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Tolkien's Gimpy Heroes

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Abstract

Tolkien, as an invalided survivor of The Somme, was well aware of the prevalence of disabled soldiers and the difficult life they faced in post-war England. He reflects many of their difficulties in his depictions of war survivors in *The Children of Húrin* and in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Children of Húrin*; Tolkien, J.R.R. —Characters—Sador; Tolkien, J.R.R.

—Characters—Gwindor; Tolkien, J.R.R. —Characters—Brandir; Tolkien, J.R.R. —Characters—Frodo; World War I; World War I—Social effects; War trauma



TOLKIEN'S CROPPY HEROES

VICTORIA HOLTZ WODZAK

IN MINAS TIRITH, AFTER THE BATTLE ON THE PELENNOR FIELD, the deaths of Denethor and Théoden, and the departure of the Host of Gondor to confront Sauron at the gates of Mordor, the “[f]air weather and clear sun [...] seemed but a mockery to men whose days held little hope, and who looked each morning for news of doom” (Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*, [LotR] VI.5.958). Éowyn and Faramir, accustomed to the din and danger of battle, find themselves instead in the quiet and relative safety of the Houses of Healing. Éowyn, clearly, finds her confinement frustrating. She demands news of the women who care for her. They can provide her none. She inquires of the Warden whether there is no deed to do, for, she says, she is “in great unrest, and [...] cannot lie longer in sloth” (VI.5.958). She takes her complaint to Faramir, hoping that he will release her to some war-like task and fearing that he will “think her merely wayward, like a child that has not the firmness of mind to go on with a dull task to the end” (959-60). Instead, he sympathizes with her frustration, telling her that he himself is “prisoner of the healers” (959). He would hesitate, he says, to “cross [the warden’s] will” (960) and instead, awaits his own healing. He tells her “death in battle may come to us all yet, willing or unwilling. You will be better prepared to face it in your own manner, if while there is still time you do as the Healer commanded.¹ You and I, we must endure with patience the hours of waiting” (960).

It is easy to read Éowyn’s frustrations and their causes in this passage because Tolkien gives her a free voice to express them.² It is somewhat harder to recognize that Faramir, warrior and steward of the city, shares them. His frustration is revealed only in a few passing words. He describes himself as a “prisoner” and one who must follow the dictates of the healers, even though he realizes that any wholeness he might gain is likely to be short-lived. They both must “endure with patience” the waiting, the inaction, the not knowing. He can

¹ Here, Faramir recognizes what Éowyn bitterly pointed out to Aragorn: that if the warriors fail, those who remain behind “have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more” (*LotR* V.2.784).

² For a full analysis of the causes of Éowyn’s frustration, see Johnson, “Éowyn’s Grief.”

only invite Éowyn to join him in the garden in the sun to walk and to wait, and to look east.³

Faramir is not alone in his frustration. In *The Children of Húrin*, Tolkien provides three studies of the effect of injury and disability on individuals' social standing. Sador is the lame household servant of Húrin and Morwen; Gwindor, an elf, is only a shadow of his former self, following his imprisonment by Morgoth, and his escape from thralldom; Brandir, while a skillful leader of the men of Brethil, is lame and cannot rival Túrin in love or leadership. All three offer important assets, but to their people, what they offer pales in comparison to the merit of those who are un-maimed by war or misfortune.⁴

Sador is a member of Húrin's household to whom the child Túrin turns for companionship, advice, and the occasional small gift. As an old man, Sador

loved [...] to dwell upon the short days of his full manhood before his maiming.

"That was a great battle they say, son of Húrin. I was called from my tasks in the wood in the need of that year; but I was not in the Bragollach, or I might have got my hurt with more honour." (Tolkien, *Children of Hurin* [CH] 41)

As a soldier, Sador fought Morgoth's orcs under Húrin, and they successfully "drove the Orcs into the sand" (CH 42), but he lost his joy in war. He tells Túrin "[b]ut alas! My love of battle was sated, for I had seen spilled blood and wounds enough; and I got leave to come back to the woods that I yearned for. And there I got my hurt; for a man that flies from his fear may find that he has only taken a short cut to meet it" (CH 42).

Sador's injury is not the honorable wound suffered in battle. Instead, "by ill-luck or the mishandling of his axe he had hewn his right foot, and the footless leg had shrunken" (CH 41). He is now a lame house-man in the service

³ Similarly, Merry watches the men of Gondor and Pippin, "a small but upright figure among the tall men of Minas Tirith," march off to Mordor, doubting he will ever see him again. With little hope remaining "the pain in his arm returned, and he felt weak and old, and the sunlight seemed thin" (*LotR* V.10.883-84). He had wanted to go, but his injuries force him to remain in the care of the healers too.

⁴ In her study, Margaret Sinex maps this pattern onto the pattern of shifting views of wounded veterans in the years following World War I. She concludes that veterans were increasingly set aside by a society that came to value the aesthetics of the whole male body enhanced by exercise and muscle-building programs. Similarly, Joanna Bourke observes "[t]he war-maimed competed for limited economic and emotional resources with disabled civilians: in the end, there were no winners in this struggle. By the late 1920's, the respect that had initially been given to the fragmented bodies of war-mutilated men had ended" (31).

of Húrin and “of small account” (CH 41). Húrin honors him for his artistic skill at carving small animals, and eventually a great wooden chair, and perhaps for his ability to recall the deeds of the past, but Morwen is suspicious of Sador, pointing out that “he is self-maimed by his own want of skill, and he is slow with his tasks, for he spends much time on trifles unbidden” (CH 49). Húrin tells Morwen to “[g]ive him pity nonetheless [...]. An honest hand and a true heart may hew amiss; and the harm may be harder to bear than the work of a foe” (CH 50). It is difficult to miss the sting in Morwen’s assessment or the note of self-doubt in Sador’s words about himself.⁵

Sador’s story remains a sad one. Many years later, Túrin finds him, now an old beggar huddled around Brodda’s hearth fire. Sador observes that if it weren’t for his “cursed [accident] in the woods long ago, [he] would be lying in the Great Mound now” (CH 184). The “hurt” of his youth that lamed him is now, in his age, described as “cursed.” Sador draws Túrin outside, and cautions him, saying that “[y]ou speak too loud, and I too much, for an Easterling’s hall” (CH 185). Sador tells Túrin that “[f]ew are we left; and we are old and weaponless. Happier are those in the Great Mound” (CH 185). After Túrin kills Brodda and incites an ill-fated rebellion in his hall, Sador’s dying words to him are to “[g]o, and do not come back, unless with greater strength. [...] Go, or you will end here. Farewell!” (CH 189).

Like Sador, Gwindor has suffered injuries that do not permit him to return to his life as a soldier. Taken captive during the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, Gwindor, like other captured Noldor, was put to work mining metals and gems in Morgoth’s mines. After fourteen years, he escaped, and Beleg Strongbow finds him while searching for the band of orcs that has captured Túrin and is taking him to Angband. Gwindor had lost his left hand during his escape and “was but a bent and timid shadow of his former shape and mood” (CH 152). Together, Beleg and Gwindor rescue Túrin from the orcs, and after Beleg’s death at Túrin’s unwitting hand, Gwindor guides Túrin in his madness and grief to find healing in the waters of Eithel Ivrin. When Túrin asks his name, Gwindor replies that he is a “wandering Elf, a thrall escaped, whom Beleg met and comforted [...]. Yet once [he] was Gwindor son of Guilin, a lord of Nargothrond, until [he] went to the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, and was enslaved in Angband” (CH 157). His reply reveals the extent to which his experience has eroded his sense

⁵ It is also easy to hear echoes of skepticism about Tolkien’s contemporaries in World War I who were suspected of self-injury to escape the trenches. Self-inflicted wounds could, in theory, be punished by firing squad, although in practice imprisonment was the usual result. There were 3,894 soldiers imprisoned for self-inflicted wounds (“1914-1918 Casualty Figures”).

of identity. He used to be Gwindor, an elf with a claim to lineage and title. Now, he is a "wandering elf" to whom he attributes no name.

Eventually, Gwindor returns to Nargothrond with Túrin, but he finds himself increasingly displaced by Túrin in both policy and love. Gwindor has "[fallen] into dishonour, for he was no longer forward in arms, and his strength was small; and the pain of his maimed left arm was often upon him" (*CH* 163). By contrast, Túrin

was young, and only now reached his full manhood; and he was in truth the son of Morwen Eledhwen to look upon: tall, dark-haired and pale-skinned, with grey eyes, and his face more beautiful than any other among mortal men, in the Elder Days. His speech and bearing were those of the ancient kingdom of Doriath, and even among the Elves he might be taken at first meeting for one from the great houses of the Noldor. So valiant was Túrin, and so exceedingly skilled in arms, especially with sword and shield, that the Elves said that he could not be slain, save by mischance, or an evil arrow from afar. (*CH* 163-64)

Gwindor and Túrin disagree on the proper defensive policy for Nargothrond. Túrin advocates an aggressive strategy. He argues that their best hope lies in "[v]aliant defence of the borders and hard blows ere the enemy gathers" (*CH* 162). He asks whether the women and children of Nargothrond "love such skulkers in the woods, hunting strays like a wolf, better than one who puts on his helm and figured shield, and drives away the foe, be they far greater than all his host?" (*CH* 162).⁶ Gwindor disagrees. He tells Túrin "you think of yourself and of your own glory, and bid us each do likewise; but we must think of others beside ourselves, for not all can fight and fall, and those we must keep from war and ruin, while we can" (*CH* 162). He points out that the river that Túrin complains slows the passage of arms and soldiers has been Nargothrond's most certain defense against enemies. He says "[p]etty victories will prove profitless at the last [...]; for thus Morgoth learns where the boldest of his enemies are to be found, and gathers strength great enough to destroy them [...] Only in secrecy lies hope of survival" (*CH* 160). But the elves of Nargothrond no longer respect Gwindor's cautious views about confrontation with Morgoth, and they accept Túrin's demand that they build the bridge at their gates. The decision is fatal, for "the bridge that Túrin had caused to be built over Narog proved an

⁶ This contrast is highlighted in more approving terms in Tolkien's depiction of Faramir's woodcraft. The characteristics that Túrin derides as "skulking" are the same characteristics that Carter points out are typical of the twentieth century soldier and ones that Tolkien seems to admire, given his positive depiction of Faramir and his apparent reservations about the more overtly aggressive Boromir (92).

evil; for it was great and mightily made and could not swiftly be destroyed, and thus the enemy came readily over the deep river, and Glaurung came in full fire against the Doors of Felagund, and overthrew them, and passed within" (*CH* 177-78).

Gwindor and Túrin become unwitting rivals for the love of Finduilas, daughter of the king. When Gwindor returned to Nargothrond, only Finduilas "knew him and welcomed him, for she had loved him, and indeed they were betrothed, before the Nirnaeth" (*CH* 159). But after his ordeal Gwindor seemed "as one of the aged among mortal Men, because of his torments and his labours; and now also he was maimed" (*CH* 159). As Gwindor watches, Túrin spends more and more time confiding in Finduilas, as she seeks him out, though it seems to be by chance (*CH* 164). Túrin notes that "Gwindor's friendship grew cooler towards him; and he wondered also that whereas at first the woe and horror of Angband had begun to be lifted from him, now he seemed to slip back into care and sorrow" (*CH* 165).⁷ And Túrin advises Finduilas that "[Gwindor] has suffered in the darkness of Angband; and it is hard for one so valiant to be thus crippled and backward perforce. He needs all solace, and a longer time for healing" (*CH* 166). But Finduilas is conflicted, "[f]or she honoured Gwindor and pitied him, and wished not to add one tear to his suffering; but against her will her love for Túrin grew day by day" (*CH* 165). She tells Gwindor "I love you [...] and I am ashamed that I love you not more, but have taken a love even greater, from which I cannot escape. I did not seek it, and long I put it aside. But if I have pity for your hurts, have pity on mine. Túrin loves me not, nor will" (*CH* 168). Mostly by virtue of being strong, forceful, and whole, Túrin has overcome Gwindor, though he takes little pleasure in his success. Dying, Gwindor tells Túrin "though I love you, son of Húrin, yet I rue the day that I took you from the Orcs. But for your prowess and your pride, still I should have love and life, and Nargothrond should yet stand a while" (*CH* 177). Gwindor has lost everything—home, kin, the love of Finduilas—to Túrin the warrior.

Unlike Sador and Gwindor, both of whom can claim some sort of status as former warriors, though it counts for little, Brandir of Brethil "was no man of war, being lamed by a leg broken in a misadventure in childhood; and he was moreover gentle in mood, loving wood rather than metal, and the knowledge of things that grow in the earth rather than other lore" (*CH* 193).⁸ He tries to rule

⁷ On the complexity and persistence of post-traumatic stress and its study among World War I soldiers, see Jones, Fear, and Wessley. For information on the lingering after effects of torture, see Moisaner and Erikson, de Feu, and Erelvelles "In Search."

⁸ One hears in this description echoes of Tolkien's own well-known love of trees and of Treebeard's negative description of Saruman as a wizard with "a mind full of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment" (*LotR* III.4.473).

his people, who are “dwindled now by war” (CH 193) in peace and to avoid confrontation with the orcs of Morgoth. They live secretly in a stockade deep in the Forest of Brethil, a “remnant of free men, the last of the Three Houses to defy the power of the North” (CH 221).

Just as in Nargothrond, the people are divided over how best to survive the long-lasting hostility of Morgoth. Túrin, now under the name of Turambar, tries to accept the practice of secrecy and to “renounce name and kin” (CH 196), but he cannot ignore the orcs who prowl the Forest of Brethil. His hunting, whether with sword or bow, displeases Brandir, who hopes to “preserve his people by silence and secrecy” (CH 197). As the orcs increase their pressure on the Woodmen of Brethil, one of men comes to Túrin and says “[s]ee, lord, now is the time of our need come upon us, after a false peace, even as I foreboded. Did you not ask to be counted one of our people, and no stranger? Is this peril not yours also? For our homes will not remain hidden, if the Orcs come further into our land” (CH 222). Turambar (Túrin) accepts the challenge, and he leads the woodmen against the orcs, whom they kill and burn in great numbers. He now “ordered things as he would, as if he were lord of Brethil, and no man heeded Brandir” (CH 223).

Glaurung's approach forces the contrast between Turambar and Brandir into high relief. Brandir's authority is challenged by Dorlas, a follower of Turambar, and one who has long chafed under the cautious, and increasingly ineffectual, leadership of Brandir. He says “[h]earken, Men of Brethil, it is now well seen that for the evil of our times the counsels of Brandir were vain. There is no escape by hiding. Will none of you take the place of the son of Handir, that the house of Haleth be not put to shame?” (CH 227). Dorlas' tone of bitter disrespect, for both cautious leadership and the physical inability to hold his own as the “son of Handir” and head of his family is unmistakable. Turambar does not defend Brandir, and it falls to another kinsman to say to Dorlas

You do evilly [...] to speak thus to the shame of your lord, whose limbs by ill hazard cannot do as his heart would. Beware lest the contrary be seen in you at some turn! And how can it be said that his counsels were vain, when they were never taken? You, his liege, have ever set them at naught. I say to you that Glaurung comes now to us, as to Nargothrond before, because our deeds have betrayed us, as he feared. (CH 227)

Turambar's physical prowess has overcome Brandir's wisdom, his abilities as a healer, and his fundamentally wise strategy for, if not defeating his enemy, then at least avoiding or delaying the full pressure of Morgoth's malice. Like Dorlas, the men of Brethil, challenged and encouraged by Turambar, set Brandir's counsels “at naught” and pay little respect to the wise ruler who has kept them alive but who cannot lead them into battle.

When Níniel arrives in Brethil, suffering illness and amnesia, Brandir “used all his skill in her healing” (CH 216), and as she recovered, he taught her what he knew of the forest and living things. In time “Brandir grew to love her; and when she grew strong she would lend him her arm for his lameness, and she called him her brother. But to Turambar her heart was given, and only at his coming would she smile, and only when he spoke gaily would she laugh” (CH 217). When Turambar proposes marriage, Brandir counsels her to wait. His “heart was sick within him” (CH 218), but he tells Níniel he “scarce know[s] why” (CH 219). He characterizes himself as her “[I]ame brother [...] unloved and unlovely” (CH 219). Ultimately, Níniel marries Turambar, in spite of Brandir’s reservations, to the sorrow of all concerned. Overridden in both policy and love, Brandir breaks his staff and says to the few of his people who have not followed either Turambar or Níniel to confront Glaurung,⁹

Behold how I am scorned, and all my counsel disdained. Choose you another to lead you: for here I renounce both lordship and people. Let Turambar be your lord in name, since already he has taken all my authority. Let none seek of me ever again either counsel or healing! (CH 233).

Sador, Gwindor and Brandir: all three are sidelined by disability and lose the respect of their communities.¹⁰ Their experiences beat out a repeating pattern: young, whole men prevail; damaged men don’t.¹¹

⁹ In his despair, Brandir sounds like Denethor, who tells Gandalf that, if he cannot rule as he always has he “will have *naught*: neither life diminished, nor love halved, nor honour abated” (*LotR* V.7.854). Denethor also implies to Pippin that he fears infirmity and disability. He shows Pippin that he is wearing mail under his long black cloak and tells him “[T]hus have I walked, and thus now for many years have I slept [...] lest with age the body should grow soft and timid” (V.4.818).

¹⁰ Of course, there is another pattern implicit here. Túrin is a clear example. He carries with him a striking and destructive pattern of damage, partly invoked by Morgoth’s curse on his family, but perpetuated by the price that repeated war-based trauma has exacted. While lacking obvious physical injury, he is impulsive, prone to violence, and ever-vigilant, all clear markers of what, today, we call PTSD. Other likely carriers of PTSD are Boromir and Éowyn. Boromir is also impulsive, angry, prone to violence, and all too easily tempted by the power the Ring offers. Éowyn, doubly-hampered by her life experience and her gender, is suicidal in her insistence on riding to war as Dernhelm. She is marked by the early loss of her parents, the recent loss of her cousin Théodred, and the ongoing violence the Rohirrim both exert and endure to protect their land. Further, as a woman, she pointedly explains, she is denied any outlet or expression for her stress.

¹¹ Tolkien doesn’t have to be consistent across all maimed heroes to make his point. In both literature and history, there are the exceptional few who manage to thrive—or who appear to. Maedhros, for example, is one of those exceptions. He loses a hand as the price of his

A similar pattern plays itself out when Frodo and his companions return to the Shire. Frodo has been clearly identified as heroic. Sam has wondered, on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol, if they will be put into stories and tales. After their rescue from Orodruin, the hobbits awaken in a wood on the Field of Cormallen and are greeted as they emerge from the wood by a "great host" whose "swords were unsheathed, and spears were shaken, and horns and trumpets sang [...]: *Eglerio!* [...] *Praise them!*" (*LotR* VI.4.953). And to Sam's "final and complete satisfaction and pure joy" (954) a minstrel offers the lay of "Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom." Finally, for his coronation, Aragorn appoints Frodo to carry the crown to him, and Gandalf to place it on his head because, he says, "by the labour and valour of many I have come into my inheritance" (VI.5.967). But there are signs that Frodo's heroism has left its mark.¹² He tries to decline carrying a sword, even for ceremonial purposes. When he returns to the Shire, he exerts his energies to prevent conflict and bloodshed, arguing "there is to be no slaying of hobbits, not even if they have gone over to the other side. [...] No hobbit has ever killed another on purpose in the Shire, and it is not to begin now. And nobody is to be killed at all, if it can be helped" (VI.8.1006). Perhaps, in a war-damaged world such as his, it is the most valuable thing he can do. But his friends chide him: "[y]ou won't rescue Lotho, or the Shire," Merry tells him, "just by being shocked and sad" (1006). It is Merry and Pippin's military experience that raises the Shire and wrests control of it from Sharkey, Lotho, and the ruffians, at the cost of seventy men and nineteen hobbits dead, and thirty hobbits wounded. Frodo's hope for a peaceable and bloodless resolution fails. Further, he cannot protect Saruman from the murderous Wormtongue, nor can he protect Wormtongue, a murderer and likely cannibal, from the arrows of indignant hobbits.

By his own account, Frodo is tired, and he is damaged by knife, sting, and tooth. He carries incurable wounds both visible and invisible. Flieger argues that

Frodo's greatest unhealed wound transcends his physical maiming and loss. It is the deeper self-inflicted wound of his "unreasoning self-reproach" [at his personal failure to destroy the Ring]. [Frodo] has been changed both externally and internally into the maimed and battered body and damaged psyche, the "broken failure" who returns to the Shire [...] only to fade out of the picture and finally to leave it altogether. (18)

escape from the cliff where Morgoth had suspended him by his wrist. After his rescue, he reassumes his position of leadership and teaches himself to fight left handed.

¹² For a thorough analysis of Frodo and what Tolkien's contemporaries termed *shell shock*, and what modern psychologists term *post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD), see Michael Livingston, "The Shell-Shocked Hobbit."

Contrast matters here. Frodo has sacrificed the most and has returned maimed and broken, but Sam, Merry and Pippin, who are whole, assume public position. Merry and Pippin ride the familiar roads of the Shire in their armor, a place where its only obvious function is to draw attention to themselves, singing and reveling in their unusual size and martial glory. Sam settles happily into Bag End with Rosie, soon with baby Elanor, and a “vague anxiety about his master” (*LotR* VI.9.1025). Sam notices, with pain, “how little honour Frodo had in his own country. Few people knew or wanted to know about his deeds and adventures; their admiration and respect were given mostly to Mr. Meriadoc and Mr. Peregrin and (if Sam had known it) to himself” (1025).

Gradually, Frodo withdraws from the life of the Shire. He resigns his post as temporary mayor as soon as Will Whitfoot has regained sufficient girth for the office, and lives a quiet life, “writing a great deal and going through all his notes” (VI.9.1025). His withdrawal is symptomatic of his psychological and physical maiming. Flieger notes that

Frodo’s illnesses, the year-marks of his wounds, are debilitating reminders of his ordeals, reminders to readers not just of the inescapable fact that Frodo does not recover, but that Tolkien does not want us to forget that he does not recover. Frodo at the end of the book is less “like a glass filled with clear light” than like a deeply damaged, battle-scarred veteran of war whose post-traumatic flash backs are the psychic souvenirs of his physical injuries. (17)

Smol agrees with Flieger’s assessment of the seriousness of Frodo’s injuries, arguing that

Frodo’s body is the territory on which he battles to maintain his physical and psychological integrity. As a liminal figure—as someone who has crossed the boundary between a familiar peaceful world and an unknown world of war—Frodo struggles to resist the disintegration of other boundaries that shore up his sense of self: those between human and animal, animate and inanimate, life and death. (39)

Smol continues: “Frodo’s inability to return successfully to a peacetime life is figured as an inability to awaken fully into the old life he once led. He continues to be suspended in the liminal position that he experienced throughout the quest” (56).¹³ While it seems to be Frodo’s choice to withdraw from the life of

¹³ It is worth noting, as Flieger does, that this passage was composed at the time when Tolkien was likely also watching his “much damaged” son Michael trying to “recover a shadow of his old health.” Carpenter, in a footnote to the letter Flieger quotes, documents Michael’s discharge from the RAF after being found “unfit for further military service due

the Shire, at least as far as his damaged state grants him choice, his community does not recognize what he has done or seek him out. They allow the withdrawal. One wonders about the Shire. If they can't recognize Frodo's sacrifice, are they too complacent to keep the peace? How long before those who wanted to kill Bill Ferny and the other ruffians resurface? How long before suspicions and resentments against hobbits who "collaborated" with the ruffians start to cause division? The Shire is defended against this sort of fate by hobbit temperament, but clearly not all of its inhabitants are immune to the likes of Sharkey.

As Frodo has noted, he can't really go home again. Instead, he turns to Sam, recognizing in him someone who is "meant to be solid and whole" (*LotR* VI.9.1026). As they prepare to part ways when Frodo joins the company making its way to the Grey Havens, Frodo tells Sam "I have 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" (1029). Not only is Frodo giving up the Shire, but in a very real sense, he is also giving up himself. He says to Sam "you are my heir: all that I had and might have had I leave to you" (1029). Frodo has finished his pages in the Red Book. Those that remain are for Sam. Frodo tells him "your hands and your wits will be needed everywhere. [...] [Y]ou will read things out of the Red Book, and keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, so that people will remember the Great Danger and so love their beloved land all the more" (1029). Sam is the defense against complacency, the holder of memory, and that, Frodo hopes, will protect the Shire once he is gone.

A large part of the problem is the response of the community to the maiming of a hero. Sador seems to be viewed with a degree of suspicion. Gwindor is described as a shadow of his former self, and while his ongoing pain may explain at least part of his withdrawal from active leadership, it seems all too easy for Túrin to take his place. Similarly, Brandir, when things get tough, can't hold his own against Túrin's full-bodied and aggressive style. Hobbits are mostly just comfortable and complacent. Once Sam's garden dust has restored the health and fertility of the Shire, they are content to settle back into the quiet, complacent rhythms of their lives, trusting in habits and customs and distance from the outside world to protect them. They have little knowledge of the "Great Danger" that has struck them only a glancing blow. Rosie Cotton and Sam's

to 'severe shock to the nervous system due to prolonged exposure to enemy action'" (*Letters* 439n74.2). Flieger suggests that "[Tolkien's] portrait of the heroic, failed, irrevocably damaged Frodo may be part oblique allusion, part oblique tribute to this other 'much-damaged' soldier" (18). For further information on Michael's military service, see Eden, "Michael H.R. Tolkien (1920-1984)."

Gaffer reflect the Shire's views of the heroism that has delivered them. Rosie says to Sam "Well, be off with you! [...] If you've been looking after Mr. Frodo all this while, what d'you want to leave him for, as soon as things look dangerous?" (VI.8.1008). The Gaffer observes that Sam has "been mixing in strange company. What's come of his weskit?" Gaffer asks. "I don't hold with wearing ironmongery, whether it wears well or no" (1014). Partly, hobbits like Gaffer and Rosie are just provincial and ignorant, but they are also too comfortable not knowing about the dangers of the outside world that their heroes, both maimed and whole, have saved them from. They are happy to watch Merry and Pippin in their shiny armor and to enjoy the restored fertility that comes from Sam's gift. But for the maimed hero in their midst, they seem to spare little thought.¹⁴

Tolkien could not have been unaware of the disabling cost of war.¹⁵ British amputees alone numbered 250,000, and that number doesn't include soldiers disabled by shell shock, trench fever, or the much-prized *blighty*, a wound severe enough to send a soldier back to England, but not so severe that it threatened his survival or long term physical health.¹⁶ Tolkien's good friend C.S. Lewis received a blighty wound that sent him home. Although Lewis required surgery later in life to remove shrapnel from his chest, he had lived many years in good health before surgery was required. Tolkien himself was invalidated home from the Somme in 1916, suffering from what proved to be a particularly stubborn case of trench fever. He spent the balance of the war stationed with other partially-invalided soldiers and men considered too old to be sent to fight in France, guarding the Humber River estuary against possible German incursion. His ailment was an invisible disability, perhaps laying him open to suspicions, or self-accusations, of malingering.¹⁷ Finally, writing to

¹⁴ The problem of the maimed soldier in post-war Britain is a complicated one. Among the most "side-lined" were those who had suffered facial disfigurement. For an analysis, see Biernoff, "The Rhetoric of Disfigurement in First World War Britain." Sinex explains that, in the post-war years, disabled veterans were increasingly overlooked and undervalued in a society inclined to treat them as children. Additionally, Sinex argues, because of a growing interest in the aesthetics of the male body, and body-building programs to enhance the male body, the social space for the damaged male body shrank. Also see Bourke.

¹⁵ For a description of some of the damaged survivors of the war, see Hochschild, 347-59. For casualty figures, see "1914-1918 Casualty Figures."

¹⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *blighty* as an affectionate slang term for England common in the early twentieth century, especially among travelers, and a *blighty wound* as a term for a non-life-threatening war injury that would send a soldier home.

¹⁷ For details on Tolkien's military record, see John Garth, *Tolkien and The Great War* and Janet Brennan Croft, *War in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*. On Lewis's sidelining injury, see Green and Hooper, 55.

Stanley Unwin in 1944, Tolkien mentions his son Michael, "a much damaged soldier" who is trying to "recover a shadow of his old health" (*Letters* 86).

Christopher Tolkien, writing in the appendix to *The Children of Húrin*, explains that, while the earliest versions of the matter of Túrin/Turambar were written before 1919, it was a story that his father worked and reworked for many years and in many different forms until what he calls the "great 'intrusion'" (280) of *Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien returned to these stories in the 1950's, when he turned his attention to "the latter part of the story, the culmination of his disastrous history after the destruction of Nargothrond" (281).¹⁸ If one looks at what else Tolkien was writing in the 1950's, a unifying pattern emerges. Hammond and Scull note that

Tolkien completed *Lord of the Rings* at last, at least in draft, in the period 14 August to 14 September 1948 [...]. Over the next year Tolkien made fair copies and typescripts of *Lord of the Rings* finishing the complete work in October 1949. In doing so he incorporated late changes and additions already in draft and made new changes as well. Not until this late date was [...] Frodo's role in the Scouring of the Shire made passive rather than active. (II.539-540)

In 1953, Tolkien published *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son*, with the accompanying essay "Of ermod." In the essay, Tolkien observes "[t]here could be no more pungent criticism in a few words of "chivalry" in one of responsibility than Wiglaf's exclamation: *oft sceall eorl monig anes willan wræc adreogan*, 'by one man's will many must woe endure'" (24). Given the play's skeptical tone regarding heroism and stories about heroism, and the complementary condemnation of the excesses of chivalry in "Of ermod," these texts, written relatively late in life provide a useful cluster for considering Tolkien's mature thinking on heroism and its results and permit us to include the discussion of "gimpy heroes" in that consideration.

If Tolkien demonstrates a preoccupation with the disabling consequences of injury,¹⁹ he is not alone. If we take Wilfred Owen²⁰ as a

¹⁸ Scull and Hammond trace the complex history of the Túrin/Turambar story, II.1053-1063. Sinex notes that "[w]ith the original *Turambar* of 1919 Tolkien establishes a scrutiny of the wounded male body, and all subsequent prose versions reveal a mounting preoccupation with it" (39).

¹⁹ Smol notes "The frequent occurrence of dismemberment in Tolkien's work seems to be a constant feature of his imagination, quite possibly a reflection of the realities of the reality of injuries caused by shelling in the trenches" (43).

²⁰ While Owen and Tolkien were contemporaries, Garth ("Secrets") documents that there is no evidence that they ever met, nor is there evidence that Tolkien knew Owen's work. Instead, the argument is that the shared socio-historical environment focuses their

representative contemporary of Tolkien, turning to his poem "Disabled" is instructive. In a poem whose overall rhetorical intent is to critique the human waste and dishonesty of the war, Owen depicts a young soldier, sitting in a wheel chair, at dusk, in a suit sewn short at the legs and arms. He is listening to the voices of children on the evening air and, one infers, wishing for death. He notices how girls "touch him like some queer disease" and like Gwindor, he notices, "how the women's eyes / Passed from him to the strong men that were whole." Owen, writing from a hospital in France, speculates about the future of a disabled soldier; Tolkien, writing from England, early on with first-hand insight into life on the home front and the difficulties the whole and the disabled face in war time, and later with the perspective of several decades of observation, is writing from surer knowledge.^{21,22}

Tolkien consistently shows how those with disability are effectively displaced by those who are whole. But he also shows that, despite being displaced, what they have to say matters, and disregarding it has consequences. Tolkien places the alternative, cautionary view in the mouths of his disabled. Sador recognizes the sorrow that Morwen felt as she sent her son into exile, and more significantly, he recognizes the risks that Túrin brings when he returns home as an angry young man whose actions and rash words place everybody in danger.²³ In response to that danger, his long-suffering aunt burns down the

attention on similar issues. Both Fussell and Das provide extensive discussion of war time writers; Croft and Garth provide similar discussion of Tolkien as a war time writer.

²¹ These writers' depictions of the situation of the disabled in wartime are not just a matter of artistic invention, nor are they used as symbols of the debilitating effect of war on a nation, both common, and sometimes objectionable, uses of the disabled in literature. They are anchored in historical reality. Erevelles writes "Wars produce scarcity, and those who suffer the most are society's most vulnerable populations. For example [...] the material and logistic requirements of fighting during World War I had both social and material repercussions for asylum inmates. The wartime rationing of food resulted in decreased caloric intake for inmates as well as less heat, clothing, and medication. These shortages, along with overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions, led to an increase in communicable diseases and mortality rates among asylum inmates. Thus, even though caregivers acknowledged the deplorable conditions in asylums, these conditions were generally accepted as a necessary transfer of resources from those deemed unable to support the war effort to those considered able to do so. These ideas characterized disabled people as 'useless eaters' and justified the violent practice of euthanasia as the right way to alleviate suffering for disabled people" ("Color" 130).

²² For a fuller examination of Tolkien's home front military service and its implications for his writing see Holtz Wodzak, "Tolkien Sidelined."

²³ Boromir resembles Túrin in the disruptive danger he represents. Both are war-damaged, but physically un-maimed. Had Boromir managed to return to Minas Tirith, even without the Ring, one wonders what sort of rash trouble he might have brought with him when confronted with the true king.

house, with herself in it, after Túrin leaves. Gwindor recognizes both the convenience and the risks of a permanent bridge over the Narog. Without it, bringing in supplies is difficult, but the Narog provides a defensible boundary to Nargothrond, which is only breached when, at Túrin's insistence, the elves build the bridge that allows the dragon Glaurung to sack their kingdom. Gwindor counsels caution, prudence, but he is overruled by the rash warrior Túrin.²⁴ Finduilas suffers bitterly for the actions of the warrior she, almost against her will, comes to love. She is taken captive and killed by the marauding orcs who accompany Glaurung. Having rejected Brandir's caution, the men of Brethil find themselves in direct confrontation with the dragon, and Níniel finds herself married to her brother and carrying their child. And Frodo, in leaving the Red Book to Sam, invokes the importance of memory, not Merry and Pippin in their armour, in protecting the Shire from repeating the Great Danger. At your peril, Tolkien seems to suggest, do you listen only to fighters. They miss things, or they act out of haste and *hubris*. It is a warning that often seems to go unheeded. His disabled share something with the prophet Cassandra: they are often right and rarely believed. The contrast between the disabled and whole forces the contrast between two ways of understanding a world of violence to the fore. Echoing the charges and countercharges of appeasement and war-mongering flung back and forth between Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill, Tolkien's characters reenact a debate over the relative merits of quiet resistance vs. confrontation, and it seems that the advocates of quiet resistance often represent the greater wisdom.²⁵

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²⁴ World War I is not the only likely driver of Tolkien's focus on this issue. *Beowulf*, a text Tolkien identifies as a key source, turns to the question of the consequences of rash heroic behavior both in the exchange between Beowulf and Unferth when Beowulf first arrives at Heorot, and again in the implications of the aftermath of Beowulf's fatal confrontation with the dragon which leaves his people free of the dragon, but also bereft of effective leadership.

²⁵ There are echoes of this conflict in the conversation between Gandalf and Denethor. Gandalf charges him with having done little to oppose Mordor other than maintain the boundaries of Gondor; Denethor retorts that all he has wanted is for life to be as it always has been for him and his predecessors.

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