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## The Shire Quest: The 'Scouring of the Shire' as the Narrative and Thematic Focus of *The Lord of the Rings*

David M. Waito  
University of Ottawa, Ontario

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### The Shire Quest: The 'Scouring of the Shire' as the Narrative and Thematic Focus of *The Lord of the Rings*

#### Abstract

Urges us to take a step back from the well-known and thoroughly examined Ring Quest in *The Lord of the Rings* and consider its frame, the beginning and ending chapters set in the Shire, as representing an important Quest in their own right. The 'Shire Quest' is ultimately seen as the real focus of the book, with the 'Ring Quest' providing the necessary maturing experiences that allow the hobbits to succeed in reclaiming their homeland.

#### Additional Keywords

Plato. *The Republic*; Quests in *The Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Frodo; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Framing devices; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. "The Scouring of the Shire"



THE SHIRE QUEST:  
THE 'SCOURING OF THE SHIRE' AS THE  
NARRATIVE AND THEMATIC FOCUS  
OF *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

DAVID M. WAICO

**An Introduction to the Quests**

THE QUEST NARRATIVE OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* (*LotR*) has been a thoroughly discussed, analyzed, and deconstructed element of Tolkien's epic novel since its first publication in 1954. Critics and essayists have carefully critiqued the quest to destroy the Ring (the Ring Quest), assuming it to be the central conflict of the story. Admittedly, the Ring Quest seems to be the driving force of the narrative, and the most climactic narrative action occurs when Frodo and Gollum wrestle greedily for possession of the Ring of Power on the brink of Mount Doom. Yet it is somewhat suspicious that the climax of such a carefully constructed narrative as *LotR* occurs less than halfway through Book Six, with a significant portion of narrative action still to follow. This fact prompts us to ask the following questions: Why does Tolkien take such care in detailing "The Scouring of the Shire"? And, for that matter, why does he spend so much time describing hobbits and the Shire during the first five chapters of Book One? Clearly Tolkien believes this detail to be vital to his story. As dominating as the Ring Quest seems, we cannot underestimate the significance of Tolkien's specificity in the Prologue: "Concerning Hobbits" or chapters like "The Scouring of the Shire."

In this paper, I propose that Tolkien provides this detailed backdrop of the Shire because there is another quest, a quest to save the Shire (the Shire Quest), which overarches the Ring Quest in the narrative. Although it appears blissful through much of its introductory descriptions, the Shire is an unhealthy community from the outset of Book One. Significant power struggles and issues lurk beneath the Shire's surface, inhibiting its healthy growth and mirroring many of the same power struggles and issues of the Ring Quest. By undertaking the Ring Quest, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin gain experience that enables them to become cognizant of problems that exist in the Shire, and equip themselves with the necessary skills to cleanse the Shire of its destructive tendencies. I argue that the Ring Quest serves merely as a means for the four hobbits to acquire what is necessary to complete the Shire Quest, and that the

main conflict of Tolkien's novel is not to destroy the Ring, but to "scour" or save the Shire.

This need to cleanse the Shire community resonates with much of the premise of John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett's *The Myth of the American Superhero*. Lawrence and Jewett discuss the problematic nature of American culture's infatuation with the redemptive tales of superheroes, wherein the members of a society inhabit a "spectator democracy in which they passively witness their redemption by a superhero" (29; emphasis original). Their study adapts the "monomyth" schema of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, but suggests that a fundamental shift has occurred in the Americanizing of this monomyth: while Campbell's "classical monomyth seemed to reflect rites of initiation, the American monomyth derives from tales of redemption" (Lawrence and Jewett 6). The following is the basic plot structure of the American monomyth:

A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity. (Lawrence and Jewett 6)

Janet Brennan Croft has applied Lawrence and Jewett's American monomythic framework to *LotR* through an analysis of Peter Jackson's interpretation of Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy. Croft draws on Jackson's increased emphasis on Aragorn's "uniqueness as the lone hero" and examines his fitness as the typical American superhero (Croft, "Jackson's Aragorn and the American Superhero Monomyth" ["Jackson's Aragorn"] 12). Lawrence and Jewett's study intersects with mine more in its analysis of the problematic nature of American culture's habitual fascination with this redemptive superhero, rather than with the superhero character itself. For example, the initial setting of the American monomyth is described as Eden-like and pastoral—starkly reminiscent of Tolkien's initial depictions of the Shire (Lawrence and Jewett 22). I will highlight this and other connections between these two unhealthy communities as they arise in my examination of the Shire, so let us return to the Shire and establish why it is in need of cleansing.

In her study *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power*, Jane Chance discusses the state of the Shire in the first few chapters of *The Fellowship of the Ring* by identifying critical problems that exist beneath the veil of perfection that initially appears to be draped over the Shire. Chance writes that the Shire, like Mordor, is a somewhat isolated community in which significant power struggles exist. Hobbits demonstrate an inherent intolerance of difference by distrusting anything unfamiliar: "Marks of distinction—wealth, education, even

leadership—can set a Hobbit apart, make him different” (27). Chance proposes this as a central question in Tolkien’s work: “How can individuals (and nations) so different from one another coexist in harmony?” (34). The theme of difference “polarizes the forces of good and evil, social class, and political group” (37). Indeed, Bilbo, who is wealthy, educated, and independent, is consequently marginalized by other hobbits and marked as “queer” (*LotR* I.1.21).

Chance identifies “queer” as the operative word in Book One which represents “the problem of difference” that makes the Shire dysfunctional (27). She demonstrates that “queer” shows the ability of language to control others by illustrating the political nature of language and the power of knowledge reflected through language in the three volumes of *LotR*. “In *Fellowship*,” Chance writes, “language as the articulation of knowledge and desire serves as moral and political weaponry against threats to survival and community (which often take the form of subversive language and its concomitant power)” (23). Exemplifying such subversion, “queer” motivates hobbits to blend in with their communities and to evade being labeled as “different.” Individual differences that undoubtedly exist among hobbits are accordingly concealed. This suppression is problematic in a community because its members cannot be themselves, and any individual skills they may possess from which the whole community could benefit are never nurtured. Such a community becomes stunted, infertile, and stagnant very quickly.

Once these problems become apparent, the presence of the Shire Quest is realized. In *LotR* the call for the Shire Quest is issued by the Shire’s problem of difference before the call for the Ring Quest, and concludes after the Ring Quest is completed. In fact, a symbiotic relationship exists between these two quests: The Ring Quest is macrocosmic as it affects and is affected by events concerning all of Middle-earth, but microcosmic with respect to the narrative since it exists within the larger text of the Shire Quest. Likewise, the Shire Quest is microcosmic in its exclusively local effects, but macrocosmic in relation to the entire narrative of the novel. Nevertheless, the presence of the Shire Quest is undeniable and its importance in *LotR* must be observed.

In what follows, I first identify the Shire Quest as the four hobbits’ true quest by working from Chance’s idea that the Shire is a problematic, non-ideal society in need of cleansing. A discussion of the Shire in relation to Plato’s ideal state from the *Republic* realizes its non-ideal status by demonstrating what the Shire lacks most are virtuous Guardians. The Ring Quest, then, serves as the means by which Merry, Pippin, and especially Frodo and Sam acquire the ability to identify the Shire’s problematic tendencies; their experiential learning from the Ring Quest equips them with the necessary skills to purge the Shire of its intolerances. I will conclude by assessing the extent to which these four hobbits

acquire these skills, evaluating their fitness as Platonic Guardians, and measuring their abilities to restore and maintain justice in the Shire.

### **“Queerness” and The Call for Leadership in an Intolerant Shire**

At the outset of *LotR*, Frodo’s focus is certainly very local. His chief concerns pertain merely to the planning and enjoyment of “a long-expected party,” the departure of his beloved Uncle Bilbo, and his responsibility as Bilbo’s heir to distribute various possessions which Bilbo has left to other hobbits (*LotR* I.1.36). Even seventeen years after Bilbo’s party and departure, Frodo’s most foreign challenges appear to be dealing with the Sackville-Bagginses’ resentment of him for stealing their places as Bilbo’s heir, and with other hobbits who think him “queer” because he shows “signs of good ‘preservation’” (I.2.42). Yet Frodo gives no indication that this judgment of him by other hobbits warrants his concern. Since his entire life and all of his adventures and challenges up to this point have taken place within the familiar borders of the Shire, it is not unreasonable to expect the scope of Frodo’s attention to be limited to the Shire and its local concerns. However, once Gandalf brings news that “[Frodo’s Ring] is the Master-ring, the One Ring to rule them all,” Frodo’s world is torn wide open (I.2.49).

Gandalf’s disclosure of the Ring’s true identity forces Frodo to become concerned with issues pertaining to Middle-earth at large: “[Sauron] knows that it is the One. And he has at last heard, I think, of *hobbits* and the *Shire* [...]. Indeed, Frodo, I fear that he may even think that the long-unnoticed name of *Baggins* has become important” (*LotR* I.2.58). Interestingly, it is not the threat of Sauron repossessing the Ring that motivates Frodo to concern himself with these global affairs, but rather the threat that his possession of the Ring poses to the Shire. Frodo regards the Shire’s compromised safety as his call to adventure: “But in the meanwhile it seems that I am a danger, a danger to all that live near me. I cannot keep the Ring and stay here. I ought to leave Bag End, leave the Shire, leave everything and go away” (I.2.61). Frodo refuses to keep the Ring and its imposing danger in Bag End; he will take the Ring and leave, hoping to draw the Black Riders away from his beloved home. Thus Frodo initiates the Shire Quest, endeavoring to save his home from doom.

That Frodo begins this quest with a desire to safe-keep the Shire is an important point. But equally important is something of which even Frodo is not entirely aware: there is more reason than Black Riders for Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin to depart from the Shire and embark on their adventures. The Shire is in need of cleansing, and only the wisdom and skills that the hobbits will acquire

from their individual adventures can alert them to this need and enable them to initiate it.<sup>1</sup>

The pastoral image of the Shire created in the opening chapters of *LotR* seems enough to justify Frodo's wish to preserve its safety. In the Prologue the narrator introduces a seemingly idyllic, innocent Shire community: "Hobbits are an unobtrusive but very ancient people [...] [who] love peace and quiet and good tilled earth" (*LotR* Prologue.1). And in "The Ordering of the Shire," the narrator initially seems to corroborate the notion of the Shire's ideal innocence by suggesting the redundancy of a government in the Shire:

The Shire at this time had hardly any 'government'. Families for the most part managed their own affairs. Growing food and eating it occupied most of their time. In other matters they were, as a rule, generous and not greedy, but contented and moderate, so that estates, farms, workshops, and small trades tended to remain unchanged for generations. (Prologue.9)

This description of the Shire is reflected in Lawrence and Jewett's portrayal of the initial setting of the American monomyth:

Tales of the American monomyth typically begin and end in Eden-like-settings. We see small communities of diligent agrarians, townspeople, or members of a work group together in harmony. [...] The *monomythic Eden* has distinctive features [...]. It is a small, well-organized community whose distinguishing trait is the absence of lethal internal conflict arising from its members; the surrounding pastoral realm echoes its inner harmony. The citizens are law-aiding and cooperative, without those extremes of economic, political, or sexual desires that might provoke confrontations. (22; emphasis original)

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Tolkien disagreed with the suggestion of any "political" motivation in this context. In a letter commenting on W.H. Auden's review of *The Return of the King*, Tolkien wrote, "It seems clear to me that Frodo's duty was 'humane' not political. He naturally thought first of the Shire, since his roots were there, but the quest had as its object not the preserving of this or that polity [...] but the liberation from an evil tyranny of all the 'humane'" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien [Letters]* 240-41). Thus, when I propose a further reason for the hobbits to depart from the Shire, I am not suggesting that Frodo considers these reasons when deciding whether to leave the Shire; I agree that his intentions and the Ring Quest's objectives are to liberate all the "humane" from the tyranny that Sauron would establish should he repossess the One Ring. However, I do propose that the Shire Quest inevitably occurs and, in retrospect, begins before the Ring Quest when Frodo decides to remove himself and the Ring from the Shire to protect it.

Lawrence and Jewett point to the “Midwestern small town” as the real-life source of this idyllic community (23), and both their description of this setting and Tolkien’s of the Shire imply communities whose surface appearances mirror their apparent internal harmony. “Yet, if we examine it more closely, small-town life in the American heartland has hardly been Edenic” (Lawrence and Jewett 23). Likewise, a close reading of the Shire yields a different truth about the Shire’s health: in Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates and Glaucon propose such an ideal state which does not require government, and a comparison of Plato’s ideal state with the Shire shows that although the hobbits believe their community to be ideal, at the beginning of the narrative it is not.<sup>2</sup>

Socrates and Glaucon define the Platonic ideal state as one that responds to people’s needs, with each member of society possessing certain skills that collectively and sufficiently provide for the whole society’s needs:

[A] state comes into existence because no individual is self-sufficing; we all have many needs [...]. So, having all these needs, we call in one another’s help to satisfy our various requirements [...] if one man gives another what he has to give in exchange for what he can get, it is because each finds that to do so is for his own advantage. (II.368, p. 55-6)

In this just, ideal state, there is no need for control; all needs and services balance one another in perfect equilibrium. Injustice, Plato concludes, arises when an ideal society progresses (which is inevitable under such fertile conditions) and its needs outgrow its resources: people begin knocking on their neighbors’ doors requesting more land, services, and resources to continue to provide for their increased needs. These requests soon swell into demands, and “the next thing will be [...] that we shall be at war” (II.373, p. 61). Some mechanism must be introduced to restore justice by governing transactions between members of this now-needy (and therefore non-ideal) society. This role is achieved by a group Socrates calls “Guardians” (II.375, p. 64).

In short, Guardians must embody the virtues of the state: “wisdom,” “courage,” and “temperance” (IV.427-34, pp. 121-29). By possessing these virtues, Guardians “are found to be full of zeal to do whatever they believe is for the good of the commonwealth and never willing to act against its interest” (III.413, p. 104). Guardians restore justice by ensuring that all members of society perform the one function for which they are best suited in the name of the commonwealth. If Guardians succeed at this task, then the state becomes once again ideal. However, Socrates also observes that the equilibrium of an ideal state is so precarious that Guardians must do more than govern the interactions of the

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<sup>2</sup> Plato’s discussion of the components of the ideal state can be found in Part II, Books II-IV of the *Republic*.



members of their community; they must be, like watchdogs, "gentle to their own people and dangerous only to enemies" (II.375, p. 64). Guardians must also prevent any outside forces (foreigners) from impairing the delicate equilibrium of the ideal state.

Guardians somewhat resemble the redemptive superhero in the American monomyth who, born from the Western stories in American popular culture, offer "unofficial redeemer figures on powerful horses, impartial outsiders whose zeal for the right [...] would triumph over evil" (Lawrence and Jewett 30). Lawrence and Jewett indicate these superheroes are outsiders who fundamentally renounce community, "reced[ing] into obscurity" after saving the community from evil (6). But what these superheroes lack, and what Tolkien and the Shire seek, as we will come to see through Sam, is the complementary aspect to this protection from outside forces: the maintenance of justice *inside* the community.

As *The Fellowship of the Rings* begins, the Shire appears to be a version of Plato's ideal state: hobbits seem concerned with only "peace and quiet" and "[managing] their own affairs" (*LotR* Prologue 1, 9). Indeed, "[a]t no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought amongst themselves" (Prologue.5). But the Shire is still without Guardians who enforce and maintain justice. Although there is a Mayor (Old Will Whitfoot) and "Bounders," the narrator describes the present effectiveness of these positions:

The only real official in the Shire at this date was the Mayor [...]. As mayor almost his only duty was to preside at banquets [...]. But the offices of Postmaster and First Shirriff were attached to the mayoralty, so that he managed both the Messenger Service and the Watch. [...]

The Shirriffs was the name that the Hobbits gave to their police, or the nearest equivalent that they possessed. [...] There were in all the Shire only twelve of them, three in each Farthing, for Inside Work. A rather larger body, varying at need, was employed to 'beat the bounds', and to see that Outsiders of any kind, great or small, did not make themselves a nuisance.

At the time when this story begins the Bounders, as they were called, had been greatly increased. There were many reports and complaints of strange persons and creatures prowling about the borders, or over them: the first sign that all was not quite as it should be [...]. Few heeded the sign, and not even Bilbo yet had any notion of what it portended. (*LotR* Prologue 10)

Mayor Whitfoot's role to "preside at banquets" suggests that the title of "Mayor" is merely ceremonial and he is never seen fulfilling his role as First Shirriff until he "set[s] off for Bag End to protest" against Pimple and the ruffians

in Book Six (*LotR* VI.8.989). But this protest only accomplishes Whitfoot's own imprisonment. As for the Bounders, they too fail to protect the Shire adequately from Outsiders: in the earlier quotation the narrator reveals that most hobbits deny that the increased number of Outsiders in the Shire is affecting the Shire and their lives. Ultimately, it appears the Shire's posts of Mayor and Bounder were created and designed with an understanding of the need for and the roles of Platonic Guardians; however, those maintaining these positions do so incompetently. Furthermore, neither the Mayor nor the Bounders seem conscious of the fact that there are issues even more pressing than Outsiders affecting the Shire.

The narrator of Tolkien's Prologue comments that "ease and peace had left [hobbits] still curiously tough. [...] and at need [they] could still handle arms" (*LotR* Prologue 6-7). Why are hobbits "curiously tough"? And why is marksmanship still practiced if hobbits have not fought a battle in over two hundred and fifty years?<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, the answers to these questions are the consequences of the Bounders' inadequacies. Without effective Guardians to whom responsibilities of justice and foreign affairs are entrusted, hobbits take personal ownership of these responsibilities by maintaining their toughness and marksmanship in case the need to protect themselves should arise. This ownership of self-preservation is also reflected in the hobbits' distrust of difference.

Readers soon discover that although hobbits "had never fought amongst themselves," they are not so "generous" and "contented" when dealing with inhabitants beyond the borders of their respective Shire communities, or even with hobbits who dwell outside their own hobbit-holes. Hobbits scorn anything different and promote only the most normal and familiar of actions, traits, and even ideas. This intolerance of difference is seen as early as the second paragraph of the first chapter of Book One when Bilbo is judged for his "peculiar" love of traveling, his "(apparently) perpetual youth," and his "(reputedly) inexhaustible wealth." Some hobbits "shook their heads and thought this was too much of a good thing [...]. 'It will have to be paid for,' they said. 'It isn't natural, and trouble will come of it!'" (*LotR* I.1.21). This is the first of many instances where unnaturalness or non-conformity is interpreted by hobbits as "trouble," problematic, or unacceptable. The Shire is in need of Guardians who can simultaneously protect the Shire from external and internal sources of evil.

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<sup>3</sup> The last battle fought in the Shire was the Battle of Greenfields, in which Bandobras Took led the charge against the invasion of Orcs in S.R. (Shire Reckoning) 1147. Frodo's fiftieth year is S.R. 1418 (*LotR* Prologue 5; Appendix C.1074).

The case for the Rangers as Guardians of the Shire proves fruitless since Rangers only protect the Shire from outside forces and do not maintain justice within the Shire itself. Furthermore, since Rangers are not seen within the Shire, their presence does not increase the hobbits' sense of security and therefore does not alleviate the hobbits' intolerance of difference. This point also demonstrates why the superhero figure of the American monomyth would not suffice in the Shire. First of all, the evil which this superhero combats is imposed exclusively from the outside—"The Intruding, Evil Other" (Lawrence and Jewett 26)—while the Shire is threatened also by its intrinsic intolerances. Moreover, the American superhero's tendency to recede into the background after saving the threatened community would fail to maintain justice in the Shire over time effectively; the Shire needs a more consistent presence to purge its unhealthy habits. After all, the absence of Guardians and leadership in the Shire is what has permitted the present infestation of intolerant practices. The Shire needs a more enduring solution.

### **The Subversive Power of Language in the Shire**

As stated earlier, Jane Chance identifies "queer" as the operative word in Book One.<sup>4</sup> "The word 'queer,'" she claims, "illustrat[es] the ability of language to exert control over others by playing on their fears of difference and that which is foreign" (38). Hobbiton Hobbits use this word three times on the third page of Book One to describe hobbits from Buckland. Daddy Twofoot judges Bucklanders solely on the location of their homes: "And no wonder they're queer [...] if they live on the wrong side of the Brandywine River, and right agin the Old Forest." The Gaffer supports this judgment by recalling the narrator's connection between the "unnatural" and "trouble": "they're a queer breed, seemingly. They fool about with boats on that big river—and that isn't natural. Small wonder trouble came of it" (*LotR* I.1.22). The contexts in which Daddy Twofoot and the Gaffer use "queer" clearly indicate their judgmental, intolerant attitudes. Hobbiton hobbits are not alone in their engagement in this behavior. Bucklanders, too, prejudicially discriminate against Hobbiton dwellers, as Farmer Maggot exemplifies: "You should never have gone mixing yourself up with Hobbiton folk, Mr. Frodo. Folk are queer up there" (I.4.92). This intolerance of difference can be interpreted as hobbits' attempts to retain their own ideal notions of the Shire, and to impose these notions on others. Chance claims that hobbits "play" on common fears, discouraging difference of any kind.<sup>5</sup> In a sense

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<sup>4</sup> See Chance's *The Mythology of Power* for a more thorough discussion of Tolkien's use of the word "queer" in the chapter titled "'Queer' Hobbits: The Problem of Difference in the Shire" (Chance 26-37).

<sup>5</sup> Although Chance identifies hobbits' uses of "queer" as attempts to produce social pressures promoting conformity, it is my contention that such uses derive from a lack of

they hold onto their ill-perceived notions of the Shire as ideal by attempting to remove all forms of difference from it, trying to compensate for the absence of Guardians.

Ted Sandyman epitomizes how hobbits feign perfection in their community through denial while discussing the “[q]ueer things you do hear these days” with Sam at *The Green Dragon*. While Sam seems both to be aware of and to believe news of “Tree-men,” “queer folk,” and “Elves” crossing the Shire, Ted blatantly rejects such “fireside-tales and children’s stories.” Ted distrusts his fellow hobbits, refusing to believe Sam’s cousin Hal who claims to have seen a Tree-man (an Ent) beyond the North Moors “as big as an elm tree, and walking—walking seven yards to a stride, if it was an inch”:

‘Then I bet it wasn’t an inch. What he saw *was* an elm tree, as like as not,’ [answered Ted].

‘But this one was *walking*, I tell you; and there ain’t no elm tree on the North Moors.’

‘Then Hal can’t have seen one,’ said Ted. There was some laughing and clapping: the audience seemed to think that Ted had scored a point. (*LotR* I.2.43-44).

Ted’s denial is so rigid that clearly no amount of evidence could convince him that Hal, or anyone else for that matter, has seen an Ent in the Shire. And “the audience” who feels Ted “scored a point” is no better: encouragement of such closed-mindedness is as problematic as denial itself. Ted proceeds to reject the idea that Elves are passing through the Shire on their way to the West on the grounds that these are “old tales”: “And I don’t see what it matters to me or you. Let them sail! But I warrant you haven’t seen them doing it; nor any one else in the Shire” (*LotR* I.2.44). Here Ted reveals that he is concerned only with things that matter to him, and this is not inherently a fault: after all, Socrates concludes, “when each order—tradesman, Auxiliary, Guardian—keeps to its own proper business in the commonwealth and does its own work, that is justice and what makes a just society” (IV.434, p. 129). The Shire’s problem is not that hobbits like Ted wish to mind their own business, but rather that they lack Guardians whose business it is to ensure that Ents and Elves do not interfere with the Shire’s equilibrium. Without Guardians restoring and maintaining justice, the Shire is not an ideal state.

Ted’s ignorance also demonstrates a lack of independent thought, which “the audience” reveals is common among hobbits. This quality only increases the susceptibility of the Guardian-less Shire to corrupt, unjust rule: a community that

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leadership in the Shire. Chance also does not identify hobbits’ use of “queer” and its prejudicial and discriminatory intentions as a call for a political cleansing of the Shire.

lacks leadership and lacks the ability to think for itself is indiscriminately accepting of any leader. While perhaps four of the most independent-minded hobbits are away on their errands for Middle-earth, Saruman uses Pimple (Lotho Baggins) as his pawn to gain power in the Shire. Readers learn through Merry and Pippin's discovery of the stores at Orthanc that Pimple has been exporting pipe weed and Shire goods to Saruman. It is not unreasonable to suggest that Saruman endorses Pimple's campaign in the Shire with the intention of usurping him after Pimple has created a throne which Saruman could steal from Pimple at his will. This scheme provides Saruman with the opportunity to avenge his perceived ill-treatment by the hobbits along the Road earlier in Book Six.

Pimple himself gains power in the Shire by purchasing real estate in amounts that are "a sight more than was good for him" (*LotR* VI.8.989). But by the time Farmer Cotton makes this observation, there are so many Outsiders and ruffians from the South in the Shire that even the most oblivious hobbit cannot ignore them; their abundance provides Pimple with the perfect diversion for his plans. Unnoticed and unopposed, Pimple quickly and easily gains power, soon finding himself to be the most influential hobbit in the Shire. Pimple increases his hold on the Shire by exploiting one of its chief weaknesses—its intolerance of difference. He and his ruffians draft lists of rules which they distribute and enforce throughout the Shire to ensure that Pimple's powerful new position remains unchallenged. "[A]nd if anyone got 'uppish' as they called it, they followed Will [and were imprisoned]" (VI.8.989). This threat of imprisonment combines with years of hobbit-conditioning to conform to the rest of the community, resulting in the unlikelihood of any "uppish" behavior—that is, until the four hobbits return from the Ring Quest.

### **The Liberating Power of Language in the Shire**

Like "queer" in Book One, the root word "up" is operative in Chapter VIII of Book Six: "The Scouring of the Shire." Pimple and the ruffians use the adjective "uppish" to describe hobbits who disobey the rules. Again like "queer," "uppish" evolves into a label describing hobbits that choose to think for themselves and to act against prescribed social norms or rules. Indeed, "uppish" is just another term promoting intolerance of difference in the Shire, and it is this point that Pimple exploits, since opposition to his rules is a form of difference that would be detrimental to his status. But in this chapter, "up" does more than express intolerance.

Tolkien employs more than twenty-five differing forms of "up" in Chapter VIII, including its adjective form: "uppish"; its figurative adverb form: hobbits rallying "up in fire" or "standing up" against the ruffians; and even its use as a common, literal adverb: "none o' the ruffians were left up at Bag End" (*LotR* VI.8.991). Tolkien's repetition of "up" alerts readers to the point that

“standing up” against the ruffians, rallying “up in fire,” and being “uppish” are exactly what the Shire needs. This community has been suppressed for too long by the pressures of conformity and has submitted too often to the notion that difference is bad. In Plato’s ideal state, the differing skills of its members allow the state to provide for all its varying needs. The Guardians’ unique leadership qualities enable them to enforce justice successfully in the state and maintain its precarious equilibrium. In the Platonic state, difference is a good thing. Jane Chance, too, states that “[d]ifference [...] leads to recklessness [...] adventure [...] and ultimately wisdom and understanding” (34-5). Tolkien repeatedly uses “up” to alert the reader to the call for leadership in the Shire—a call that was first issued by “queer” in Book One but remained unheard, hidden beneath years of supposed safety and feigned perfection.

Frodo and his companions cannot themselves perceive the Shire’s call for leadership until their own adventures teach them the necessity of tolerance, pity, and leadership in a community. To succeed in the Shire Quest, Frodo must first embark on the Ring Quest, from which he gains the experience that enables him to see the need to eliminate the Shire’s unhealthy tendencies and establish an effective Guardianship to protect and maintain justice in the Shire.

### **The Ring Quest—“*The Pedagogy of Suffering*”**

In a letter to Richard Jeffery in 1955, Tolkien explained the origins of Frodo’s name: “Frodo is a real name from the Germanic tradition. Its Old English form was *Fróda*. Its obvious connexion is with the old word *fród* meaning etymologically ‘wise by experience’” (*Letters* 224). As a philologist, Tolkien would have chosen this name for his protagonist carefully, wanting it to indicate an important quality of his hero. Since it is important that Frodo become “wise by experience,” it is important to ask how exactly Frodo gains this wisdom, and which of his experiences in *LotR* contribute to its acquisition. As discussed earlier, the success of Frodo’s Shire Quest requires his recognition of the need for tolerance, pity, and especially Guardianship in the Shire. Such recognition represents wisdom that can be achieved only through experience, and Frodo’s experiences in the Ring Quest serve as the lessons which contribute to Frodo’s wisdom. Some of the more interesting and important experiential lessons Frodo receives on the Ring Quest are those which leave Frodo wounded.

The abundance of wounded heroes in countless myths and mythic quest stories suggests the importance of wounds in what Joseph Campbell identifies as a hero’s “initiation” in the classical monomyth (Campbell 97).<sup>6</sup> In his

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<sup>6</sup> Again, this initiatory pattern of Frodo’s narrative positions him in the realm of classical monomythic heroes rather than the redemptive narrative pattern of American monomythic superheroes.

book *Iron John*, literary theorist Robert Bly uses the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale "Iron John" and a plethora of other mythological examples to discuss traditional initiations of a male's life as he moves from boyhood into manhood. Bly identifies Odysseus as a hero who, as a boy, is wounded in the leg when hunting a boar: "We could say that we have two kinds of men by this time: those men whom the boar kills, and those men whom the boar only scars" (214). Odysseus kills the boar but is scarred by this contest. According to Bly, the man who is scarred "remains alive, and, when old, is cunning like Odysseus and full of knowledge" (214). We might say this man gains wisdom. Arthur W. Frank also argues that wounds directly contribute to wisdom; the subtitle of this section, "The Pedagogy of Suffering," comes from Frank's study of the representation of the body in illness narratives, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*. Frank writes, "[t]he pedagogy of suffering means that one who suffers has something to teach," suggesting that the experience of being wounded leads to a certain knowledge or wisdom (150).

In *LotR*, the shoulder wound which Frodo suffers at Weathertop contributes to his wisdom. The Weathertop incident is the fourth time Frodo is lured into wearing the Ring. Granted, on two of these four occasions he is only tempted to wear it: on the Old Road when the hobbits first encounter the Black Rider, and in the Barrow-downs when they are captured by the barrow-wight. To the third temptation, Frodo succumbs and puts the Ring on his finger in Tom Bombadil's house. In each of these temptations so far, Frodo chooses either to wear the Ring or not for reasons besides mere respect for it. But the wound he suffers from the Morgul-knife at Weathertop instills in Frodo a respect for the danger of wearing the Ring. Frodo demonstrates having learned from this experience by willfully removing the Ring from his finger after escaping Boromir in "The Breaking of the Fellowship." Frodo has never before shown such resolve to resist the Ring consciously, and this strength can be attributed directly to the incident at Weathertop.

There is a fifth incident concerning Frodo wearing the Ring, which occurs at *The Prancing Pony*. Here, Frodo accidentally slips the Ring on his finger and describes not knowing how this happens: "He could only suppose that he had been handling it in his pocket while he sang, and that somehow it had slipped on when he stuck out his hand with a jerk to save his fall" (*LotR* I.9.157). Tolkien constructs this scenario to illustrate the Ring's wilful nature: "perhaps it had tried to reveal itself in response to some wish or command that was felt in the room," Frodo wonders (157). Since this fifth scenario is exclusively suggestive of the Ring's wilful nature, it is omitted from my present discussion, which focuses on Frodo's ability to control his conscious temptation to wear the Ring.

The scar left by Frodo's Weathertop wound is important, too. Bly demonstrates that scars serve purposes in mythological quests from a range of cultures and literary traditions. In *The Odyssey*, for example, Odysseus's scar is the mark by which his old nurse recognizes him upon his return to Ithaca in Book Nineteen. Frodo's scars represent wounds that never fully heal, and greatly affect his decision to leave Middle-earth from the Grey Havens at the conclusion of *The Return of the King*. Scars also play an important role in Native American tradition: "When you die, you meet the Old Hag, and she eats your scars. If you have no scars, she will eat your eyeballs, and you will be blind in the next world" (Lame Deer,<sup>7</sup> qtd. in Bly 216). Frodo's shoulder wound is also connected with sight, for when he suffers this wound, he is wearing the Ring, and when he wears the Ring his sight improves: "the shapes [of the Ringwraiths] became terribly clear. [Frodo] was able to see beneath their black wrappings" (*LotR* I.11.191). The Ring enables Frodo to see into and be seen in the wraith world. However, it is important to note that Frodo's specific sensory experience when wearing the Ring is unique; Sam's is quite different: "At once [Sam] was aware that hearing was sharpened while sight was dimmed" (*LotR* IV.10.717). Interestingly, the scene in which Frodo deliberately removes the Ring from his finger occurs on Amon Hen, which in Sindarin means "hill of the eye" and in Westron the "Hill of Sight" (Foster 10). The name of this location further connects Frodo's wound with sight, as it is this wound that enables him, at this crucial moment, to see and understand the danger in his wearing the Ring.

### **The Power of Pity**

Another crucially important moral lesson that Frodo and Sam learn during the Ring Quest is the importance of and need for tolerance, pity, and forgiveness. In "The Shadow of the Past," upon hearing that it is Gollum who provides Sauron with the names "Baggins" and "the Shire," Frodo responds to Gandalf rashly, revealing that he is not yet above the Shire's intolerant ways: "What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance! [...]. He deserves death" (*LotR* I.2.58). Tolkien repeats the word "pity" six times on page 78—four of which place the noun at the head of its clause—and three more times on the following three pages. Tolkien's repetition of "pity" alerts the reader to the importance of its idea in the following pages.

Understanding the need for pity, though not an easy task, is something upon which the success of both the Ring and Shire Quests ultimately depends. Gandalf foreshadows pity's importance in the Ring Quest in his response to Frodo's wish for Gollum's death: "Pity? It was Pity that stayed [Bilbo's] hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded,

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<sup>7</sup> Lame Deer (c. 1900-76) was a Lakota medicine man.



Frodo" (*LotR* I.2.58). By suggesting that Bilbo has benefited from his pity, Gandalf begins to prepare Frodo for his own eventual meeting with Gollum:

Deserves [death]! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the wise cannot see all ends. [...] My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many – yours not the least. (*LotR* I.2.58)

Gollum's role in the Ring Quest does eventually "rule the fate of many," and through this lecture Gandalf begins to awaken Frodo from the Shire's spell of intolerance and prepare him to show pity for Gollum. As Gandalf is well aware, intolerance of difference will only harm Frodo's chances of succeeding in his quests.

Pity, however, is not necessarily a saving grace; it can be a weakness as well. Two pages after praising Bilbo's pity of Gollum, Gandalf warns Frodo of the danger of pity: "Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. [...] The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength" (*LotR* I.2.60). Herein lies pity's irony in *LotR*: the quality which will eventually save Frodo and the Ring Quest is the same quality by which the Ring would gain mastery even over Gandalf. To be wise, Frodo must learn that pity can be simultaneously his shield and his Achilles' heel.

Frodo's decision to protect the Shire by leaving and taking the Ring away demonstrates how he has begun to understand the complex necessity of pity: "I should like to save the Shire, if I could – though there have been times when I thought the inhabitants too stupid and dull for words, and have felt that an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them. But I don't feel like that now" (*LotR* I.2.61). Although his wish to protect Shire-folk is not the same as the pity that Bilbo showed (and Frodo will show) for Gollum, Frodo's decision to remove the threat of danger from the Shire does suggest that Frodo has already begun to understand Gandalf's lesson: pitying those who deserve otherwise may sometimes bring suffering upon oneself, but it is always morally obligatory.

The long-awaited meeting between Gollum and Frodo and Sam occurs in Book Four. Immediately, we see by the wisdom with which Frodo handles this meeting that he has learned much since his initial wish that Bilbo had killed Gollum. When the hobbits encounter Gollum, Sam assumes the role of the naïve hobbit wishing that Gollum be killed. Responding to Frodo's declaration not to kill Gollum since "[h]e has done us no harm," Sam retorts, "'Oh hasn't he! [...] 'Anyway he meant to, and he means to, I'll warrant. Throttle us in our sleep, that's his plan'" (*LotR* IV.1.600). Although he does comprehend the danger of the

Ring to all of Middle-earth, Sam's chief motivation on the journey thus far has been pure devotion to his master. Because of this devotion, Sam sees Gollum as a threat to his master and reacts protectively and instinctively; reason does not factor into his wish for Gollum's removal. And Sam is not wrong to trust his instincts; this scene is the first of many in which Sam is torn between loyalty to Frodo and complete disagreement with Frodo's trust in Gollum. By the end of the story Sam's distrust of Gollum is irrefutably justified by Gollum's many treacherous endeavors. However, as Frodo is beginning to understand, untrustworthiness is not just cause to condemn Gollum to death.

Frodo's own response to his first meeting with Gollum is to recall Gandalf's speech from Bag End that praises the pity that "stayed Bilbo's hand." Tolkien even reprints this speech in full for the reader in Chapter 1 of Book Four, "The Taming of Sméagol." Unlike Sam, Frodo pauses to think "for a while" about whether to kill Gollum (*LotR* IV.1.600). Too many people have counseled Frodo to acknowledge pity's importance for him to make this decision rashly. At length, Frodo decides: "'Very well,' he answered aloud, lowering his sword. 'But still I am afraid. And yet, as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him'" (601). Frodo has carried the Ring long enough to come to appreciate the chronic effects it has on its bearer's mind. His experiences with the Ring have colored his perception of Gollum with a sympathetic shade that only another Ring-bearer could appreciate. Frodo pities Gollum because of an understanding gained from experience, which he lacked in Book One.

Frodo further demonstrates his developing wisdom by not dismissing his own feelings of caution that warn him against fully trusting Gollum: "But still I am afraid," he says. Frodo's allowance of his feelings of pity for Gollum is important; virtuous pity must be an act of will that demonstrates forgiveness, rather than an irrational sentiment resembling weakness. Thus Frodo is wise to pity Gollum cautiously: he clearly understands Gandalf's implication that although pitying Gollum may prove decisive in the Quest, it can still be a weakness upon which evil can prey. Gollum has done nothing to gain Frodo's trust yet, so it would be naïve of Frodo to allow his pity for this creature to grow unchecked into such trust.

In the last stage of the Ring Quest, Frodo suffers the second of his three major wounds.<sup>8</sup> Just as his shoulder injury at Weathertop teaches him to respect the Ring, his wound from Shelob's stinger convinces him that Gollum cannot be trusted. To whatever extent Frodo has helped Gollum reclaim something of his old hobbit self, Gollum proves that he is irredeemably untrustworthy when he leads Frodo and Sam to Shelob's lair in the hope that she will eat them and

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<sup>8</sup> Frodo's third wound occurs when Gollum bites off Frodo's finger as a final attempt to regain the Ring (*LotR* VI.3.925).

discard the Ring for him to reclaim. It is clear that Gollum's desire for the Ring will continue to ensnare his mind as long as he is without it. This betrayal allows Sam, Frodo, and readers to label Gollum as dangerous and treacherous once and for all.

But despite this decisiveness, it would still be unwise to kill Gollum. Sam's experience of possessing the Ring allows him to see the need for pity and forgiveness when he is presented with the chance to kill Gollum on the slopes of Mount Doom:

Sam's hand wavered. His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved [...]. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's shrivelled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again. (*LotR* VI.3.923)

Sympathy is a prerequisite to pity, and knowledge of the Ring's effect on its wearer is required for one to pity another who has possessed it. Both Frodo and Sam have now pitied Gollum and chosen not to murder him. Providentially, Frodo and Sam are rewarded for their compassion when Gollum inadvertently saves the Ring Quest. Gollum's final act, i.e., biting off the Ring and Frodo's finger and falling into the fire, is ironically both a betrayal and a service to Frodo. Gollum's intentions were not benign, and he cannot be acclaimed as the savior of the Ring Quest. The true saviors are pity and forgiveness. Without these, the quest was doomed to fail. Tolkien's message is that these benevolent virtues which enable the destruction of the Ring of Power are the same virtues that provide protection from greed, excessive pride, and uncontrollable lust for power.

As important as this moment is for Middle-earth, the climax of the Ring Quest is equally important for the Shire Quest. Frodo and Sam are ensured that their decisions to pardon Gollum are righteous, which Tolkien himself confirmed in a letter to Michael Straight: "the 'salvation' of the world and Frodo's own 'salvation' is achieved by his previous *pity* and forgiveness of injury. [...] By a situation created by his 'forgiveness', he was saved himself, and relieved of his burden" (*Letters* 234; emphasis original). Frodo has internalized the utmost importance of pity: "But for [Gollum], Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over" (*LotR* VI.3.926).

With this last phase of the Ring Quest complete, Frodo must now return home to the Shire, where he will encounter problems similar to those which he

has faced abroad. But this time Frodo is prepared, being equipped with the wisdom and experience of the Ring Quest. Now, he will recognize the need for change in the Shire, since he possesses the requisite skills to effect the cleansing of the Shire's malignant intolerances.

### **The Return of the Hobbits—*The Shire Quest, At Last***

While returning to the Shire, Gandalf suggests that the purpose of the Ring Quest was to prepare the hobbits to complete the Shire Quest: "I am with you at present, but soon I shall not be. I am not coming to the Shire. You must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for" (*LotR* VI.7.974). The hobbits' experiences from the Ring Quest have allowed them to witness the desolation of Mordor and the infertility resulting from tyranny. Readers can only imagine how frustrating it must be for the hobbits to return to the Shire to find their beloved home under the dictatorship of Pimple and Sharkey. Nevertheless, this is the Shire's state upon the hobbits' return, which they discover when they find their way blocked by a gate on the Road.

The first "uppish" acts that the hobbits perform are to disregard Pimple's rules, to which the hobbits of the Shire have been blindly adhering. Indeed, these are the rules that led Pimple to use the term "uppish" in the first place, so it is fitting that they are the first things to be attacked by the "uppish" behavior of the four returning hobbits. On the newly constructed gate that blocks their entrance into the Shire is a notice stating "*No admittance between sundown and sunrise*" (*LotR* VI.8.975). The Shire, which before was skeptical only of foreigners, now bars them with gates that are heavily manned during the day and closed at night. Frodo, however, has learned that although there is evil in the outside world, it is not to be locked out. Help can come from unexpected places, so differences must be tolerated. Mordor prohibits outsiders from entering its lands with the Black Gate, and the Shire is not yet Mordor. Therefore, the four hobbits uppishly disregard the rule by climbing the gate and entering the Shire after sundown. Sam challenges the absolute nature of this rule by asking for the gatekeepers to exercise reason: "And if hobbits of the Shire are to be kept out in the wet on a night like this, I'll tear down your notice when I find it" (*LotR* VI.8.975). Wisdom will always call for exceptions to absolute rules, as Sam logically argues. Blindly following these rules, the gatekeepers are clearly unfit as Platonic Guardians, lacking the wisdom required to understand when to bend (or break) rules that are arbitrary to begin with.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Lawrence and Jewett also discuss the American monomyth as a threat to democratic practices as societies are represented as impotent in the face of adversity, needing a superhero to come and save the day. Janet Brennan Croft argues, "the Scouring [of the Shire] is very much an example of group action by established democratic (though loosely established) institutions with leadership by consultation and consensus" ("Jackson's

After finally getting through the gate and into the Shire, the four hobbits discover the means by which Pimple gained power in the Shire, that Sharkey eventually usurped him, and that Sharkey and the ruffians have imposed a tyrannical rule over the Shire and its inhabitants. But upon hearing the details of Pimple's usurpation by Sharkey, Frodo pities Pimple as he has Gollum: "[Pimple] never meant things to come to this pass. He has been a wicked fool, but he's caught now. [...] He's a prisoner of Bag End now, I expect, and very frightened. We ought to try and rescue him" (*LotR* VI.8.983). Just as Frodo perceives that Gollum was enslaved by the Ring, he also perceives that Pimple is enslaved by Saruman.

Frodo displays another act of pity and forgiveness as he pardons Saruman despite the damage he has done to the Shire under the alias Sharkey:

Do not kill him even now. For he has not hurt me. And in any case I do not wish him to be slain in this evil mood. He was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hands against. He is fallen, and his cure is beyond us; but I would still spare him in the hope that he may find it. (*LotR* VI.8.996)

What a contrast this statement is to Frodo's wish that Bilbo had killed Gollum when he had the chance! Saruman himself acknowledges the wisdom with which Frodo pardons him: "You have grown, Halfling. Yes, you have grown very much. You are wise [...]" (*LotR* VI.8.362). Frodo's pity and forgiveness punish Saruman more effectively than would vengeful execution, by denying Saruman the pleasure of knowing he has hurt Frodo and the hobbits. But the ruffians do not submit so quietly.

Merry and Pippin understand that they will have to fight the ruffians, and they make plans to do so by recalling the need for "uppishness." Here, uppishness takes the form of wisdom and courage, which is embodied in Merry's response to Sam's suggestion to take cover at Tom Cotton's: "It's no good 'getting *under* cover'. That is just what people have been doing, and just what the ruffians like. They will come *down* on us in force [...]" (*LotR* VI.8.983).<sup>10</sup> Instead of allowing this downward repression by the ruffians, Merry uses upward imagery to "*Raise* the Shire! [...] 'Now! Wake [*up*] all our people [...]. [The Shire-folk] want a match, though, and they'll go *up* in fire'" (983). Merry and Pippin demonstrate their courageous uppishness by organizing and leading the

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Aragorn" 12). While it is clear that the form of leadership attempted by the four hobbits is certainly not totalitarian, the question of whether it is democratic or republican, or even how the notion of Guardianship fits into this government, if indeed it is democratic, is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>10</sup> Emphases on directional imagery in this and the following quotation are mine.

hobbits against the ruffians in the first battle fought in the Shire in over two hundred and fifty years. Their performances in this battle demonstrate their possession of courage, a necessary quality of Platonic Guardians.

Having demonstrated their wisdom and courage, the only quality which remains in question to prove the four hobbits' worthiness as Guardians is temperance. Temperance demands restraint from succumbing to one's desires. Frodo and Merry show temperance during the battle when the ruffians surrender: after killing the leader of the ruffians, Merry "drew his forces off, encircling the last remnant of the Men in a wide ring of archers," effectively halting the battle once its purpose is served (*LotR* VI.8.992). Strongly advocating for peace, Frodo also demonstrates temperance during the battle: "Frodo had been in the battle, but he had not drawn sword, and his chief part had been to prevent the hobbits in their wrath at their losses, from slaying those of their enemies who threw down their weapons" (VI.8.993). In this way, Frodo, Merry, and Pippin are clearly fit to be Guardians of the Shire; their wisdom enables them to courageously restore justice and peace in the Shire, while their temperance checks them from seeking fruitless revenge.

Once the band of ruffians is defeated and Lotho, Saruman, and Wormtongue die, the Shire is effectively cleansed of the tyranny that had tainted it. The leadership that Frodo, Merry, and Pippin have demonstrated so far confirms that the Shire's call for leadership has been answered and the establishment of a worthy, virtuous Guardianship is well on its way. Additionally, the purging of tyranny in the Shire resembles the role of the American superhero: ridding society of "the intruding, evil other." However, as already discussed, this is only half of the cleansing needed in the Shire. With Sharkey and Pimple gone, there still remain the maintenance of justice and the cleansing of the underlying, intolerant problems of difference that must continuously be kept at bay. And for this we need a Guardian-in-community.

Frodo seems to be the logical choice for Guardian of the Shire after all he learns and overcomes on the Ring and Shire Quests; however, the wounds that he suffers leave him too permanently injured (physically and emotionally) to be able to remain in and enjoy the Shire. Each sixth of October and thirteenth of March (the respective anniversaries of Frodo's wound at Weathertop and of his sting by Shelob), Frodo's pains and illnesses return (*LotR* VI.9.1025). This recurring pain becomes too much for Frodo to endure, and he decides finally to journey to the Grey Havens with Bilbo, Gandalf, Elrond, and Galadriel: "But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them" (*LotR* VI.9.1006). Michael Livingston attributes Frodo's inability to re-assimilate into the Shire community to the trauma associated with the wounds he suffers in the Ring

Quest, and to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: "Like veterans returning to England, Frodo finds that he is a stranger in the land that he fought so long and hard to save" (88). Devin Brown suggests that in addition to the quest to destroy the Ring, Frodo journeys to move from isolation to community in *LotR*. This movement, however, "is only partially complete at the end of the story" (163). Brown implies that perhaps Frodo's voyage to the Grey Havens might fulfill his quest from isolation to community (172-73), but regardless, Frodo cannot be the internal Guardian the Shire needs. Croft discusses how Frodo represents the "unwilling leader" who "alternates between reluctantly accepting a leadership role thrust upon him and rejecting or trying to escape it" (*War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien [War and Tolkien]* 83). Croft suggests that to Frodo, leadership is temptation, and in leaving for the Grey Havens Frodo "is at last free of any temptation or responsibility for leading others" (87). Whether it is his wounds, his quest for community, or his redemption from leadership responsibilities that motivates Frodo to leave for the Grey Havens, his choice to entrust the Shire to Sam is undeniably wise.

Socrates claims that a society qualifies as ideal once justice is restored to it and maintained, and a just society is one in which all its members perform the one function in the community for which they are best suited. At heart, Sam is first and foremost a gardener, and it is no coincidence that "gardener" and "Guardian" are so phonetically alike. As a gardener, Sam possesses an understanding and appreciation for nurturing that will undoubtedly aid him in ensuring that the needs and desires of all members of the Shire are met. These skills will enable him to preserve successfully the delicate balance of justice in the Shire. Sam's unwavering servitude to Frodo attests to his temperate ability to restrain himself from putting his own needs before those whom he serves. Croft identifies Sam's leadership training as arising from being "the perfect follower" (*War and Tolkien* 92) and it is his devotion to Frodo that makes Sam the best candidate for Guardianship. Sam will prove to be a wise eventual choice for Mayor of the Shire since it is reasonable to expect him to show the same level of devotion to the Shire that he does to Frodo, thus placing his position firmly and devotedly within the Shire community.<sup>11</sup> Sam's wisdom is illustrated by choosing to pity Gollum and not to kill him at Mount Doom. And his courage cannot be doubted after literally carrying Frodo into the Cracks of Doom. In her own wisdom and foresight, Galadriel knew Sam to be the rightful restorer and

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<sup>11</sup> In Appendix B, Frodo takes up the position of Mayor. However, he becomes ill and resigns the post to Will Whitfield again, who holds it from S.R. 1420 until Sam is elected in 1427. Sam remains Mayor of the Shire until 1476 when he, the last of the Ring-bearers, finally sails across the sea to the Grey Havens (*LotR* Appendix B.1070-72).

preserver of justice in the Shire when she gave Sam a box of earth from her orchard upon his departure from Lothlórien:

It will not keep you on your road, nor defend you against any peril; but if you keep it and see your home again at last, then perhaps it may reward you. Though you should find all barren and laid waste, there will be few gardens in Middle-earth that will bloom like your garden, if you sprinkle this earth there. (*LotR* II.8.366)

Galadriel foresees that Sam will one day need to restore the Shire, and this symbolic gift of hope will allow Sam to grow a magnificent garden out of the “barren” land of the Shire, symbolizing the restoration and maintenance of the Shire’s own “garden”: justice.

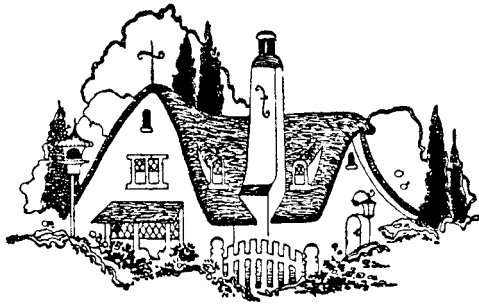
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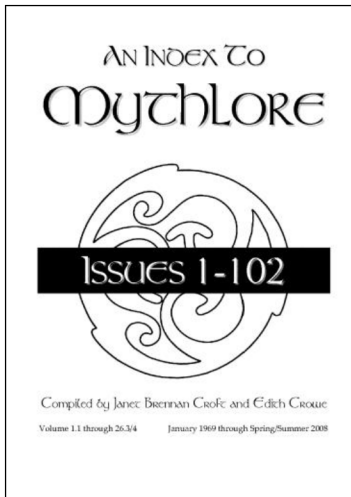
#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID M. WAITO is currently completing his M.A. in English Literature at the University of Ottawa in Ontario. This article grew out of his B.A. honors thesis project which focused on issues of leadership in *The Lord of the Rings*.



Mythopoeic Society member Donald T. Williams has recently been appointed editor of *The Lamp-Post*, the quarterly journal of The Southern California C.S. Lewis Society. You don't have to live on the left coast to be a member of The Southern California C.S. Lewis Society and a subscriber to *The Lamp-Post*! Frequent contributors include well-know Lewis scholars such as Joe R. Christopher, Paul F. Ford, Marvin D. Hinten, and Jim Prothero. To become a Society member and *Lamp-Post* subscriber, send a check in the amount of \$15.00 for one year payable to the Southern California C.S. Lewis Society to: The Southern California C.S. Lewis Society, P.O. Box 2232, Irwindale, CA 91706. Send literary submissions (articles, essays, poetry, or book reviews on Lewis, his life, his circle, his works, and his ideas) to Williams at dtw@tfc.edu as Microsoft Word attachments. *The Lamp-Post* uses MLA format for citations, and is indexed in the *MLA Annual Bibliography*.

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