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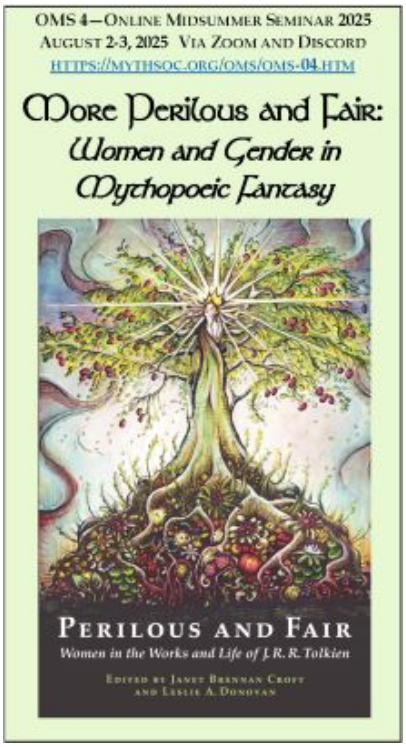


# Well, I'm Back: Samwise Gamgee and the Future of Tolkien's Literary Pastoral

## Abstract

This article examines the treatment of the literary pastoral in *The Lord of the Rings* in order to demonstrate that Tolkien's pastoral, often considered a vestige of authorial nostalgia, is as forward-looking as it is wistful. Through Samwise Gamgee and his connection to the Shire, Tolkien presents a pastoral that, though rooted in memory, is as mutable as nature itself – one that orients the reader forward and conveys that change is not only something to be accepted, but also embraced.

## Additional Keywords

Tolkien; pastoral; Samwise Gamgee

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# "Well, I'm Back": Samwise Gamgee and the Future of Tolkien's Literary Pastoral

MG Prezioso

**Introduction**

"To look upon the maps of Middle Earth [*sic*]," Seth Lerer writes in *A History of Children's Literature*, "is now, after decades of war rooms and map rooms, to see the cartographies of nostalgia" (257). Indeed, to inhabit Middle-earth, with the green of Spring "shimmering in the fields" (I.2.46), Lothlórien's trees moving in the breeze like "a sea of fallow gold" (II.6.346), and the heir of Gondor, "tall as the sea-kings of old" (VI.5.968), becoming king of the realm, is to traverse ancient lands and encounter classic virtues. To be steeped in mythic, epic, Christian, and Old English literary traditions until the wistfulness of J.R.R. Tolkien materializes as vividly as the contours of the world he created.

*The Lord of the Rings* plays host to a variety of literary tropes, genres, and modes, all of which bear the cartographies of nostalgia. The most notable of these, and the one often considered the most nostalgic, is the literary pastoral mode. Tolkien once wrote that "[The trilogy's] *centre* is not in strife and war and heroism (though they are understood and depicted) but in freedom, peace, ordinary life, and good liking" (Tolkien, *Letters* 105, #93), and his narrative, which entwines the conservation of Middle-earth with the quest to destroy the Ring of Power, reflects this aim. Much has been made of Tolkien's own pastoral nostalgia, including the recollections of his childhood in Sarehole and his desire to reclaim a pre-war England untouched by industrialization and war. And through the trilogy, with its emphasis on the natural world and the characters who cultivate it, many have glimpsed an author longing for an England of the past, a "corridor of peace, sunlit and pastoral" (Hynes 3).

However, *The Lord of the Rings* is more than a vestige of nostalgia, and it is the aim of this paper to demonstrate that Tolkien's pastoral is as forward-looking as it is wistful. Beginning with a general overview of the pastoral mode, then transitioning to *The Lord of the Rings*, I will explore Tolkien's treatment of the pastoral by focusing on the role of Samwise Gamgee, the trilogy's gardener and the English "jewel amongst the hobbits" (Tolkien, *Letters* 88, #76). Through Sam, who preserves the Shire while contributing to its evolution, I argue that Tolkien presents a pastoral that, though rooted in memory, is as mutable as nature itself. As Sam develops, so, too does the Shire, and through this fusion of the provincial with the worldly, the old with the new, we see a land as dynamic

as the gardener who cultivated it: a pastoral more prosperous and progressive than ever before. Sam evolves the Shire to ensure its survival, and through this accommodation, we, too, are oriented forward, understanding that seasonal change and the growth that accompanies it is something to be accepted and embraced.

## TOLKIEN AND THE LITERARY PASTORAL

One of England's earliest pastoral poets, Alexander Barclay, characterizes the vastness of the pastoral genre in this excerpt from his 16th century *Eclogues*:

> Beside all these yet finde I many mo
> Which haue employed their diligence also,
> Betwene Shepherdes, as it were but a fable,
> To write of matters true and profitable.
> But all their names I purpose not to write,
> Which in this maner made books infinite. (Barclay ll. 43-48)

Through his poem, which gestures toward the pastoral's limitless boundaries, Barclay suggests that the origins of this mode are indeterminate, and its scope is vast. Andrew Ettin echoes this in *Literature and the Pastoral*, writing that, "It is, after all, hard to find the starting point in an interpretive circle," and that the pastoral is "inherently multiplicitous" (2, 7). Despite the challenges presented by the mode's expansive nature, however, there are certain common threads that give consistency to the pastoral. "All pastoral poets and characters know and remember one another," Ettin continues. "Therein lies one of the special graces of the pastoral universe. It is cozy and timeless […]. Its temporal and spatial continuity is sustained by art, which gives the pastoral world shape, duration, moment, and meaning" (142). It is a remembrance that, as Paul Alpers writes in "What is the Pastoral?", is usually characterized not only by "idyllic landscape, landscape as a setting for song, an atmosphere of *otium*, [and] a conscious attention to art and nature" (22), but also by a "double longing after innocence and happiness" (10). It is also, as Greg Garrard writes in *Ecocriticism*, "the idea of nature as a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies" (59). An homage to the beauty of rural living, the pastoral is one that yearns for a bygone golden age of simplicity, idyll, and harmony with nature.

However, as Ettin also observes, "The idyll is what it is because it is clearly set apart from something different" (11). The pastoral can be a contained entity, sequestered from all external forces; however, it can also be juxtaposed with a threatening "other" environment to appear more harmonious than it would be on its own. Though these binaries vary from text to text, they can

usually be reduced to a conflict between the pastoral and the non-pastoral (Ettin 22). Theocritus, for example, one of the earliest Greek pastoral poets, created in *Idyll VII* a clash between the pastoral and epic literary genres (Toliver 5). Virgil, on the other hand, a contemporary of Theocritus, was preoccupied by class tensions between rural and urban societies, refuting in Eclogue 4 the association between "rustic" and "lowly" by tethering a political leader to the landscape (Toliver 7). And though examples of tensions between the pastoral and non-pastoral are endless, their main similarity is that they all exploit the contrasts between a golden age and a normative world (Toliver 5).

Similar patterns arise in *The Lord of the Rings*. From the Shire, a rural land with its picturesque streams and deep meadows (I.3.71), to the more mystic Lothlórien, land of the Elves, with trees whose "leaves fall not, but turn to gold" and whose "boughs are laden with yellow flowers" (II.6.335), Tolkien emphasizes the beauty of the natural world. His characters, too, are deeply connected to the landscape. Tom Bombadil, a creature of the Old Forest, is as timeless as the pastoral itself, and the Ents, Elves, and Hobbits are all deeply entwined with the worlds they inhabit. Despite their similarities, however, these lands and characters are, like the pastoral mode, multiplicitous, each with their own characteristics and nuances. For example, the Ents are patient, sentient, and cautious, with a different sense of time than the mortal creatures of Middle-earth. The Elves are worldly, immortal, and pensive, while the hobbits embody the essence of ordinary, even provincial, living. And yet, these differences give shape, duration, and meaning to Tolkien's world, infusing it with the beauty and depth that epitomizes the pastoral mode.

All these landscapes lie in stark contrast to the eastern land of Mordor, which Tolkien describes as "a dead land, silent, shadow-folded, waiting for some dreadful stroke" (VI.3.945), as well as to Isengard and its leader, Saruman, with his "mind of metal and wheels" (III.4.473). The moral stakes of the trilogy are reflected in this clash between the natural and the industrial, where a battle between pastoral peace and industrialized warfare ensues, and where war and instruments of war are situated in stark opposition to Middle-earth's pastoral. The pastoral becomes emblematic of the conflict between good and evil, and Tolkien, like other pastoral writers before him, employs the mode, not only to reveal the beauty of the landscape, but also to highlight the narrative's deeper conflicts.

For Tolkien, the clash between the pastoral and the industrial also reveals England's identity: one characterized by rural life in the midst of destructive urbanization. In a letter to his publisher, Rayner Unwin, composed in 1956, Tolkien wrote, "'The Shire' is based on rural England and not any other country in the world […] in much the same sense as are its inhabitants: they go together and are meant to. After all, the book is English, and by an Englishman"

(*Letters* 250, #190). And, just as Tolkien's Shire embodies England, its inhabitants, the hobbits, symbolize English citizens, an "imaginative incarnation and personification of an 'Englishness' which was rooted deep in [Tolkien's] own psyche" (Pearce 153). Tolkien even likens himself to a hobbit, saying, "I am in fact a *Hobbit* (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food […]. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); [and] have a very simple sense of humour" (*Letters* 288, #213), connecting his identity with the pastoral he created. The hobbits are, in many respects, the heroes of the trilogy, and that Tolkien imbues his heroes not with classical virtues but instead with the simplicity and charm of rural living demonstrates his affinity for the pastoral, which he holds in the highest regard.

And yet, the Shire, too, is not without its social tensions. Hobbits, while endearingly simple, are also incredibly provincial. They are distrustful of foreigners, and as noted by Dickerson and Evans, hobbits on one side of the Shire are even leery of hobbits from the other side of the Shire (74). "You should never have gone mixing yourself up with Hobbiton folk," Maggot says to Frodo. "Folk are queer up there" (I.4.94). The sentiment is returned by the hobbits in Bywater, one of whom is Old Noakes: "beats me why any Baggins of Hobbiton should go looking for a wife away there in Buckland, where folks are so queer," he echoes (I.1.22). The Shire may be an idyllic place, and the hobbits might live in harmony with the countryside, but it can also be a place of narrow-mindedness rife with class and gender inequalities. In "Power and Knowledge in Tolkien: The Problem of Difference in the 'Birthday Party,'" Jane Chance observes that, "Marks of distinction—wealth, education, even leadership—can set a hobbit apart and make him different" (117). This is true of Bilbo, for example, whom, after acquiring wealth and worldliness, the other hobbits label "queer" (117), and it is also true of Merry, Pippin, Frodo, and Sam upon their return. "The word 'queer,'" Chance says elsewhere, "illustrat[es] the ability of language to exert control over others by playing on their fears of difference and that which is foreign" (*The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power* 38). The Shire is not without interpersonal conflicts and hostile views towards outsiders, and through these social tensions, as well as its countryside charm, it, too, is emblematic of the literary pastoral mode.

By highlighting the beauty of the natural world, as well as placing it in opposition to various non-pastoral elements, Tolkien seems to remain within the boundaries of the traditional pastoral. What we see as the Quest of the Ring progresses, however, is that through Samwise Gamgee, he begins to evolve the tradition. The following sections will focus on Sam and the pastoral, exploring Sam's ties to the Shire, his commitment to saving it, and how, through his journey, Tolkien's new vision of the pastoral comes to light.

## A Garden Swollen to a Realm: Samwise Gamgee and the Embodiment of the Pastoral

It is impossible to explore Tolkien's pastoral without discussing Sam. Tolkien explained that Sam's purpose was "precisely to bring out the comicness, peasantry, and if you will Englishry of this jewel among the hobbits" (*Letters* 88, #76). And, reflecting these aims, Sam's associations with nature abound. Sam is a gardener, and he joins Frodo on his quest mainly because Gandalf discovers him eavesdropping while trimming the grass-border under Frodo's window (*LotR* I.2.62). He possesses a particular affinity for animals, and he is entranced by the Elves, brother-kin to the hobbits with regard to their respect for nature. Sam is also humble, a virtue to which his name, which means "halfwise, simple," bears witness (*LotR* App.F.1136). Unlike Frodo, Sam is working class, and his roots as a modest Shire gardener become integral to the quest's success. At the Council in Rivendell, Elrond remarks that, "This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere" (II.2.269). These words, which describe the hobbits in both size and scope, encapsulate one of the trilogy's fundamental values: that humility and strength can coincide, and that even the "smallest," literally and symbolically, have a role to play in shaping the course of the future.

However, what Tolkien also makes clear is that, for Sam, this role is realized gradually. When we first meet him, we are introduced to not only a humble gardener, but also a child-like one. He agrees to journey with Frodo, exclaiming, "'Me, sir!' [...] springing up like a dog invited for a walk. 'Me go and see Elves and all! Hooray!' he shouted, and then burst into tears" (I.3.64). Sam is charmingly simple, and as Tolkien narrates, "Maps conveyed nothing to Sam's mind, and all distances in this strange land seemed so vast that he was quite out of his reckoning" (II.3.285). The reach of his imagination begins quite small, and unlike Gandalf or Aragorn, he has no experiences outside the world of the Shire. He is endearingly naive; when he pursues Frodo, for example, who attempts at the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring* to set out for Mordor alone, he clumsily fumbles through the water and nearly drowns:

> 'Coming, Mr. Frodo! Coming!' called Sam, and flung himself from the bank, clutching at the departing boat. He missed it by a yard. With a cry and a splash he fell face downward into deep swift water. […] Frodo was just in time to grasp Sam by the hair as he came up, bubbling and struggling. Fear was staring in his round brown eyes. (II.10.405-406)

Here, Sam's inexperience is again revealed, and though he is loyal and kind, his fear of the unknown is palpable, and his capacity for leadership lies dormant.

And yet, although Sam is, at the trilogy's start, a simple, provincial gardener, it is this identity that allows him to successfully complete the quest. He constantly longs for the Shire, but by recurrently summoning memories of his pastoral life, he finds both motivation and untapped strength. In the quest's initial stages, Sam calls upon ancient Shire wisdom passed down from his father, such as "*but where there's life, there's hope*, as my gaffer used to say; *and need of vittles*, as he mostways used to add" (IV.7.700). This wisdom, however, soon transforms into vital resources. When Sam believes Frodo has died after his skirmish with the spider, Shelob, Sam debates whether to assume the Ring and continue the quest or to turn back. And, though terrified, it is the memory of the Shire that encourages him: if "Mr. Frodo's found, and that Thing's on him, well, the Enemy will get it. And that's the end of all of us, of Lórien, and Rivendell, and the Shire and all. […] Then take It, it is!" (IV.10.732). Determined to save his beloved Shire and emboldened by his memories, Sam continues onward, committed to complete his task.

After Frodo and Sam unite once more, the stakes of the mission heighten, and Sam's pastoral ties become even more valuable. When the pair is discovered by the orc Watchers in Cirith Ungol, Sam cries, "Gilthoniel, A Elbereth!" after which Tolkien interjects that, "For, why he did not know, his thought sprang back suddenly to the Elves in the Shire, and the song that drove away the Black Rider in the trees" (VI.1.915). His song disperses the orcs, and he and Frodo escape unscathed. And, as they approach Mount Doom, with the night of Mordor upon them, Tolkien writes that "through all [Sam's] thoughts there came the memory of water; and every brook or stream or fount that he had ever seen, under green willow-shades or twinkling in the sun […]. He felt the cool water on his toes as he paddled in the Pool at Bywater" (VI.3.939). His memories once again instill fortitude within him, and summoning all his strength, he carries Frodo to the base of Mount Doom. The instances of Sam's pastoral reliance are numerous, and in these moments of repetition, we glimpse just how essential his pastoral ties remain to the success of the quest.

Sam's relation to the pastoral also allows him to do what few characters can do: resist the Ring. When Lady Galadriel offers him the opportunity to return home early, he is tempted, recalling that, "She seemed to be looking inside me and asking me what I would do if she gave me the chance of flying back home to the Shire to a nice little hole with—with a bit of garden of my own" (II.7.358). And, when Sam becomes the Ringbearer, the Object torments him with visions of power, of "Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land" (VI.1.901). However, while he is momentarily enticed, his pastoral identity is precisely what protects him from its power. In "Moral Vision in *The Lord of the Rings*," Rose A. Zimbardo observes the following:

> Even Sam experiences the temptation to subject the All to himself, but because he is a gardener, the very nature of his vision restores his balance. For an instant he wants the whole world to be his garden alone, but because his particular excellence has been promoting and restoring nature's life, he sees at once the folly of a small creature in nature trying to consume the whole that embraces him. (75)

His ties to nature and his need for balance contribute to his own survival, as well as to the successful outcome of the quest. What is at first his weakness, his "smallness" becomes more valuable than one might initially have thought, as it is the very reason why he resists the power of the Ring, and why the quest succeeds, despite all odds. Tolkien writes that "he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him. The one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command" (VI.1.901). As a gardener, Sam understands that the earth cannot survive if it is under the command of a single hand, and it is this knowledge that shields him from the power of the Ring and grounds him in the fulfillment of his quest.

While Sam's pastoral ties help him retain the humility necessary to complete the quest, they also catalyze his character development. In the final chapter of *The Two Towers*, "The Choices of Master Samwise," Sam battles the spider Shelob, and believing Frodo to be dead, takes on, albeit briefly, the role of the Ringbearer (IV.10.732). Marion Zimmer Bradley writes of this moment that "In essence the Quest from this moment is Sam's. […] Sam has become, not the devoted dogsbody of volume I, nor the sometimes fierce but simple and submissive watchdog of volume II, but the 'tall, towering elf-warrior' of the orc's vision" (Bradley 87). As Shelob prepares to strike, Sam retrieves the Phial of Galadriel, and summoning his memories of Elves as they "walked under the stars in the beloved shadows of the Shire," and the "music of the Elves as it came through his sleep" (IV.10.729), Sam ignites the phial and defeats the spider. Notable here is that as enchanted as he is by the Elves, Sam imagines them in his moment of need not in Lothlórien or Rivendell, but instead in the Shire. He may rely on the Elven magic from Galadriel's phial, but the courage that he summons is grounded not in the Elves' paradise, but instead in his own. This moment is echoed at the beginning of *The Return of the King*, where Sam, in the Tower of Cirith Ungol, begins to sing excerpts of Bilbo's Shire songs, which again bring him "fleeting glimpses of the country of his home. And then suddenly a new strength rose in him," Tolkien writes, "and his voice rang out, while words of his own came unbidden to fit the simple tune" (VI.1.908). Sam summons the resolve he needs to defeat the orcs, liberating Frodo and paving

their way for the final leg of their quest. In both instances, Sam's longing for the pastoral transforms him, and he becomes bolder and fiercer than he was at the start of the trilogy. The pastoral may tether him to the earth, keeping him firmly focused on destroying the Ring, but it also serves as a hidden fount of strength that catalyzes his development from simple and naive to grounded and resolute.

After Frodo and Sam reunite in the Tower, Sam's newfound authority is palpable. He directs Frodo to Mount Doom, then carries him to the base of the volcano. Tolkien narrates, "Sam lifted Frodo with no more difficulty than if he were carrying a hobbit-child pig-a-back in some romp on the lawns or hayfields of the Shire" (VI.3.941), once again making reference to the source of his strength and marking his evolution from the nearly-drowned oaf whom Frodo lifts out of the water to the "tall towering warrior" who, in turn, carries Frodo towards the quest's finale. His leadership continues to influence his development even after the Ring is destroyed. When he returns to the Shire and finds it overrun with ruffians, he disbands them with such authority that one is reminded of Gandalf and Aragorn more than the Samwise who began the series. And, as he leads the Shire's restoration efforts, we glimpse once again his commitment to the pastoral and how this dedication, in turn, nurtures his development. Drawing strength from the conviction that the Shire's way of life is worth not only preserving or remembering, but also perpetuating, Sam experiences both change, in his leadership, and stasis, in his humility, becoming a hero who, through his combination of "humble servant, able warrior, knowledgeable scout, faithful friend, merciful enemy, and hard-nosed skeptic" (Rosenberg 11), is poised to return to the land that sustained him throughout his quest and tend to it once more.

When Frodo departs for the Grey Havens, he leaves Sam the Red Book of Westmarch, a recording of both Bilbo and Frodo's adventures. "[Y]ou will read things out of the Red Book, and keep alive the memory of the age that is gone," Frodo says to Sam, "so that people will remember the Great Danger and so love their beloved land all the more" (VI.9.1029). Frodo bequeaths his role and space in the novel to Sam, revealing that, while he himself has arrived at the "end of all things" (VI.4.950) his end is Sam's true beginning. Sam's legacy, unlike Frodo's, transcends their quest to Mount Doom and comes to fruition in the Shire, where he cleans up the mess from Saruman and revitalizes the land. After having become, as Marion Zimmer Bradley articulates, "the beauty of the Elves, the hardiness of the Dwarves, the wisdom of the wizards, the gallantry of men, and the sound staunchness, at the root, of the halflings" (92), a fusion of identities through which he keeps alive the memories of the quest, Sam is poised to restore the Shire while also evolving it, imbuing it with elements of the journey that transformed him.

**THERE AND BACK AGAIN: SAM AND THE REMAKING OF THE SHIRE**

Sam remakes the Shire, but he also makes it anew. One example of this occurs when Sam returns to the Shire and finds the silver nut and magic dust from Lothlórien that Lady Galadriel gifted him. While Merry suggests that Sam make use of the materials in his own garden, Sam replies that, "I'm sure the Lady would not like me to keep it all for my own garden, now so many folk have suffered" (VI.9.1023). Resisting self-interest in much the same way as he did when tempted by the Ring, Sam plants saplings, not in his own garden, but throughout the Shire, spreading the dust so that each tree can grow:

> So Sam planted saplings in all the places where specially beautiful or beloved trees had been destroyed, and he put a grain of the precious dust in the soil of the root of each. He went up and down the Shire in this labour […]. And at the end he found that he still had a little of the dust left; so he went to the Three-Farthing Stone, which is as near the centre of the Shire as no matter, and cast it in the air with his blessing. The silver nut he planted in the Party Field where the tree had once been, and he wondered what would come of it. (VI.9.1023)

Notable here is the reverence with which he treats the saplings, his commitment to restoring the trees, and that he plants the Elven nut, a token of the Elves, in the very heart of the Shire, to keep the memory of the Age alive. As the tree grows, sprouting golden leaves, it becomes known "far and wide and people would come long journeys to see it: the only *mallorn* west of the Mountains and east of the Sea, and one of the finest in the world" (VI.9.1023). In preserving the memory of the Elves, we see how the Shire functions as a vestige of a bygone age, and how that emphasis continues to figure into Tolkien's pastoral.

At the same time, in planting the tree, Sam transforms the Shire into a more expansive, worldly place than what it was before. The postwar Shire, like the postwar Sam, fuses the provincial and the worldly, the old and the new, transfiguring the old land, with its "woods and fields and little rivers" (I.1.33), into a land filled with an extraordinary beauty "beyond that of mortal summers that flicker and pass upon this Middle-earth" (VI.9.1023). Sam scatters Galadriel's dust, claiming the Shire as his own, and the Shire becomes the "garden swollen to a realm" (VI.1.901) that it was in Sam's visions. And yet, it remains rooted, neither in greed nor in power, but in the "freedom, peace, ordinary life and good liking" valued so highly by the hobbits (*Letters* 105, #93) —a paragon of Gandalfian stewardship where humility and dedication prevail. Under Sam's care, the same green of Spring shimmers in the fields, but there is also new growth from distant lands, tilled not by a hero bearing a flaming sword, but a working class gardener, through whom the harvests of the Shire become all the more varied and bountiful, or, as Queen Galadriel called them,

"more than ever blessed and beloved" (VI.9.1028) Through Sam's cultivation of the Shire, Tolkien begins to unveil a new pastoral, one that is not rooted in the conflict between the past and the future, but instead in their fusion. The memory of a bygone age is kept alive, but this remembrance is united with a commitment to growth, open-mindedness, and change.

A similar conception of the pastoral is presented in "The Scouring of the Shire," where Sam returns home to find that it is not the Shire of Sam's memories, but instead a Shire overrun by Saruman and in need of urgent restoration. The Ring has been destroyed, but still, evil persists, permeating all corners of Middle-earth, including the Shire. In this way, we glimpse a pastoral that is not a binary clash between good and evil, but one that encompasses, and will continue to encompass, both entities. "Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set," Gandalf says, "uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till" (V.9.879). Through this fusion of good and evil, we see once again how Tolkien blurs the lines of the pastoral and the non-pastoral; instead of situating the "good" pastoral against the "evil" non-pastoral, Tolkien entwines them. We move from the Shire, Rivendell, and Lórien, havens situated in opposition to the dangers of Isengard and Mordor—"pastoral oas[es] in the midst of destruction" (Croft 11)—to lands that play host to both. In this way, Tolkien complicates the traditional pastoral mode, acknowledging that evil will always persist, even in the most idyllic of places. By aligning his pastoral more with the "*et in arcadia ego*" motif ("Even in Arcadia, there am I [Death])" than the idealized classical pastoral writings, Tolkien pushes the boundaries of the mode, unveiling a pastoral where paradise and death, and good and evil, coexist.

Additionally, "The Scouring of the Shire" highlights another important part of Tolkien's evolved pastoral. Through this chapter, we come to understand that nostalgia, without an eye towards the future, is unsustainable. The Shire cannot be replicated, only remade, and although with Sam's guidance the Shire becomes prosperous again, it is not the old Shire, and no amount of wistfulness will make it so. This, it turns out, is advantageous, as the Shire that Sam remakes is preferable to the old one. Its connections to the wider world, stemming from Sam's *mallorn* tree and the elven dust, bring new visitors and a harvest more bountiful than anything the Shire has ever seen. Sam becomes the Mayor of the Shire for seven consecutive terms (a position previously unattainable for a member of the Shire's working class), also reflecting a change at the societal level that would not have been accepted by the old Shire. While the pre-war hobbits, known for their small-mindedness, were, in Frodo's opinion, sometimes "too stupid and dull for words," so much so that "an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them" (I.2.62), by the end of the trilogy, we see a

more worldly, less provincial Shire, one that, after the disruption of war, begins to uproot class distinctions and prejudices in favor of incremental progress. It is precisely these changes that ensure the Shire's survival, and under Sam's guidance, the Shire becomes not only forward-looking, but also forward-thinking, engendering a more equitable society, as well as a more prosperous harvest. And, through this transformation, we glimpse Tolkien's evolved vision of the pastoral, one that, as Patrick Curry recognizes in "Less Noise, More Green," does not accept society as is, but instead embraces progress and radical social change (135).

Sam's ability to unite the provincial and the worldly, the past and the present, can be traced to his gardener roots. In "The Shire Quest: The 'Scouring of the Shire as the Narrative and Thematic Focus of The Lord of the Rings," David M. Waito writes that Sam, as a gardener, "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" (175). He argues that this ability to nurture informs Sam's sense of justice, and that it is Sam's generosity and selflessness that help him save the Shire. And while this is true, there is more to Sam's success than his ability to nurture. As a gardener, Sam weathers the seasons while also looking ahead to the times of harvest. From his earliest moments in the narrative, we see this forward orientation. "[T]here was a lot to do up in the Bag End garden," Tolkien writes in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, "and he would have a busy day tomorrow, if the weather cleared. The grass was growing fast" (I.2.45). We glimpse this again at the end of the trilogy, when Sam, faced with the damage of the Shire, acknowledges, "this hurt would take long to heal, and only [Sam's] great-grandchildren, he thought, would see the Shire as it ought to be" (VI.9.1022). In both instances, Sam instinctively looks ahead, considers what needs to be done, envisions what the land can become, anticipates the time needed to enact that vision, and gets to work. He is poised to cultivate the Shire for current and future generations, not only because he is nurturing and selfless, but also because he, knowing that nature is never static, plans for the future. His forward-looking perspective, therefore, contributes to his successful transformation of the Shire, and through it, we understand that the world Sam rebuilds is one not oriented backwards, but forwards.

And, as Tolkien makes clear, the new age of Middle-earth, and the new pastoral that accompanies it, can only accommodate those who look forward. When explaining his departure to the Grey Havens, Frodo explains, "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. But you are my heir: all that I had and might have had I leave to you" (VI.9.1029). Frodo speaks, of course, about his own experiences with the Ring, acknowledging that the loss and pain

he experienced was too much to bear, and that peace for him lies far beyond Middle-earth. And, recognizing that Sam cannot be made to choose between the old and the new, the past and the present, his obligations to his Master and his responsibilities to his wife and children, Frodo—an emblem of the old—departs, and Sam, rooted wholly in the new, assumes full responsibility of the Shire. From this moment, Sam inherits not only Frodo's possessions, but also his role in the narrative. The new leader of the Shire, Sam becomes the primary character, adding his beloved Frodo to the cast of comrades—Elves, Dwarves, Wizards, and Men— that he so lovingly memorializes. "Do not be too sad, Sam," Frodo says to Sam. "You cannot be always torn in two. You will have to be one and whole, for many years. You have so much to enjoy and to be, and to do" (VI.9.1029). It is difficult here not to draw parallels between Sam and Tolkien, Frodo and the Lost Generation, glimpsing a Tolkien torn between the memory of his fallen comrades and the possibilities of his future. The moment is infinitely symbolic, with many other interpretations to be articulated, not only about war, but also about pain, growth, and abandoning the remnants of an old identity or old life. What is apparent in each of these iterations, however, is that through Frodo's departure and Sam's duration, Tolkien reconciles the past and the present to confront the future. At the end of Sam's journey, we see a gardener who is poised, not only to preserve the past, but also to perpetuate and evolve it. And through Sam, one and whole, we see, too, a pastoral that, because of its malleability, continues to survive and thrive.

What is interesting about this vision is that it also extends beyond Sam and reaches beyond the hobbits in general. "[H]obbits are not a Utopian vision," Tolkien writes, "or recommended as an ideal in their own or any age. They, as all peoples and their situations, are an historical accident—as the Elves point out to Frodo—and an impermanent one in the long view" (qtd. in Dickerson & Evans 264). Though the hobbits, like the Elves, embody the natural world, their time in Middle-earth, like all things in nature, is temporal. "[I]t is not your own Shire," echoes Gildor. "Others dwelt here before hobbits were; and others will dwell here again when hobbits are no more. The wide world is all about you; you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out" (I.3.83). Here, we see Tolkien evolving the pastoral even further, acknowledging that even hobbits will become a part of the past. Through Gildor's explanation, which recognizes that, as Dickerson and Evans write, "a steward is not an owner but a caretaker of something that belongs to another" (91), we are reminded that our place in the natural world, and the role we play in protecting it, is also subject to death and change. "Environmental stewardship," Dickerson and Evans point out, "sometimes requires people to relinquish certain claims […] to ensure the transmission of the natural environment in a fertile and habitable condition to those who will come after" (88). As a gardener, Sam knows this, and by allowing

the Shire leadership to evolve by accepting his own mortality, entrusting the Red Book to his daughter, Elanor, and sailing to the Undying Lands to be reunited with Frodo, Sam ensures its survival (Appendix B.1074). Here, we are reminded that the essence of Tolkien's pastoral lies in its malleability, but also that the presence of death in the pastoral ("*et in arcadia ego*") is not always a symbol for evil, but sometimes an indication of natural and necessary change.

The various threads of Tolkien's pastoral come together in the novel's final pages. When Frodo, Sam, and company journey through the Shire to the Grey Havens, Tolkien writes that "Sam was silent, deep in his memories. Presently he became aware that Frodo was singing softly to himself, singing the old walking-song, but the words were not quite the same" (VI.9.1028). This is, in fact, the same song from the trilogy's opening chapter, one that Bilbo taught Frodo years before, though, as Sam notices, Frodo has modified the words. The original lyrics are: "Still round the corner there may wait / A new road or a secret gate, / And though we pass them by today, / Tomorrow we may come this way / And take the hidden paths that run / Towards the Moon or to the Sun (I.3.77). The new version is similar, with some slight changes: "Still round a corner there may wait / A new road or a secret gate; / And though I oft have passed them by, / A day will come at last when I / Shall take the hidden paths that run / West of the Moon, East of the Sun" (VI.9.1028). The song, a pastoral ode, looks ahead, with both versions alluding to an unknown yet to be revealed: a "new road" or "secret gate." The words Tolkien modifies, which preview the upcoming changes for Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam, also use the future tense ("A day will come"), again emphasizing what lies ahead. And, after Frodo finishes, the Elves, riding alongside the Hobbits towards the Havens, answer his song with the same lyrics, "Gilthoniel, A Elbereth!" that Sam uttered in the Tower of Cirith Ungol. Here, Tolkien, comes full circle; employing the pastoral, he unites the past with the present by entwining old lyrics with new ones. He integrates the Elves into the songs of the Shire, signaling the land's more worldly transformation, as well as the impermanence of the Elves, Frodo, and Gandalf, who are on their way towards the Grey Havens to leave Middle-earth. And, lastly, he orients the pastoral forwards, looking ahead towards new roads, hidden paths, and secret gates yet to be discovered. As Sam leaves Frodo at the Grey Havens and returns home, "never again looking back" (VI.9.1031), we glimpse once again the gardener and hero, having fully reconciled the past and the present, ready to embrace a future as variable and durable as the pastoral itself.

## Conclusion

"The Third Age of the world is ended," Gandalf says to Aragorn at the end of *The Return of the King*, "and the new age is begun; and it is your task to order its beginning and to preserve what may be preserved. For though much

has been saved, much must now pass away […]. For the time comes of the Dominion of Men" (VI.5.971). Frodo, Bilbo, Gandalf, and the Elves sail to the Undying Lands, Men assume the mantle of Middle-earth, and Tolkien's vision of the future, one in which humans become the earth's primary stewards, is realized. As Gandalf plants a sapling, a symbol of rebirth, in Gondor's citadel, interweaving Aragorn's lineage with the tree to symbolize the prosperity of his reign, Tolkien ushers in the Dominion of Men, tethering Aragorn and his people to the landscape and granting them stewardship over Middle-earth.

However, Tolkien ends the novel, not with Aragorn, but with Sam, returning readers once again to the ordinary, pastoral life that begins the trilogy. Men may have become Middle-earth's primary stewards, but by highlighting the Shire, Tolkien places continued value on our hobbit-relatives and their role in Middle-earth. And, given that the narrative of the trilogy is focused primarily on the hobbits' role in saving Middle-earth, it is fitting that these creatures begin and conclude the series. We may be the newest stewards of the earth, but the spirit of the hobbits is embedded within us, a connection that, in turn, entwines us more deeply with the land and our role in cultivating it.

In light of this, it is impossible to read, for example, the description of Rivendell, with its "faint scent of trees and flowers" (II.1.226), glimmering "dew upon the yellow leaves," and snow "white upon [the mountain] peaks" (II.2.239), and not feel that we have failed. With global industrialization more destructive than Tolkien could have imagined, peace and environmentalism seem less attainable than ever before. And yet, this is precisely the struggle that *The Lord of the Rings* embodies. "Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again," Gandalf says to Frodo. "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us" (I.3.51). Tolkien acknowledges that despite the persistence of the "evil in the fields" (V.9.879), we must be committed to uprooting as much of that evil as possible—a task that, as Sam demonstrates, requires not a backwards glance, but a forward one. With the humility and strength of present and future gardeners, our hands to use, not to command, Tolkien offers us a way forward that is fruitful and flexible: one that, like Sam's Shire, is worth both preserving and perpetuating.

In this way, Tolkien's model of stewardship is a stark departure from the traditional literary pastoral. The pastoral has a history, not only of being mired in place, but also, as Garrard points out, of being "ecologically delusive" (53). With tropes that imply the "perspective of the aesthetic tourist," the pastoral is considered impractical from an ecocritical perspective (117). Rarely entwined with stewardship, the mode is instead presented as a "stable, harmonious state of nature in the absence of human 'interference'" (64). Tolkien's pastoral, by contrast, shatters that conception; it is aligned just as much with the ecocritical idea of dwelling, or "coming to dwell on the earth in a

relation of duty and responsibility […] the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory" (117), as it is with environmental aesthetics. By reconciling the aesthetic with the ecological, Tolkien further evolves the pastoral, presenting a vision of the mode that unites an appreciation for the natural world with a commitment to the "sacred duty" (123) of stewardship.

Tolkien's "new" pastoral also offers a counterpoint to some of the more problematic appropriations of the mode. The pastoral, malleable and multiplicitous, has a history of co-option by radical political movements, often to horrific ends. For example, Nazi Germans, who established strict criteria for respecting the environment (Biehl and Staudenmeier 15), justified their invasion of the East, as well as their extermination of the Jews and other groups, based in part on "blood and soil," or "the link between those who held and farmed the land and whose generations of blood, sweat, and tears had made the soil part of their being, and their being integral to the soil" (Bramwell qtd. in Garrard 105). In instances like these, we see how the duty and responsibility that defines "dwelling" can be easily restricted, corrupted, and exploited.

And yet, perhaps Tolkien's pastoral also offers a corrective to these interpretations. As noted earlier, Sam returns from the quest embodying the "beauty of the Elves, the hardiness of the Dwarves, the wisdom of the wizards, the gallantry of men, and the sound staunchness, at the root, of the halflings" (Bradley 92), a fusion that guides him as he expands the reach of the Shire. He spreads Galadriel's soil dust and welcomes visitors from across the world, globalizing his homeland by offering it not just to his family or to the hobbits, but to the entirety of Middle-earth. He entwines the Shire with all peoples of Middle-earth, championing a world where no group can be considered the sole dwellers, or owners, of the land. Through Sam, Tolkien unveils a more inclusive form of stewardship, one that, in turn, can be extended beyond the trilogy to modern environmentalism and ecological approaches. Our own hands to use, not the hands of others to command, each of us are rightful dwellers and caretakers of the earth, our roots entwined with its past, present, and future. Tolkien's vision not only counters the pastoral's aesthetic limitations and extricates the genre from xenophobic nationalism, but also embraces us all as both dwellers and stewards, fashioning an evolved, progressive pastoral for a modern, global world.

Tolkien, then, leaves us much to consider. Through Sam and his relationship with the earth, Tolkien disentangles the pastoral from nostalgia, extending its roots not only into the past, but also into the present and future. His literary pastoral becomes as "infinite" as that of Alexander Barclay's *Eclogues*: the epitome of a prosperity that, through its adaptability, even in the midst of future tensions, will sustain future generations. He provides us with a guide—a gardener, champion of the pastoral—reminding us that what makes

the earth so remarkable is not what it used to be, but instead what it is and can still become. Sam, like nature and its seasons, renews the Shire, and as *The Lord of the Rings* is read by new generations, restores our hope, lifting us out of nostalgia and into action. It is fitting that the final line of *Lord of the Rings*— "'Well, I'm back,' he said" (VI.9.1031)— is Sam's, for through him we glimpse a hero reincarnated, present in other fictional characters, in conservationist poets and writers, in budding activists, equally as committed to tilling the earth in all its seasons. And, lastly, we glimpse in Sam the author himself, ramified across space and time, bequeathing to future readers the land that he adored and a vision that will sustain it—if only we decide rightly.

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