⁴ Defining Aragorn as a traditional romance hero, Flieger explains,

The romance element is manifest, too, in Aragorn's capacity to heal and to renew. It has been plain from the beginning of the story that Aragorn is a healer, for his skill and knowledge of herb-lore pull Frodo through in the first hours after he is wounded at Weathertop. But at that point Aragorn is still Strider to the reader, and his ability to heal could well appear as practical knowledge of the road gained as a Ranger. Only much later, when he has healed Éowyn and Faramir and Merry, when the old wife Ioreth has told everyone who will listen that 'the hands of the king are the hands of a healer (III, 136), does the reader recognize that Aragorn as healer and as king is what he has always been. (49–50)

The link between the health of the rightful King and the health of the land becomes increasingly pronounced once Aragorn enters the city gates of Gondor. Exploring Aragorn's innate ability to use *athelas*, "a naturally occurring herbal remedy," to heal the wounded soldiers in the House of

²⁴ Parallels could certainly be drawn between Aragorn's return and the return of Christ; however, I think that attempting to make those parallels work on every level requires a theological gymnastics of sorts, that detracts from other points, so I purposely avoid that here. In truth, the return of Christ is echoed on every page in Tolkien's fiction.

Healing, Dickerson and Evans unite Aragorn's kingship with his own ability to heal, stating, "In acts of royal diplomacy afterward, Elessar dispenses peace, pardon, and freedom in the lands of Mirkwood, Dunland, Harad, and Mordor. He secures lasting bonds of brotherhood between Gondor and Rohan and between himself and Éomer, who departs for his own realm, 'where there is much to heal and set in order.' Restoration under King Elessar also includes reunification of the ancient kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor" (Dickerson and Evans 239). In other words, Aragorn recognizes the interdependencies and contingencies in Middle-earth, and as such, he seeks to heal "the whole person or the whole body seen as an integrated system with both physical and spiritual components" (Nakakis83).

Tolkien makes Aragorn's healing characteristics explicit in the House of Healing, where Aragorn literally restores physical and spiritual health to his friends. Aragorn, "deem[ing] the time unripe" for him to exercise his kingship (*Return* 843), pitches his tent outside the walls of Gondor so as not to offend the steward of the city. Yet, once again, someone else—namely, Gandalf—claims Aragorn's kingship for him and asks that he enter the city to heal the wounded in the House of Healing. Because the situation is dire, Aragorn agrees, and enters the city. In so doing, Aragorn's kingship becomes evident throughout the kingdom, because common lore recounts that "*The hands of the king are the hands of a healer*" (842).

Once officially king, however, Aragorn's healing abilities are not limited to physical bodies, but also to the landscape which has been ravaged. As Flieger explains, "Where there is no king, or where the king is infirm, the land also will be barren" (50). Drawing extensively from Flieger's exploration of Aragorn's heroism, Karen Nakakis ties Aragorn's healing kingship to its sacral nature, essentially arguing that "like the sacral and sacrificing kings of old, Aragorn chooses his own time to die," an event which is not included in the main narrative (84).

Choosing death in this manner, according to Nikakis, prevents the natural decay of the body, and thereby, continues to propagate “the continuing fruitfulness of the earth” (84). In other words, Nikakis connects Aragorn’s life and health (as King) to the life and health of the natural world which he stewards. Caldecott, discerning a similar relationship between sacrifice and Kingship, explains that Aragorn faces a type of sacrificial death when he ‘harrows hell’ by daring the Paths of the Dead under the haunted mountain and summons the spirits of the dead oathbreakers to his side at the black stone of Erech” (29). Aragorn’s return from death in this instance serves to advance his return to the throne.

Moreover, Aragorn’s return from death signals the renewal of the land. This image is most powerfully displayed when Gandalf and Aragorn find the “sapling of the line of Nimloth the fair” one of the ancient trees of the Valar. Nikakis explains, “The coming of the ‘rightful king’ is mirrored powerfully in the literal and metaphorical flowering of the landscape. The link between the re-emergence of the White Tree, ‘Telperion [...] Eldest of Trees’ and Aragorn, is made explicit by Gandalf on discovery of the sapling” (89). After finding the sapling,

Aragorn laid his hand gently on to the sapling, and lo! it seemed to hold lightly to the earth, and it was removed without hurt; and Aragorn bore it back to the Citadel. Then the withered tree was uprooted, but with reverence; and they did not burn it but laid it to rest in the silence of the Rath Dínen. And Aragorn planted the new tree in the court by the fountain, and swiftly and gladly it began to grow; and when the month of June entered it was laden with blossom. (*Return* 950–1)

That the blooming of the tree coincides with Aragorn’s coronation is no coincidence, for Aragorn ushers in peace and restoration for Middle-earth at large.

Consistent with Aragorn's character and leadership, the peace and restoration that he ushers in does not operate in a strictly top-down fashion. Instead, as is true throughout the story, restoration and health depend on reciprocity. For this reason, neither Aragorn nor Gandalf accompany the Hobbits all the way back to the Shire; rather, they send them there to resume their place and carry out the restoration in their own land. When he parts from them, King Aragorn tells the Hobbits that he will remain vigilant to steward his realm, including the Hobbits in the Shire, and, through this exhortation, Aragorn reminds them to remain vigilant as well. In this respect, Aragon establishes himself as a faithful steward, a just king, and an ardent defender of that which is good. This final narrative act by Aragorn is reminiscent of Gandalf's advice to the leaders of Men, "Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succor of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they have is not ours to rule" (*Return* 861). Thus, Aragorn sends the Hobbits home to resume their place to uproot the evil that has taken root there and to continue the work of the restoration.

Chapter Four—“Quite a Little Fellow in a Wide World”: The Health of the Local Agrarian Community

Although not a part of the legendarium proper, Hobbits are perhaps the most beloved characters in Tolkien’s stories. Many scholars have attributed the mass affection for these little creatures to their simplicity—to the pleasure that they derive from the seemingly mundane acts of eating, smoking a pipe, and visiting with neighbors on the front stoop. Tolkien provides us with a glimpse into the simplicity of their world in the prologue to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy where he writes, “[Hobbits] love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favorite haunt” (*Fellowship* xvii). This quote is quite possibly the most cited line in the scholarship surrounding Tolkien’s Hobbits, a fact which further confirms the significance of the Hobbits’ relationship to their natural environment.²⁵ Hobbits, more so than any other people group in Tolkien’s primary body of fiction, depict the responsible relationship to their immediate environment. This relationship is predicated upon the acceptance of their place: Hobbits, generally speaking, do not aspire to greatness, nor are they prone to seek adventure outside of the Shire. Rather, Hobbits, maintain a strong sense of local placed-ness that prioritizes simplicity and comfort, a fact which occasionally causes the Hobbits to lose sight of how their economy fits within and contributes to the larger economy of Middle-earth. Despite the Hobbits’ tendency toward short-sightedness, however, Tolkien presents the agrarian life-style they represent as one which is replete with wisdom, virtue, and value within Middle-earth’s economy, and thereby within our own as well.

Short and often a little round through the middle, “bright-eyed” and “red-cheeked, with mouths apt to laughter and to eating and drinking” (*Fellowship* 2), the Hobbits are simple, earthy

²⁵ This quotation is treaded most thoroughly in in Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans’ *Ents, Elves and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien* and in Patrick Curry’s *Defending Middle-earth*.

creatures. Their short stature is no surprise, nor is it coincidental. Whereas the Elves stand tall with their minds and manners close to the heavens, the Hobbits' heads and habits are much closer to the ground. Dickerson and Evans note that the Hobbits' tendency to go barefoot literally keeps them "in constant contact with the soil" (90). More specifically, the Hobbits are in constant contact with their own soil since they rarely travel far from their hobbit holes. These dwellings, too, reflect the Hobbits' intimate connection to and affinity for the earth. The Hobbit holes of the Shire are literally carved into the ground. For this reason, Dickerson and Evans conclude that "Hobbits are a race defined by their identification with the soil: their style of architecture and their very name derive from their homes built within the holes in the ground (90). In other words, the Hobbit's identity (both individually and communally) is deeply rooted in the soil.

This close identification with the soil naturally elevates the position of the farmer within the Shire's community. Tolkien reveals the importance of the farmer most explicitly through the characters of Farmer Maggot and Farmer Cotton, who "form bookends of the story, appearing in Books I and VI, respectively" (Dickerson and Evans 85). Dickerson and Evans describe Farmer Maggot and Farmer Cotton, saying, "Both figures are first and foremost farmers, with agriculture in their veins, wisdom in their thoughts, and dirt under their fingernails" (75). Tolkien also embeds his explicit estimation of the farmers within the Shire in the story through Tom Bombadil, the eerie but wise character whose presence in Middle-earth predates even the Elves. Bombadil²⁶ esteems Farmer Maggot, praising him to the Hobbits "as a person of more importance than they had imagined," saying, "There's earth under his old feet, and clay on his fingers; wisdom in his bones, and both his eyes are open" (*Fellowship* 130). Through this

²⁶ Tom Bombadil's character is shrouded in a natural mystery. While his character is certainly interesting, this project will not explore him in any depth. Dickerson and Evans thoroughly treat Bombadil's character in Chapter 1 of their book.

statement, Bombadil connects Maggot's wisdom and vision to his intimate connection to the land. According to Bombadil, this connection equips Maggot with the ability to recognize oddities and discontinuities—the things that are out of place—when he sees them. In this particular instance, Maggot has tipped Bombadil off to Frodo's possession of the ring, a fact which Maggot discerns without ever being explicitly told. At the end of the story, Farmer Cotton also emerges as the discerning character, recognizing the corruption at work in the Shire and resisting it in his own subtle ways until help arrives, a point which I discuss more later in this chapter. In both cases, however, the farmers are characterized primarily by their discernment and their virtue, something which is directly bound up with their connection to the soil.

While Maggot and Cotton are the most obvious farmers in the story, there is another character that depicts Tolkien's true estimation of the farmer even more fully: Sam Gamgee. Sam is certainly not a character of obvious power or strength. Commenting on Sam's status in the stories, Richard Purtill notes that "at the beginning Sam seems only a minor, comic character, and Frodo seems to be the 'hero' of the tale" (68). However, Sam's affinity for the soil and his affection for his garden endows him with a very practical sort of wisdom—or "hobbit-sense" (*Return* 881)—which grounds him throughout his quest and connects him to the Shire in spite of his absence. This sense of placed-ness expressed through personal responsibility for the health of the place makes Sam the "central character" (Purtill 68) through which Tolkien reveals the virtue of the Hobbits' agrarian vision.

Sam's environmental vision and sense of personal responsibility for the Shire manifests itself on multiple occasions throughout his journey, frequently in the form actual *visions* of his garden and confessions of his desire to return to it. For example, when Sam gazes into the Mirror of Galadriel in Lothlórien and sees the felling of trees and the destruction of Bagshot Row, he

exclaims, ““There’s some devilry at work in the Shire.” Sam goes on to cry, ““I must go home. They’ve dug up Bagshot Row, and there’s the poor old gaffer going down the Hill with his bits of things on a barrow. I must go home!”” (*Fellowship* 353). In this moment, Sam displays his deep-rooted feelings of responsibility for and connection to the Shire. However, Sam’s desire to return home is restrained by his loyalty to Frodo and his (perhaps unconscious) recognition that he must ultimately complete the journey to destroy the ring in order to save the Shire.

In a second dream vision, Sam connects his sense of responsibility directly to physical labor and cultivation of the soil. When Sam dreams of the garden in Bag End all “weedy and rank” where “thorns and bracken were invading the beds down near the bottom hedge,” his responds by accepting the responsibility for cleaning it up, saying, “A job of work for me, I can see” (684). Sam ultimately hopes to return to the Shire in order to cultivate the soil and re-establish order and health in his garden. Furthermore, when Sam and Frodo are climbing the stairs of Cirith Ungol, Sam explains to Frodo that he is eager to return home to the Shire so that they can enjoy some “plain ordinary rest, and sleep” and the ordinary “morning’s work in the garden” (*Towers* 697). For Sam, it is the distinct, day-to-day patterns of labor and rest to which he is eager to return. Through this, Sam implies that although he is not the sort of person to fulfill “the big important plans” (697), he is personally responsible for cultivating his garden in the Shire, a responsibility which Sam embraces and Tolkien esteems.

While all of the Hobbits generally share a similar overarching connection to the soil, Tolkien does not present a homogenous picture of the Hobbits in Middle-earth. Rather, the Hobbits maintain a sense of regional diversity established through their own historical divisions based on preferences. In the prologue to the *LOTR*, the narrator offers a historical account of the Hobbits and their coming to Eriador. Through this prologue, we learn that Hobbits have not

always lived in the Shire, nor do all Hobbits reside in the Shire in the Third Age. Rather, the narrator explains that “before crossing the mountains the Hobbits had already become divided into three somewhat different types: Harfoots, Stoors, and Fallohides” (*Fellowship* 3). These three types are largely defined by the landscapes in which they chose to settle: Harfoots “preferred the highlands and hillsides,” Stoors “preferred flat lands and riversides,” and Fallowhides “were lovers of trees and woodlands” (3). Recognizing the significance of the diversity among the Hobbits, Dickerson and Evans state, “We note that the Hobbits have not built cities or fortifications, and although each settlement group is described as having own distinct cultural traditions, it is implied that they all underwent a transition from a primitive, migratory form of subsistence living to the establishment of a culture closely defined by the soil and the landscape” (82). The division of the Hobbits into these three distinct groups each with its “own distinct cultural traditions” (82) is significant in that it points to diversity as something that is both necessary and esteemed in the economy Tolkien has established in Middle-earth. The three types of Hobbits inhabit vastly different landscapes, and as such, develop their own traditions and methods for providing sustenance. Although Tolkien only provides us with a focused narrative of the Shire Hobbits, his explanation of the bioregional diversity among the Hobbits points to his belief that it is both necessary and praiseworthy within the economy he establishes.

Moreover, the diversity that emerges among the Hobbits is reminiscent of the diversity among the Elves, especially as it relates to the history of the land. Whereas the Elves largely record the history of the land and their relationship to it in their language, the Hobbits record that history in their soil. Or, to state it more appropriately in the case of the Hobbits, the soil retains and reflects its own history, a history of which the Hobbits are only a small part. Wendell Berry,

writing many years after the publication of Tolkien's stories and on an entirely different continent, aptly explains the necessity for human communities to recognize and participate in the collective history of a place, stating, "A human community, too, must collect leaves and stories, and turn them to account. It must build soil, and build that memory of itself—in lore and story and song—that will be its culture. These two kinds of accumulation, of local soil and local culture, are intimately related" (*What are People For?* 154). Berry's agrarian essay identifies two types of cultural accumulation: the natural accumulation of a culture in its soil and its lore. By the end of the story, Sam emerges as the primary cultivator of both in that he remains in the Shire to continue the task of revitalizing the land and recording the stories that Bilbo started.

Importantly, however, Sam's work represents only a limited part of the Shire's history. The narrator hints at the history that the Shire's soil retains, stating that the "land was rich and kindly and though it had been long deserted when they entered it, it had before been well-tilled, and there the king had once had many farms, cornlands, vineyards, and woods" (5). In other words, when the Hobbits of the Shire finally come to settle there—a history which is not recorded in writing or in Hobbit lore—they enter into an agricultural history of the place itself. In this sense, the Hobbits do not and cannot entirely possess the Shire; rather, they inhabit it, steward the land, and benefit from the rich, well-maintained soil. Sam obviously embraces the role of the steward in the Shire, taking painstaking lengths to maintain his gardens and, in the end, investing his time and energy planting trees and re-establishing the health of land within the Shire.

In many respects, however, the Hobbits do not have a strong tradition of lore in place that allows them to accumulate a history of their relationship to the land. In fact, many of the inhabitants of the Shire mock Bilbo for his penchant for story-telling and writing. Although

eventually joined by Sam in this labor, Bilbo is initially distinct among the Hobbits in this respect. This shortsightedness (and even short memory), as it were, is one of the primary character flaws of the Hobbits. Dickerson and Evans begin to make this point when they state, “After a time with Bombadil, even the hobbits ‘began to understand the lives of the Forest, apart from themselves’ (I/vii)” (21). Dickerson and Evans, however, only emphasize the separateness of Hobbits from the Forest. This moment also represents the Hobbit’s growing awareness of their active participation in the environmental history. In other words, when the Hobbits recognize the separateness of the Forest, they themselves are in it, walking among the trees. Citing Sam’s conversation with Frodo where he expresses his excitement over the future tales that will be told of their adventure, Stratford Caldecott makes a similar point when he explains, “But in this crucial moment of insight, Sam has bridged the gap, and seen their own lives as part of a great tale full of wonder and meaning, that stretches from the beginning of time to its mysterious end” (“Over the Chasm of Fire” 32). Through the Hobbits’ journey out of the Shire, they become increasingly aware of their own place in Middle-earth; they become more aware of their own finite existence in the world and of the long memory of the Earth—and specifically, the Shire—

itself.

In many respects, the shortsightedness of the Hobbits serves as a focal point for their tales (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*); it is a characteristic aspect of their provincial nature, but it is not a characteristic that Tolkien means for us to praise or mimic. Dickerson and Evans explain that although the Shire is idyllic, it is not perfect, nor are the Hobbits themselves perfect in it. The Hobbits, too, are often “vulnerable to the personal vices of self-aggrandizing self-centeredness” and are susceptible of becoming overly concerned with “business,” a characteristic for which Bilbo is satirized throughout *The Hobbit* (83). Caldecott, too, explains that the Shire

has shortcomings well before Saruman's corruption takes effect in the Shire. The Hobbits are both characterized by small bodies, and, in many ways, small-minds (124). However, even the problems in the Shire prior to Saruman's invasion are characteristically small by comparison. The major issues include Bilbo's petty bickering with the envious Sackville-Bagginses and the occasional hungry young Hobbit sneaking off with some of Farmer Maggot's mushrooms.

Over the years, the smallness of the Shire and the Hobbits is something that has been both praised and denigrated by Tolkien's critics. In his own discussion of the critical history surrounding the Hobbits, Patrick Curry explains that the Hobbits and their home, the Shire, represent a sort of "nostalgic pastoralism, celebrating a time 'when there was less noise and more green'" (28). Dickerson and Evans, too, recognize the pastoral undertones in the *LOTR* trilogy and the tendency to characterize the Hobbits as representations of Tolkien's own highly romantic ideals. For this reason, Dickerson and Evans acknowledge the criticism that Tolkien's picture of the Shire and of the farm life might be labeled "purely romantic, giving an idealized and unrealistic vision of a pastoral landscape" (73) or as "a lovely picture, but one unrelated to reality" (77). This criticism of Tolkien's romanticism and idealism is not completely unwarranted. Tolkien's depiction of the Shire and of the Hobbits in many ways does appear to be idealized. And, had Tolkien only written about the Hobbits living happily in the Shire, the criticism would have been entirely appropriate. However, the story Tolkien gave us is more dynamic than that in that it takes the Hobbits on a perilous journey to save Middle-earth, a journey which ultimately helps to correct their idealized notions, while preserving the central goodness of their simple agrarian lifestyle.

The praise of the local agrarian lifestyle is central to Tolkien's fiction. As already noted, Tolkien embedded within his story a high estimation for the wisdom and vision offered through

the farmers in the small agrarian communities. Dickerson and Evans attribute this estimation to Tolkien's own historical context: "Tolkien wrote in a period when images of agrarian life were romanticized...indicating a reaction against industrialization and a desire to return to the perceived ideals of the previous century" (73). Undoubtedly, Tolkien valued the pastoral images, as the agrarian setting was the backdrop for some of Tolkien's most formative and joyous memories from his childhood. Carpenter explains that after the death of Tolkien's mother, the countryside reminded Tolkien of her, but it was part of a "remote past that could not be regained" (40). This experience of great loss at such a young age left Tolkien with the feeling that perhaps "nothing was safe. Nothing would last. No battle would be won forever" (39).

In this respect, Tolkien's detestation of the modern industrialization that was rapidly spreading throughout England (and throughout the world at large) was matched only by his realization that the world could not simply return to the past. To this point, Cladecott explains that "the Shire fits neatly into [the Distributist] tradition of social thought" in that "it represents an agricultural, largely self-sufficient way of life" that was rapidly passing away during Tolkien's lifetime: "It was a way of life founded on local tradition, which Chesterton once called 'the democracy of the dead'—one shaped by our ancestors, not just by those who happened to be walking around" (126). In his own lifetime, Tolkien was bearing witness to the passing of a tradition he cherished, but he also realized that the world could not and would not simply return to that agrarian lifestyle wholesale. In other words, through the *LOTR* Tolkien gives us "an extended argument that pastoralism alone is not enough—doomed even" (Curry 35).

For this reason, Tolkien does not simply stop his story after presenting the idealized picture of the Shire at the beginning, although it is necessary for him to start his story there. In painting the idealized images of the countryside governed largely by the farmers and gardeners,

Tolkien did, perhaps, romantically envision his mother and the world before the industrialization and devastating world wars; however, Tolkien's idyllic depiction of the Shire offers more than a nostalgic recollection of and escape into the historical past. These romantic and idealized notions offer a reasoned and logical solution to the obvious wounds of Tolkien's generation. The Shire, with all of its idealized simplicity and romanticized pastoral images, and the Hobbits who inhabit the Shire provide a picture of a healthy and well-established sense of local placed-ness. For the Hobbits, the Shire is removed from Middle-earth; it belongs to them, and they belong to it. They are satisfied with the comfort of their hobbit holes filled to the brim with their home-grown food and with the simple pleasure of enjoying an evening on the stoop smoking a pipe full of local pipe-weed. The Hobbits are a uniquely and distinctly placed people with a healthy sense of belonging and an ample helping of humility.

In this respect, the Hobbits provide us with a picture of the healthy (though not perfect) person, the healthy local community and economy, and this is where Tolkien must start his story. Tolkien, drawing upon Chesterton's ideas, believed that "idealism is only considering everything its practical essence" (*What's Wrong with the World* 4). For Chesterton, casting the vision of the ideal state is the necessary first step for correctly identifying and remedying the blemishes and ills. In his estimation, it is impossible to truly understand what is wrong with a body (physical, social, or political) if we are not first able to conceive of what the healthy, properly functioning body would look like. To this point, Chesterton writes,

I maintain, therefore, that the common sociological method is quite useless: that of first dissecting abject poverty or cataloging prostitution. We all dislike abject poverty; but it might be another business if we began to discuss independent and dignified poverty. We all disapprove of prostitution; but we do not all approve of

purity. The only way to discuss the social evil is to get at once to the social ideal.

We can all see the national madness; but what is national sanity? I have titled this book “What Is Wrong with the World?” and the upshot of the title can be easily and clearly stated. What is wrong is that we do not ask what is right. (*What’s Wrong with the World* 3)

Tolkien largely embraced this philosophy of first principles, beginning with a picture of the whole, healthy man in order to discern the fractures and diseases in the real man. The Shire and its habitants give us a picture of what Tolkien thought the healthy community might look like if it were functioning properly. It is perhaps idealistic in many ways, but it is an ideal which Tolkien suggests is worth working toward because it is the picture of health.

Moreover, even the sense of nostalgia that Curry recognizes in Tolkien’s pastoralism serves a purpose. Tolkien does draw upon an idealized picture of the historical agrarian lifestyle that largely passed away with the advent of modern industrialization. Tolkien looks back into history at a world that he sees as good—perhaps not perfect, but good—and he brings that picture into the modern world, adapting it to its context and offering it as a solution to the problems ushered in with modern industrialization. In this manner, Tolkien again takes on a Chestertonian task, for Chesterton argues that the “modern attitude is really this: that men invent new ideals because they dare not attempt old ideals. They look forward with enthusiasm, because they are afraid to look back” (*What’s Wrong with the World* 13). Tolkien’s idealized depiction of the Shire resists the pressure to favor modern progress, and instead reclaims and reasserts the values of the past without neglecting the current status of the world. In other words, through the *LOTR*, Tolkien does not merely gloss over the problems to present the world in a perfectly idealized state. Rather, he begins with health—which is represented largely in the Shire—and

then proceeds to expose all of the sores, infections, and diseases that threaten that health. As Dickerson and Evans explain, “Through the Shire and its farmers and gardeners, Tolkien offers us a vision of the complex interdependencies of people, community, and land comparable to modern environmentalists’ recognition that healthy human culture requires responsible agricultural use of the land” (75).

Tolkien’s portrayal of the Shire does, in fact, depict the “healthy human culture” through the agrarian lifestyle, but Tolkien’s depiction of the healthy order is more broad and complex than simply depicting the agrarian life of the one small community. Health, in Tolkien’s depiction, depends not just upon the health of an individual or a single community, but also upon the healthy recognition of the “complex interdependencies” present throughout the global economy. For this reason, Tolkien’s most famous Hobbits, though comfortable and satisfied in the Shire, spend very little of their recorded time in the Shire. These Hobbits—namely, Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippen—journey out of the Shire in to defend and restore Middle-earth to its rightful order. However, when they travel, they do so largely against their own inclinations. The Shire is comfortable, which is a primary concern for Hobbits; thus, when Hobbits leave the Shire on their quest to destroy the ring and thereby save Middle-earth, they exercise great courage, even in the face of the potential for great loss.

In this sense, Tolkien does not avoid the realistic sense of displacement and loss associated with war, for when the Hobbits leave home, some of them are not able to return fully. This is the case for both Frodo and Bilbo, whose experience as ring-bearers displaces them, causing them both to be cut off from the Shire even when they return. Due to his wounds, Frodo finds that “there is no real going back” (*Return* 967). For Frodo, too much has been lost for him ever to return home. Frodo explains, “Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same;

for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?" (*Return* 967). Frodo's (and Bilbo's) preoccupation with rest in the midst of turmoil disqualifies them for the work required to re-establish health in the Shire. Like the Elves who created islands of rest to escape the turmoil and who eventually depart into the West, Frodo and Bilbo retreat from the work required to finally restore the Shire, and thus retire into the West as well. By contrast, Sam (still youthful in his vigilance and vision) willingly and enthusiastically undertakes the work.

Yet, even in the midst of this loss, Tolkien leads us to believe that the Hobbits' quest is noble in that it affirms and protects the sense of placed-ness for others. This is at the heart of Frodo's message to Sam when he says, "I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some on has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them" (*Return* 1006). In this sense, the quest of the Hobbits presents the web of intricate reciprocity between the local economy and the global one. Although the Hobbits commonly enjoy peace removed from the many travails of Middle-earth at large, their own economy is not exempt from the suffering of Middle-earth. Dickerson and Evans explain that "if Hobbits are susceptible to any general moral failing, it is the temptation to regard comfort as a given" (83). The Shire and its inhabitants have a place in Middle-earth, and their community belongs to the global economy. Thus, if the Shire is to continue to exist, it must develop an awareness of itself as part of the whole.

In other words, the health of the Shire and of its inhabitants largely depends upon the health of the Middle-earth. This is the message that Gandalf communicates to Bilbo at the end of his adventure in *The Hobbit*: "You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr.

Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!” This statement points to the Shire’s connectedness to the rest of Middle-earth and is suggestive of the fact that the health of the Shire cannot be sustained long without its inhabitants recognizing their place in Middle-earth. Curry explains that Tolkien was a conservative, not in the more contemporary sense, but in the sense that he firmly believes in “striving to conserve what is worth saving” (38). The Shire, for all of its faults, is worth saving in Tolkien’s estimation. Moreover, the Shire must be saved in order for Middle-earth to be saved.

For this reason, the two chapters in the trilogy, “The Scouring of the Shire” and “The Gray Havens,” present perhaps the most powerful picture of the full expression of placed-ness. In these chapters, the Hobbits who left the Shire on their quest to destroy the ring return home to find that their work is not finished even though the ring is destroyed. Their home, the Shire, must be reclaimed and restored. Curry explains that “The Scouring of the Shire” is “an account of local resistance to fascist thuggery and forced modernization” (41).²⁷ This task is arduous, and it costs the Hobbits much, but it is necessary for the health of the Shire and of Middle-earth to be re-established.

At the root of this task is the individual and communal acceptance of limitations, both metaphysical and physical. This acceptance of limitations naturally introduces the question of human possession and ownership. In other words, it presents the question of what finite human beings can metaphysically and physically own. This is the question of property, and it is a question that Tolkien asks and answers naturally within his stories through his hints of Distributism. Tolkien, like Chesterton, praises the value of personal property, but he does so

²⁷ Curry’s statement is ironic in that while he classifies this final act of courage as a resistance to “fascist thuggery,” Peter Firchow sees the Hobbits as an expression of Tolkien’s unconscious fascism. Firchow’s article, though interesting in its own right, largely neglects the Distributist context for Tolkien’s writing, and in so doing, overlooks key passages from the stories that might work against his argument.

while simultaneously affirming the necessity of boundaries and limitations implicit in ownership. Limitless ownership of property, by which I mean the consumptive act of endlessly acquiring more property at the expense of one's neighbors, negates the very meaning of ownership in Chesterton's, and Tolkien's, estimation. In Chesterton's words, "A man with the true poetry of possession wishes to see the wall where his garden meets Smith's garden; the hedge where his farm touches Brown's. He cannot see the shape of his own land unless he sees the edges of his neighbor's" (24). In other words, possession is communal; it involves recognizing where your garden ends and your neighbor's begins. For this reason, Dickerson and Evans ultimately conclude that "it is not Frodo but Sam, the gardener and forester, who emerges as the real 'hero' of the reconstruction" in the Shire (18). This point is most clearly demonstrated when Sam briefly possesses the ring. As the ring begins to work its magic on Sam, he considers keeping the ring in order to wield its power for good: he wishes to use the ring to turn the entire world into a garden. However, Sam recognizes the perversion of such a dream; for by turning the world into a garden, he must deprive his neighbors of their land along with his enemies and turn them all into servants and slaves who must work the land for him as master.

Instead of using the ring to exercise ultimate ownership and domination of Middle-earth, Sam realizes that what he truly desires is a little plot of land that he can manage by his own hands. Through the narrator's voice, Tolkien reveals Sam's sense of his own limits and his acceptance of his place in the global economy:

In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm; but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him. The one small garden of

a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of other to command. (*Return* 881)

Sam's recognition echoes E.F. Schumacher's praise of smallness. In his essay "Small is Beautiful Versus Big Is Best," Joseph Pearce explains,

In practical terms Schumacher counteracted the idolatry of gigantism with the beauty of smallness. People, he argued, could only feel at home in the human-scale environments. If structures—economic, political, or social—became too large they became impersonal and unresponsive to human needs and aspirations. Under these conditions individuals felt functionally futile, dispossessed, voiceless, powerless, excluded and alienated." (50)

Pearce goes on to state, "The moral is easy enough to discern for those who have ears to hear. It is this: that, ultimately, small is beautiful because the earth itself is not only beautiful, *but* small" (51). Tolkien undoubtedly believed that the earth and its resources are limited. Moreover, Tolkien's theological acceptance of the finitude of humankind abounds throughout his stories. When provided with the opportunity to possess the world, Sam responds with humility by embracing his own limitations. Sam's deep-rooted hobbit-sense is his acceptance of his place in the economy of Middle-earth. He belongs to and in the Shire with a small plot of ground that he can manage with his own hands rather than with the hands of hundreds of "wage-slaves" (Cladecott 125).

Interestingly, Sam is not the only Hobbit to willingly surrender the ring. Bilbo, too, willingly gives the ring to Frodo as his parting birthday gift, though he admittedly surrenders it with far more reluctance than Sam does. The history of the ring being passed among the Hobbits reveals another important facet of the Hobbits' economy—namely, their tradition of what Alison

Milbank has termed “gift-exchange” (117). As Curry explains, “the hobbits are intensely communal” (40), and “gift-exchange” in the Hobbit economy functions as an expression of that communal emphasis. Rather than receiving gifts on their birthdays as is common in our economy, the Hobbits give gifts away to all of their friends. The ring is, of course, the gift that Bilbo gives to Frodo on their shared birthday, and it also the gift that Gollum (or Sméagol) “received” from his friend on his own birthday. As Milbank explains, the economy of the Shire includes both a “cash economy” and a “parallel private gift-exchange system.” This gift-exchange system depends upon “relations of reciprocity that operate at all levels and in most complex chains of connection” (130–1). In case of the ring specifically, those “complex chains of connection” that Milbank references are tied both to the ring’s inherent tendency to evoke a sense of possession and to the burden inherent within that possession.

By its very nature, the ring incites its owners toward possession and isolation, making its participation in the “gift-exchange” tradition even more startling.²⁸ While Hobbits are naturally predisposed toward communal participation and gift-exchange making them less-susceptible to the power of the ring, Gollum, Bilbo, and Frodo all succumb (to one degree or another) to the desire to possess the ring utterly. With Gandalf’s non-coercive help, Bilbo does freely give the ring to Frodo of his own volition, but only after the ring has “stretched” him, making him feel “like butter that has been scraped over too much bread” (*Fellowship* 32). Gollum, of course, is

²⁸ In her book *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians*, Milbank dedicates an entire chapter to exploring how “gift-exchange” functions within the economy of Middle-earth and specifically within the Shire. This chapter offers a fascinating exploration of this one particular aspect of the economy. However, since my focus is specifically placed-ness, I have limited my discussion of “gift-exchange” to the ring in order to demonstrate Sam’s placed-ness as a means for withstanding the power of the ring.

all but completely consumed by the ring (or, rather, by his uncontrollable desire to possess it), a fact which, in the end, delivers Frodo from his own obsessive possession of the ring.²⁹

The true significance of the ring, however, is seen most clearly through Sam's temporary possession of the ring. Of the four Hobbits who possessed the ring, Sam is the only one who completely withstands the temptation of the ring in that while he feels the desire to possess it and to wield it, he ultimately refuses as a result of his own sense of placed-ness. More specifically, Sam understands that he is only one small (but significant) part of Middle-earth's economy. As such, he embraces his place as the gardener and commits himself to work in the garden. In the moment when Sam refuses the ring, he refuses to succumb to the temptation of the homogenizing and centripetal forces of modern industrial economy that is largely represented through Mordor. Through this rejection, Sam maintains his place in the Shire and in Middle-earth, even when Bilbo and Frodo feel they must leave for the illusive West.

In stark contrast to Sam's humble acceptance of his place, Pimple emerges in the Shire as a glutton with a centripetal force. Dickerson and Evans note that Pimple, who is characterized as owning "a sight more than was good for him," is remarkably similar to the "agribusinessman in our world" (86). At the end of the trilogy, Pimple's character has become consumptive and controlling, eagerly spreading out his arms and gathering treasure for himself to hoard in his lair, much like the dragon that Bilbo must slay in his adventure in order to help re-place the Dwarves. In many ways, Sam is the antithesis of Pimple in that Sam willingly gives up the ring and with it the vision of turning the world into one large garden. At the root of Sam's surrender of the ring is his affection for his neighbors and his love of his Master.

²⁹ In his essay "Morals Makyth Man—and Hobbit," Leon Pereira OP explains Gollum's final betrayal this way: "The survival of Gollum is what enables the Quest to be fulfilled, because Frodo fails at the end. [Frodo and Sam's] forgiveness of Gollum opens the way for his great betrayal, which ultimately saves their lives because both Gollum and the Ring perish" (180).

The role of the community in preserving and protecting private property is a recurring theme in Tolkien's fiction. Pimple's explicit desire to hoard the goods produced through the labor of his neighbors is only one manifestation of the human tendency—and especially the modern human—to slip into a solipsistic desire to consume and control when operating outside the healthy bounds of community. Hob tells the foursome, “We grows a lot of food, but we don't rightly know what becomes of it. It's all these ‘gatherers’ and ‘sharers,’ I reckon, going round counting and measuring and taking off to storage. They do more gathering than sharing, and we never see most of the stuff again” (*Return* 976). Sam refers to the rules and their philosophies as “orc-talk” (*Return* 977), seemingly referring to the over-emphasis on efficiency and expediency rather than comfort and community. Another powerful example of this tendency is Gollum, whose desire to possess the ring leads him to murder his best friend and escape into isolation in order to protect it. Gollum's character, like Pimple's, operates in stark contrast to Sam's. Whereas Sam willingly gives up the ring and is willing to risk his life in order to help Frodo destroy it, Gollum kills in order to possess it. Moreover, while Sam desires to return to the Shire and re-assume his work there, Gollum willingly abandons his home and his community in order to keep the ring for himself.

Gollum's home after he steals the ring reveals his ultimate rejection of community. When Bilbo meets Gollum, he lives deep in the heart of the Misty Mountains on island in the middle of an underground lake, attempting to remain hidden from the goblins whose cave he shares. Yet, this is not Gollum's true home for Gollum is—or, rather was—Sméagol, a Hobbit whose place is really among the Hobbits. In this sense, Gollum is displaced, cut off from his home due to his greed and his desire to possess the ring. Gollum's island represents his utter rejection of his place in Middle-earth. Likewise, characters such as Saruman and Sauron, who desire to possess all of

Middle-earth, find that they belong to no place. They ultimately become homeless outcasts before their final destruction. Yet, for some reason, Gollum's character incites more pity, both from the characters in the story and from the readers. Explaining this predisposition to pity Gollum expresses within the story, Curry writes, "Gollum, originally a hobbit, is more pitiable than evil because he is so palpably [the ring's] victim...In the end, of course, even Frodo fails the ultimate test" (65). In other words, while Saruman (and to some extent Pimple under Saruman's direction) actively exerts power for the purposes of consumption apart from the control of the ring, Gollum and Frodo merely succumb to the power of something they did not seek out in the first place.

For this reason, Sam's active rejection of the ring and the powers associated with it serves as the focal point of healing for the Shire and for Middle-earth at large. Sam, like Frodo and Gollum, might have been seduced by the allure of ultimate power and control; yet, he resists arguably because of his own intimate connection to the soil. Using the ring to transform the world into a garden would ultimately cut Sam off from the very thing that he desires—working in the garden with his own two hands. When Sam does finally return to the Shire, he is the character most able to carry out the task of re-establishing health in the Shire because, in many ways, he is no longer susceptible to the temptations of power and control. He has faced those temptations and withstood. Thus, in the end, Sam returns to the Shire equipped with the wisdom and patience the farmer, knowing that the work of healing the Shire is worth pursuing, even if "only his great-grandchildren...would see the Shire as it ought to be" (*Return* 999).

With Sam's final commitment to completing the task of restoring the Shire, Tolkien brings the narrative full-circle. The Shire, once presented as idyllic and pastoral, has seen the great party tree felled and its well-maintained gardens destroyed, but not utterly. Through Sam,

Tolkien intimates that the return to the agrarian values of the past remains possible even in the face of the displacement ushered in through the modern industrialism. Moreover, Tolkien indicates that the return to those values is enhanced through the experience with the effects of industrialism. Upon his return, Sam has a better understanding of his place in Middle-earth, and by extension, he understands how his work in the Shire fits within the economy of Middle-earth. For this reason, Sam plants the mallorn-trees knowing that he is investing in the soil of the future.

Chapter Five—Conclusion: Transplanting Trees and Sowing Seeds for the Future

At the center of Tolkien's development of his sense of place throughout his fiction rests the highly symbolic image of the tree. Tolkien employed the tree in a variety of ways throughout his fiction, and many scholars, likewise, have identified the tree as a symbol to represent Tolkien as a scholar, author, and individual, and rightfully so. At the end of his story, the tree emerges as Tolkien's strongest suggestion regarding the method by which his characters might go about the work of re-establishing health in Middle-earth. We see this suggestion through Galadriel's gift of the mallorn seeds to Sam, Aragorn's tender transplanting of the sacred tree, and Sam's diligent cultivation of the soil and re-planting of the great party tree in the Shire. Through each of these pictures, Tolkien suggests that healing the wounds of a generation and mitigating the sense of displacement that plagued the world in the post-world war era would not be a simple or quick task, but neither is it an impossible one in Tolkien's estimation. Rather, it is slow, deliberate, and dependent upon the collective effort of diverse local communities contributing to the re-establishment of health within the bounds of their own geographical and metaphysical limitations.

These geographical and metaphysical limitations emerge throughout the stories and help to define Tolkien's sense of place, with characters such as Aragorn and Sam serving as central figures, each respectively displaying a strong sense of placed-ness. This placed-ness, however, is not inherent in these characters, but rather is progressively developed in them as they engage themselves in the work necessitated by their respective places. For Aragorn, this work includes the active defense of the realm and healing the land through his position as King, duties which Aragorn performs with humility, temperance, and prudence, establishing him as a positive example of placed-ness within both the local and global economy. For Sam, this work, though

perhaps smaller and more narrowly focused than Aragorn's, is no less central to the health of Middle-earth in that Sam, too, maintains the agrarian heritage of the Shire by cultivating his garden and transplants the legacy of the Elves into the Shire's soil by planting the mallorn tree of Lothlórien to replace the felled party tree. With these seemingly simple acts, Sam preserves a remnant of the elven aesthetic of Lothlórien, and thereby sows the heirloom seeds of the past as an investment in the future. The tree, though not native to the Shire, is grafted into the agricultural and cultural history of the place, thus carrying on the tradition of the Hobbits' careful stewardship of the land recounted by the narrator in the Prologue and the natural aesthetic of the Elves as representative of their history in Middle-earth.

While developing a thorough sense of local placed-ness among the diverse races in Middle-earth, Tolkien also suggests these local communities depend upon one another for health, thereby showing the inherent and complex interconnectedness of the human experience in the world. Boundaries, limits, private property, and individual ownership—Tolkien establishes an economy in Middle-earth that esteems each of these things as necessary for health within any economy; yet, he simultaneously suggests that these estimable aspects of the economy do not exist in individualistic isolation, but rather depend upon community. In other words, the value of private property rests not in its capacity for elevating the individual or the few, but in its capacity to make us good stewards and good neighbors. Thus, Tolkien suggests that, in a healthy economy, individuals belong to a local community—agrarian or otherwise—where they might take pleasure in seeing the place where their own garden meets their neighbors'. Likewise, in a healthy economy, those local communities invest themselves in maintaining the health of that community, but not at the expense of a neighboring community or at the expense of the global

community. Rather, each community stewards what has been placed under its stewardship, and thereby contributes to the health of the whole.

Although this examination of Tolkien's sense of place is intentionally limited to Elves, Hobbits, and Men in Tolkien's Middle-earth economy, there is much more that could be said regarding Tolkien's development of place among the other races in Middle-earth. The tree that Tolkien planted in his fiction continues to bear fruit, not just for academia, but for life. By planting his story firmly in a place (geographically, in England, and metaphysically, in orthodox Catholic theology) and time in history, Tolkien, like Sam Gamgee at the end of his story, entered into a literary tradition, taking what was valuable from the past and transplanting into his own soil as an investment for the future. As evidenced by continued contemporary scholarship about and mass readership of the stories, J.R.R. Tolkien's investment continues to bear fruit.

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