

"THE HANDS OF A HEALER:" J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF KINGSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

The Applicability of Faerie: The Value of Fiction in Religious, Philosophical, and Political Studies

*"The Cultural Schism"—
Tolkien and His Critics*

One of the most common criticisms of J.R.R. Tolkien's writing is that he merely produced idealistic, allegorical stories for children. Because the purpose and meaning of his work are often misinterpreted, the bulk of Tolkien criticism, whenever his work is given any consideration, is "shallow and silly commentary, both hostile and laudatory."¹ Yet, despite the literary community's dismissal of Tolkien's works, British readers chose *The Lord of the Rings* as "the greatest book of the century" in a 1997 poll by Channel 4 and Waterstone's, a prominent British bookseller. Upon learning of the people's wide support for *The Lord of the Rings*, the literary community issued forth even harsher criticisms of both Tolkien and his readers. The *Times Literary Supplement* maintained that the poll's results were "horrifying."² The *Sunday Times* proclaimed

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¹ Brian Rosebury, *Tolkien: A Critical Assessment*. (London: St Martins, 1992), 2.

² *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 January 1997.

it a "black day for British culture" and called for all the libraries to be closed because "it just shows... the folly of teaching people to read."³ Perhaps the greatest criticism of the poll's results came from Germaine Greer. In Waterstone's own magazine, she writes that it had been her "nightmare" that readers would deem Tolkien as the "most influential writer of the twentieth century," and now, "the bad dream has materialized."⁴ She further sneers, "Novels don't come more fictional than that... The books that come from Tolkien's train are more or less what you would expect; flight from reality is their dominating characteristic."⁵

In response to this onslaught by the literary community, many writers rose to Tolkien's defense. Specifically responding to Greer's reaction, Patrick Curry, author of *Defending Middle Earth*, argues that critics have long misunderstood Tolkien and his reasons for writing:

Tolkien addressed the fears of late-20th-century readers... he gave them hope. Far from being escapist or reactionary, *The Lord of the Rings* addresses the greatest struggle of this century and beyond. And Greer, unlike the common reader, has completely missed it: certainly in the book, and perhaps in the world.

³ *Sunday Times*, 26 January 1997.

⁴ Germaine Greer, 'The book of the century-' *W: the Waterstone's Magazine* (Winter/Spring 1997) 8: 2-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Who, then, is living in a world of fantasy? Tolkien's critics, not his readers, are out of touch with reality. Never has the intellectual establishment so richly deserved defiance.⁶

Curry, like many other writers, completely dismisses the value of these criticisms; however, the literary establishment continues to call into question the judgment and taste of Tolkien's readers. Truly, the conflicting views of both camps represent a drastic "cultural schism," as Joseph Pearce refers to the debate.⁷ The critics accuse readers of being "hell bent on escaping,"⁸ and the readers insist that it is indeed the critics who are "out of touch with reality."⁹ Readers defy claims that *The Lord of the Rings* is merely a story for children or the "adult slow."¹⁰ Nor do they allow criticisms of it being "an escape into a nonexistent world;"¹¹ rather, they maintain, as Tolkien himself asserted, that it is anything but an escape from truth—providing a glimpse of Truth is the story's "highest function."¹²

What is a Fairy Story?

In response to similar criticisms, Tolkien himself admitted that because his texts include fantastical elements, critics might mistakenly confuse his writing with that of fairytales. However, he maintained that he wrote something different than a fairytale; he wrote fairy stories. Tolkien often refused to provide a definition of a

fairy story, maintaining, "Faerie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible."¹³ He does, however, distinguish fairy stories from fairytales and beast fables in that fairy stories do not merely deliver a simplistic moral through a charming children's story; rather, he insists that fairy stories must be "taken seriously, neither laughed at or nor explained away."¹⁴ Unlike these other tales, the fairy story does not simply teach an allegorical lesson and leave readers with a feeling of passing delight. Rather, the chief end of fairy stories is to deliver a deep truth and impart joy to the readers.¹⁵

Tolkien explains that this glimpse of joy and deep truth, is a *eucatastrophe*,¹⁶ and he asserts that all fairy-stories must end with it. It is this "happy ending" element of Tolkien's writing that the literary community is so quick to term "escapist." However, Tolkien maintains that many misunderstand the idea of "escape."

In what misusers are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in criticism it would seem to be worse the better it succeeds.

Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he

⁶ *New Statesman*, 31 January 1997.

⁷ Joseph Pearce, *Tolkien: Man and Myth*. (San Francisco: Saint Ignatius Press, 1998), 2.

⁸ *Independent Education*, 23 January 1997.

⁹ *New Statesman*, 31 January 1997.

¹⁰ *Sunday Times*, 26 January 1997.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 100.

¹³ J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," in *Poems and Stories*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ As Sam himself said, "I daresay there is more truth in some of them [fairy stories] than you reckon" J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), 43.

¹⁶ *Eucatastrophe*: "the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 100).

cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailors and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using escape this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and, what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter.¹⁷

He asks why, if one is living in a world filled with “hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, and death,”¹⁸ is it wrong to desire respite. He further argues that the consolation the story provides does not imply that the danger is permanently averted or that evil is forever defeated; rather, this singular occurrence is only a glimpse of the harmony and peace he believes is ultimately to return to the world.¹⁹

It is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dycastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and so in far is *evangelium*,²⁰ giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.²¹

This eucatastrophe—the “piercing glimpse of joy and heart’s desire”²² and “sudden glimpse of Truth”²³—is the chief end of fairy stories, and when readers

recognize it, it causes the “catch of the breath, a beating of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears.”²⁴ It is for this reason that *The Lord of the Rings* has been able to touch readers so deeply. They understand what the literary establishment cannot; they are not deserting the task that is before them. They know that they still have to work, “with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die,” but now, after having a glimpse of the evangelium to come, they are able to perceive that all their “bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed.”²⁵

Considering *The Lord of the Rings* as a Fairy-Story

Tolkien considers *The Lord of the Ring* a fairy story,²⁶ and, as such, it also includes glimpses of deep truths, moments of extreme conflict, and ultimately a conclusion worthy of being termed a eucatastrophe. It is because he bases his text on objective truth and reason,²⁷ that religious, philosophical, and political ideas can be derived from *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien intended his story to be applicable, and, despite what the literary establishment

²⁴ “On Fairy Stories,” 176.

²⁵ Ibid, 180.

²⁶ “It is a fairy-story, but one written... for adults. Because I think that the fairy story has its own mode of reflecting, ‘truth,’ different from allegory, or (sustained) satire, or ‘realism,’ and in some ways more powerful” (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 232-233).

²⁷ “Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make. If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive the truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured. If they ever got into that state (it would seem not at all impossible), Fantasy will perish, and become Morbid Delusion” (“On Fairy Stories,” 162).

¹⁷ “On Fairy Stories,” 168.

¹⁸ Ibid, 173.

¹⁹ As will be argued in the first chapter of this thesis

²⁰ *Evangelium*: Good news

²¹ Ibid, 175.

²² Ibid, 176.

²³ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 100.

might argue, its fantastical elements do not impede this applicability. Rather than fleeing from reality, the text rescues the reader from the “danger of boredom and anxiety.”²⁸ It does not avoid Truth but, instead, uses fantastical means to release readers from “the drab blur of triteness or familiarity,” consequently allowing them to more easily recognize Truth, beauty, and virtue within their own world.²⁹ When ideas and truths that have become commonplace to readers are seen anew and once more appreciated, one’s perception and imagination are again enlivened. Thus, Tolkien maintains that the story provides readers with a type of recovery: “Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—a regaining of a clear view... I might venture to say ‘seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them’—as things apart from ourselves.”³⁰

“The Hands of a Healer”— Tolkien’s Understanding of Kingship

Tolkien associates this “recovery” with healing. For this reason, throughout J.R.R. Tolkien’s trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, the concept of healing is a recurring theme—possibly the most central theme. When attempting to recognize its frequency, one must first realize how Tolkien himself understood the idea of healing. The *Oxford English Dictionary*³¹ defines healing as a restoration “from some evil condition or affection, such as sin, grief, disrepair, unwholesomeness, danger, destruction.” According to this definition, healing is not merely physical; rather, it includes a metaphysical component as well. Throughout the trilogy, Tolkien supports this idea by

describing many different types of restoration. Just as the body and land may experience wounding and require physical healing, the human spirit and interpersonal relationships may also suffer wounds, which require healing through different means. To heal these tangible and intangible wounds requires a restoration of harmony. Healing a physical wound requires the harmony of the body; healing the land requires a harmony of the natural elements. The human spirit must exist in harmony with itself and its properly ordered nature, and human beings must find a way to live in harmony with one another.

Tolkien specifically develops this concept of healing through his illustration of kingship and tyranny. Throughout the trilogy, Tolkien provides readers with two opposing political systems—one that heals the people and the land and another that deepens the wound and causes division. Therefore, this project will explore J.R.R. Tolkien’s concept of kingship—the characteristics of a good king and how he rules and interacts with his subjects—and will specifically argue that healing is the defining characteristic of kingship.

In response to this question of the defining quality of kingship, literary critics have suggested that Tolkien requires a good king to offer strong leadership and physical healing for his subjects and land.³² Not only will this thesis consider the merit of these characteristics, but it will also specifically argue that a good king provides his subjects with the opportunity to fulfill their own nature as human beings. Therefore, he not only heals the people and the land, but he also provides them with the conditions necessary to better themselves. As Tolkien demonstrates, what

²⁸ Ibid, 165.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Tolkien, a scholar of languages (philology), was a contributor to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, then known as the *New English Dictionary*, in 1918.

³² As literary critic Jane Chance states, “the power of a king resides in his ability to heal, to knit together, to bring peace and fruitfulness to the community, and to return or renew that which has been torn or debilitated” [Jane Chance, *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power*. (New York City: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 104].

distinguishes men from beasts is the fact that they possess souls. Consequently, healing the human being is not merely physical in nature; rather, it includes a metaphysical component as well, and only the harmony of both the physical and metaphysical produces complete healing.

This concept of healing the soul is not unique to Tolkien. According to classical philosophers, the pursuit of politics concerns the affairs between individuals and nations, but, more importantly, it also addresses matters that ennoble the soul. Since Tolkien requires a good king to provide his subjects with the conditions necessary to better their souls, the nature of his story is political in the broad sense. His understanding of kingship and tyranny greatly reflects that of Aristotle. In the third book of *The Politics*, Aristotle describes these two regimes, among many others. Kingship is that form of government “which looks toward the common advantage.”³³ A regime that considers the common good is a “correct” regime, according to Aristotle, because it recognizes the city as a “partnership of free persons.”³⁴ Tyranny is the “deviation” of this form of monarchy, as it does not acknowledge citizens as free or equal nor does it look toward the common advantage; instead, a tyrannical regime merely concerns itself with the advantage of the tyrant.³⁵ Not only is tyranny “contrary to nature,”³⁶ but it is also the worst regime, as Aristotle later writes:

Now it is evident also which of the deviations is the worst and which is the second worst. For the deviation from the first and most divine regime

[kingship] must be the worst, but kingship must necessarily either have the name alone without being such, or rest on the superiority of the person ruling as king. So tyranny is the worst, and the farthest removed from [being] a regime.³⁷

He refers to kingship as the “first and most divine” regime; however, it is also easily corruptible since men are so easily corruptible. Consequently, Aristotle recognizes that in most cases, monarchies fail or are destroyed from within the regime.³⁸ When the king no longer pursues noble ends and the “common advantage” of all the citizens, he either becomes tyrannical and forces obedience and submission or his self-interested conduct inspires insurrection among the people. In addition, if the king exerts too much authority and fails to treat the citizens as equals, contempt and ambition might inspire individuals to revolt as well. Therefore, Aristotle concludes that monarchies only succeed when a king, who is “preminen[t] in virtue,” rules for the advantage of all citizens.³⁹ The common advantage of the city, or its end, is not just that the citizens “live” but that they live well.⁴⁰ Thus, according to Aristotle, included in the ultimate end of the city is happiness. Happiness is the product of right reason and moral virtue, which a virtuous king encourages, and virtue, in turn, strengthens the soul. Therefore, according to both Aristotle and Tolkien, a good king provides the conditions necessary for citizens to care for both their body and soul.⁴¹

³³ Aristotle, *The Politics*. Edited by Carnes Lord. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1279a34. [Hereafter, all citations from *The Politics* will be taken from the Carnes Lord translation and will be referenced using Becker numbers.]

³⁴ Ibid, 1279a20.

³⁵ Ibid, 1279b6.

³⁶ Ibid, 1287b40.

³⁷ Ibid, 1289a38-1289b1.

³⁸ Ibid, 1312b37-1313a16.

³⁹ Ibid, 1310b10.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 1252b30.

⁴¹ Although Tolkien insists that a good king has a responsibility in promoting virtue and encouraging his subjects to fulfill their particular natures, he would reject the modern idea that the government

must intrude in the people's private lives to do so. Leaders must encourage virtue by being virtuous themselves, not by merely creating laws and national standards and demanding obedience. As he describes in a 1943 letter to his son, Tolkien admits that virtuous leaders are often difficult to find because men are so easily corrupted by power. For this reason, he suggests that government ought to be limited in order to prevent both absolute rule from the top down and overly powerful and distant bureaucracies:

My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs)—or to 'unconstitutional Monarchy.' I would arrest anybody who uses the word State (in any sense other than the inanimate realm of England and its inhabitants, a thing that has neither power, rights nor mind); and after a chance of recantation, execute them if they remained obstinate! If we could get back to personal names, it would do a lot of good. Government is an abstract noun meaning the art and process of governing and it should be an offence to write it with a capital G or so as to refer to people. If people were in the habit of referring to 'King George's council, Winston and his gang,' it would go a long way to clearing thought, and reducing the frightful landslide into Theyocracy. Anyway the proper study of Man is anything but Man; and the most improper job of any man, even saints... is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity. The mediaevals were only too right in taking *nolo episcopari* as the best reason a man could give to others for making him a bishop (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 63-64).

Clearly, Tolkien is disgusted with the state of the modern world—especially the modern understanding of government. Tolkien dislikes the distance that rulers believe they are entitled to, their ambition, and self-interestedness. Instead, he advocates a system like that of the medievals: those who did not wish to be made a bishop were best suited for the office. Ambitious leaders who desire a position simply for the power will, undoubtedly, turn into tyrants. Thus, Tolkien maintains that government must be limited. Rulers must not have complete control over the lives of subjects, and the people must be unwilling to blindly submit to this degree of control. No man is naturally "fit" to rule over another man, and, as those men in leadership positions are *only* men, they can be wrong and,

Summary of the Text:

First published in 1954, *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien's longest piece of fiction, explores grand philosophical and political themes—concepts which are central to understanding human nature. In this novel, Tolkien creates a world in the midst of a battle with a physical manifestation of evil. The protagonists understand that they must destroy this evil and are willing to sacrifice even their own lives to ensure the implementation of the greatest good. Leading this defense is the character Aragorn—the heir apparent and long awaited king of the largest city in Middle-earth. Tolkien develops this character with great care, and through the account of his rise from obscurity to the highest position in the land, Tolkien provides a clear example of how a king should lead—with a healing hand. Thus, for this project, the character of Aragorn will serve as the example of a good monarch. Contrasting this political position, the realm of Mordor and the character of Sauron will represent tyrannical rule.

Division of Chapters:

In my first chapter, I will address Tolkien's Christianity and how his understanding of the Fall affected his own subcreated world, a world which also included a Fall in its own history. Because he believed sin to have entered the world and "wounded" it from its initial state of harmony, he recognized that both physical and spiritual "healing" would be necessary to again restore this harmony. Yet, despite the wounded state of these worlds, men do occasionally see glimpses of the harmony that they once lost and hope to regain once more. One way in which Tolkien provides a glimpse of this harmony is through the leadership of a good king. It is important to remember that the

therefore, must be held accountable for their decisions.

wound caused by humanity's sin cannot be healed through finite deeds—only through infinite grace. However, obedience to an objective standard of morality and truth can help to alleviate the pain caused by the wound. Therefore, a good king does not completely restore the original harmony of creation; rather, he provides a glimpse of what it was once like and what it shall be like again. The tyrant, however, encourages discord instead of harmony and ultimately perpetuates the wound.

Whereas the king rules for the good of his individual subjects and kingdom as a whole, the tyrant only advances his own will and desires—to the detriment of his entire realm. Therefore, my second chapter will discuss tyranny's effect on the land itself. The tyrant's only concern is for his own power and advancement, and, for that reason, he has no interest in the beauty or fruitfulness of his land, except when it suits his needs. Furthermore, he takes pleasure in needless destruction. As a result, the land becomes diseased and corrupted under his dominion. However, as Chapter Three will address, a good king attempts to heal the land. He recognizes the innate virtue within nature and encourages it; beauty itself is also encouraged for its own sake under his reign.

The later half of this project will discuss the different influences that tyrants and kings have on the lives of their subjects. Chapter Four will address the physical, spiritual, and political effects of tyranny. As the tyrant's only concern is for himself and his power, he merely uses his people as slaves to accomplish his ends, which are not intended to benefit the common good. Any interest he has in his people is purely self-serving; thus, if their well-being does not benefit him, then he neglects it and allows the people to suffer. Furthermore, the tyrant that Tolkien describes is of a higher order of being than mortals, and, as such, he has a greater sphere of influence and power than do human tyrants. Not only

does he corrupt the land and his slaves' physical well-being, but he also corrupts their nature, so much so that they begin to lose their capacities as free-willed, rational agents and, like their master, take pleasure in destruction and evil for their own sakes. Consequently, because the tyrant is unable to inspire political unity and trust within his regime, treason and other forms of vice become commonplace.

My last chapter will contrast this former political regime with that of kingship. Unlike the tyrant, the good king tends to his subjects' physical well-being and makes sure they are able to provide for themselves. In addition, the king always labors for the benefit of the whole city—not merely himself. Whereas the tyrant suppresses the individuality of his subjects for the sake of his own good, a good king recognizes the innate virtues within his subjects and encourages them to grow in virtue and fulfill their own particular nature for their own sakes and for the sake of the whole community. With this selfless manner of rule, the people are able to trust their king and, in turn, love him. Therefore, unlike the tyrant, a good king does not have to fear factional conflicts and treason. By striving for the “common advantage,” the king benefits the whole community and also himself. In doing so, the example of his rule proves that consistently seeking private advantage, as does the tyrant, not only corrupts the whole but, ultimately, is self-defeating.

CHAPTER ONE

The Influence of Tolkien's Own Christian Beliefs on His Writing

J.R.R. Tolkien was a devout Catholic, and, as such, these beliefs manifested themselves in all aspects of his life, including his writing. As he plainly states in one of his letters, "I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories), and am in fact a Roman Catholic."⁴² It was Tolkien's mother who "brought him into the Church," as he later described in a 1963 letter to his son.⁴³ Yet, by the age of twelve, both of Tolkien's parents had died,⁴⁴ and he and his sister were left to the care of Father Francis Morgan, who raised them in strict observance of religion. It is because of Tolkien's strong religious background and beliefs that readers often mistakenly consider *The Lord of the Rings* a Christian allegory. However, Tolkien decidedly rejects such interpretations:

I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I

think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory';⁴⁵ but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.⁴⁶

Tolkien strongly maintains that *The Lord of the Rings* is not an allegory, but he does not deny that it can still be applicable. Nor does he deny that the religious truths, which resonate in his life, also find their way into his subcreated⁴⁷ world:

There must be some relevance to the 'human situation' (of all periods). So something of the teller's own reflections and 'values' will inevitably get worked in. This is not the same as allegory.⁴⁸

For this reason, in a 1953 letter to a close friend, Tolkien acknowledges that "*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision."⁴⁹

Although Tolkien admits that Middle-earth is not a Christian world, he recognizes that it is a world of "natural theology."⁵⁰ The events that occur in Middle-earth do not serve any allegorical purpose of retelling the story of Christ; however, both the characters and plot are bound to the natural law and objective truths. Consequently, Tolkien's sub-created world is not inconsistent with his Christian

⁴² *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 288.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 340.

⁴⁴ In 1896, at the age of four, Tolkien's father died, leaving his mother to raise him and his sister alone. For a while, her family helped to financially support them. However, when she joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1900, they ceased their support. She died four years later, and this loss profoundly affected Tolkien. As he writes to his son Michael in 1963, "I am the one who came up out of Egypt, and pray to God none of my seed shall return thither. I witnessed (half-comprehending) the heroic sufferings and early death in extreme poverty of my mother who brought me into the Church" (*Ibid*).

⁴⁵ Similarly, Tolkien later writes, "That there is no allegory does not, of course, say there is no applicability. There always is" (*Ibid*, 262).

⁴⁶ Forward to the Second Edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, xv.

⁴⁷ Tolkien argued that fantasy writers serve as "sub-creators" because they create worlds still ruled by the objective laws of nature—laws established by the first Creator ("On Fairy Stories," 13).

⁴⁸ *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 233.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 172.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 220.

beliefs, and, often these beliefs and principles manifest themselves in his writing. As he states in a letter to one of his readers, “I don’t feel under obligation to make my story fit with formalized Christian theology, though I actually intended it to be consonant with Christian thought and belief.”⁵¹

Christian Tradition:

As a committed Christian, Tolkien understood all of creation to suffer from a serious and mortal wound. According to the creation account of Genesis, it was not until the disobedience of Adam and Eve that sin, strife, and sickness entered the world. Consequently, after the Fall, God’s perfect creation, which once flourished in harmony, became divided against itself—wounded physically and spiritually. The world that Adam once held dominion over became cursed. He was forced to work the ground with hard labor, animals became voracious and violent, and the natural elements became a dangerous threat to him. The Fall also cursed all of humanity. Rather than basing their actions and thoughts on the honor and praise of God, men became self-centered and only sought their own glory and success. Thus, human relations became strained with competition, envy, and pride. In their intended state, jealousy would not divide men; rather, they would excel at their particular virtues and, thus, benefit themselves and the whole community. However, after the Fall, this harmony crumbled as men became vain and selfish and chose to seek their own advancement rather than God’s will and, consequently, the good of society. By failing to fulfill their intended purpose and choosing to live in sin, not only did men negatively affect their relationships with others in the community, but they also affected their own spiritual well-being by separating themselves from God. In the

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 355.

Garden of Eden, God walked with Adam.⁵² However, after the Fall, he became physically divided from his Creator since perfection cannot fellowship with that which is fallen.

For this reason, God, in His infinite love and mercy, provided a way for mankind to be reconciled back to Him. The wound that man caused in his own disobedience, God mended with the wounding of His own Son, Jesus Christ. As a result, for those who accept this salvation, God provides the forgiveness of their sins and reestablishes their fellowship with Him. Although His followers still live in a fallen world and still possess a wounded, sinful nature, He grants them the grace to restore the harmony within their own lives. However, this restoration of harmony is a process that cannot be completed until man’s nature and environment are healed.

Sanctification is the process of being made holy, and the end result is a restoration of the intended harmony between the Creator and His creation. Although men can never be fully sanctified while still troubled by sin, they may see glimpses of this restoration as they begin the process. Saint Paul, for example, maintains that the Church must serve in harmony with all its members. He compares the Church to the human body and suggests that although each part has an individual function, when it excels in its intended role, it benefits the entire body. Yet, when the part fails to perform its function, it negatively affects the rest of the body. This relationship is also found in the Church—the Body of Christ. Just as the parts of a body work together for a common purpose, the Church must also do the same, working continually for the glory of God. As Paul writes:

⁵² Genesis 3:8 [All Biblical references will be taken from the New King James Version].

There should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.⁵³

Yet, these earthly visions of harmony are but glimpses. Therefore, the final hope of Christianity is the complete restoration of creation—the healing of its deep wound—back to its intended, holy state. However, it is important to recognize that because of the grace of salvation, which requires our choice of free will, this ultimate reconciliation will be greater than the previous state. God does not merely restore us back to what the world originally was; rather, He grants us something greater. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, God offers mankind brief visions of this final restoration. For example, in the book of Isaiah, God describes through the prophet a glimpse of the promised recreation. He states:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind... The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying... They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit...and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain... It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy My holy mountain.⁵⁴

Here, God clearly promises complete healing of the wound caused by sin. The land, the animals, the labor of men, and their relationships with one other and with God are all restored to their intended, harmonious state. Likewise, in the final book of the New Testament, the Apostle John also records a similar revelation from God:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the earth passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."⁵⁵

Again, this passage clearly demonstrates the restoration of man's relationship with God. Just as God once walked with Adam in the Garden, God will again dwell with His people after the recreation of the new earth. Thus, God will completely heal the wound that afflicted His creation and will create something greater through it.

Tolkien's Account of the Fall of Middle-earth:

Because Tolkien allowed his Christian beliefs to influence his subcreated world, its history also included a Fall. As he wrote, "There cannot be any 'story' without a fall—all stories are ultimately about the fall—at least not for human minds as we

⁵³ I Corinthians 12:25-26.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 65: 17, 19b, 21b, 23a, 24-25.

⁵⁵ Revelation 21: 1-4.

know them and have them.”⁵⁶ The chief antagonist in Tolkien’s trilogy is the character of Sauron. Although Tolkien does not include any dialogue between him and the other characters, Sauron is still one of the most important characters in the trilogy, as he is one of the most important figures in the history of Middle-earth. Sauron’s rise to power is described in the *Silmarillion*, Tolkien’s last and, as he considered, most important work, which establishes the foundation for his entire mythology. According to Tolkien’s account, before the creation of the physical world, God, referred to as Iluvatar, created a race of intelligent de-bodied beings, the Ainur/Valar, similar to the angels of the Bible. According to Tolkien’s description of these beings, they were “angelic powers whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres (of rule and government, not creation, making or remaking).”⁵⁷ Sauron was one of these beings, as were Gandalf and Saruman, although of a lesser order than Sauron. Yet, rather than taking part in the Creator’s will, Sauron chose to follow Morgoth/Melkor, another Valar who foolishly believed that he could rebel against God. Consequently, Sauron fell with Morgoth and was cast out of Valinor, the Blessed Realm.

When the Valar defeated Morgoth, Sauron deserted him and affected repentance. Yet, rather than returning to receive judgment, Sauron lingered in Middle-earth under the feigned guise of helping to restore it from the wounds of the war. Through this deception, Sauron was able to blind the Elves, who truly desired to heal the land, to his actual intention of regaining power and building a secret fortress for himself. When God created the Elves, He granted them with the natural inclination toward “the adornment of the land and the healing of its

hurts.”⁵⁸ Recognizing their desire for beauty, Sauron deceived the Elves by suggesting that they could make Middle-earth as beautiful as the Blessed Realm. By encouraging them to assume creative powers, Sauron was actually tempting them to deny the natural order and put themselves in the place of God, thus, challenging God’s supremacy and also His intended purpose for them. In addition, Sauron recognized the Elves’ desire to prevent the “decay”⁵⁹ of those things that they loved. Therefore, he helped them make several Rings of Power to assist them with their desire to do good. However, Sauron only helped them in order that he might deceive them further. Stealing all of their powers and adding the power of invisibility, Sauron made the One Ring in secret, and with this Ring, he could know all of the thoughts of the Ring-bearers and dominate them.

Upon discovering Sauron’s treachery, the Elves hid their Rings from him and began contemplating varying means to defeat him. Sauron’s weakness was that, in making the One Ring, he had to pour much of his power and strength into the Ring, and, thus, even though he created it, he became dependent on its existence for his own. The Elves knew that without the Ring, Sauron could be challenged. Furthermore, they also knew that if the Ring was destroyed, Sauron’s power would be overthrown and his realm destroyed. However, Sauron did not fear the Ring’s destruction because the lust for power that the Ring created in its Bearers would strongly tempt them to use it rather than destroy it. As a result of fearing no real threat, Sauron’s power and influence grew and spread throughout Middle-earth.

Not only did Sauron deceive the Elves, but he also deceived the race of Men, the Numenoreans, who dwelt on the island of Numenor. These men benefited from

⁵⁶ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 147.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 146.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 151-152.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 152.

multiple blessings. First, their island was in sight of Eressea, which was in sight of Valinor. In addition, because the Numenoreans were men, they were mortal; however, they were granted with lifespans three-times longer than those of other mortals. In return for enjoying these blessings, the Valar forbade the men from sailing any farther west than their island because seeing the immortal would only tempt them with the desire of becoming immortal. For some time, although the men did not understand this command, they obeyed it. Then, their obedience became rather hesitant, and they began to honor the dead much more than before as a means to keep their memory alive and immortal.

It was at this time, when the men of Numenor began to desire immortality and question the will of God, that Sauron openly declared himself as the Lord of the World. However, Tar-Calion, the King of Numenor, defeated him and brought him as a prisoner to Numenor. Yet, rather than remaining a prisoner, Sauron soon became the king's chief counsel. Immediately, Sauron began tempting the Numenoreans by denying the existence of God and telling them that the Valar simply created the notion of the One. The real God, Sauron claimed, was he who dwelt in the Void—Melkor. He further suggested that the Valar only prohibited them from sailing west because they feared that the Numenorean Kings might rival them. Thus, because of Sauron's deception, the men began worshiping the Dark and cruelly persecuting the faithful.

When Tar-Calion began to approach death, he decided to violate the Valar's commandment and sail west toward immortality. Recognizing his blatant disobedience and blasphemy, the Valar appealed to God and received the power and authority to respond. They rent a chasm in the sea, which engulfed Tar-Calion's armada as well as the island of Numenor. They did not

destroy Valinor and Eressea, but they cut men off completely from these Blessed Realms. Consequently, through this disobedience, the race of men fell from their once high position, and their world was wounded.

Yet, among men, hope was never completely lost. Elendil and his sons, Isildur and Anarion, fled Numenor before the storm, and they established the twin cities of Gondor and Arnor in Middle-earth. They created the last alliance with Elves and waged war upon Sauron, who also fled Numenor and established a stronghold in Mordor. They temporarily defeated Sauron when Isildur cut the Ring from his hand with the shards of his father's sword. However, lured by the lust of the Ring's power, Isildur refused to destroy the Ring and instead kept it for himself. Not long after he took possession of the Ring, Isildur drowned, and the Ring was lost. Therefore, Sauron was not completely destroyed; although temporarily weakened, his corrupt spirit still lived. Arnor's power diminished and eventually faded away. Gondor rose in power for a short while, but eventually it too began to decay. Meanwhile, Sauron slowly regained his power in Mirkwood before he declared himself again in Mordor, and, at the same time, an unsuspecting hobbit discovered the Ring.⁶⁰

These developments form the background of *The Lord of the Rings*, which includes, as Tolkien summarizes:

The overthrow of the last incarnation of Evil, the unmaking of the Ring, the final departure of the Elves, and the return in majesty of the true King, to take over the Dominion of

⁶⁰ Tolkien describes this account of the Ring's discovery in his earlier work *The Hobbit*. Through this story, Tolkien establishes the framework for the *Lord of the Rings* by explaining Sauron's reemergence as the Dark Lord, introducing several central characters, and by familiarizing readers with the nature of hobbits.

Men, inheriting all that can be transmitted of Elfdom in his high marriage with Arwen daughter of Elrond, as well as the lineal royalty of Numenor.⁶¹

As the story opens, the wound of the Fall has again become inflamed and brought to a head in the War of the Ring, but there is the hope of healing offered by Aragorn, the heir of Isildur, who will help lead the battle against Sauron and who will also reestablish the throne of Gondor. With his reign, he will bring restoration, and the people and land of Middle-earth will begin to experience physical, political, and spiritual healing from the years of being oppressed by evil.

The Desire for Reconciliation and Healing

Because of the suffering caused by the wound of the Fall, mankind always longs for healing and the restoration of Eden's perfection. Tolkien describes this desire in a 1945 letter to his son Christopher Tolkien:

...[b]ut certainly there was an Eden on this very earth. We all long for it, and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most humane, is still soaked with a sense of 'exile'... We shall never recover it, for that is not the way of repentance, which works spirally and not in a closed circle; we may recover something like it, but on a higher plane.⁶²

Tolkien maintains that mankind will always long for a restoration of Eden, but he argues that men will never return to the Garden. Rather, he suggests that God will provide an

even greater restoration for mankind, one of which He continually offers glimpses. The greatest glimpse that the world has yet experienced has been the Resurrection,⁶³ but until the day when Christ will return triumphant and the world will be recreated, God blesses His people with other brief visions of the harmony that should, and someday will, exist again among them.

While God intended the Church to serve as an example of this future harmony, He also provides glimpses through other means. Although it is important to remember that Tolkien did not intend *The Lord of the Rings* to serve as an allegory, the truths described in it were intended to be applicable.⁶⁴ Therefore, since this desire for healing and restoration resided in Tolkien, brief visions of this harmony often find their way into his writing. He describes a world

⁶³ "...and I concluded by saying that the Resurrection was the greatest 'eucatastrophe' possible in the greatest Fairy Story—and produces that essential emotion: Christian joy which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow, because it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love. Of course I do not mean that the Gospels tell what is *only* a fairy-story; but I do mean very strongly that they do tell a fairy-story: the greatest. Man the story-teller would have to be redeemed in a manner consonant with his nature: by a moving story. *But* since the author of it is the supreme Artist and the Author of Reality, this one was also made to Be, to be true on the Primary Plane. So that in the Primary Miracle (the Resurrection) and the lesser Christian miracles too, though less, you have not only that sudden glimpse of the truth behind the apparent Ananke [necessity, constraint] of our world, but a glimpse that is actually a ray of light through the very chinks of the universe about us"

(Ibid, 100-101).

⁶⁴ See note 45.

⁶¹ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 160.

⁶² *Ibid*, 110.

that, while troubled by evil, still constantly struggles to regain the intended harmony of its creation. The leadership provided by Aragorn offers readers such glimpses. He is not an allegorical Christ-figure, as many have mistakenly concluded; however, he is a godly man whose actions mirror the objective standard of Christ. The wound caused by the Fall can only be healed by God's hand, but obedience to His objective standard can help alleviate the pain and prevent future wounding. Thus, by allowing both the land and the people to fulfill their purposes and by encouraging each to excel in their specific virtues, the king promotes harmony throughout his realm and provides a glimpse of what sort of kingdom is ultimately to come.

CHAPTER TWO

A Land "Diseased and Beyond All Healing"

Tyranny's Corruption of the Land

Tolkien insists that there can never be a story that is not affected by or concerned with a Fall of some sort. Therefore, just as the Bible begins with an account of man's Fall, Tolkien's myth also includes a Fall—of angels and men. Yet, while his story is "quite different in form, of course, to that of Christian myth," both "contain a large measure of ancient and wide-spread motives or elements" since both share common truths.⁶⁵ For this reason, although the two accounts describe the Fall through varying means, both share the theme that disobedience causes the creation to become wounded spiritually and physically.

In the Genesis account, man's sin expels him from the Garden of Eden—a place where all of creation existed in complete harmony with each other and man could enjoy unhindered fellowship with God—and forces him to enter a cursed and antagonistic world. Similarly, Tolkien's description of the Fall includes an actual rending of the land between the kingdom of Numenor and the Blessed Realm of the gods. Consequently, man must then dwell in Middle-earth—a cursed world, fallen from its intended nature. As such, the land is wounded and suffers from disorder and evil. This imagery of the curse is consistent throughout Tolkien's writings; one such illustration is the negative effect that corrupt rule has on the land.

Tyranny is the corrupt form of monarchy. As Aristotle describes it, tyranny is a

⁶⁵ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 147

“deviation” from kingship.⁶⁶ Not only is tyranny the corrupt form of monarchy, but it is also the “worst” regime.⁶⁷ While the monarch rules for the good of his kingdom, the tyrant allows his own desires and ambitions to dictate his actions and laws. Consequently, a good king attempts to alleviate the pain from the wound inherent in a fallen world, but a tyrant perpetuates this wound through the selfish subversion of true virtue and harmony.⁶⁸ Because tyranny is the corrupt form of monarchy, it must also corrupt all that it rules—including the land. Therefore, as Tolkien illustrates throughout his trilogy, the land becomes barren and sickly when under this type of dominion.

Because Sauron was once of a higher order of being than the Children of God,⁶⁹ the effects of his tyrannical rule are more extreme than human forms of despotism. As Tolkien wrote in his notes of W.H. Auden’s review of *The Return of the King*:

In my story Sauron represents as near an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible. He had gone the

way of all tyrants: beginning well, at least on the level that while desiring to reorder all things according to his own wisdom he still at first considered the (economic) well-being of other inhabitants of the Earth. But he went further than human tyrants in pride and the lust for domination, being in origin an immortal (angelic) spirit.⁷⁰

Since Sauron does come from a higher order than do mortals, he has a greater sphere of influence and power than do human tyrants. Corruption is associated with capacity, and he is as the lily that festers.⁷¹ As a part of the higher order of creation, Sauron possessed a great capacity toward virtue, beauty, and wisdom. However, because of this power and influence, he also possessed the ability to inflict much far-reaching evil as well. Although the consequences of his tyranny might be more extreme than the consequences that result from mortal forms of despotism, through these drastic examples, Tolkien can more clearly demonstrate the negative effects of tyranny and can also illustrate the basic principle that corrupt rule produces corrupt effects.

Sauron’s Corruption of His Realm

According to Aristotle, “tyranny... looks toward nothing common, unless it is for the sake of private benefit.”⁷² As a tyrant of the worst sort,⁷³ Sauron only thinks

⁶⁶ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1279b5.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 1289a40.

⁶⁸ Aquinas also suggests that a tyrant “seeks from the regime his own advantage, not the good of the people subject to him.” The name “tyrant” is “derived from strength, namely, in that he crushes by his power and does not rule by justice.” [Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, Translated by Richard J. Reagan, Edited by William P. Baumgarth and Richard J. Reagan, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 206.]

⁶⁹ Whereas God granted some creative powers to the Valar, He alone created the Children of God—Elves and Men. The purpose of the Elves, the “First-born,” was to “love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection, to last while it lasts, never leaving it even when ‘slain,’ but returning—and, yet when the Followers [Men] come, to teach them, and make way for them, to ‘fade’ as the Followers grow and absorb the life from which they both proceed” (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 147).

⁷⁰Ibid, 243.

⁷¹ As Shakespeare writes in Sonnet 94, “Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.” Those with the greatest capacity for good, accordingly, possess the greatest capacity to inflict great evil.

⁷² Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1311a5.

⁷³ “There is a third kind of tyranny, the one that is most particularly held to be tyranny, being a sort of counterpart to absolute kingship. Any monarchy must necessarily be a tyranny of this sort if it rules in unchallenged fashion over persons who are all similar or better, and with a view to its own

of his own advancement—expansion of his power and the destruction of any who would oppose him. With these motives, his concern for anything is merely utilitarian; that is, he only acts in a manner that might prove useful in contributing to or sustaining his empire. Therefore, he has no concern for the beauty or fruitfulness of his land because these abstract virtues do not appear to promote his power. In addition, as he is evil, he also takes pleasure in death, destruction, and disease for their own sakes. Rather than discouraging the further decay of the land, he instead encourages the perpetuation of the wound. As a result, not only does his own land become an utter wasteland, but, as his power stretches throughout Middle-earth, the effects of his influence also physically manifest themselves in the surrounding areas.

Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee have embarked on a journey from their comfortable life in the Shire to the heart of Sauron's dominion, Mt. Doom, to destroy the One Ring and free Middle-earth from the Dark Lord's influence. Although they observed evidence of the Dark Lord's hand as they made their way away from the Shire, the sickly barrenness of the tyrant's own realm is quite appalling to them when they first enter Mordor. Tolkien's initial description of Mordor vividly illustrates this idea:

Frodo looked round in horror. Dreadful as the Dead Marshes had been, and the arid moors of the Noman-lands, more loathsome far was the country that the crawling day now slowly unveiled to his shrinking eyes. Even to the Mere of Dead Faces some haggard phantom of

green spring would come; but here neither spring nor summer would ever come again. Here nothing lived, not even the leprous growths that feed on rottenness. The gasping pools were choked with ash and crawling muds, sickly white and grey, as if the mountains had vomited the filth of their entrails upon the lands about. High mounds of crushed and powdered rock, great cones of earth fire-blasted and poison-stained, stood like an obscene grave-yard in endless rows, slowly revealed in the reluctant light.

They had come to the desolation that lay before Mordor: the lasting monument to the dark labour of its slaves that should endure when all their purposes were made void; a land defiled, diseased beyond all healing—unless the Great Sea should enter in and wash it with oblivion. "I feel sick," said Sam. Frodo did not speak.

For a while they stood there, like men on the edge of a sleep where nightmare lurks, holding it off, though they know that they can only come to morning through the shadows.⁷⁴

Tolkien describes Mordor with vivid images of disease and death. Since the previous waterways have become stagnant "gasping pools," nothing can survive in this environment, "not even the leprous growths that feed on rottenness." Further illustrating this image of death, even the rocks appear like gravestones. This severe corruption of the land cannot but have an adverse effect on the travelers. Just as it seems like the mountains had "vomited the filth of their

advantage and not that of the ruled. Hence [it is rule over persons who are] unwilling; for no free person would willingly tolerate this sort of rule" (Ibid, 1295a15-20).

⁷⁴ *The Two Towers*, 617.

entrails upon the lands,” it also makes Sam physically ill and leaves Frodo without words.

Despite this initial description of Mordor, the land is not completely devoid of life. However, what little growth that has managed to survive there also demonstrates the effects of its corrupt care:

Upon its outer marges under the westward mountains Mordor was a dying land, but it was not yet dead. And here things still grew, harsh, twisted, bitter, struggling for life. In the glens of the Morgai on the other side of the valley low scrubby trees lurked and clung, coarse grey grass-tussocks fought with the stones, and withered mosses crawled on them; and everywhere great writhing, tangled brambles sprawled. Some had long stabbing thorns, some hooked barbs that rent like knives. The sullen shriveled leaves of a past year hung on them, grating and rattling in the sad airs, but their maggot-ridden buds were only just opening. Flies, dun or grey, or black, marked like Orcs with a red eye-shaped blotch, buzzed and stung; and above the briar-thickets clouds of hungry midges danced and reeled.⁷⁵

Without adequate care, the wound worsens, forcing life to struggle for survival. Vegetation becomes defensive against all that would seek to destroy it or leech off it as a parasite. Therefore, sharp thorns became commonplace. Sam, the faithful gardener, comments on one such thorn:

I didn't know anything grew in Mordor! But if I had known, this is just what I'd have looked for. These thorns must be a foot long by the feel

of them; they've stuck through everything I've got on.⁷⁶

The land of Mordor is either dead or defensive; there is no longer any beauty or potential for beauty. However, Ithilien, the former garden of Gondor, is just beginning to manifest the ruinous effects of evil, as it has only been under Sauron's control for a short while. As the hobbits attempt to enter Sauron's stronghold, they pass through these former gardens on its outskirts. After the disgust at first entering Mordor, the hobbits find joy in a place that, although under the influence of Sauron, still possesses beauty:

The hearts of the hobbits rose again a little in spite of weariness: the air was fresh and fragrant, and it reminded them of the uplands of the Northfarthing far away. It seemed good to be reprieved, to walk in a land that had only been a few years under the dominion of the Dark Lord and was not yet fallen wholly into decay.⁷⁷

Rather than being stagnant and diseased, Ithilien only lacks proper care and, thus, is rather overgrown. Its capacity for beauty is not lost, but it does not fulfill all of its potential for beauty either. However, this lack of care bothers the gardener little. Sam finds exceeding joy in the overgrown gardens, until he discovers evidence that the Enemy's servants had recently been there and defiled it.

Because tyranny, by its nature, is selfish, the only concern a tyrant has for the fruitfulness of his land is purely self-serving. If the productivity of the land serves the will of the tyrant, then he will cultivate it. However, if he has no need of the fruits of the land, then he will not concern himself

⁷⁵ *The Return of the King*, 900.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 896.

⁷⁷ *The Two Towers*, 634-635.

with it and, instead, will allow it to perish or simply destroy it needlessly. For this reason, Sauron does not properly care for the once great garden of Ithilien. He does not respect its beauty, and, therefore, his servants do not care for it either. Consequently, Sam knows that the Enemy was near because of the needless destruction that they left behind them:

They had not come very far from the road, and yet even in so short a space they had seen scars of the old wars, and the newer wounds made by the Orcs and other foul servants of the Dark Lord: a pit of uncovered filth and refuse; trees hewn down wantonly and left to die, with evil runes or the fell sign of the Eye cut in rude strokes on their bark.

Sam scrambling below the outfall of the lake, smelling and touching the unfamiliar plants and trees, forgetful for the moment of Mordor, was reminded suddenly of their ever-present peril. He stumbled on a ring still scorched by fire, and in the midst of it he found a pile of charred and broken bones and skulls. The swift growth of the wild with briar and eglantine and trailing clematis was already drawing a veil over this place of dreadful feast and slaughter; but it was not ancient. He hurried back to his companions, but he said nothing: the bones were best left in peace and not pawed and routed by Gollum.⁷⁸

Tolkien claims that the Orcs inflict additional “wounds” on the land, which also leave behind evident “scars.” Because their lord has no concern for life and beauty, he does not teach them to respect these qualities either. Instead, he allows, and

encourages them, to destroy both life and beauty at their whim.

This destruction truly is mindless and contrary to reason. Ithilien was the former garden of Gondor and, thus, had the potential to yield a great harvest for its lord. Yet, Sauron does not cultivate the land and instead allows its wanton destruction. For this reason, his lack of concern for the land, which could provide so much for him, violates his utilitarian motives and could also be self-defeating as well.⁷⁹ Despite the pleasure he takes in destruction, he does depend on some supplies to sustain his slaves. Yet, since he allows for his land’s destruction, he also destroys his direct means of provision and must seek supplies elsewhere. However, as his power extends, his corrupting influence and damaging consequences do as well. Therefore, to continue to revel in mindless destruction could also lead to his own self-destruction since the ultimate victory of evil is nothing at all.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ In her essay, “Power and Meaning in *The Lord of the Rings*,” Patricia Meyer Spacks similarly argues that Evil rejects a type of closeness, or harmony, with the natural world. As such, the Enemy has to depend on machinery rather than natural forces to accomplish its work. When nature is corrupted so far, it cannot produce a good product. Thus, Sauron has to look to secondary sources for supplies, and, again, this has the potential to be self-defeating [Patricia Meyer Spacks, “Power and Meaning in *The Lord of the Rings*,” in *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*, Edited by Rose A. Zimbaro and Neil D. Issacs, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 56].

⁸⁰ Tolkien shares Saint Augustine’s view of evil—absolute evil cannot exist. “In my story I do not deal in Absolute Evil. I do not think there is such a thing, since that is Zero. I do not think that at any rate any ‘rational being’ is wholly evil. Satan fell. In my myth Morgoth fell before the Creation of the physical world. In my story Sauron represents as near an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible” (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 243). Augustine claimed that nothing which exists can be completely evil. Existence is a good in and of

⁷⁸Ibid, 637.

Sauron's Influence on Surrounding Areas

As the armies of Mordor begin to advance on surrounding areas, they bring death and decay with them. As a means of intensifying anxiety and breeding despair within the hearts of his opposition, Sauron casts a darkness over the land while his armies approach Gondor:

The world was darkening. The very air seemed brown, and all things about were black and grey and shadowless; there was a great stillness. No shape of cloud could be seen, unless it were far away and westward, where the furthest groping fingers of the great gloom still crawled onwards and a little light leaked through them. Overhead there hung a heavy roof, somber and featureless, and light seemed rather to be failing than growing.⁸¹

Sauron recognizes the influence that nature has on individuals. The lack of light creates a sense of lifelessness throughout the land, and, thus, as the light fades, hope seems to wane as well.

itself. Therefore, even those things which appear to be wholly evil, in fact, are not because they still exist. As Augustine writes, "to that nature which supremely is, and which created all else that exists, no nature is contrary save that which does not exist. For nonentity is the contrary of that which is. And thus there is no being contrary to God, the Supreme Being, and Author of all beings whatsoever" [Saint Augustine, *The City of God*. Translated by Marcus Dods. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1950), 382].

Evil cannot exist on its own; it is only a negation of something originally good. Because evil depends on goodness for its own existence, the ultimate goal of evil would be complete nothingness. Yet, this end is also self-defeating.

⁸¹*The Return of the King*, 783-784.

Similarly, the armies also herald their approach with the sounds of devastation and death:

All night watchmen on the walls heard the rumour of the enemy that roamed outside, burning field and tree, and hewing any man that they found abroad, living or dead... The plain was dark with their marching companies, and as far as eyes could strain in the mirk there sprouted, like a foul fungus-growth, all about the beleaguered city great camps of tents, black or somber red.⁸²

Like their master, the Orcs find perverse pleasure in needless destruction, as evidenced in their mutilation of both living and dead men. As the men of Gondor listen to these sounds throughout the night, their spirits cannot help but be diminished. Then, as they look out upon the plain and see how the Orc camps destroy their land while leeching off of it, "like a foul fungus-growth," the enemy is able to further wound the spirit and morale of the men of Gondor.

While traveling to their various destinations, the Fellowship visits many strange and beautiful places, but they also witness the effects of Sauron's influence as well. For example, when Merry and Pippin meet Treebeard the Ent, he describes Sauron's corruption of Saruman, a wizard of high order and an imitator of Sauron. The Ent explains that Saruman used to come to him for lessons, but now he realizes that it was not for wisdom's sake but, rather, only for the wizard's own selfish gains. He suggests that that Saruman is attempting to become a Power, one that will initially align with Sauron but will later emerge as a competing force.

Saruman's power, under the influence of evil, has become misdirected,

⁸²*Ibid*, 803-804.

and, therefore, like Sauron, he wantonly destroys and corrupts life. Treebeard laments the effects of the wizard's downfall:

He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment. And now it is clear that he is a black traitor. He has taken up with foul folk; with the Orcs. Brm, hoom! Worse than that: he has been doing something to them; something dangerous. For these Isengarders are more like wicked Men. It is a mark of evil things that came in the Great Darkness that they cannot abide in the Sun; but Saruman's Orcs can endure it, even if they hate it. I wonder what he has done? Are they Men he has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be a black evil!⁸³

In order to create a new breed of Orc, Saruman had to twist and distort the virtues of something else, namely, the race of Men. Thus, when used for evil purposes, the wizard's power can only further corrupt that which had already been ruined or ruin that which was previously good. In this manner, Saruman's power then fails to serve the purpose for which it was intended—the betterment of life. Instead, he acts contradictorily to his own intended purpose by further wounding the creation.

In addition, Treebeard describes how the wizard also corrupts nature itself by damming the waterways, cutting down the forests, and polluting the surrounding areas with his waste:

He and his foul folk are making havoc now. Down on the borders they are felling trees—good trees.

Some of the tress they just cut down and leave to rot—Orc-mischief that; but most are hewn up and carried off to feed the fires of Orthanc. There is always smoke rising from Isengard these days.⁸⁴

Like Sauron, the wizard destroys the trees both for his own twisted pleasure and also for tyrannical and utilitarian purposes. His slaves, following the example of their lord, have no respect for life or beauty and, therefore, also engage in this meaningless destruction. Yet, Isengard does make use of some trees it has hewn down. However, rather than being used for any beneficial purpose that is not simply self-serving for Saruman, the wizard only makes use of these trees if they might aid him in producing further corruption. Thus, not only do their fires produce filthy smoke that seeps through the forest, but the fires also provide the means to create more weapons that can inflict further wounds on the land and the people.

Both Sauron and Saruman bring destruction upon the Shire as well. When in Lothlorien, Galadriel allows both Frodo and Sam to look into her Mirror and see what has and could result from the evil of their day. When Sam looks into the Mirror, he observes the devastation of their home and longs to return in order that he might stop it. However, he resolves only to return with his master once they have accomplished their task. When they finally are able to make their way back home, they discover how far the hand of evil reached. Their hobbit holes had been destroyed, and new ugly structures replaced them. The Bywater had been polluted, and all the trees, including Bilbo's Party Tree, had been felled. In a fit of tears, Sam cries, "This is worse than Mordor! Much worse in a way. It comes home to you, as they say; because it is home, and you

⁸³ *The Two Towers*, 462.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

remember it before it was all ruined.” Frodo replies, “Yes, this is Mordor. Just one of its works. Saruman was doing its work all the time, even when he thought he was working for himself.”⁸⁵

mately calls for good to prevail and assists in the overthrow of evil.

Nature’s Rebellion Against the Forces of Tyranny

In Tolkien’s world, when a tyrant ceases to care for the land and instead corrupts it, nature will ultimately strike back. It is Treebeard, with the assistance of the other Ents, who attacks Isengard and begins to reverse the effects of the wizard’s corruption. Similarly, as Frodo and Sam make their way through the ancient ruins of Gondor and into Mordor, nature provides them with a glimpse of hope. The hobbits see the stone image of a great king and observe that the servants of the Enemy had scrawled all over it and disfigured it by knocking off its head, replacing it with another stone on which they had painted a large red eye and an evil grin. However, in the sunlight, Frodo sees the king’s head along the roadside and cries, “Look Sam! Look! The king has got a crown again!”

The eyes were hollow and the carved beard was broken, but about the high stern forehead there was a coronal of silver and gold. A trailing plant with flowers like small white stars had bound itself across the brows as if in reverence for the fallen king, and in the crevices of his stony hair yellow stonecrop gleamed.

Encouraged by this vision of hope, Frodo exclaims, “They cannot conquer forever!”⁸⁶ Thus, despite the efforts of the Enemy to further wound the land, nature itself ulti-

⁸⁵ *The Return of the King*, 994.

⁸⁶ *The Two Towers*, 687.

CHAPTER THREE

The Rise of a King from "Deep Roots" – The Harmony and Healing of the Land

The King's Manifestation of the Elvish Virtues

As Tolkien writes, God created the Elves with the intention that they would concern themselves with "the adornment of the land and the healing of its hurts."⁸⁷ They were to "love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection," and when came their Followers—Men—the Elves were to "teach them, and make way for them, to 'fade' as the Followers grow" in prominence throughout Middle-earth.⁸⁸ One such man befriended and trained by the Elves was Aragorn—Dunadan and Ranger of the North.

According to Tolkien's account of the Fall, when man's disobedience caused the gods to destroy the island of Numenor, some men escaped to Middle-earth.⁸⁹ These men were the Dunedain, the "Men of the West." Once in Middle-earth, Elendil and his sons founded the twin kingdoms of Gondor in the south and Arnor in the north. As Arnor was initially the most prestigious of the two states, the high king ruled both realms from the northern capital. Yet, through wars and internal conflict, the city of Arnor eventually dissolved. Similarly, although the city of Gondor remained intact, its line of kings also failed. However, the royal line of descent remained intact through the Dunedain of Arnor—the Rangers of the North.

The Rangers considered it their duty to protect the Northern realm from the influences of Sauron. Because of the Enemy's great hatred for them, the Rangers labored in secret with the help of the Elves from Rivendell. The alliance between the Elves and the Rangers was long-standing, since the first king of Numenor was Half-elven himself—the brother of Elrond. Therefore, the Numenorean royal line contained Elven-blood, as evidenced in the Rangers' dark hair, grey eyes, and keen insight. Not only were the Rangers gifted with great wisdom, but they were also learned in Elven-lore and greatly valued the teachings of the Elves.

During the War of the Ring, Aragorn served as the Chieftain of the Rangers and also the heir to Gondor's throne. As a child, his mother had concealed him from the Enemy by harboring him in Rivendell where Elrond raised him under the Elven name of *Estel*, meaning "hope." While in Imladris, Aragorn became learned in lore and the ways of the Elves. Then, on his twentieth birthday, Elrond revealed to Aragorn his true name and lineage and presented him with the shards of Narsil.⁹⁰ With this knowledge, Aragorn left Rivendell, assumed the position as the Chieftain of the Dunedain, and engaged in the war against the Enemy. It was during this time that he befriended the wizard, Gandalf the Grey, and learned of the newest developments concerning the Enemy and his Ring.

The hobbits first encounter Aragorn in the city of Bree, after escaping from the Enemy's pursuit of them through the Shire. They are intrigued, but also scared of the

⁸⁷ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 151-152.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 147.

⁸⁹ For a more detailed account of the Fall of Middle-earth, see Chapter One.

⁹⁰ Elendil's broken sword. His son, Isildur, from whom Aragorn has descended, picked up the broken hilt of his father's sword and cut the Ring from Sauron's finger. The shards had been preserved by Elrond for when the King would again return to the throne of Gondor. The reforging of the sword was one of the signs of the King's return.

“strange-looking weather-beaten man” who introduces himself as “Strider.”⁹¹ Although hesitantly at first, the hobbits soon realize that they can trust this man, and, consequently, they follow him when he offers to lead them to Rivendell. As they travel with him, they quickly recognize his gifts of foresight and wisdom. In addition, as an Elf-friend, Aragorn understands and shares their desire to live in harmony with the land and heal it from its wounds.⁹² As Gandalf had previously explained to Frodo, Aragorn possesses “strange powers of sight and hearing” and can “understand the languages of beasts and birds.”⁹³ Therefore, Aragorn serves as an excellent guide for the hobbits as they travel to the Elven city. He leads them by “paths that are seldom trodden,”⁹⁴ provides them with the locations of ancient and hidden shelters for rest, and, with his knowledge of herb lore, is also able to offer them medicinal care, as on Weathertop, when the emissaries of the Dark Lord severely wound Frodo. Without Aragorn’s care, Frodo would have been unable to make it to Rivendell since the power of the Enemy’s weapons is so great. However, Aragorn, like the Elves, is able to make use of the innate power of nature that many would overlook. Thus, he tends to Frodo’s wound with *athelas* leaves, a plant in which even the acclaimed herb-master of Gondor does not recognize any virtue, except its wholesome smell when bruised:

For it has no virtue that we know of,
save perhaps to sweeten fouled air,
or to drive away some passing
heaviness. Unless, of course, you

⁹¹ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 153.

⁹² Like Aragorn, the hobbits are also “in touch with ‘nature’ (the soil and other living things, plants and animals).” This similarity is one of the reasons that the hobbits develop such a great respect for the Ranger (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 158).

⁹³ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 145.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 162.

give heed to the rhymes of old days
which women such as our good
Ioreth still repeat without under-
standing.

*When the
black breath blows
and death’s shadow grows
and all lights pass,
come athelas! Come athelas!
Life to the dying*⁹⁵

Because Aragorn is akin to the Elves in his ability to recognize the particular virtues of nature, he is able to fully utilize this plant for its intended purpose and, therefore, can preserve Frodo’s health long enough to bring him the superior healing hands of Elrond.

When they reach Rivendell, they learn they are not the only individuals to seek Elrond for counsel. Elves from Mirkwood, Dwarves, and Men all come to Rivendell with similar questions regarding the Dark Lord. Rather than answering their questions separately, Elrond decides to hold a council in which they all might benefit from each other’s questions and answers. During the course of the council, Aragorn reveals his lineage and his position as the heir to the throne of Gondor, and he also announces his intention to return to the City.

Gondor had been without a king for a thousand years. However, during that time a family of faithful Stewards arose and ruled Gondor in the king’s stead without ever claiming the Crown for themselves. Therefore, for Aragorn to claim to be the heir to the Throne was quite an assertion—one that required proof. The Steward’s eldest son, who was present at the Council and also a member of the Fellowship, was never truly satisfied with the evidence of the Ranger’s claim. Yet, throughout the trilogy, Aragorn continually fulfills necessary prophecies and

⁹⁵ *The Return of the King*, 847.

eventually transforms from the weather-beaten Ranger into the long-awaited King.

As a Ranger, Aragorn did not appear like a majestic king. Rather, many would often laugh at the man they referred to as "Strider" or they would fear him for his appearance and quietness. For this reason, Gandalf left word in Bree for the hobbits that they could trust the Ranger. In his letter, he included these verses attributed to Aragorn and the coming King:

*All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.*

*From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be the blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.⁹⁶*

At Elrond's Council, these verses are again mentioned in reference to Aragorn, as the heir-apparent of Gondor. The natural imagery in these verses is quite strong. Aragorn does come from an ancient line of kings—a line deeply rooted in the lore and wisdom of the Elves. Although the royal line appeared lost, in reality, it had been preserved and will again thrive. Furthermore, Elrond reforges Elendil's broken blade into Andruil and gives it to Aragorn after the conclusion of the Council.⁹⁷

In addition to these verses attributed to Aragorn, several other "legends" regarding the King become realities before he is crowned.⁹⁸ Furthermore, his coronation

brings the fulfillment of even more legends, such as the blossoming of the White Tree—one of the most important symbols of Gondor's royalty. The White Tree was a descendent of Telperion, the Eldest of Trees of the Valar, and, as such, it was not only a symbol of the Throne but also a representation of man's kinship with the High Elves and the Valar. When Gondor's line of kings failed,⁹⁹ the White Tree and its subsequent saplings also died, but because of the Tree's importance, the people still kept the dead Tree in the Court of the Fountain. Placed in such a prominent location, the Tree made quite an impression on Pippin when he and Gandalf first entered the City:

A fountain played there in the morning sun, and a sword of bright green lay about it; but in the midst, drooping over the pool, stood a dead tree, and the falling drops dripped sadly from its barren and broken branches back into the clear water. Pippin glanced at it as he hurried after Gandalf. It looked mournful, he thought, and he wondered why

Andruil shone like a sudden flame as he swept it out. "Elendil!" he cried. "I am Aragorn son of Arathorn, and am called Elessar, the Elfstone, Dunadan, the heir of Isildur Elendil's son of Gondor. Here is the Sword that was Broken and is forged again! Will you aid me or thwart me? Choose swiftly!"

Gimli and Legolas looked at their companion in amazement, for they had not seen him in this mood before. He seemed to have grown in stature while Eomer had shrunk; and in his living face they caught a brief vision of the power and majesty of the kings of stone. For a moment it seemed to the eyes of Legolas that a white flame flickered on the brows of Aragorn like a shining crown.

Eomer stepped back and a look of awe was in his face. He cast down his proud eyes. "These are indeed strange days," he muttered. "Dreams and legends spring forth to life out of the grass."
(*The Two Towers*, 423).

⁹⁹ See Chapter One, "Tolkien's Account of the Fall of Middle-earth."

⁹⁶ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 167, 241.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 269.

⁹⁸ In his first encounter with Aragorn, Eomer questions him regarding his allegiance to the Dark Lord. Aragorn responds that he is an enemy of all those who serve the true Enemy. He also reveals his lineage to Eomer:

Aragorn threw back his cloak. The elven-sheath glittered as he grasped it, and the bright blade of

the dead tree was left in this place where everything else was well tended. *Seven stars and seven stones and one white tree.* The words that Gandalf had murmured came back into his mind.¹⁰⁰

Initially, Pippin cannot understand why the people of Gondor would leave a dead tree in such a well cared for court, but then he remembers Gandalf's words regarding the Tree and the history associated with it. The White Tree had always been one of the central symbols of Gondor's royalty, and, therefore, the people had long anticipated that if the Tree should again bloom, then the return of the King would soon follow. It is for this reason that after his coronation Aragorn is extremely anxious to discover a new sapling. Since the Tree symbolized the continuation of the royal line, its blossoming would also serve as a sign to him that his bride would soon be coming—Arwen, daughter of Elrond. With their marriage, not only would the line of Kings resume, but it would also emphasize the kinship between Men and Elves. Therefore, when Gandalf shows Aragorn the sapling of the White Tree, it is immediately planted with great rejoicing in the Court, “and swiftly and gladly it began to grow; and when the month of June entered in it was laden with blossom.”¹⁰¹

Not only does his ascendancy to the Throne bring about the blooming of the White Tree, but King Elessar¹⁰² also renews the City during his reign. He restores the damage from the war and also makes the

White City of Gondor more beautiful than it ever was, even in its earlier peak of power:

In his time the City was made more fair than it had ever been, even in the days of its first glory; and it was filled with trees and with fountains, and its gates were wrought of mithril and steel, and its streets were paved with white marble; and the Folk of the Mountain laboured in it, and the Folk of the Wood rejoiced to come there; and all was healed and made good, and the houses were filled with men and women and the laughter of children, and no window was blind nor any courtyard empty; and after the ending of the Third Age of the world into the new age it preserved the memory and the glory of the years that were gone.¹⁰³

The King plants trees throughout the City and enlists the help of the Dwarves, who are known for their skill in crafting metals and stone, to come and restore the City's stonework. They also rebuild the gates with steel and mithril—their most precious metal. By adorning the City with the inorganic and organic beauty of the land, both the Elves and the Dwarves find delight in the beauty of the City, and, thus, the King is also able to unite two peoples previously prone to conflict.

A Hobbit's Exercise of Similar Virtues

Just as Aragorn shares the Elves' desire to heal the land and reconcile it to its intended harmony, so does Samwise Gamgee. Prior to embarking on their quest, Sam serves as the gardener of Bag-end, and it is there that he has the opportunity to hear Bilbo's stories and learn of the Elves. Consequently, Sam becomes fascinated by

¹⁰⁰ *The Return of the King*, 736-737.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 951.

¹⁰² The name Aragorn assumes at his coronation. It means “Elf stone,” in reference to the stone from Arwen that he wore around his neck. This name further enforces the reestablished connection between Men and Elves that the King's reign will bring.

¹⁰³ *The Return of the King*, 947.

the Elves and longs to encounter them. It is his love of stories¹⁰⁴ that forces the curious gardener to take part in the quest to Mordor; for, by eavesdropping at the window and listening to Gandalf's discussion with Frodo concerning the Ring, Sam unwittingly becomes his master's companion. Throughout his travels, Sam meets several Elves—of Mirkwood, Rivendell, and Lothlorien. Yet, of these encounters, it is his experience with Galadriel, the Lady of the Wood, which touches him the most.

After completing their quest, the hobbits are able to return to the Shire. However, upon their return, they discover that, to their horror, Mordor's influence has not left their home unscathed either. Saruman, bitter with the hobbits for their part in the overthrow of Isengard, decides to wreak havoc upon their home as well. Therefore, he tears down buildings, pollutes their waterways, turns up their fields, and cuts down their trees. The destruction of the trees is especially difficult for Sam:

The trees were the worst loss and damage, for at Sharkey's bidding they had been cut down recklessly far and wide over the Shire; and Sam grieved over this more than anything else. For one thing, this hurt would take long to heal, and only his great-grandchildren, he thought, would see the Shire as it ought to be.¹⁰⁵

Sam recognizes that although he can help clean the filth and repair the damages, the trees will take years to grow, thus, allowing the scarring effects of the devastation caused by Saruman to remain for longer than desired.

Yet, in his grief, Sam remembers his gift from Galadriel, given to him as the

Company parted from Lothlorien in the beginning of their Quest:

“For you little gardener and lover of trees, I have only a small gift.” She put into his hand a little box of plain grey wood, unadorned save for a single silver rune upon the lid. “Here is set G for Galadriel, but it may also stand for garden in your tongue. In this box there is earth from my orchard, and such blessing as Galadriel has still to bestow is upon it. 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. Then you may remember Galadriel, and catch a glimpse far off of Lothlorien, that you have only seen in our winter. For our spring and summer are gone by, and they will never be seen on earth again save in memory.”¹⁰⁶

Remembering such a generous treasure, Sam asks his friends what he should do with it. Pippin suggests allowing the soil to blow into the wind, and Merry tells him to plant it in one spot, but Sam says, “I'm sure the Lady would not like me to keep it all for my own garden, now that so many folk have suffered.”¹⁰⁷ Frodo agrees and tells Sam that he trusts his judgment. Therefore, Sam uses his gift to the benefit all of the Shire:

So Sam planted saplings in all the places where specially beautiful or beloved tress had been destroyed,

¹⁰⁴ Fairy stories (see footnote 16 of Introduction).

¹⁰⁵ *The Return of the King*, 999.

¹⁰⁶ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 366.

¹⁰⁷ *The Return of the King*, 1000.

and he put a grain of the precious dust in the soil at the root of each. He went up and down the Shire in this labour; but if he paid special attention to Hobbiton and Bywater no one blamed him. 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 center of the Shire as no matter, and cast it in the air with his blessing. The littler sliver nut he planted in the Party Field where the tree had once been; and he wondered at what would come of it. All through the winter he remained as patient as he could, and tried to restrain himself from going round constantly to see if anything was happening.¹⁰⁸

Sam's labor and selflessness creates bounteous results, and the Shire is eventually healed of its ruin. As Galadriel foretold, the beauty of his garden—the Shire—becomes well known throughout Middle-earth:

Spring surpassed his wildest hopes. His trees began to sprout and grow, as if time was in a hurry and wished to make one year do for twenty. In the Party Field a beautiful young sapling leaped up: it had silver bark and long leaves and burst into golden flowers in April. It was indeed a *mallorn*, and it was the wonder of the neighborhood. In after years, as it grew in grace and beauty, it was 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.¹⁰⁹

The natural virtue of the Elves was that they might engage in the “the adornment of the land and the healing of its hurts.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, they were to “love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection.”¹¹¹ Sam shares these virtues, and by selflessly giving his own gift to the Shire, he mirrors the people he so greatly admires. Although he might not rule as the great King of the North and the South as does Aragorn, he humbly serves as the Mayor of Bag-end. As such, both the King and Sam manifest the Elvish virtue of proper stewardship. Not only do they do their part to prevent the perpetuation of the wound caused by the Fall, but they also offer some alleviation for the pain by encouraging the particular virtues of nature to flourish.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 1000-1001.

¹¹⁰ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 151-152.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 147.

CHAPTER FOUR

The "Sickening Spirit" of Mordor: Tyranny's Negative Effect on the Physical, Spiritual, and Political Well-Being of Its People

Physical

Aragorn's knowledge of Elven lore allows him to make use of nature's innate virtues in order to heal the wounded, and this ability is a sign of his legitimacy as king; however, the Enemy is also capable of healing. For example, when the Orcs capture Merry and Pippin, they provide the hobbits with medicinal care:

Ugluk thrust a flask between his [Pippin's] teeth and poured some burning liquid down his throat: he felt a hot fierce glow flow through him. The pain in his legs and ankles vanished. He could stand...Seizing him [Merry] roughly Ugluk pulled him into a sitting position, and tore the bandage off his head. Then he smeared the wound with some dark stuff out of a small wooden box. Merry cried out and struggled wildly... He was healing Merry in Orc-fashion; and his treatment worked swiftly... The gash in his forehead gave him no more trouble, but he bore a brown scar to the end of his days.¹¹²

Therefore, although it appears that the Orcs have the ability to heal, their means of healing first causes pain and then leaves a scar. In addition, the healing capacities of the Enemy are also limited, because, unlike

the King, Evil cannot offer complete healing; rather, it can only provide temporary relief. For, as Pippin discovers when the "warmth of the Orc-draught had gone," he feels "cold and sick again."¹¹³ The reason the care provided by the Enemy is only temporary is because it serves a different purpose than the healing from the King. Whereas the King heals his subjects because he cares for them, the Tyrant only allows his slaves and prisoners to be tended to if their healing serves his ultimate purpose or benefit. Therefore, the Orcs only care for the hobbits in order that they might be able to run, while being whipped, to their final torture. Otherwise, Evil offers no assistance to those in need and, instead, revels in others' pain.

The Tyrant does not concern himself with the well-being of his subjects; instead, he only cares for his own interests. If he demonstrates any care for his people, it is merely a utilitarian concern. For this reason, the tyrant destroys life and has no consideration for the goodwill of his slaves, except when it suits his purpose. As Tolkien describes in one letter, "the tyrants lose sight of objects, become cruel, and like smashing, hurting, and defiling as such."¹¹⁴ Consequently, during war, Sauron does not mourn the deaths within his army—nor does his Captain:

Yet their Captain cared not greatly what they did or how many might be slain: their purpose was only to test the strength of the defence and to keep the men of Gondor busy in many places.¹¹⁵

The Captain, one of the Dark Lord's wraiths—the Witch King of Angmar, views his army not as individuals but as tools. As

112 *The Two Towers*, 438.

113 *Ibid*, 440.

114 *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 200.

115 *The Return of the King*, 809-810.

a result, he deliberately allows for their deaths without any hesitation in order that the loss of their lives might serve the greater purpose of his offensive attack. If ever he or Sauron was concerned with the number of casualties within their army, it would only be because of their anxiety regarding the strength of their forces, not because of any care for their individual soldiers and subjects. A tyrant's concern for anyone or anything always relates back to himself and his own advancement and power.

Spiritual

According to Tolkien, because a good king cares for the individual well-being of his subjects, he recognizes their potential and encourages them to fulfill their particular nature. However, rather than helping those under his dominion to achieve their intended purpose, a tyrant commands them to fulfill *his* purposes and, in addition, further wounds their nature and corrupts them. For example, while Sam and Frodo are struggling to travel through Mordor, Sam notices the Orcs' apparent ability to travel quickly throughout the wasteland. He asks, "Don't Orcs eat, and don't they drink? Or do they just live on foul air and poison?" Frodo answers him by commenting on the Enemy's inability to create or better creatures:

No, they eat and drink, Sam. The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the Orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them; and if they are to live at all, they have to live like other living creatures. Foul waters and foul meats they'll take, if they can get no better, but not poison.¹¹⁶

Frodo explains that the Dark Lord can only corrupt already existing creatures; he cannot create or improve life. According to Tolkien, creative powers only reside with God. In a letter to William Hastings, an owner of a Catholic bookstore, Tolkien explains the limits of creative powers:

In my myth I have used 'subcreation' in a special way... to make visible and physical the effects of Sin or misused Free Will by men. Free Will is derivative, and is therefore only operative within provided circumstances; but in order that it may exist, it is necessary that the Author should guarantee it, whatever betides: sc. when it is 'against His Will,' as we say, at any rate as it appears on a finite view. He does not stop or make 'unreal' sinful acts and their consequences. So in this myth, it is 'feigned' (legitimately whether that is a feature of the real world or not) that He gave special 'sub-creative' powers to certain of His highest created beings: that is a guarantee that what they devised and made should be given the reality of Creation. Of course within limits, and of course subject to certain commands or prohibitions. But if they 'fell,' as the Diabolus Morgoth did, and started making things 'for himself, to be their Lord,' these would 'be,' even if Morgoth broke the supreme ban against making other rational creatures like Elves or Men. They would at least 'be' real physical realities in the physical world, however evil they might prove, even 'mocking' the Children of God. They would be Morgoth's greatest Sins, abuses of his highest privilege, and would be creatures

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 893.

begotten of Sin and naturally bad... I have represented at least the Orcs as pre-existing real beings on whom the Dark Lord has exerted the fullness of his power in remodeling and corrupting them, not making them.¹¹⁷

Within Tolkien's mythology, only God possesses ultimate creative powers. However, He did grant His higher ordered beings certain "sub-creative" powers, that is, the freedom to *make* anything (except rational creatures) that exists under the ultimate dominion of God and is in accord with His laws and precepts. Tolkien distinguishes the act of "making" from that of "creating." Only God may assume ultimate creative powers—the ability to give "independent *life*" to His creation.¹¹⁸ Therefore, only God can grant His creatures with free will and rationality. If those beings with sub-creative powers attempted to create rational beings, they could create something but not independent life. Tolkien illustrates this principle through the myth of Aule and the Dwarves. Aule, one of the Valar, became impatient waiting for God to reveal His Children. Consequently, he made his own children, not because he wanted them to exist as his slaves or subjects, but because he desired to commune with them and praise God with them. However, God admonished Aule as Tolkien writes:

The One rebuked Aule, saying that he had tried to usurp the Creator's power; but he could not give independent *life* to his makings. He had only one life, his own derived from the One, and could at most only distribute it. "Behold" said the One: "these creatures of thine have only thy will, and thy movement. Though you have devised a language for

them, they can only report to thee thine own thought. This is a mockery of me."¹¹⁹

Aule was able to reorder pre-existing elements to make his children, but he could not create independent life within them. He only had one life to give, and that was his own. Therefore, his creation was naturally ordered unto him and not God. It was for this reason that God limited the creative powers of His beings. With much repentance and humility, Aule appealed for forgiveness and even offered to destroy his children. However, God took pity on Aule and granted his children with independent life, thus, creating the Dwarves.

No one but God can create independent life or bestow free will. Yet, God does not prevent His creatures from attempting to do so, as this would be a violation of their own free will. One necessary condition of free will is that God "cannot stop or make 'unreal' the sinful acts and their consequences." Instead, individuals often provide their own punishment, since disobedient actions produce their own corrupt results.

The Orcs themselves are a manifestation of the "effects of Sin or misused Free Will." The First Enemy—the Diabolus Morgoth—not content to submit himself to the supreme power of God, attempted to assume creative powers and order beings unto himself. Tolkien claims that, traditionally, the legends from the Elder Days suggest that the Orc race derived from Elves that the "Diabolus subjugated and corrupted."¹²⁰ They were pre-existing life forms that Morgoth twisted and corrupted. He did not and could not give them life but, rather, ruined the nature they previously possessed. Originally intended to be ordered unto God, Morgoth desired that they

¹¹⁷ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 195.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 287.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 191.

be “for himself” and, therefore, enslaved their wills to him. As a result, their rationality became significantly impaired, and, thus, they became more primitive and bestial.

As Sauron gained power, he corrupted the Orcs and their wills further. As both Tolkien and Frodo suggest,¹²¹ Sauron “ruined” or “twisted” pre-existing and rational¹²² life forms. Sauron corrupts the Orcs further than did Morgoth—both through their physical bodies and rationality. They can survive on spoiled meats, unclean waters and polluted air; they also have cannibalistic tendencies. They live in the darkness, content with filth, and are repeatedly referred to as “foul.” Similarly, their wills have also become corrupted and enslaved to Sauron. As they begin to lose their independent will, the Orcs become slaves motivated through fear—not any real commitment to their master’s cause itself. This fear is not an honorific respect; rather, it is dread and terror for one’s own life. Therefore, when the malicious will of their Lord is turned away, they have no inspiration or drive. As soon as Sauron is aware of the Ring-bearer’s presence on Mt. Doom, his will becomes focused on discovering the Ring, for the sake of his own self-preservation, rather than directing his troops.¹²³ Consequently, with a lack of

drive from their Lord, his slaves also lose their drive:

From all his policies and webs of fear and treachery, from all his stratagems and wars his mind shook free; and throughout his realm a tremor ran, his slaves quailed, and his armies halted, and his captains suddenly steerless, bereft of will, wavered and despaired.¹²⁴

Similarly, when Frodo completes his task and destroys the Ring, Sauron and his wraiths are ultimately destroyed, since their existence is tied to the Ring. As a result, without the fear of their captains, the armies lose their purpose and will to fight as well:

...and even at that moment all the hosts of Mordor trembled, doubt clutched their hearts, their laughter failed, and their hands shook and their limbs were loosened. The Power that drove them on and filled them with hate and fury was wavering, its will was removed from them; and now looking in the eyes of their enemies they saw a deadly light and were afraid...

As when death smites the swollen brooding thing that inhabits their crawling hill and holds them all in sway, ants will wander witless and purposeless and then feebly die, so the creatures of Sauron, Orc or troll or beast spell-enslaved, ran hither and thither mindless; and some slew

¹²¹ Tolkien recognizes that his characters are not omniscient and, therefore, can be wrong in their opinions. However, he agrees with Frodo’s suggestion that Sauron did not give life to the orcs but, rather, “ruined” them. In his letter to William Hastings, therefore, Tolkien references this quote in support of his argument that Evil cannot create (Ibid).

¹²² “[The Orcs] are fundamentally a race of ‘rational incarnate’ creatures, though horribly corrupted, if no more so than many Men to be met today” (Ibid, 190).

¹²³ In creating the One Ring, Sauron had to impart some of his own power and strength into the Ring, and, thus, although he created it, he became dependent on it for his existence. Therefore,

without the Ring, Sauron could be challenged and, in addition, if the Ring was destroyed, Sauron’s power would be overthrown and his realm destroyed. The only way for the Ring to be unmade was by casting back into the fires that initially formed it—the mountain of Orodruin—Mt. Doom.

¹²⁴ *The Return of the King*, 925.

themselves, or cast themselves in pits, or fled wailing back to hide in holes and dark lightless places far from hope. But the Men of Rhun and of Harad, Easterlings and Southrons, saw the ruin of their war and the great majesty and glory of the Captains of the West. And those that were deepest and longest in evil servitude, hating the west, and yet were men proud and bold, in their turn now gathered themselves for a last stand of desperate battle. But for the most part fled eastward as they could; and some cast their weapons down and sued for mercy.¹²⁵

It is important to notice the differing reactions among the troops. The Orcs, who have had their wills enslaved to their master, become utterly confused when that will is removed. Tolkien compares them to ants scattered about their destroyed hill; they are creatures without purpose and direction, wandering in a state of confusion that ultimately leads to their self-destruction.¹²⁶ The Men of the South, although their rationality was impaired by aligning themselves with Sauron, still possess rational capacities. Therefore, when they lose the will of the Dark Lord, some are still able to gather themselves together for a "last stand of desperate battle." However, most flee out of fear.

Political

¹²⁵ Ibid, 927-928.

¹²⁶ Like Aristotle, Aquinas argues that what distinguishes men from animals is their capacity to exercise reason. Merely living in a community does not help men grow in reason because other animals live in communities as well—such as "cranes, ants, and bees." Therefore, in order to distinguish themselves from animals, human beings need to live in a *correct* political community that encourages them to grow in their ability to reason (*On Law, Morality, and Politics*, 205).

Corrupt plots must be carried out by corrupt individuals: individuals whose character does not include any aspect of faithfulness or selflessness. Therefore, treason is common within such causes and is, eventually, self-defeating.¹²⁷ Neither Sauron nor Saruman fully trust their Orcs. When Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli are searching for Merry and Pippin after the Orcs captured them, Aragorn observes that it is not likely that Saruman or the Dark Lord would have told their Orcs what the hobbits might be carrying:

Their masters would not dare to give such plain orders to Orcs, even if they knew so much themselves; they would not speak openly to them of the Ring: they are not trusty servants.¹²⁸

Aragorn understands that they would have kept this information from their Orcs, because if they realized for what they were searching, they would have most likely seized it for themselves and abandoned the will of their masters. As a result, it is this selfishness and treachery that allows Merry and Pippin to escape their captors. One Orc attempts to run off with the hobbits because he believes they are carrying the Ring. As he flees, the Riders of Rohan find him and kill him, but because he has taken the hobbits far from camp, the other Orcs are not able to escape with them back to Isengard or Mordor. Thus, Merry and Pippin are able to break away into Fangorn Wood, where they meet Treebeard who ultimately destroys the stronghold of Isengard.

¹²⁷ As W.H. Auden similarly notes, alliances of Evil with Evil are "unstable and untrustworthy" because they are based on "fear or hope of profit, not on affection" (W.H. Auden, "The Quest Hero," in *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*, 48).

¹²⁸ *The Two Towers*, 479.

Frodo and Sam also recognize the lack of faithfulness within the slaves of the Dark Lord. As he makes his way to Cirith Ungol, determined to rescue his master from the Orcs, Sam realizes the actual purpose for the threatening tower:

As he gazed at it suddenly Sam understood, almost with a shock, that this stronghold had been built not to keep enemies out of Mordor, but to keep them in... Since his return to Mordor, Sauron had found it useful; for he had few servants but many slaves of fear, and still its chief purpose as of old was to prevent escape from Mordor.¹²⁹

Sauron cannot trust his slaves to remain in Mordor and, therefore, must use fear and physical barriers to keep them within his dominion. Likewise, he cannot trust them to remain faithful to each other either. Consequently, it is the mutiny of the Orcs amongst themselves that allows Sam to enter the tower of Cirith Ungol, virtually unnoticed, and rescue Frodo. After making it through the Gate, Sam does not engage in the encounters he had expected; rather, he notices, “They’ve done all the killing of themselves.”¹³⁰ Soon, he finds Frodo and comments on how the selfishness, treachery, and hate of the Enemy have actually benefited them: “Well, I call that neat as neat. If this nice friendliness would spread about in Mordor, half our trouble would be over.” Yet, Frodo does not take much hope in this “friendliness” because he recognizes that the Orcs’ hate for them supersedes their hate of each other:

But that *is* the spirit of Mordor, Sam; and it has spread to every corner of it. Orcs have always behaved like

that, or so all tales say, when they are on their own. But you can’t get much hope out of it. They hate us far more, altogether, and all the time. If those two had seen us, they would have dropped all their quarrel until we were dead.¹³¹

Fortunately, the Orcs do not notice the escape of their precious prisoners because it is their own corrupt nature that distracts them from their guard and makes possible this breakaway. Therefore, the tyrant’s inability to inspire unity and trust within his people is often self-defeating to the cause of evil.

¹²⁹ *The Return of the King*, 880.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 890.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 905.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Healing Hand of a King

Physical and Political Restoration

The physical and spiritual wounds that sin inflicts on the world cannot be healed through finite deeds—only through the infinite grace of the Creator. Yet, while tyranny perpetuates the wound, a good king can help alleviate its pain. Although he can never restore the original harmony of creation, he can prevent additional wounding during his reign and can also provide a glimpse of what the world was once like and what it shall be again. Thus, it is important to remember that because of his mortal limitations and shortcomings, Aragorn is not an allegorical Christ-figure and cannot provide complete healing on a spiritual level to his people and kingdom. However, he does exemplify godly qualities that allow him to help bring about physical and political¹³² restoration to the lands and peoples of Middle-earth during his reign.

Physical

As previously discussed, while Aragorn was still traveling with the Fellowship, he was able to draw upon his knowledge of Elven lore to tend to his companions who were suffering from fell wounds inflicted by the Enemy. However, it is not until the defeat of Mordor's forces on the Pelennor Fields that Aragorn began to fully exercise his abilities as a healer. During the course of the battle, many of his own men and the people of Rohan are deeply wounded, but worse yet is the Black Shadow that rests upon many who came in contact with the Captain of the Ring-wraiths—including Faramir, the beloved

Steward of Gondor. Tolkien writes that “those who were stricken with it fell slowly into an even deeper dream, and then passed to silence and a deadly cold, and so died.”¹³³ Despite their extensive medicinal knowledge, the wardens of the Houses of Healing could not even provide relief for those suffering from the malady. However, the true King is able to heal those under the Black Shadow, and he also tends to those suffering from severe wounds and fevers. As he did in the wilderness, Aragorn still chooses to make use of the *athelas* leaf. He crushes it and places it in hot water, and then with the steam, he calls Faramir out from his state of troubled sleep.

Suddenly Faramir stirred, and he opened his eyes, and he looked on Aragorn who bent over him; and a light of knowledge and love was kindled in his eyes, and he spoke softly. “My lord, you called me. I come. What does the king command?”

“Walk no more in the shadows, but awake!” said Aragorn. “You are weary. Rest a while, and take food, and be ready when I return.”

“I will lord,” said Faramir. “For who would lie idle when the king has returned?”

...And soon the word had gone out from the House that the king was indeed come among them, and after the war he brought healing; and the news ran through the City.¹³⁴

Faramir's reaction is immediate, as is his obedience and willingness to serve. Yet, his desire to serve seems to be a product of

¹³² “Political” in the classical sense that includes matters of the soul as well. See Introduction.

¹³³ *The Return of the King*, 842.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 847-848.

the king's own service to him. Thus, Tolkien appears to be suggesting that there is a reciprocal relationship between the king and his people. Both serve each other rather than themselves, and this relationship distinguishes their kingdom from the dominion of the tyrant.

Yet, Faramir is not the only individual to recognize the King by his healing hand; Ioreth, one of the older healers, does so as well. Before Aragorn tends to Faramir, the wardens of the House are unable to care for him and are at a loss as to what they should do for him; they believe he will die. In her grief, Ioreth longingly recalls what Gondor was like in the days of the king—when the people would be ruled with a healing hand:

“Alas! if he should die. Would that there were kings in Gondor, as there were once upon a time, they say! For it is said in old lore: *The hands of the king are the hands of the healer.* And so the rightful king could ever be known.”

And Gandalf, who stood by, said: “Men may long remember your words, Ioreth! For there is hope in them. Maybe a king has indeed returned to Gondor; or have you not heard the strange tidings that have come to the City?”¹³⁵

In longing for Faramir's healing, Ioreth also longs for the restoration of the Throne because she associates the people's physical well-being with the reign of the king. Unlike the tyrant, the king does not merely have a utilitarian interest in his subjects; rather, he is deeply concerned with the welfare of each citizen because he desires the best for all of them, not just himself. Consequently, when Aragorn heals Faramir

and the people learn of this occurrence, they begin to hope that there is indeed a king in their midst, and, thus, as Aragorn labors through the night, the people search him out and then leave his presence saying, “The King is come again indeed.”¹³⁶

Political

According to Aristotle, kingship is that form of government “which looks toward the common advantage” of all citizens.¹³⁷ Similarly, St. Thomas Aquinas also maintains that a king “is a shepherd who seeks the common good of the people and not his own good.”¹³⁸ The leadership of Aragorn follows this Aristotelian model of “correct” monarchy.¹³⁹ He recognizes that his regime is a “partnership of free people,” and as such he respects his subjects as equals.¹⁴⁰ Their well-being is always a priority for him when making decisions, since their interests are also his interests. Because he rules according to the common advantage, the people, in turn, love and respect him. They can trust that his commands are for their own good, and, therefore, they willingly obey his every order and voluntarily follow him and his banner without any question regarding the integrity of his cause. As a result of his concern for the whole, all are benefited, including himself.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Ibid, 853.

¹³⁷ Aristotle, *The Politics*. 1279a30.

¹³⁸ Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, 206.

¹³⁹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1279a20.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 1279a20.

¹⁴¹ Rose Zimbaro argues that *The Lord of the Rings* is a “romance, in the Renaissance use of the term” (68). She claims, “Each order of being has its particular excellence, its unique way of creating ‘the Beautiful’” (68). Because it is a romance, Zimbaro claims that *The Lord of the Rings* describes a battle between the “All” and the “self.” She defines the “All” as “a wholeness of operation of which man's unique nature contributes” (69). Evil strives for the “self.” She maintains that evil

¹³⁵ Ibid, 842.

Unlike the Enemy, Aragorn places the good of the City over his own private desires. Although his heart “yearns”¹⁴² for his own City, he does not enter the City gates without first considering how it would affect his people:

“Behold the Sun is setting in a great fire! It is a sign of the end and fall of many things, and a change in the tides of the world. But this City and realm has rested in the charge of the Stewards for many long years, and I fear that if I enter it unbidden, then doubt and debate may arise, which should not be while war is fought. I will not enter in, nor make any claim, until it be seen whether we or Mordor shall prevail. Men shall pitch my tents upon the field, and here I will await the welcome of the Lord of the City.”

But Eomer said: “Already you have raised the banner of the Kings and displayed the tokens of Elendil’s House. Will you suffer these to be challenged?”

“No,” said Aragorn. “But I deem the time unripe; and I have no mind for strife except with our Enemy and his servants.”¹⁴³

is “not an aspect of human nature but rather is the perversion of human will” (69). Evil results from a being dedicating himself to the service of the self rather than to the All. When a being pursues self, he does not benefit himself as he would hope. Rather, this pursuit results in a perversion of his own nature and the “greater nature of which it is a part” (69). When a being pursues the service of the All, his own nature is benefited as well as his whole community (Rose A. Zimbardo, “Moral Vision in *The Lord of the Rings*,” in *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*, 68-69).

¹⁴² *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 384.

¹⁴³ *The Return of the King*, 843.

Aragorn exercises great political discernment here. If he followed the desire of his own heart, he would enter the City and make claim to the Throne. However, he recognizes that, although he is the rightful heir and that any claim he made would be legitimate, to declare himself at this point in the battle might lead to civil unrest. Therefore, fearing that any disorder within the City would aid the Enemy, he puts aside his personal desires for the best interest of his people.

Because Aragorn always labors for the common advantage, the people love him and are willing follow him anywhere. They even follow him when it does not serve their own purpose simply because of the respect and trust they have for him. When he is attempting to persuade Eowyn to remain behind with her people, he tells her that she has “no errand in the South.” However, this does not stop her, nor does it stop others, for she responds, “Neither have those others who go with thee. They go only because they would not be parted from thee—because they love thee.”¹⁴⁴ The men to whom she is referring are those who will join Aragorn on the Paths of the Dead, a way haunted by the cursed souls of men who abandoned their allies in an earlier battle with Sauron. Prophecy has foretold that their curse may be lifted if ever they fulfill their oath and again rise up to battle against the Enemy. However, they can only be summoned by the King. Thus, recognizing the need for these troops, Aragorn agrees to enter the cursed path, and, despite their horror of such a place, his companions stand firm in their resolve to follow him. They have no duty to follow him; it is only because of their love for him that they make such a resolution. As his companions soon discover, even the Dead themselves are willing to follow him. Although they are traitors and murderers whose love for self brought about their curse, Aragorn still

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 767.

recognizes the good they can do for others and, in turn, themselves. They are initially resistant to his plea and maintain that they only obey their own will, but Aragorn remains unyielding in his position; he needs them to abandon their selfishness and pride so that they might benefit the common good of the Alliance against Mordor. Because he does not tyrannize over others, he recognizes that it has to be their own decision to follow him, and eventually they submit. Through the fulfillment of their oath, the Dead eventually come to realize that it is only in serving the common good that they can truly benefit themselves.

Aragorn does not merely enjoy political relationships with those he leads but, rather, friendships. These friendships, however, are produced by his political discernment and selflessness. He recognizes that his position as king is part of a political partnership between free and equal individuals, and, consequently, he respects them as his allies and friends. It is for this reason that they also respect him and are willing to obey him. They have no need to question the motivation of his decisions since they know that he makes these choices for their own good. They can rest assured in his discernment, and they do not feel threatened by his power.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, he does not

¹⁴⁵ In order to have an effective reign, a ruler must be able to command the respect and obedience of his people. However, when that power is directed toward the personal advantage of the ruler, his reign becomes tyrannical. Therefore, discernment, restraint, and concern for the common advantage must be exercised by a good king. When a people can be confident that their king labors for their own benefit rather than merely his own, they can trust his decisions and willingly obey him. They would have no reason to fear him and his power, but those enemies who would desire to overthrow the king and his kingdom in order that they might seek their own advantage would have every reason to fear him.

When Aragorn led the Company through the Paths of the Dead, Legolas witnessed this power and restraint in the heir to the Throne: "In that hour I

have to overly fear the prospect of internal enemies and can focus his attention on protecting his people from those external enemies who would desire to tyrannize over them."¹⁴⁶

Those who would typically be the greatest internal threat—his commanders—love and respect him. When it is believed that the Ring-bearer is in Mordor, Gandalf suggests that they provide him with assistance by emptying the Enemy's stronghold of its troops. In suggesting this plan, Gandalf suggests self-sacrifice, for they are to make themselves "bait."¹⁴⁷ It is quite possible that this might be their last stand against the Enemy, but Aragorn agrees that it is better that they might perish than that the Ring is discovered. Thus, he encourages the other lords to join them, but to do so out of their own free choice. Eomer responds by declaring that his love of Aragorn would take him anywhere:

I have a little knowledge of these deep matters; but I need it not. This I know, and it is enough, that as my friend Aragorn succored me and my

looked on Aragorn and thought how great and terrible a Lord he might have become in the strength of his will, had he taken the Ring to himself. Not for naught does Mordor fear him. But nobler is his spirit than the understanding of Sauron; for is he not of the children of Luthien? Never shall that line fail, though the years may lengthen beyond count" (Ibid, 858).

¹⁴⁶ In Book Five of *The Politics*, Aristotle argues that kingships are often destroyed from within the regime. If the king fails to pursue noble goals or the common good, the people might organize out of fear and cast him down. If the king considers himself as above the people in anyway and assumes absolute power, others might become jealous of this power and seek to replace him. Granted, people might still seek to overthrow the king, but if he is truly dedicated to the common advantage, then these individuals are not many in number, nor are they justified (1312b37-1313a16).

¹⁴⁷ *The Return of the King*, 862.

people, so I will aid him when he calls. I will go.¹⁴⁸

Imrahil's response is similar, "As for me, the Lord Aragorn I hold to be my liege-lord, whether he claim it or no. His wish is my command. I will go also."¹⁴⁹ Eomer specifically refers to Aragorn as his "friend." True, he does have a political relationship with him, but, more importantly, there is a friendship between the two men produced by the respect Aragorn shows for others and the selfless manner in which he leads.

Faramir, as well, has a strong relationship with Aragorn. As the rightful Steward of Gondor, Faramir could have been the person more unwilling than anyone to allow Aragorn to ascend the Throne. However, his love and devotion for Aragorn prevent all resistance. He only hesitates in renouncing his position in order that he might prepare the City for the King's return, "for now being healed he took upon him his authority and the Stewardship, although it was only for a little while, and his duty was to prepare for the one who should replace him."¹⁵⁰ Yet, when it comes time for Faramir to surrender his position, Aragorn will not accept it. Instead, he gives him back his rod and says, "That office is not ended, and it shall be thine and thy heirs' as long as my line shall last."¹⁵¹

He recognizes Faramir's faithfulness and rewards it. He does not have to allow him to keep his position; rather, it is natural for it to end with the ascension of the King. However, this action reflects the manner in which Aragorn will choose to rule; he will recognize the particular virtues and deeds of all the people and will encourage them to grow in these virtues and to fulfill their

nature.¹⁵² His coronation also illustrates this quality in him:

Then to the wonder of many Aragorn did not put the crown upon his head, but gave it back to Faramir, and said: "by the labour and valour of many I have come into my inheritance. In token of this I would have the Ring-bearer bring the crown to me, and let Mithrandir set it upon my head, if he will; for he has been the mover of all that has been accomplished, and this is his victory."

...[W]hen Aragorn arose all that beheld him gazed in silence, for it seemed to them that he was revealed to them now for the first time. Tall as the sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat upon his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him. Then Faramir cried: "Behold the King!"¹⁵³

Aragorn includes Faramir, Gandalf, and Frodo in his coronation, and, in doing so, he admits that he did not win the battle alone. Many others participated and many others advised him, and he acknowledges that he is indebted

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 942.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 945.

¹⁵² St. Thomas Aquinas argues that everyman is given a particular end, or purpose, while on earth. (He also maintains that the final end of every Christian is to attain the Beatific Vision, that is, being in the presence of God.) Because of the influential force of individual passions, Aquinas insists that there must be a "regulative power" that rules the community, which he generally refers to as a king, and can help control and limit these passions. He further argues that his power should help direct individuals to both the common good and also to their own particular good (*On Law, Morality, and Politics*, 204, 205).

¹⁵³ *The Return of the King*, 946-947.

to their loyalty and beholden to their counsel. He recognizes that they have skills and virtues that complement his own, and, therefore, he refuses absolute power. Upon assuming his position as King of both the North and the South, he also distributes authority among those he values as leaders, since they know their own people better than he does. Eomer returns to his people in Rohan and Imrahil to his own subjects. In addition, the King bestows Ithilien upon Faramir in order that he might serve as its Prince, and, of the treasonous Beregond, he is appointed as Faramir's captain.

This situation with Beregond further demonstrates Aragorn's ability to recognize and encourage the particular virtues in others. Beregond was a member of the Guard of the Citadel in the White Company of Gondor. As such, he was required to guard the White Tower and not leave his post unless commanded to do so by the Steward. However, when he learned that Denethor had gone mad and was going to burn Faramir alive, he abandoned his post and shed the blood of his fellow guards in order to protect his Captain. Not only was it treason to refuse to follow the Steward's orders, but it was also such to shed blood in the sacred tombs of the Kings and the Stewards. Therefore, justice required that Beregond be relieved of his position as Tower Guard, and it also condemned him to death. For this reason, when Aragorn ascends the Throne, Beregond is brought before him to receive his judgment. Rather than sentencing him to death, the King rescinds this punishment because of Beregond's bravery in battle and love for his Captain. Yet, despite this mercy, Beregond is still ordered to leave the City.

Then the blood left Beregond's face, and he was stricken to the heart and bowed his head. But the King said:

“So it must be, for you are appointed to the White Company, the Guard of Faramir, Prince of Ithilien, and you shall be its captain and dwell in Emyrn Arnen in honour and peace, and in the service of him for whom you risked all, to save him from death.”

And then Beregond, perceiving the mercy and justice of the King, was glad, and knelling kissed his hand, and departed in joy and content.¹⁵⁴

Although he has great respect for the traditions of the City and the rule of law, Aragorn does not condemn Beregond without first considering all of the circumstances regarding the situation. Consequently, in this instance, Aragorn places his own discernment above the rule of law, since the law provides no allowances for a situation such as this one.¹⁵⁵ He recognizes that he cannot punish Beregond for such honorable devotion and, instead, rewards him for his bravery and faithfulness. By allowing him to follow Faramir and serve him as his captain, Aragorn encourages Beregond to grow in his virtue and to live a life suited to his particular nature.

A further example of Aragorn's sensitivity toward the specific conditions of individuals can be seen in his treatment of his soldiers while they are on their way to the final stand against the Enemy. During the journey, many young men become horrified at this nightmare made reality, and they long to turn around. Rather than acting as an uncompassionate slave-driver, Aragorn

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 947-948.

¹⁵⁵ Aristotle recognizes the need of established, written law in regimes, but he also admits that the law is unable to judge properly in some situations. In such cases, he allows that good men should be entrusted to deliberate on the issue and judge accordingly (*The Politics*, 1286a6 – 1286b1).

shows mercy on them and allows them to return.

“Go!” said Aragorn. “But keep what honour you may, and do not run! And there is a task which you may attempt and so be not wholly shamed. Take your way south-west till you come to Cair Andros, and if that is still held by enemies, as I think, then retake it, if you can; and hold it to the last defence of Gondor and Rohan!”

Then some being shamed by his mercy overcame their fear and went on, and the others took new hope, hearing a manful deed within their measure that they could turn to, and they departed.¹⁵⁶

Aragorn recognizes that his troops are comprised of young men and farmers—not trained soldiers. He further recognizes that they are traveling to a land whose darkness they have always considered legend and at whose Gates they believe they will perish. For these reasons, Aragorn does not force their obedience but, rather, respects their free will and allows them to return. However, he also provides them with an occasion to retain their honor by retaking the garrison from the Enemy. Like he later does with Beregond, Aragorn treats these soldiers with mercy and also provides them with an additional opportunity to grow in virtue and fulfill their nature as men.

Just as he did with his soldiers, Aragorn recognizes that his regime is also a “partnership of free persons.”¹⁵⁷ As such, his reign will not be that of an absolute monarch. He respects his subjects as his equals and understands that they did not aid him in battle so that they might exchange the

threat of an evil tyrant for the rule of a better one. Rather, Aragorn recognizes and respects the fact that they fought to preserve their freedom and general self-governance. For this reason, although Aragorn reigns as the High King Elessar, he will not extend his hand in total control; instead, he will merely oversee their own continued self-rule and will assist them when needed.¹⁵⁸

As the hobbits and Gandalf make their way back to the Shire, the wizard tells the absent-minded innkeeper about the newly crowned king:

“And there is a king again, Barliman. He will soon be turning his mind this way. Then the Greenway will be opened again, and his messengers will come north, and there will be comings and goings, and the evil things will be driven out of the waste-lands. Indeed the waste in time will be waste no longer, and there will be people and fields where once there was wilderness...”

... “Well, that sounds more hopeful, I’ll allow,” said Butterbur. “And it will be good for business, no doubt. So long as he lets Bree alone.”

¹⁵⁶ *The Return of the King*, 868.

¹⁵⁷ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1279a20.

¹⁵⁸ John West similarly writes, “The freedom to be left alone—especially the freedom of ordinary people to be left alone by the elites who want to rule them for their own good—is a central theme in *The Lord of the Rings*. It is shown perhaps most clearly by the Hobbits, most of whom are perfectly willing to live their quiet, boring, and mundane lives without any interference from officious busybodies, thank you... But even outside the Shire, one gets the idea that to be left alone to rule one’s own family and community was prized” [John G. West, “*The Lord of the Rings* as a Defense of Western Civilization,” in *Celebrating Middle Earth*, Edited by John G. West, (Seattle: Inkling Books, 2002), 22-23].

“He will,” said Gandalf. “He knows it and loves it.”¹⁵⁹

Aragorn rules as the High King over both the North and the South, and his reign is legitimate. However, he restrains his power because of his love and respect for the people. He admires the uniqueness of each people group and encourages them to grow in their particular virtues and nature. Thus, the Dwarves continue mining, and the Hobbits are left to their tobacco and ale. Among the Men, the King distributes his power. Although Eomer, Imrahil, and Faramir still serve the High King, Aragorn allows them to lead their own people because of the love and admiration that the people have for them. In doing so, Aragorn encourages his people to fulfill their particular earthly end as human beings, and, consequently, he engages in true political rule.

CONCLUSION

Tolkien did not intend for *The Lord of the Rings* to be considered an allegory; nevertheless, he did not deny that its message is still applicable. Therefore, while Middle-earth is not a Christian world, it is a world of “natural theology,” and, as such, it is bound to natural law and objective truths.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, although the story is not explicitly Christian in form, the message of the text is not inconsistent with the religious and philosophical framework that shaped Tolkien’s Western worldview and Christian beliefs. The hope of Christianity is for a restoration of harmony in both the physical world and the soul. Politics, when rightly understood, concerns matters of the soul and endeavors to discern the particular nature and end of man. Thus, as

Tolkien addresses these matters of restoration and the soul in his understanding of the healing role of the king, the nature of his story is political in the broad sense.

One of the most central beliefs of Christianity is an understanding of the Fall. As a consequence of man’s sin, the land, human relations, and the condition of men’s souls were all mortally afflicted with physical and spiritual wounds. Continued sin, strife, and sickness only perpetuate the wound. The ultimate hope for Christians living in a fallen world is for the complete healing that only God can provide, but, until that time, His grace and man’s obedience to His objective moral standard are all that can help alleviate the pain and prevent further wounding. Because Tolkien allowed these beliefs to influence his subcreated world, Middle-earth also suffered from wounds that resulted from a Fall of their own. Tolkien understood that man, both in our own world and Middle-earth, was intended to be a caretaker of the earth and also a relational being. However, he further understood that the Fall not only physically wounded the land but also wounded man’s nature to such a degree that now the needless destruction of both the land and human relations are often chosen over the dictates of an objective moral order. Although the Fall did affect man’s rationality, it did not completely impair it. Thus, while it might be difficult to discern this objective standard of morality, it can still be followed with some effort. It is for this reason that when Eomer asks Aragorn, “How shall a man judge what to do in such times?” that he replies, “As he has ever judged. Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another thing among Men.”¹⁶¹ Because this moral order is discernable, all men are held accountable to it. For Tolkien, the king is held even more accountable, since his obedience to this

¹⁵⁹ *The Return of the King*, 971-972.

¹⁶⁰ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 220.

¹⁶¹ *The Two Towers*, 428.

standard has such sweeping influences. Not only does his obedience allow him to fulfill his own nature—serving as a caretaker of the land and enjoying positive relationships with others—but through his obedience he also is able to encourage his subjects to fulfill their intended nature as well. Thus, as Tolkien suggests, the good king, by ruling in accordance with this objective standard, is able to promote harmony throughout his realm and can also provide some healing for his people and land. A tyrant, however, abandons any objective standard in favor of his own will and, as a result, only furthers the wound inflicted by the Fall.

Like many authors and poets of the past, Tolkien associates the leadership of the monarch with the prosperity of the land.¹⁶² The king's primary concern is to secure the "common advantage," and this selfless concern benefits himself and the whole kingdom. However, the tyrant only pursues his own private advantage, and this pursuit negatively affects his entire realm. Because the tyrant's only concern is for his own power and advancement, he has no interest in the beauty or fruitfulness of his land, except when it suits his needs. Furthermore, he takes pleasure in needless destruction, and as a result, the land becomes diseased and corrupted under his dominion. A good king, however, recognizes his role as caretaker and attempts to heal the land. Although the land is fundamentally afflicted with the consequences of the Fall, it still possesses virtues that must be encouraged in order to flourish. Thus, the king is able to recognize and make use of these virtues, and he also encourages and appreciates the beauty of the land for its own sake.

Because the tyrant only concerns himself with his pursuit of power, he merely uses his subjects as slaves to accomplish his private ends. Any interest that he might have in his people is purely utilitarian; thus, if their well-being does not benefit him in any way, then he neglects them and allows them to suffer. Furthermore, the tyrant that Tolkien describes has a greater sphere of influence and power than do human tyrants. Not only does Sauron corrupt the physical well-being of his slaves, but he also corrupts their nature to such a degree that their capacity as free-willed, rational agents becomes almost completely impaired. Like their master, the tyrant's slaves take pleasure in destruction, discord, and evil—even amongst themselves. For this reason, Sauron is unable to inspire political unity and trust within his regime. As Tolkien suggests, tyranny is ultimately self-destructive because of needless and wanton destruction and the threat of internal enemies.

Unlike the tyrant, the good king puts aside his own desires and strives for the "common advantage" of his kingdom. Not only does the king physically heal the land and the people, but he also tends to his subjects' souls as well. What distinguishes men from beasts is not merely their rational capacities but also the possession of a soul. Men have the free will to choose to live a life of disorder and vice, but they also have the ability to exercise and grow in virtue. Consequently, in order to live a complete life, men must meet their physical needs, but they also must tend to their souls by following the standards of an objective moral order. Therefore, as Tolkien seems to suggest, a good king not only helps care for the physical well-being of his people, but, through personal example and dictates, he also encourages his subjects to excel in virtue and to fulfill their particular nature as human beings for their own sake and also for the sake of the city as a whole. This

¹⁶² For example, Alexander Pope, a famous Tory poet of 18th century England, similarly associated the fruitfulness of the land with the legitimacy and goodness of the king in his poem *Windsor Forest*. "Rich Industry sits smiling on the plains/And peace and plenty tell, a *Stuart* reigns" (41,42).

selfless manner of rule benefits the peace and prosperity of the whole community, but it also benefits the king because, unlike the tyrant, he does not have to fear factional conflicts and treason.

Tolkien never intended the character of Aragorn to serve as an allegorical Christ figure; however, he is a godly man who understands his responsibility as King. With the hands of a healer, he tends to the physical and political needs of his kingdom and people. Not only does he himself lead with moral fortitude, but he also encourages others to fulfill their nature as human beings. He understands that he is a mere man and that his regime is a partnership between free and equal individuals. As such, he respects his people as equals and praises them for their particular virtues. The people, in turn, deeply love and respect him, and because they never have to question the integrity of any cause he might choose to pursue, they are willing to follow his banner at any cost. Tolkien depicts this harmony of Aragorn's reign beautifully when he describes Sam and Frodo's first encounter with the King of Gondor since the breaking of their Fellowship. In a world that insists that the King bows to no one, Aragorn unquestioningly rejects this idea by humbly bowing before those whose actions and sacrifices are deserving of even the King's praise and gratitude:

... but behind the highest throne in the midst of all a great standard was spread in the breeze, and there a white tree flowered upon a sable field beneath a shining crown and seven glittering stars. On the throne sat a mail-clad man, a great sword was across his knees, but he wore no helm. As they drew near he rose. And they knew him, changed as he was, so high and glad of face, kingly,

lord of Men, dark-haired with eyes of grey.

Frodo ran to meet him, and Sam followed close behind. "Well, if this isn't the crown of all!" he said. "Strider, or I'm still asleep!"

"Yes, Sam, Strider," said Aragorn. "It is a long way, is it not, from Bree, where you did not like the look of me? A long way for all us all, but yours has been the darkest road."

And then to Sam's surprise and utter confusion he bowed his knee before them; and taking them by the hand, Frodo upon his right and Sam upon his left, he led them to the throne, and setting them upon it, he turned to the men and captains who stood by and spoke, so that that his voice rang over all the host, crying:

"Praise them with great praise!"¹⁶³

¹⁶³ *The Return of the King*, 932-933.

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