

THE WARS OF TOLKIEN:  
TRAUMA AND WAR COMMENTARY IN *THE LORD OF*  
*THE RINGS*

by

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This thesis examines the connection between J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* and World War I. It argues that Tolkien's trilogy was influenced by his experience in the Great War and that by depicting a narrative that resonates so closely with modern war experience, Tolkien creates a critical commentary on the ways war can be justified and must be conducted. I trace the particular forms of trauma that Tolkien's protagonist Frodo Baggins suffers and use the poetry of prominent British trench poets to highlight the parallels between his trauma and the trauma of British soldiers in the First World War. I examine Tolkien's descriptions of battle in the trilogy, analyzing how he avoids glorifying combat, instead depicting the harsh realities of war. I argue that Tolkien emphasizes the importance of innocent people and unblemished natural spaces and that in showing how war destroys those things, the trilogy confirms that just war must defend them. I also argue that the trilogy depicts the responsible use of powerful weaponry through the portrayal of the One Ring and its use. In this thesis, I define the critical commentary on war in *The Lord of the Rings*: war can only be justified if it serves to defeat evil, defend innocent people, protect untouched natural spaces, and is conducted with a responsible use of powerful weaponry.

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“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us”  
-Gandalf

## Introduction

### Synopsis

*The Lord of the Rings* narrates the story of the Third Age of Middle-earth, a fantastical world that resembles earth but whose creation and history is entirely different. The story follows the Hobbit Frodo Baggins and his three friends, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, as they are forced to leave their home, a region called the Shire, to secretly transport the One Ring, a ring of power created by the Dark Lord Sauron to help rule all of Middle-earth. Hobbits, who occupy the role of the central protagonists in the narrative, are diminutive people who live simple and comfortable lives and rarely, if ever, leave their homeland. The Shire is an isolated region in the northwest of Middle-earth and in it the Hobbits live a pre-industrial lifestyle.

Sauron is the major antagonist of *The Lord of the Rings*. He is a powerful spirit, essentially a demi-god, who was corrupted long before the events of the trilogy and seeks dominion over all of Middle-earth. He is cruel, compassionless, merciless, and calculating. He was defeated once before by a coalition known as the Last Alliance of Elves and Men, an alliance between the Kingdom of Gondor and the Elves. These two forces fought a great war against Sauron thousands of years before the events of *The Lord of the Rings* which culminated in a final battle known as the Battle of Dagorlad featuring Sauron's defeat and the cutting of the Ring from his hand by Isildur, the son of Gondor's king Elendil. However, the Ring was not destroyed as Isildur chose to keep it for himself, and Sauron's spirit lived on. Isildur died soon after when he was ambushed by a party of Orcs, the evil creatures that serve Sauron and populate his armies. The Ring then fell into the Anduin River, the major eastern river in Middle-

earth, where it stayed until it was found by Déagol and his cousin Sméagol, two Hobbit-like people who lived in the area. Desiring the Ring, Sméagol strangled Déagol and took it for himself. The Ring's corruptive power transformed Sméagol into the creature Gollum, a pitiful and vile former version of himself whose mind was wholly consumed by the Ring. However, Gollum lost the Ring in the caves underneath the Misty Mountains where it was found by Bilbo Baggins, Frodo's relative, during the events of Tolkien's first novel *The Hobbit*.

*The Lord of the Rings*, beginning with *The Fellowship of the Ring*, begins with Bilbo's 111<sup>th</sup> birthday party, where he announces he will be leaving the Shire on an indefinite holiday. Before Bilbo leaves, the wizard Gandalf talks him into leaving the Ring behind for Frodo to inherit along with the rest of Bilbo's belongings, since Bilbo had named Frodo as his heir. Gandalf is one of five wizards who work in Middle-earth and is extremely influential in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, lending aid to Bilbo and Frodo as they travel on their adventures. Gandalf is kind, wise, patient, and very powerful, and without him, none of the events of *The Lord of the Rings* would be possible. And so, the Ring passes to Frodo, and listening to the advice of Gandalf, Frodo leaves the Shire with the intended destination of Rivendell, one of the last houses of the Elves in Middle-earth and a relative safe-haven from Sauron and his servants. Frodo is accompanied by his gardener Samwise Gamgee, and his friends Meriadoc Brandybuck, also called Merry, and Peregrin Took, nicknamed Pippin.

The Hobbits receive significant help and companionship along the way, initially and foremostly from Gandalf. However, Gandalf leaves the Shire before Frodo and is not seen again until Frodo arrives in Rivendell. Upon leaving the Shire, the Hobbits

travel through the Old Forest, briefly receiving refuge from a strange being named Tom Bombadil, before reaching a town called Bree. There they meet Aragorn, the heir to the throne of the last great kingdom of men Gondor, although he is disguised as a grizzled ranger named Strider. Aragorn escorts them to Rivendell, where the Council of Elrond is held, during which it is decided that Frodo, as the Ring-bearer, must travel into the dominion of Sauron, a land called Mordor, to destroy the One Ring once and for all and destroy evil forever. This decision forms The Fellowship of the Ring which consists of Frodo and nine companions: his three Hobbit friends, Gandalf, Aragorn, an Elf named Legolas, a Dwarf named Gimli, and a man named Boromir who hails from Gondor.

Over the course of their journey, the Hobbits and their companions become separated and Frodo and Sam travel to Mordor alone, with Gollum as their guide. The rest of the Fellowship fight in the climactic War of the Ring against the evil forces of Sauron. Frodo and Sam reach Mount Doom, but it is Gollum who destroys the Ring, falling into the lava after stealing the Ring from Frodo. Nevertheless, Sauron is destroyed, albeit at a terrible cost of life to the kingdoms of men. The Hobbits return home to the Shire to find that war has penetrated its once isolated and safe borders, and they must deal with one last enemy before they can live out the rest of their lives wholly and irrevocably changed by their experiences.

## **Preface**

In the Foreword of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, J.R.R. Tolkien writes, “An author cannot of course remain wholly unaffected by his experience, but the ways in which a story-germ uses the soil of experience are extremely complex, and attempts to define the process are at best guesses from evidence that is inadequate and ambiguous”

(*The Fellowship of the Ring* xi). This foreword was written for the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, published in 1966, and it is in large part a response to the belief that *The Lord of the Rings* was a direct allegory for World War II and that the One Ring represented the atom bomb. Tolkien resented this notion, stating in the foreword: “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” (*Fellowship* x).

Tolkien further discredits the possibility of allegory revealing that the central theme of the Ring in the story was planned and written before World War II, “It was written long before the foreshadow of 1939 had yet become a threat of inevitable disaster, and from that point the story would have developed along essentially the same lines, if that disaster had been averted” (*Fellowship* x). Yet Tolkien acknowledges that the trilogy is affected by his experiences, which includes serving as an officer in the British military during the First World War (John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War* 88). This acknowledgement shows that *The Lord of the Rings* may contain aspects that resemble and were influenced by World War I.

The influence of the Great War on Tolkien’s work has been studied by a number of Tolkien scholars and the connections between his experience and his fiction are numerous. It was during World War I that Tolkien wrote one of his first stories about Middle-earth while recovering in a Birmingham hospital from a fever he caught on the front. This story is *The Fall of Gondolin*, which depicts a grim siege where Elves are assailed by horrible monsters and machines (Garth 38). Thus, even the earliest of Tolkien’s stories on Middle-earth features war and while he might not have been

attempting to intertwine his stories with his war experience, the depiction of war and its brutality is prevalent throughout *The Lord of the Rings*.

In this thesis I argue that the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* contains events that are connected to and influenced by World War I and Tolkien's experience on the battlefield. Furthermore, I argue that by creating a fictional narrative with such explicit parallels to modern war experience, Tolkien produces a commentary on how war can be conducted and justified in the modern era. The trauma that Frodo experiences while bearing the Ring, as well as the trauma endured by all the Hobbits, resembles the traumatic experiences of soldiers of the First World War. The friendship that holds the Hobbits together as well as the friendships formed by members of the Fellowship also recall the connections made by British soldiers during the conflict. Furthermore, Tolkien's descriptions of battle in the trilogy portray the grimness of combat without glorifying war. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, in fact, Tolkien emphasizes friends, people, and beautiful landscapes. By presenting a narrative that emphasizes people and nature, and by showing how war can destroy those things, Tolkien creates a narrative that demonstrates that friendship, people, and nature must be defended in war. Moreover, the trilogy also portrays the urgency of using powerful weaponry responsibly, dramatized through the One Ring, its corruptive powers, and the dialogue surrounding its use. Therefore, I argue that *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates that leading a nation to war can only be justified if it combats great evil, defends good people and the beautiful places of the world, and uses powerful weaponry with restraint and responsibility.

One final note on how I approach Tolkien's trilogy regarding relations between authorial intent and the interpreted meaning of a text: I am not reading *The Lord of the Rings* in order to determine Tolkien's personal opinions about war. I think it is likely that he held opinions about war similar to those I uncover in the trilogy. But literary texts have agency beyond their authors' intent and continue to adapt and acquire new meanings as time goes on. Indeed, the meanings of a story are arguably determined as much by readers as writers. I analyze *The Lord of the Rings* to determine what the text *itself* reveals about war, a commentary that derives from the text and extends beyond authorial intent, with consideration to the context of the text's composition. With that distinction made, I will now proceed to the first chapter of the thesis, an analysis of the trauma of Frodo Baggins and the other Hobbits and the similarities between Tolkien's portrayal of them and the experiences of British soldiers in World War I.

## Chapter 1: The Trauma of Frodo Baggins: Tolkien's World War I

### Experience Evoked in the Hobbits of the Shire

*The Lord of the Rings*, at its core, is a story about Hobbits. The story begins with the Shire and ends with the Hobbits' return to the Shire. *The Fellowship of the Ring* even opens with an eighteen-page prologue detailing Hobbit culture, the ordering of the Shire, and a bit of Hobbit history. The opening line of this prologue reads, "This book is largely concerned with Hobbits, and from its pages a reader may discover much of their character and a little of their history" (*Fellowship* 1). Thus, the reader is told that this story is about a people. Hobbits may be small people, but they are significant. They are ordinary people who find pleasure in daily life. Tolkien also clarifies in the prologue that, "At no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought among themselves. In olden days they had, of course, been obliged to fight to maintain themselves in a hard world; but in Bilbo's time that was very ancient history" (*Fellowship* 6). Hobbits live a safe and easy life. The Shire is an isolated place, secure from the harsher realities of the outside world. Peace and prosperity reign and Hobbits live undisturbed. The Shire is free from war and violence and the people live their lives oblivious to the realities of warfare. It is important that the story begins with the Shire because that technique establishes what is going to be changed and lost in the struggle to defeat evil.

The people that come from the Shire, these Hobbits, will be forever changed by their experiences, with the most notable example being Frodo Baggins. In the trilogy, Frodo experiences the greatest trauma of any of the Hobbits. He is the Ring-bearer and must complete the task that no one else can: take the Ring into Mordor and destroy it.

Frodo never wants to be a hero or join a great conflict, but it becomes his duty to complete this impossible challenge. Frodo's sense of responsibility plays an important role in his characterization. The duty he feels to protect the Shire and do his part to protect Middle-earth inspires Frodo and his companions to undergo such an arduous task. As Frodo continues on his journey, he also comes to represent the ordinary British men who served during World War I. Frodo is the little guy who feels a duty to protect his country and defend the world from evil. In this chapter, I will analyze the similarities between Frodo and the British soldiers of World War I and compare his trauma to soldier trauma.

One of these parallels between Frodo, his fellow Hobbits, and soldiers of the Great War is the innocence that they leave home with. Despite the duty Frodo and his companions feel to protect their country and friends, each of the Hobbits is completely unprepared for the terrible danger they will face. Frodo decides to leave his homeland with the Ring so he can protect the Shire. When he leaves, he has no intention of going all the way to Mordor to destroy it. He just knows he must leave because he would endanger the Shire if he stayed. Although he does have a desire to follow his uncle Bilbo, Frodo is still reluctant to leave home stating, "I wish it need not have happened in my time" (*Fellowship* 55). This reluctance does not stop Frodo, as he sells his home Bag End, and, along with Sam, Merry, and Pippin, leaves the Shire with the intended destination of the Elvish refuge, Rivendell. However, this departure from the home he loves only initiates Frodo's trauma. *The Fellowship of the Ring* begins the story of a young man who must leave his home so he can save it. In this chapter, I will show how these diverse traumatic sufferings, both mental and physical, liken Frodo's experience

to that of the soldiers of World War I where psychological trauma, specifically shellshock, became a crippling ailment on the front. I discuss the numerous forms of trauma Frodo experiences, the parallels between his trauma and that of World War I soldiers, and the trauma of the other Hobbits and their connection to First World War experience. By presenting this narrative of trauma in *The Lord of the Rings*, I intend to show how this trilogy portrays a convincing representation of war and war experience. Ultimately, this realism demonstrates the impact of World War I on Tolkien's writing and reveals the characteristics of the Great War that permeate *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Tolkien critic Janet Croft also argues that Frodo's experience resonates with World War I in her book *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*, which analyzes the impacts of World War I and II on Tolkien's fiction. Croft examines themes of the Great War that appear in Tolkien's writing, including briefly arguing how the Hobbits resemble British soldiers:

Like the experience of the common soldier in the trenches in World War I, their part is far from glorious; there is tedious waiting, a sense of uselessness and futility, terror and pain and ugliness. But instead of falling back on irony as the proper response, the Hobbits illustrate Tolkien's ideal of courage, going on in spite of being without hope. (Croft, *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* 28).

Indeed, the dutiful courage of the Hobbits resembles the soldiers of World War I, refusing to give up despite the daunting odds. However, Croft also alludes to the traumas of the Hobbits' experience in the trilogy, most notably Frodo's, and the parallels between their ordeals and the trauma of soldiers in the Great War. These traumas, which I analyze extensively in this chapter, represent the most significant ways that Frodo and his fellow Hobbits dramatically recall soldier experience. Ultimately,

Croft only briefly analyzes the specific connections between the Hobbits and British soldiers, instead tracing major themes of the Great War in Tolkien's works.

In this chapter, I will use Croft to support my analysis of Frodo's trauma and its parallels to the trauma of British soldiers in the First World War. By understanding that Tolkien depicts the terrible consequences of war on the individuals who fight in it, we can infer that the trilogy might include a critical commentary on war to be analyzed.

### **Defining Trauma**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines trauma in two ways. The first definition, relating to pathology, labels trauma as "A wound, or external bodily injury in general; also the condition caused by this; traumatism." The second definition pertains to psychoanalysis and defines trauma as, "A psychic injury, esp. one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed; an internal injury, esp. to the brain, which may result in a behavioural disorder of organic origin. Also, the state or condition so cause" (OED Online). These two definitions show that trauma can result from a physical wound, one that causes pain and suffering, or the more complex psychological wound that plagues the brain and mind. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo experiences both of these aspects of trauma. He suffers a debilitating knife wound that leaves a lasting physical effect, but also undergoes the mental trauma caused by the fear, loss, and despair of his journey, and, most especially, from the burden of the Ring. The Ring itself is the strongest cause of mental trauma for Frodo, as its torment of his mind leaves the Hobbit psychologically damaged for life.

## **The Traumas of Frodo Baggins**

The full extent of Frodo's trauma goes beyond any one form. During his quest to destroy the Ring, Frodo endures constant fear, painful injury, the loss of friends, the certain doom of his mission, and the burden of the Ring. To fully examine and understand his trauma, my discussion considers in turn the categories of trauma he suffers.

### *Fear of the Enemy, Despair, and Hopelessness*

Fear is one of the core traumatic feelings Frodo experiences on his quest. Before he even leaves the Shire, he is exposed to the danger that chases him. This initial danger comes from the Nazgûl, also called the Black Riders, the most powerful servants of Sauron. They are Ring-wraiths, formerly lords of men who were corrupted by the power of the One Ring, and in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, they are on a mission from Sauron to go to the Shire and find a Hobbit named Baggins. These Black Riders pursue the Hobbits as they begin their journey and come close to catching and killing the Hobbits several times. While the Hobbits do escape the Black Riders and make it to Rivendell, the Nazgûl continue to play a significant role throughout the remainder of the trilogy.

The Nazgûl possess a chilling cry that is a physical fear-inducing sound to all that hear it. The Hobbits first hear the cry when they are still in the Shire, travelling to Buckland, the eastern edge of the Shire, during the first stage of Frodo's journey.

A long-drawn wail came down the wind, like the cry of some evil and lonely creature. It rose and fell, and ended on a high piercing note. Even as they sat and stood, as if suddenly frozen, it was answered by another cry, fainter and further off, but no less chilling to the blood. (*Fellowship of the Ring* 101)

The Nazgûl's cry is chilling, painful to hear, and extremely foreign. None of these Hobbits have ever left the Shire before, and this sound certainly has never been heard in the Shire. Even without knowing the danger of the sound's maker, the Hobbits still feel fear when they hear it. The sound alone exudes evil and its power is shown by the temporary paralysis it imposes on the Hobbits. Tolkien uses the striking image of blood chilling to emphasize the immediate fear that this cry produces. The Hobbits have no idea where the sound comes from, but merely that sound alone instills fear in all of them. Tolkien also shows that the creature producing this sound is evil, heightening the apprehension this sound induces. As the Hobbits continue their journey, the Nazgûl's cry reminds Frodo that the enemy is always chasing him and that he is never safe.

Upon hearing this terrifying cry in the Shire, the Hobbits realize that danger surrounds them. They are being hunted. No longer are they safe in the confines of the Shire: the Nazgûl's cry reminds them that they could be found and killed at any moment. After hearing the cry for the first time, the Hobbits are deeply affected: "No more was said about it. They were all thinking of the Riders, but no one spoke of them. They were now reluctant either to stay or go on" (*Fellowship of the Ring* 102). This wail fills the Hobbits with the fear of the enemy closing in on them. Their thoughts turn from the merriment of travel to the fear of the proximity of their enemy and the possibility of being found and killed. As Frodo begins his quest, the group travels in good spirits. Pippin even sings a song that Bilbo wrote about travelling. But after hearing the Nazgûl wail, the Hobbits travel in silence. Their fear is overpowering, and their natural Hobbit cheer is replaced with dread.

Even when the Hobbits are in relative safety in the house of Tom Bombadil, Frodo is still gripped with fear. Bombadil is a peculiar being and the protector of the Old Forest on the borders of the Shire. He helps the Hobbits in the early stages of their journey, shortly after they learn that the Black Riders are chasing them and decide to travel off-road through the Old Forest. He rescues the Hobbits from an evil willow tree and provides them with shelter and safety for a time. Bombadil himself is an extremely old spirit who has been in Middle-earth since the beginning of the continent's existence. However, despite Bombadil's power and the safety provided by his home, Frodo's dreams are plagued by the Nazgûl: "There was a noise like a strong wind blowing, and on it borne the sound of hoofs, galloping, galloping, galloping from the East. 'Black Riders!' thought Frodo as he wakened, with the sound of hoofs still echoing in his mind" (*Fellowship* 144). Frodo experiences this nightmare in a place where the enemy cannot reach him, where he is protected, and yet, the Nazgûl still haunt his mind.

This fear of the enemy closing in matches the feeling of the soldiers in the trenches in World War I. Every day they awoke with the fear that the enemy might attack them or that their section of the trench might be hit by bombardments. Like Frodo, these young boys came to a foreign land and were faced with impending death every day. They were not prepared for the conflict they had entered and their expectations for the war were completely misguided. Paul Fussell notes this innocence as one of the great ironies of the Great War:

One reason that the great war was more ironic than any other is that its beginning was more innocent. "Never such innocence again," observes Philip Larkin, who has found himself curiously drawn to regard with a wondering tenderness not the merely victimized creatures of the nearby Second World War but the innocents of the remote Great War, those

sweet, generous people who pressed forward and all but solicited their own destruction. (Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* 19-20)

As Fussell notes, the English soldiers who proudly joined the war effort helped bring about their own doom. Fussell speaks to the lack of understanding among English men as to the nature of modern warfare, stressing their innocence. Fussell's description of the British soldiers as sweet and generous parallels Tolkien's description of Hobbits. Hobbits too are cheerful, modest, and generous. Due to their isolation, the Hobbits live innocent and peaceful lives. None of Tolkien's four Hobbit protagonists have any idea of the terrible power the enemy possesses. Frodo slightly understands the perils of their journey, due to his conversation with Gandalf, but the true power of the enemy is unknown to any of the Hobbits.

Like the British boys who rushed to join the war effort, these Hobbits begin their journey with feelings of duty and loyalty without any clear idea of the terrible danger of their mission. Frodo and Sam are naïve and become excited upon hearing that they are going to Rivendell, thrilled by the opportunity to see the elves, "'Rivendell!' said Frodo. 'Very good: I will go east, and I will make for Rivendell. I will take Sam to visit the Elves; he will be delighted.' He spoke lightly; but his heart was moved suddenly with a desire to see the House of Elrond Halfelven" (*Fellowship* 73). Frodo speaks of delight and shows pleasure in anticipation of seeing Rivendell, but neither he nor Sam realizes that the journey in front of them will result in Frodo receiving an injury that will scar him for life and leave him with lasting mental trauma. Merry and Pippin are innocent too, deciding to join Frodo due to a feeling of duty to support their friend. But neither one is prepared to be thrust into the midst of the War of the Ring.

Anticipating the naivete of Tolkien's Hobbits at the start of their dangerous journey, the trench poet Wilfred Owen, an Englishman who served as an officer in World War I, wrote of the innocence of the British men eager to join the war. In the poem "Disabled" that laments a boy who lost his legs in the trenches, Owen recounts the soldier's naïve enlistment:

He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;  
Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.  
Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,  
And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears  
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jeweled hilts  
For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;  
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;  
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.  
And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers. (Owen, *Three Poets of the First World War* 100-101, 28-36)

This stanza speaks of a young boy who lies about his age in order to enlist in the British army. Owen notes how the boy shows no fear of the danger of the war or of the enemy. These lines epitomize many of the young soldiers who went into the Great War thinking that the conflict would be thrilling and heroic. The boy in Owen's poem has no idea of the danger he is going to face: he is naïve, disillusioned, and unprepared. Moreover, the boy's dreams of war resemble the legends of the Middle Ages he has read, the kind of gallant displays that appear in fantasy stories such as *The Lord of the Rings*. This soldier boy's ideas of war parallel what Frodo and Sam expect from their adventure: stories of adventures in the outside world, and delight in seeing the wondrous halls of the Elves. However, unlike the stories that the boy in Owen's poem has read, Tolkien uses the literary language of fantasy to share the harsh realities of war rather than to idealize and romanticize them. He portrays these harsh realities through Frodo's experience.

Like the boy in “Disabled,” the Hobbits have no idea of the peril that awaits them on their adventure. Frodo begins his quest understanding that he has a duty to protect the Shire and take the Ring elsewhere. His friends, Merry, Pippin, and Sam, all feel a duty to protect and help their friend. But they are all naïve. They come from a place that is isolated from danger. So, when they face danger for the first time, they are terrified. They have no idea who or what the enemy is and when they might be assailed. But they can hear the Nazgûl’s cry and they fear this terrible sound. This fear of the sounds of warfare another parallel between the Hobbits and the British soldiers of World War I.

Soldiers in the trenches of World War I lived in fear of the terrible sounds of war. These sounds could be gunfire, artillery, airplanes, or explosions. The English trench poet Ivor Gurney writes about the soldiers’ fear and the effect of the sounds of war on the soldiers’ minds in “Strange Hells”: “There are strange Hells within the minds War made / Not so often, not so humiliatingly afraid / As one would have expected – the racket and fear guns made” (Gurney, *Three Poets of the First World War* 23, 1-3). The onomatopoeic “racket” highlights the noise these soldiers fear: bullets and gunfire. These sounds carry the connotation of death and danger and could easily be followed by actual death and injury. Importantly, Gurney describes the fear of the sound of guns as a Hell of the mind. This description displays the severity of this fear by identifying the mental trauma that such fear caused.

Merely the proximity of these noises terrified the soldiers, a reality that Gurney captures again in the poem “On Somme”: “Suddenly into the still air burst thudding / And thudding, and cold fear possessed me all [...] No flame we saw, the noise and the

dread alone / Was battle to us” (*Three Poets* 32, 1-2 ... 9-10). The sound of enemy fire paralyzes the narrator of this poem, he is possessed by fear, controlled by it. While the assault is out of the speaker’s sight, the sound alone terrifies him. The thudding of the guns is overwhelming, and the repetition of “thudding” shows that this soldier is fixated on the sound. Gurney also uses the feeling of cold to characterize the soldier’s fear, a descriptor that Tolkien uses to describe the effect of the Nazgûl’s cry.

These poetic descriptions portray the profound effect of frightening sounds on the soldier’s mind and body, experiences shared by Tolkien’s Hobbits. The soldiers of Gurney’s poems are terrified by the sound of gunfire and weaponry. Similarly, Frodo and his companions are terrified of the Nazgûl’s cry. The enemy is out of sight, their location unknown, but the sound alone is enough to produce gripping fear. However, the sound of the enemy is not the only fear inducing element of traumatic war experience. In World War I, and in *The Lord of the Rings*, terror also comes from the uncertainty of when the next attack will come.

The uncertainty and tedious waiting of the trenches resulted in further fearfulness for the soldiers waiting to be attacked. In trench warfare, enemy bombardments could strike unprompted at any moment, and an enemy attack could be imminent. No more profound was this terrifying uncertainty than during the sunrise and sunset ritual of Stand-to, which Fussell vividly describes:

Stand-to was a solemn moment. Twice a day everyone stared silently across the wasteland at the enemy’s hiding places and considered how to act if a field-gray line suddenly appeared and grew larger. And larger through the mist and the half-light. Twice a day everyone enacted this ritual of alert defense that served to dramatize what he was in the trench for and that couldn’t help emphasizing the impossibility of escape. (*Great War and Modern Memory* 55)

This ritual of Stand-to is a ritual of waiting to be attacked. Each Stand-to moment results in tedious waiting with the complete uncertainty if enemy fire will come or if the morning will be peaceful. Fussell highlights how these moments of waiting dramatize the soldier experience: the soldiers in the trenches are simply waiting for their turn to be killed. That hopeless notion is terrifying and is emphasized by the utter uncertainty of when a soldier's death will come. Fussell paints the world of the trenches as a place of despair, hopelessness, and fear, highlighting the impossibility of escaping this world of war and death.

This daily fear of potential assault, death, and injury, with no certainty whether they will come, parallels the precarious position Frodo travels in during *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The Nazgûl could catch him at any time and yet he has no way to escape his mission. He has a duty to bear the ring and if he does not the world will fall. While Frodo knows the enemy hunts him, he has no idea when the enemy will appear or attack. Frodo's future is uncertain, and that uncertainty fills the Hobbits with fear. The Hobbits are finally attacked at the ruins of the Watchtower of Amon Sûl, also known as Weathertop, and although the Nazgûl are driven off by Aragorn, Frodo is stabbed by the leader of the Nine. After this attack, as Aragorn leads the Hobbits to Rivendell, the uncertainty of the Nazgûl's pursuit terrifies the company: "They dreaded the dark hours, and kept watch in pairs by night, expecting at any time to see black shapes stalking in the grey night, dimly lit by the cloud-veiled moon" (*Fellowship* 225). At night, they lie waiting in fear of the Black Riders, anticipating an attack at any moment. These shared emotions of fear and the unpredictability of assault demonstrate another similarity between the Hobbit's journey and the experience of soldiers in the Great War.

The stress and fear of this waiting for impending attack are portrayed by the trench poets of World War I. Gurney depicts the fear and waiting through night in the poem “Laventie.” The poem centers on a French town on the front and features an attack by enemy aircraft. Gurney writes of the fear of this attack, “the being afraid / Before strafes, sultry August dusk time than death dumber - / And the cooler hush after the strafe, and the long night wait” (*Three Poets* 20, 18-20). This airplane attack disrupts the pleasant summer evening and frightens the poem’s soldiers. Gurney captures the fear of the impending attack and the disruptive noise the planes make; the words “death dumber” in juxtaposition with “the cooler hush after” suggest that the noise of the strafe is deafening. The cool hush he describes presents the uneasy feeling caused by the silence after an attack. Just like the Hobbits, the soldiers in Gurney’s poem spend the night anticipating an attack from the enemy, fearful, tense, and uneasy in the silence. In “Returning We Hear the Larks,” Isaac Rosenberg, another English trench poet, characterizes the same long night wait that Gurney describes: “Sombre the night is. / And though we have our lives, we know / What sinister threat lurks there” (Rosenberg, *Three Poets of the First World War* 63, 1-3). Rosenberg speaks to the peaceful atmosphere of night time but reveals how that atmosphere is deceptive. The sinister threat Rosenberg describes is the potential attack from the enemy. The tone of these lines is apprehensive, the narrator is on edge, afraid of this sinister threat hiding in the night.

This apprehensive feeling anticipates the feeling the Hobbits experience when running from the Nazgûl. The darkness hides the enemy from sight, and the silence leaves a feeling of uneasiness: any sounds cause fright. The Hobbits’ apprehension

shows when the Elf Glorfindel, who has come to help bring them to Rivendell, appears unexpectedly. As the Hobbits hear the Elf approaching, they feel suspicious: “They had been in fear of pursuit so long that any sound from behind seemed ominous and unfriendly” (*Fellowship* 236). The Hobbits are so certain that the Nazgûl will attack at any moment that they assume any sound is the enemy. Even when an ally fortuitously appears, the approach rattles the Hobbits nerves. The uncertainty of the enemy’s next attack, and their feelings of apprehension, fearfulness, dread, and suspicion parallel the soldiers depicted in Gurney and Rosenberg’s poems.

While the uncertainty of enemy assaults filled soldiers with apprehension, the attacks themselves provoke a different form of fear: the fear of being seen. This fear was caused by the reality that if the enemy saw a soldier, that man was likely to be shot. The fear of being seen is another similarity that the Hobbits and British soldiers of World War I share. Frodo understands that his enemy hunts him. Even while travelling, Frodo is always hiding. This reality inspires in Frodo a constant fear of being seen. This fear manifests most intensely when Frodo encounters the Eye of Sauron, the physical representation of the Dark Lord’s omnipotent power. The Eye is not a literal eye, but it demonstrates Sauron’s power to see events and people across Middle-earth. Frodo first encounters the Eye while in the Elven Haven of Lothlórien deep into his journey during *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The Eye appears in the Mirror of Galadriel, a magical pool conjured by the powerful Elf Galadriel, the ruler of Lothlórien. The Mirror produces visions of the past, present, and future from all over Middle-earth, and while gazing at these visions, Frodo is presented with the Eye. Despite the safety of his location, the power of the Eye still frightens him:

In the black abyss there appeared a single Eye that slowly grew, until it filled nearly all the Mirror. So terrible was it that Frodo stood rooted, unable to cry out or to withdraw his gaze. The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing. Then the Eye began to rove, searching this way and that; and Frodo knew with certainty and horror that among the many things it sought he himself was one.  
(*Fellowship* 408-409)

The Eye is not physically present, but Frodo can see it and feel its searching gaze. The description of the Eye is frightening: the blazing fire, the cat-like color, and its disembodied presence remove any natural or human aspects from it. It is a sinister image, the pit of a pupil revealing only darkness. The Eye also exudes power. It seems to overwhelm the Mirror, growing and almost filling the entire pool. The Eye literally paralyzes Frodo with fear. Moreover, as Frodo watches the Eye, he begins to understand that the Eye is searching for him specifically.

This experience reminds Frodo that his enemy will never stop hunting him. His quest brings him closer to this enemy that seeks him, and his vision of the Eye shows him the power and menace of his enemy. He knows that if the Eye finds him, all is lost. Thus, as Frodo and Sam get closer to Mordor, the effect of the Eye increases, and with it, Frodo's fear: "The Eye: that horrible growing sense of a hostile will that strove with great power to pierce all shadows of cloud, and earth, and flesh, and to see you: to pin you under its deadly gaze, naked, immovable" (*The Two Towers* 264). The Eye's gaze is starkly violent, it pierces and pins that which it sees. The Eye invades privacy: no natural barriers like "cloud, earth, and flesh" can block its view, and it conjures a powerful sense of vulnerability characterized by Frodo's feeling of exposure and paralysis.

This imagery of Frodo's fear of Sauron's Eye likens that feeling to the fear felt by soldiers in the trenches during World War I. The prominent English trench poet Siegfried Sassoon depicts the peril of being seen in the trenches in "A Working Party." He describes soldiers performing their daily trench maintenance duties, focusing in on one member of the party. In the final stanza, that boy peers over the edge of the trench and is promptly shot, demonstrating the danger of being seen in the trenches: "He pushed another bag along the top, / Craning his body outward; then a flare / Gave one white glimpse of No Man's Land and wire; / And as he dropped his head the instant split / His startled life with lead, and all went out" (Sassoon, *War Poems* 23). As Sassoon describes, even appearing for only one brief moment still provides enough time to be shot. The word "startled" indicates how quickly the enemy can respond to seeing a soldier and "all went out" demonstrates the severe consequence of being seen. Frodo too knows that if he is found he will be killed. This peril, and the desire to avoid being seen connects Frodo's experience and British soldiers'. Both parties must hide constantly from their enemies, fearing discovery and knowing that being seen means death.

One of the many distressing factors of Frodo's quest is his knowledge that the task of destroying the Ring is likely a suicide mission. As Frodo progresses on his journey, this reality becomes more and more prevalent. The first hint that he understands the hopelessness of his journey appears in Rivendell when Pippin complains that Sam is rewarded by Elrond when the elf lord of Rivendell assigns Sam as one of Frodo's companions. Frodo responds, "I can't imagine a more severe punishment. You are not thinking what you are saying: condemned to go on this

helpless journey, a reward? Yesterday I dreamt that my task was done, and I could rest here, a long while, perhaps for good” (*Fellowship* 305). Frodo has only just volunteered to take the Ring to Mordor, but he already understands that his mission is nigh-impossible. He calls his tasks a helpless journey and describes Sam’s role as his companion as a punishment. Frodo’s conviction in this inevitable doom increases as he nears Mordor. Gazing at Mordor from a distance, Frodo says, “It’s my doom, I think, to go to that shadow yonder, so that a way will be found” (*Two Towers* 232). Frodo displays an acceptance of the task before him. But he believes that destroying the Ring will mean his own destruction.

Frodo shares this feeling of certain doom with the soldiers of World War I. Both Frodo and those soldiers have missions that all but guarantee death. Sassoon understood and wrote about the feeling of inevitable death in the trenches. His poem “Break of Day” vividly describes the doomed fate of his fellow soldiers: “In outcast immolation, doomed to die / Far from clean things or any hope of cheer” (Sassoon, *War Poems* 15). He describes the men in a state of immolation, meaning serving as sacrifices, and says that they are doomed to die. These lines appear in a stanza describing the hell of the trenches and reveal the doomed conviction of these soldiers: eventually fighting in the trenches resulted in death.

Inevitable doom is a feeling that Frodo understands increasingly throughout his experience. As the Hobbits near the borders of the land of Mordor, Sam worries about their supply of food and ponders the logistics of returning from Mordor after the Ring is destroyed. Frodo assuages Sam, telling him the sad truth of their circumstance:

“I do not think we need give thought to what comes after that. To *do the job* as you put it—what hope is there that we ever shall? And if we do, who knows what will come of that? If the One goes into the Fire, and we are at hand? I ask you, Sam, are we ever likely to need bread again? I think not. If we can nurse our limbs to bring us to Mount Doom, that is all we can do. More than I can, I begin to feel.” (*Two Towers* 257)

Frodo identifies the hopelessness of their mission; they have little chance of survival.

He also acknowledges the total uncertainty surrounding what will happen when the Ring is destroyed. As Frodo points out, they are walking into an active volcano. If the Hobbits can reach Mount Doom and destroy the Ring, that is all they can do. This passage demonstrates Frodo’s resilience and courage, even though he understands he is walking towards his doom, he still marches on. This fate aligns him with doomed men of Sassoon’s poem, a sacrifice, doomed to die far from home.

The similarity between Frodo’s fate and that of the British soldiers in the Great War appears prominently in another Sassoon poem, “Prelude: The Troops.” The poem depicts the soldier experience and despairs over the doomed fate of those men. One verse describes the soldiers’ experience in a manner that also applies to Frodo: “They march from safety, and the bird-sung joy / Of grass-green thickets, to the land where all / Is ruin, and nothing blossoms but the sky” (*War Poems* 2). Like the protagonist of Sassoon’s poem, Frodo leaves the Shire, a place of safety filled with natural beauty and full of green and grassy spaces, and travels to Mordor, a place where everything is ruinous and dead. Like Frodo, Sassoon’s soldiers must leave their safe and beautiful homes to fight and die in a barren wasteland bereft of natural beauty and full of despair.

Sam’s realization of his and Frodo’s fate as he plans their route through the heart of Mordor provides another clear connection between Frodo and the boys of the British army. As Sam calculates how much longer it will take them to reach the mountain, he

despairs, “But the bitter truth came home to him at last: at best their provision would take them to their goal; and when the task was done, there they would come to an end, alone, houseless, foodless in the midst of a terrible desert” (*Return of the King* 234). Frodo and Sam are out of food, isolated, and in the middle of enemy territory. The land they travel through is desolate and dreadful. This description of Mordor as a terrible desert resembles Sassoon’s depiction of the front, a land of ruin. The sense of doom that both Sassoon and Tolkien evoke reveals the similarity between the hopeless situations both Frodo and the British soldiers face. Frodo’s fate is to die in the barren land of Mordor, just as Sassoon’s soldiers were doomed to die in the ruin of the trenches.

In concluding this section on Frodo’s trauma, I return to the conviction that Frodo feels constant fear throughout his journey. This perpetual feeling of fear exemplifies Frodo’s trauma, a trauma that parallels World War I soldier experience. The primary cause of this fear is the Nazgûl, who torment Frodo from the beginning of his journey until the end. While Frodo is free from their pursuit after he escapes the Black Riders in the first half of *Fellowship of the Ring*, the Nazgûl return, flying above Frodo as he travels through the outskirts of Mordor. As the Nazgûl reappear, so does their terrifying wail. While Frodo and Sam struggle to navigate the rocky mazes of the hills of Eryn Muil, they hear the Nazgûl’s terrible cry again:

The hobbits had heard just such a cry far away in the Marish as they fled from Hobbiton, and even there in the woods of the Shire it had frozen their blood. Out here in the waste its terror was far greater: it pierced them with cold blades of horror and despair, stopping heart and breath. (*Two Towers* 236)

This passage recalls the first time the Hobbits heard the Nazgûl when they began their journey. Tolkien returns to the image of paralyzing fear engulfing the Hobbits and uses

the feeling of cold to emphasize the effect of the cry. This cry is so powerful and frightening, it freezes, producing feelings of cold, horror, and despair, and has a palpable effect on the body. Tolkien characterizes these feelings with the image of a blade, like the knife that stabbed Frodo, inserting fear in the Hobbits. The heart-stopping and breathtaking sensation the cry induces also emphasizes just how terrifying this sound is.

The closer Sam and Frodo get to Mordor, the more often the Nazgûl appear above them, confirming that the enemy can sense the Hobbits near them. The Nazgûl's constant presence leaves the Hobbits in a constant state of fear, and their continuous cries only accentuate the Hobbits' terror. After a night where the Nazgûl appear above them three times, Frodo and Sam feel the chilling fear of their presence: "So they stumbled on through the weary end of the night, and until the coming of another day of fear they walked in silence with bowed heads, seeing nothing, and hearing nothing but the wind hissing in their ears" (*Two Towers* 270). The Nazgûl's constant circling above reminds the Hobbits that their enemy is always near them and that their mission brings them closer to danger every day. This perilous journey evokes the experience of the soldiers in the trenches. Throughout this section, I have identified the particular forms of fear that Frodo suffers and the similarities between his fears and those of the British soldiers during World War I. However, these various fears present only part of Frodo's trauma. In the following section, I discuss how Frodo's physical injuries recall life as a soldier in the First World War and the ways that the symptoms of his wounds, mental and physical, resemble shellshock.

*Wounds: Physical Trauma, Symptoms of Shellshock, and Pain*

Beyond the compounding fear Frodo feels during his journey, the Hobbit connects to soldiers from the First World War through his suffering from physical wounds, one of which pains him for the rest of his life. Frodo's first wound comes when he is stabbed by the Witch-King of Angmar, the leader of the Nazgûl. This stabbing occurs in the early moments of Frodo's journey, before he reaches safe haven in Rivendell. He and his Hobbit companions have left the Shire and passed through a town called Bree where they meet a man named Strider (later revealed to be Aragorn) who becomes their guide. Despite this new guide, the Hobbits struggle to evade the Nazgûl and are eventually attacked on the hill Weathertop, where they are overpowered, and Frodo is stabbed, "A shrill cry rang out in the night; and he felt a pain like a dart of poisoned ice pierce his left shoulder" (*Fellowship* 221). The Witch-King's knife feels like poisoned ice, reinforcing the motif of the chilling cold the Black Riders produce that Tolkien often uses when describing their cries. This coldness is significant because the lasting power of Frodo's injury comes from both the terrible pain it causes and from how it seems to seep towards his heart. Even after Frodo is healed in Rivendell, the Nazgûl's presence will periodically reignite this feeling of inner cold, which heightens the reoccurring pain Frodo feels from this wound.

Aragorn saves Frodo from the Nazgûl, driving the Riders off with flaming tree branches, but a small piece of the blade breaks off and stays in Frodo's shoulder. This blade possesses a dark magic that will turn Frodo into a Ring-wraith if he is not healed. Immediately after the attack, Frodo realizes that his injury is grave: "He wondered if he would remain maimed for life, and how they would now manage to continue their

journey. He felt too weak to stand” (*Fellowship* 224). Frodo’s concern demonstrates a sense of the seriousness of the wound. Indeed, the injury continues to have a profound effect on Frodo throughout the remainder of the trilogy. In the days following his injury, Frodo deteriorates, his mind succumbing to the power of the Nazgûl’s dark magic: “Ever since the sun began to sink the mist before his eyes had darkened, and he felt that a shadow was coming between him and the faces of his friends. Now pain assailed him, and he felt cold” (*Fellowship* 237). Tolkien identifies the Hobbit’s pain and supplements this assertion with this description of cold, as if the warmth of Frodo’s life is leaving him.

Significantly, key symptoms Frodo suffers from the Morgul-blade recall the afflictions of shell-shocked soldiers during World War I. The wound seems to have an effect on Frodo’s vision. He feels that a shadow blocks the image of his friends, as if his sight is going dark. This loss of vision in the aftermath of a traumatic experience is one of the symptoms of shellshock found in soldiers during the First World War. Historian of soldiers and psychiatrists Ben Shephard identifies the symptoms of shellshock: “These soldiers were not wounded, yet they could neither see, smell nor taste properly. Some were unable to stand up, speak, urinate or defecate; some had lost their memories; others vomited uncontrollably. Many suffered from ‘the shakes’” (Shephard, *A War of Nerves* 1). As Shephard highlights, these symptoms were not caused by physical injury, but these soldiers’ mental trauma caused significant physical symptoms. Frodo exhibits one of these symptoms following his stabbing: damaged vision. He experiences a shadow harming his sight and this deterioration of his senses recalls the blindness that afflicted some victims of shellshock. Although the cause of Frodo’s suffering, unlike

shellshock, is a physical wound, such resemblances between Frodo's afflictions after a traumatic experience and the symptoms of shellshock illuminates another connection between Tolkien's *Hobbit* and the soldiers in the First World War.

Croft also acknowledges that Frodo's suffering after his stabbing on Weathertop resembles the symptoms of shellshock, but she spends more time arguing that Frodo suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder after his journey concludes. Describing the symptoms of shellshock, Croft writes of Frodo: "Many of these symptoms sound like the effect of the Black Breath of the Nazgûl, or like Frodo's sufferings after the attack with the Morgul-blade on Weathertop" (*War and the Works* 133). Yet after making this important suggestion, Croft does not examine further the parallels between Frodo's affliction and shell-shocked soldiers. But the connection between Frodo's trauma and that of World War I soldiers reveals another important element of *The Lord of the Rings*' critical critique of war: its main protagonist dramatizes traumatic soldier experience thereby condemning the terrible effects of war on good people.

As the suffering from his injury increases, Frodo displays more symptoms that recall shellshock. Tolkien writes, "Frodo threw himself down, and lay on the ground shivering. His left arm was lifeless, and his side and shoulder felt as if icy claws were laid upon them" (*Fellowship* 229). Both the inability to stand and "the shakes" are among the physical symptoms of shellshock that Shephard identifies. In addition to these ailments, Frodo's pain intensifies from that cold feeling. The personification of the cold as icy claws highlights the consuming power of the Nazgûl's curse. Now Frodo's whole left side seems to have had the life sucked out of it. This passage not

only demonstrates the terrible significance of Frodo's injury, but also helps portray him as a maimed soldier whose suffering recalls the wounded of World War I.

Ivor Gurney's aptly titled poem "Pain" provides insight into the suffering of wounded soldiers during the Great War. Gurney writes, "Pain, pain continual; pain unending; / Hard even to the roughest, but to those / Hungry for beauty....Not the wisest knows, / Nor most pitiful-hearted, what the wending / Of one hour's way meant. Grey monotony lending / Weight to the grey skies" (*Three Poets* 7, 1-6). Two elements of these lines stand out. The first is the repetition and the emphasis of the word pain. This repetition depicts the experience of pain as a tedious, slow moving process with no clear end. The second striking portion of these verses is the grey imagery. Gurney describes these days in pain as "grey monotony" underneath "grey skies." His repetition of the color grey suggests feelings of blandness and emptiness, no light or color to be seen. The word grey has a double meaning in these lines, describing both the dullness and tedious nature of the experience as well as the color of the sky. Gurney's lines work to communicate that to be wounded and in pain is an ordeal that drags on, unending, and that this experience is dull and monotonous. The psychological agony from this monotony equals any physical pain Gurney's speaker may also feel.

Tolkien also uses images of greyness and dullness when describing Frodo's misery induced by his wound. After Frodo is stabbed at Weathertop, Aragorn leads the Hobbits hurriedly towards Rivendell, Frodo deteriorating every day along the way. To escape the Nazgûl, the Hobbits must cross the river Loudwater at the Fords of Bruinen. Once across, the Hobbits will be in elven territory, safe under the protection of Elven magic and Elrond, Lord of Rivendell. Shortly before the final sprint to the Fords,

Frodo's health declines to its lowest point: "Frodo's pain had redoubled, and during the day things about him faded to shadows of ghostly grey" (*Fellowship* 239). Tolkien again reminds the reader of the horrible pain Frodo feels, but also highlights how Frodo is fading from the Nazgûl's magic. Frodo is literally becoming a wraith like the Black Riders. The way Tolkien describes this fading is through the image of Frodo's sight turning to grey shadows. This depiction resembles both the shellshock-induced loss of vision Shephard describes, and the grey dullness that Gurney portrays in his poem "Pain."

Frodo suffers from mental trauma because of his wound as well. As the Hobbits and Aragorn rush to Rivendell, Frodo is beleaguered by frightful dreams: "He felt that black shapes were advancing to smother him; but when he sat up he saw nothing but the back of Strider [...] He lay down again and passed into an uneasy dream, in which he walked on the grass in his garden in the Shire, but it seemed faint and dim" (*Fellowship* 228). While Frodo's wound is physical, the curse of the Nazgûl's blade has a psychological effect, plaguing his dreams with dark images of the home he misses. The "black shapes" highlight that Frodo's feels the Nazgûl curse taking hold of his mind. This psychological torment establishes another connection between Frodo and the victims of shellshock. Frodo's wound has given him horrible pain, damaged his eyesight, and left him trembling in a world of grey dullness. Each of these afflictions appears in the experience of trench soldiers and the connection between these soldiers' pain and Frodo's further establishes the Hobbit as a sort of dramatized British soldier.

By reaching Rivendell, Frodo is saved from the Morgul-blade's magic. And while the Hobbit does heal from his injury, recovering his strength and deciding to carry

on in his quest to destroy the Ring, Frodo never fully heals. He also receives additional wounds throughout his quest, falling victim to an Orc captain's spear in Moria, an Orc arrow while boating down the Anduin River, and the venomous sting of the giant spider Shelob, which temporarily paralyzes him and almost causes the failure of the entire quest. Despite the pain caused by each of these other injuries, none causes the same lasting effect as the Morgul-blade of the Witch-King. Moreover, the Nazgûl's constant presence near Frodo during the remainder of his journey increases the reoccurring pain of his wound. Towards the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, a Nazgûl flies over the Fellowship as they travel downriver after leaving Lothlórien. This appearance rekindles Frodo's painful injury: "Frodo felt a sudden chill running through him and clutching at his heart; there was a deadly cold, like the memory of an old wound, in his shoulder. He crouched down as if to hide" (*Fellowship* 435). Although the arrival of the Black Rider fills Frodo with that same cold feeling he endured following his injury, the imagery of this passage is significantly psychological. It is Frodo's memory that causes his pain. While he has been physically healed from the Nazgûl's blade, the recollection of the pain and traumatic experience haunts him. Moreover, this horrific memory ignites a physical toll, the chilling cold piercing "through" Frodo, reminiscent of the blade itself. In this passage, Frodo's experience resonates with the symptoms of shellshock even more closely than did his previous injuries because its psychological impact manifests in physical afflictions. While the mental corruption of the Ring and the emotional toil that Frodo suffers emerge as the most prominent forms of his trauma, this wound stays with the Hobbit for the rest of his life. Through this physical and mental suffering, Frodo continues to recall the British soldiers of World War I.

These compounding similarities between Frodo and the soldiers of World War I help define *Lord of the Rings* as a story featuring authentic war experience. This aspect of the trilogy stimulates questions surrounding Tolkien's commentary on war. Moving forward in this chapter, I next discuss Frodo's loss of friends and companions and how that emotional trauma recalls the burden of British officers in World War I. These further parallels between Frodo's trauma and that of soldiers in World War I clarify how Tolkien's impactful experience in that war influences his depiction of war and its effect on people in *The Lord of the Rings*.

*Loss: The Death of Friends and the Mental Burden of an Officer*

In the preface to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Tolkien solemnly declares, "By 1918 all but one of my close friends were dead" (xi). This cruel reality of the First World War, that most of the young men of Europe died on the battlefield, was one the war's most devastating consequences. The Great War demonstrated that one certainty in a modern war was massive death and the loss of loved ones. This theme of loss also shows in *The Lord of the Rings*, most prominently in the death of Gandalf and Frodo's fear of losing his Hobbit friends during the journey. Frodo displays this concern for his friends' safety even before he leaves home. On his last night in the Shire, residing in his temporary house in Crickhollow on the eastern edge of the country, Frodo tries to refuse his friends' offer to come with him: "My dear and most beloved hobbits! [...] 'But I could not allow it. I decided that long ago, too. You speak of danger, but you do not understand. This is no treasure-hunt, no there-and back again-journey. I am flying from deadly peril into deadly peril'" (*Fellowship* 117). Frodo knows the certain danger of his mission and feels that his friends are unprepared for the extent of that danger. His

statement that he already decided to prevent them from coming shows that Frodo has been deeply concerned about his friends' desire to join him and the peril they will face if they do. This concern shows the care and love Frodo feels for his friends and manifests again later when he decides to depart the Fellowship and head for Mordor alone at the end of *Fellowship of the Ring*.

Despite Frodo's protests, his friends join him on his journey, proving throughout to be resilient and steadfast companions. While all four Hobbits make it safely to Rivendell, they face several perils along the way. While in the Old Forest, Merry and Pippin almost die suffocated by the roots of a magical old willow tree. Just before reaching Bree, the Hobbits get caught in a mystical place called the Barrow Downs where Sam, Merry, and Pippin are almost killed by the evil spirit known as a Barrow-wight. Tom Bombadil rescues them from both these dangers while Frodo watches helplessly. Then of course comes Frodo's stabbing by the Nazgûl at Weathertop. During each of these moments, Frodo must face the possibility of watching his friends die or dying himself. These experiences increase Frodo's fear that his dear friends will eventually die, all because they came along to protect him. This concern distresses Frodo as he grows fonder of the other members of the Fellowship, realizing that if any of them die, it will be because they were protecting him. As a result of this burden, Frodo decides to leave for Mordor alone: "I will go alone. Some I cannot trust, and those I do trust are too dear to me: poor old Sam, and Merry and Pippin" (*Fellowship* 451). Frodo decides that he cannot ask his friends to protect him at the risk of their own lives anymore, he cares about his companions too much to let them die protecting him. This relationship between Frodo and his Hobbit friends resembles the connection

between officers and their soldiers during World War I. Frodo occupies the officer position, asking his friends to risk their lives for him while they try to complete his mission.

Frodo's concern for his friends' wellbeing recalls the words of the officer poet Siegfried Sassoon who speaks about the burden of the officer and his concern for protecting the men under his command in the poem "The Dream." Sassoon writes, "Can they guess / The secret burden that is always mine?— / Pride in their courage; pity for their distress; / And burning bitterness / That I must take them to the accursed Line" (*War Poems* 38). These lines display Sassoon's care for the men under his command and the final line of this passage shows his anger at his responsibility to lead his men to almost certain death. Sassoon's concerns powerfully anticipate Frodo's throughout the *Fellowship of the Ring*. Frodo cares for his friends and feels great joy from their companionship and courage. But like Sassoon, Frodo feels responsible for his companions, and guilty that they walk towards danger because of him. Furthermore, Sassoon's speaker keeps his burden secret which resembles how Frodo never shares his concerns, an attitude exemplified by Frodo's decision to go to Mordor alone without consulting the rest of the Fellowship. Sassoon concludes "The Dream" with the lines, "And I must lead them nearer, day by day, / To the foul beast of war that bludgeons life" (*War Poems* 39). The imagery of "the foul beast of war" resonates with Frodo's experience considerably given that he faces numerous actual foul beasts during his journey. Moreover, Frodo feels responsible for leading his friends towards such foul beasts, both the literal and the figurative, and this burden parallels the distress of

Sassoon's narrator. These stark parallels once again confirm how Frodo's experience evokes the trauma of soldiers in World War I

In Frodo's resemblance to the officers of World War I and the responsibility they feel for protecting their troops, we find another connection between his experience and that of soldiers in the Great War. In deciding to go alone to Mordor, Frodo sacrifices the companionship of two of his Hobbit friends. He makes this sacrifice with the hope of limiting further losses he could suffer if his friends continued with him on his journey. Frodo is prompted to this decision by two moments of disheartening loss that cause him great distress: the death of Gandalf in Moria and the betrayal of Boromir. Gandalf's death is the first casualty of the Fellowship, and while Gandalf returns reborn in *The Two Towers*, Frodo spends much of the rest of his journey thinking Gandalf is dead. This death is the most crushing loss for Frodo on his quest and receives the fuller analysis it warrants presently. But first I consider the other instigator, Boromir's betrayal, which demonstrates the final reason for Frodo's decision to leave the Fellowship behind. After leaving Lothlórien, the Fellowship reaches the borders of Gondor, where they must decide between heading Gondor's capitol of Minas Tirith or turning east and heading directly to Mordor. While the Fellowship ponders this decision, Frodo goes off alone to think. Boromir follows him and asks Frodo to lend him the Ring to use to protect Gondor. Frodo refuses, and in a shocking moment, Boromir attacks Frodo, trying to take the Ring by force. Frodo slips the Ring on and escapes terrified after witnessing the Ring's corruptive power to turn even loyal companions on the person they swore to protect (*Fellowship* 449). Boromir's betrayal shows Frodo the danger he and the Company face from the Ring, as it has the power to

corrupt them and turn them against each other. This fear, in conjunction with the concern Frodo feels for his friends, leads to his decision to leave the Fellowship.

However, Frodo's fear of losing his friends would not have reached such a potent level without the loss of Gandalf in Moria. Gandalf dies when the Fellowship travel through the fallen Dwarven kingdom of Moria, the route they take to pass through the perilous Misty Mountains. While in Moria, the Fellowship battle a horde of Orcs and goblins and while escaping face the terrifying power of a Balrog, a demon-creature and remnant of the First Age of Middle-earth. Gandalf commands the Company to go on without him and faces the Balrog alone, holding the demon off so the Fellowship can escape. Gandalf defeats the Balrog, destroying the Bridge of Khazad-dûm which they fight upon. But as the Balrog falls into the abyss, it drags Gandalf with it and the wizard disappears into the blackness below (*Fellowship* 371). The loss of the wizard has a resounding effect on the entire Fellowship. This moment marks the first time the Hobbits feel the grief and loss of war: "Grief at last wholly overcame them, and they wept long: some standing and silent, some cast upon the ground" (*Fellowship* 372). Gandalf's death is devastating. He was the Fellowship's leader and guide and without him they feel hopeless. In experiencing the loss of such a close friend in battle, the Hobbits' experience once again resembles soldier experience during World War I.

There are numerous World War I poems that depict the loss of dear friends in the trenches and the emotions of loss, grief, and despair. In his poem "In the Trenches," Isaac Rosenberg describes the moment when a close friend is killed by a shell:

I snatched two poppies  
From the parapet's edge,

Two bright red poppies  
That winked on the ledge.  
Behind my ear  
I stuck one through,  
One blood red poppy  
I gave to you

The sandbags narrowed  
And screwed out our jest,  
And tore the poppy  
You had on your breast ...  
Down – a shell – O! Christ.  
I am choked ... safe ... dust blind – I  
See the trench floor poppies  
Strewn. Smashed you lie. (*Three Poets* 58-59, 1-16)

The tender moment between these two soldiers portrays the friendship and care between them, emphasizing speaker's grief when the bombardment kills his companion.

Rosenberg portrays this bombardment using hyphens and ellipses to show the discombobulating effects of shelling. Each moment jumps out and then jumps to the next. There is the call to duck down, then the shell lands, then the horror of the realization, then the narrator's choking, gasping for breath, and the relief of surviving the attack. Each of these moments comes and goes, giving the lines a frightening quick and jarring pace. When the hyphens end, Rosenberg slows the poem as the reeling narrator comes to the haunting realization upon seeing his friend's "smashed" body.

This poem demonstrates the shocking suddenness of death in war and the traumatic feelings of loss experienced by survivors. One moment, a man shares a tender moment with his friend, the next that friend is dead. The narrator is wholly unprepared for his friend's death and the sight of the companions broken body is shocking.

This shocking suddenness resembles the loss of Gandalf for the Fellowship. Throughout the entire journey from Rivendell, Gandalf serves as their leader and guide.

He also instigates the Hobbits' journey from the Shire. Every member of the Fellowship believes that if they follow Gandalf's wisdom, their quest will succeed. His sudden disappearance leaves the Fellowship reeling, overcome with grief, hopeless and uncertain of how they shall go on. Rosenberg's "In the Trenches" resonates with this sudden shocking loss of Gandalf, depicting how abruptly war can take a friend away. Another poem that shows the grief and sorrow of losing a friend in war is "To His Love" by Ivor Gurney, which presents a sentimental and sorrowful memorial of a dear companion killed in war: "He's gone, and all our plans / Are useless indeed. / We'll walk no more on Cotswold / Where the sheep feed / Quietly and take no heed" (*Three Poets* 10, 1-5). This poem expresses pained anguish over loss. The narrator recalls a better time when he and his friend would walk in a beautiful place in England and displays a gloomy feeling of finality. The first lines of the poem demonstrate the crushing truth of death and the pain of loss. It is this first line that most aptly resembles the Hobbits' emotions after Gandalf's death. Like the fallen soldier in Gurney's poem, Gandalf is gone, and upon witnessing the wizard's death, the Company feels as if all their plans are foiled.

The loss of Gandalf gives the Hobbits a moment to truly experience the death war causes. Gandalf's death demolishes the Hobbits' innocence as they see a loved one die in battle for the first time. The Hobbits experience the immediate and distressing reality of death in war that closely resembles death by shelling and suffer the feelings of grief and hopelessness caused by losing a dear friend. Gandalf's death increases Frodo's fear for losing his friends and eventually influences him to go off on his own. While not many prominent characters die in *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf's death has a

resounding effect on the Fellowship, especially Frodo, and results in drastic consequences for their journey. Frodo's constant burden fearing that his surviving friends will die likens him to an officer during the First World War and gives another example of Frodo's soldier-like trauma. In the next section, I examine the most prominent cause of Frodo's trauma, the One Ring, and its powerful psychological effects that recall soldier shellshock.

*The Burden of the Ring: Frodo's Shellshock and Signs of Trauma*

The curse of bearing the One Ring is that it constantly torments the mind. The Ring is wholly evil and seems to possess a mind of its own, a sort of unrelenting will to find its way back to Sauron. I will discuss the Ring's power and corruptive ability extensively in the fourth chapter of this thesis. In this chapter, I am primarily concerned with the burden the Ring becomes for Frodo, both the physical weight it exerts on him and the mental trauma of the Ring's corruption of Frodo's mind. Given that the Ring is one of the more fantastical elements of the trilogy, the applicability of the Ring's effect on Frodo to soldiers during World War I is lesser than some of Frodo's other traumas. However, the mental corruption the Ring causes resembles certain effects of shellshock. It is also important to acknowledge the burden of the Ring whilst discussing Frodo's trauma because the Ring itself causes him more trauma than any of the other perils he faces.

The burden of the Ring has multiple dimensions, most obviously the literal physical burden of carrying the Ring. Despite being a small and seemingly light ring of gold, the Ring actually carries considerable weight, and as Frodo nears Mordor, that weight grows heavier around his neck. As Tolkien writes, "In fact with every step

towards the gates of Mordor Frodo felt the Ring on its chain about his neck grow more burdensome. He was now beginning to feel it as an actual weight dragging him earthwards” (*Two Towers* 264). The Ring has the power to make its possession as difficult as possible, including increasing its physical weight. This physical weight also constantly reminds Frodo of the danger of the item he carries. This understanding of the Ring’s burden adds to the mental toll it takes.

However, the physical burden of the Ring pales in comparison to the mental corruption it breeds. The Ring torments Frodo mentally from the moment he begins his journey, growing in traumatic effect the closer he gets to Mordor. This mental trauma becomes fully clear and acute during the events of *The Return of the King* while Frodo and Sam travel through Mordor to Mount Doom. As the Hobbits struggle across the Land of Shadow, Frodo tells Sam of the Ring’s terrible weight on his mind: “But this blind dark seems to be getting into my heart. As I lay in prison, Sam, I tried to remember the Brandywine, and Woody End, and The Water running through the mill at Hobbiton. But I can’t see them now” (*Return of the King* 216). Frodo recognizes that the Ring is increasingly damaging his mind: it overtakes his memory and the cheerful images of home and the beauty of the Shire are taken from him. Frodo needs the comfort of home to inspire him to complete his quest; he searches for the memory of the Shire to remind him what he is doing this task for, but the Ring prevents him. The Ring afflicts him with a sort of amnesia.

Frodo’s amnesia recalls another common symptom of shellshock that afflicted soldiers during the First World War. Shephard highlights the memory loss of shellshock: “The experience of being shelled seemed to leave men blinded, deaf, dumb,

semi-paralysed, in a state of stupor, and very often suffering from amnesia. Some could remember nothing between the moment of the explosion and coming to the hospital; others could remember nothing at all” (*A War of Nerves* 1). Frodo, like a soldier suffering from shellshock, has lived through numerous traumatic experiences and, in this moment of amnesia, demonstrates one of the most common shellshock symptoms. As Frodo continues into Mordor, this Ring induced amnesia increases as the Ring’s corrosive effects on Frodo’s mind increase.

Frodo’s traumatic amnesia reaches an all-consuming level as the Hobbits climb Mount Doom. Sam asks Frodo if he can remember the moments from their adventures, trying to find comfort for his friend in the pleasant memories of their journey, but Frodo cannot remember any of it:

“No taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of wind, no memory of tree or grass or flower, no image of moon or star are left to me. I am naked in the dark, Sam, and there is no veil between me and the wheel of fire. I begin to see it even with my waking eyes, and all else fades.” (*Return of the King* 238)

Frodo cannot picture any of his adventures, nor can he even remember the basic pleasures of his senses. He cannot find comfort in memory of the good things in life nor remember what they felt like. The only thing Frodo can see in his mind, and even when his eyes are open, is the Ring, appearing as a great wheel of fire. It has consumed Frodo’s mind to the point that he exhibits even more of the afflictions of shellshock, unable to see, struggling with his other senses, and struggling to grasp reality. This passage demonstrates the horrific effect the Ring has on Frodo’s mind, totally overwhelming his consciousness and presenting him with the constant frightening image of itself. Frodo increasingly resembles a shell-shocked soldier suffering from the

symptoms caused by the mental trauma of bearing the Ring: he too is blind, deaf, and in a daze (Shephard 1).

As I have argued, the symptoms of the Ring's corruption of Frodo's mind manifest like symptoms of shellshock. Frodo becomes a tormented version of himself, suffering from the mental shock generated by the Ring. His trauma and injuries vividly recall authentic war experience. The fact that Tolkien's story presents an ordeal that resembles the war he experienced suggests that the trilogy critiques war itself. But before pursuing that claim in the following chapters, I will analyze two other aspects of the trilogy that connect Frodo and his fellow Hobbits to soldiers in World War I: the friendship all four Hobbits display throughout the trilogy, which resembles the comradery of soldiers during the war, and the Hobbits' disillusioned return home, which dramatizes the disconnection soldiers felt from the home front and their difficult transition back to normal life after war.

### **The Bond of the Hobbits and the Homoeroticism of World War I Soldiers**

Despite all that I have discussed about the trauma and suffering of war and Frodo's experience in *The Lord of the Rings*, not every moment features pain and suffering. In addition to the trauma he suffers, Frodo resembles the British soldiers of World War I through his friendships and the comradery he shares with his companions, especially his Hobbit friends, Sam above all. In this section, I examine the friendship of the four Hobbits and the parallels between their relationships and those of soldiers in World War I. The Hobbits demonstrate a fierce loyalty to each other, insisting that they remain with Frodo throughout his journey. Merry and Pippin refuse to be left behind in the Shire and try desperately to stay with Frodo when the Fellowship reaches the crucial

turning point on the edge of Gondor in Parth Galen, but they are captured by the wizard Saruman's Uruk-hai and cannot follow their friend. Sam never leaves Frodo's side, staying with him for the whole trilogy, even when Frodo tries to sneak away to Mordor alone at the end of *Fellowship of the Ring*. This loyalty shows how much the Hobbits care for each other and throughout the trilogy they refer to each other as dear or beloved friends. But perhaps the most direct parallel between the Hobbits and the soldiers of the First World War I is the occasional homosocial intimacy and friendship displayed between them, especially Sam and Frodo.

Fussell dedicates an entire chapter of *The Great War and Modern Memory* to discussing the intimate and loving relationships of the British soldier boys of World War I. Fussell states, "we will not be surprised to find both the actuality and the recall of front-line experience replete with what we can call the homoerotic. I use that term to imply a sublimated (i.e., "chaste") form of temporary homosexuality" (295). Fussell notes that there was a sort of practiced, socially acceptable love and bond between the men in the trenches. He suggests that these men displayed a contained and temporary physical love for each other. This assertion recalls the Hobbit behavior in the trilogy. They repeatedly proclaim their affection for each other and demonstrate moments of physical care. Their relationships are more homosocial than overtly homosexual, marked by a deep care for dear friends, rather than a sexual desire for each other.

Fussell explains the distinction between practiced homosexuality and the behavior of the British soldiers in the Great War, illuminating a relationship that resembles the Hobbits' comradery: "What we find, [...] especially in the attitude of young officers to their men, is something more like the 'idealistic,' passionate but non-

physical ‘crushes’” (*Great War and Modern Memory* 295). According to Fussell, this homoeroticism in the trenches did not result in practiced homosexuality, but rather officers developed strong infatuations with some of their men, a sort of non-physical affection and appreciation for the soldiers they command. This explanation more closely resembles the relationships between Frodo and Sam and Merry and Pippin. There is no sexual tension or desire between these Hobbits, but there is a strong affection and appreciation for each other, demonstrated by their loyalty. When Elrond decides the members of the Fellowship of the Ring, Sam, Merry, and Pippin refuse to be left behind: “If you have to go, then it will be a punishment for any of us to be left behind, even in Rivendell. We have come a long way with you and been through some stiff times. We want to go on” (*Fellowship* 305). Merry speaks for the Hobbits in this passage showing the connection between the four through his insistence to join on the quest. His statement that it would be a “punishment” to be left behind strongly expresses the connection they have to their friend, a fierce affection and loyalty.

While Frodo and Sam portray the most affectionate connection between the Hobbits, Merry and Pippin also display deep care for one another through tender moments of affection. After the Siege of Gondor, Merry is badly wounded. He stumbles into Minas Tirith, still reeling from the battle, during which he helps Éowen, the niece of the King of Rohan, fight and kill the Witch-King of Angmar. Pippin finds the injured Merry, sends for medical aid, and comforts his friend while they wait. The two Hobbits share a touching moment that anticipates Sam and Frodo’s behavior in Mordor: “he let Merry sink gently onto the pavement in a path of sunlight, and then he sat down beside him, laying Merry’s head in his lap. He felt his body and limbs gently, and took his

friend's hands in his own" (*Return of the King* 149). Pippin comforts his friend with a simple gesture of touch and companionship. Just as Sam will with Frodo, Pippin holds Merry's hands as a caring reminder that he is there for his friend. This moment epitomizes the homosocial affection Pippin has for Merry and the strong bond between the two Hobbits.

Sam displays the most outward affection of any of the Hobbits. He accompanies Frodo through their most dangerous and traumatic experiences and he often displays his passionate affection for Frodo after these traumatic moments when Frodo needs comfort. As Frodo and Sam struggle to reach Mordor, Frodo declares that he fears he and Sam will die once they complete their mission. Sam acts tenderly in response: "Sam nodded silently. He took his master's hand and bent over it. He did not kiss it, though his tears fell on it" (*Two Towers* 257). This moment shows Sam's affection for Frodo, his grasping of Frodo's hand is gentle and caring, and his tears show the love he has for his master. Neither of them wants to die and Sam despairs hearing Frodo say such morbid things. Sam's actions in this scene resemble the sort of passionate affection between soldiers that Fussell speaks of, the Hobbit outwardly displays an ardent care for Frodo.

Frodo also shows affection and appreciation for Sam. In that same interaction where Sam holds Frodo's hand, Frodo calls Sam "my dearest hobbit, friend of friends" (*Two Towers* 257). It is not surprising that Sam and Frodo display affection for each other; after all, they face a journey of terrible danger with only each other for comfort. When the Hobbits face the perils of their quest, they often lean on each other for support. When Gollum abandons them in Shelob's cave, leaving the Hobbits stranded in

darkness, Frodo and Sam find comfort in each other's presence: "Sam left the tunnel-side and shrank towards Frodo, and their hands met and clasped, and so together they still went on" (*Two Towers* 370). They are in a tunnel of complete darkness, aware of some terrible danger near them, and their instinct is to find each other and proceed together. As intimate companions, they rely on each other for support and comfort, both mental and physical.

Finding comfort in soldier companions is a sentiment Gurney clearly expresses in his poem "Servitude." The poem discusses the pains of serving in the military and the key to enduring those pains: "If it were not for England, who would bear / This heavy servitude one moment more? [...] // Only the love of comrades sweetens all, / Whose laughing spirit will not be outdone" (*Three Poets* 8, 9-10). These lines speak of soldiers finding loving comfort through fellow soldiers. The poem begins with a feeling of despair over the pain and futility of their service, but the later lines show how the comradery of their companions sweetens the experience. Frodo and Sam demonstrate similar feelings. Their journey is perilous and frightening, but they find comfort in each other's presence. Even the simplest touching of hands provides relief from the terrors of their quest.

This simple affectionate gesture of handholding is one of the main ways Sam shows his love for Frodo and reminds Frodo that he is there to help and protect him. While Frodo and Sam climb Mount Doom, Frodo falters. Feeling the power of Sauron's will searching for him, Frodo drops to his knees and begins to crawl up the mountain. As Sauron's power surges again, Frodo collapses and his hands begin to paw at the Ring mindlessly. Knowing that if he puts the Ring on, he and Sam will be revealed to

Sauron, Frodo begs his friend for help, asking him to hold his hand. Sam responds in the same tender, affectionate manner as before, “Sam took his master’s hands and laid them together, palm to palm, and kissed them; and then he held them gently between his own” (*Return of the King* 244). Once again, Sam comforts Frodo by holding his hands, this time kissing them as an added source of comfort. There is something beautiful in the companionship of Sam and Frodo. Left alone on a near impossible mission, stuck in a foreign land, they find comfort in the simple pleasure of each other’s presence and touch. Here are two men who are dear friends and care for and protect each other through times of peril and despair. Like the men in Gurney’s poem, these two Hobbits find comfort in their companion’s presence.

The two Hobbits display the sort of passionate affection between soldiers that Fussell speaks to in his recounting of soldier boys in the trenches. As Fussell writes, “Although the usual course of protective affection was from superior to subordinate, sometimes the direction was reversed, with men developing hero-worshipping crushes on their young officers” (*Great War and Modern Memory* 297). This hero-worshipping crush that Fussell details well describes Sam, as he constantly shows loving affection for Frodo, his master. Sam is Frodo’s gardener, his subordinate, and he is ordered to go on the mission by Gandalf with the purpose of accompanying and protecting Frodo without end. But through their travels, Sam comes to realize his love for his master. In the land of Ithilien on the edges of Mordor, he looks at Frodo while he sleeps and thinks to himself, “I love him. He’s like that, and sometimes it shines through, somehow. But I love him, whether or no” (*Two Towers* 291). Sam looks at his master in a sort of hero-like revering way. His love and physical affection for Frodo shown through his gentle

care and handholding, once more liken these Hobbits to the soldiers of the First World War that Fussell describes. They each seek comfort from their dangerous days in the companionship of their beloved fellow soldiers.

### **Returning Home: The Disconnection Between the Returning Hobbits and the Shire**

Turning now to the final part of the Hobbits' journey, I will discuss the difficulty they have returning home, especially Frodo, and the powerful sense of disconnection between the Hobbits in the Shire and the four companions, as their kin have no knowledge of the danger the four Hobbits faced. Frodo has particular difficulty acclimating back into the Shire, eventually deciding that he is no longer comfortable living in Hobbiton. Frodo decides to leave the Shire and Middle-earth forever and travel with the Elves across the sea to the undying lands of Valinor. His struggle to readjust and his final decision to leave the Shire confirm the permanent effects of his trauma.

After the defeat of Sauron and the destruction of the Ring, the Hobbits linger in Minas Tirith and attend the crowning of Aragorn as King of Gondor. Soon after, they begin their journey home, accompanied by Gandalf until they reach Bree. There Gandalf leaves them, and the Hobbits return to the East Farthing of the Shire to find that their home has changed considerably while they were gone. Tolkien calls the events that follow the Scouring of the Shire. The Hobbits discover that men from the south have infiltrated the Shire and built ugly human sized buildings, destroying the natural beauty of parts of the Shire and imprisoning Hobbits who disobeyed the new laws implemented by these men. Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin help inspire the Hobbits to rebel against the southern men culminating in the Battle of the Bywater in which many Hobbits fight and kill many evil men and drive the rest out of the Shire. After the battle, the Hobbits

discover that Saruman, who has escaped from Isengard, aggravated the corruption of the Shire. The Hobbits face Saruman and force him to leave the Shire but before he can, he is stabbed in the back by his servant Grima Wormtongue. This ends the Scouring of the Shire and the four Hobbits begin helping rebuild as they try to return to normal life.

But the Hobbits also realize that their experiences have changed them all and that they cannot simply fall right back into life in the Shire as usual. The first indication that the Hobbits will struggle to re-acclimate comes when they reach Bree and notice that the townspeople look at them in amazement. As the returning Hobbits realize, their experiences have changed the way they perceive the world:

They themselves had become so used to warfare and to riding in well-arrayed companies that they had quite forgotten that the bright mail peeping from under their cloaks, and the helms of Gondor and the Mark, and the fair devices on their shields, would seem outlandish in their own country. (*Return of the King* 303)

The Hobbits have spent so much time in the outside world that they have forgotten the isolated and unexcited pleasantries of life in the northwest of Middle-earth. They now appear as foreigners in their own country. The way they dress and act and hold themselves has changed so much that they no longer fit in with the rest of their people. To an extent, these Hobbits have lost the feeling of familiarity in their home.

Foremost in feeling out of place in the Shire is Frodo, who returns having performed the great sacrifice of bearing the Ring through Mordor so Middle-earth can be saved. Despite Frodo's heroic deeds, none of the people of the Shire can understand or appreciate what he has done. To the common Hobbits of the Shire, Frodo went away and came back after a long absence. The Shire's inability to thank Frodo for his sacrifices on their behalf is shown when Sam's father Hamfast Gamgee blames Frodo

for all the evil that happened in the Shire after he left: “You didn’t never ought to have a’ sold Bag End, as I always said. That’s what started all the mischief. And while you’ve been trespassing in foreign parts [...] they’ve been and dug up Bag Shot Row and ruined my taters!” (*Return of the King* 327). Hamfast’s tone is accusatory and he shows no acknowledgment of what Frodo went through while he was away. His response to Frodo’s return is a microcosm for how all the Shire views Frodo upon his return: they simply do not understand that Frodo saved them all from evil. There is an unbridgeable divide between Frodo and the Hobbits in the Shire.

A similar division between soldiers and the people back home confronted Sassoon at the end of World War I. In his poem “Return of the Heroes,” Sassoon depicts a woman enthusiastically cheering from the crowd calling out the names of men she recognizes returning from the war, “They must feel sad to know they can’t win any more / Great victories!...Aren’t they glorious men?...so full of humour!” (Sassoon, *War Poems* 102-103). The speaker shows excitement and thrill at the men returning home; she sees them as heroes and thinks they must be proud of their glorious accomplishments. Yet she knows nothing of the horror of the trenches. Significantly, this poem only shows one side of the division between soldiers and the home front: Sassoon offers no response to this woman’s exclamations. Instead, he uses omission to ironize her view. The lack of Sassoon’s response isolates the woman’s words and emphasizes how absurdly inaccurate her view of the war is. This poem shows the detachment between soldiers and the people at home; people who do not experience war first-hand simply cannot understand what it is like. There were no glorious victories in World War I, only the terrible life of the trenches and the millions of dead men.

Sassoon's poem demonstrates the gap between the experience of soldiers returning home after war and those who remained that Tolkien captures in Frodo's return to the Shire. The Shire Hobbits think Frodo must be happy to be home and do not appreciate or understand Frodo's experiences outside the Shire. Some, like Hamfast Gamgee, even criticize and blame Frodo for the damage to the Shire. Sam notices this alienation between Frodo and other Hobbits:

Frodo dropped out of all doings of the Shire, and Sam was pained to notice how little honour he had in his own country. Few people knew or wanted to know about his deeds and adventures; their admiration and respect were given mostly to Mr. Meriadoc and Mr. Peregrin and (if Sam had known it) to himself. (*Return of the King* 341)

This passage shows how the Shire has more appreciation for Merry and Pippin, the Hobbits who appear in brightly colored mail and armor of the great kingdoms of Middle-earth than they do for Frodo. Yet the appreciation shown for Merry and Pippin also indicates that the Shire Hobbits do not understand what Merry and Pippin have been through either. Merry, Pippin, and Sam are thought of as glorious heroes returning after accomplishing great feats in battle, but the Shire Hobbits, like the woman in Sassoon's "Return of the Heroes," show no understanding of the cruel nature of war. Furthermore, Frodo is given no admiration despite performing the most heroic and sacrificial duties of any of the Hobbits.

Adding to Frodo's struggles returning home are the profound effects his trauma has had on him. While the lack of welcome appears to have a disheartening effect on Frodo, the scars of his traumatic experience make him uncomfortable even in the peace and quiet of the Shire. As Frodo tells Sam as he prepares to leave the Shire for good, "But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved,

but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them” (*Return of the King* 345). Frodo cannot find comfort in the Shire after his experience. He has seen too much and suffered through too much pain to live in the innocence and isolation of the Shire. Gurney’s poem “Old Dreams” addresses the struggle to find rest at home after returning from war: “Once I had dreamed of return to a sunlit land / Of summer and firelit winter with inns to visit, / But here are tangles of Fate one does not understand, / And as for rest of true ease, where is it or what is it?” (*Three Poets* 26, 1-4). Gurney’s narrator speaks of his old dreams of returning to a blissful home of sunlight in summer and warm fires in winter but realizes those dreams are long gone. He cannot find the desired comfort at home, just as Frodo cannot find rest in the Shire. The soldier can never be free from their traumatic experience and cannot return to the normal life of home.

Croft also analyzes the lasting effects of Frodo’s mental trauma, arguing that he exhibits clear symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder: “One of the grimmest lessons *The Lord of the Rings* teaches about war is that some of the mental wounds it causes never heal in this world. Frodo is Tolkien’s prime example of the heartbreaking effects of war on certain minds” (*War and the Works* 133). I agree with Croft that Frodo evokes the terrible psychological effects of war on soldiers. However, she spends more time showing how Frodo exhibits post-traumatic stress disorder and how he and his fellow Hobbits cope with their experience than she does explaining what that portrayal emphasizes about war’s costs. Indeed, the stark similarity of Frodo’s trauma to the sufferings of World War I soldiers is crucial to understanding Tolkien’s critical commentary on war in the trilogy.

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have identified the numerous forms of trauma Frodo suffers on his quest to destroy the Ring. I have compared each of these traumatic experiences to the experiences of soldiers during World War I primarily through comparisons to the poetry of the trench poets Siegfried Sassoon, Ivor Gurney, Isaac Rosenberg, and Wilfred Owen. I discussed the various forms of fear Frodo feels in his adventures, specifically fears of attack, pursuit, the sound of the enemy, the uncertainty of danger ahead being seen, and the despair over the hopelessness of his mission. I related each of these fears to the fears of World War I soldiers. I continued my discussion with an analysis of wounds, showing how Frodo's injury at the hands of the Nazgûl likens him to soldiers injured in war and, more specifically, to soldiers who suffered from shellshock. I traced connections between Frodo's trauma and the trauma of World War I soldiers, including the loss of dear friends and the responsibility to protect friends, as well as the burden of bearing the One Ring and the similarities between Frodo's afflictions and shellshock. I also argued that the friendship and tender care for each other the Hobbits demonstrate also resembles the affection soldiers in the trenches shared for one another. Lastly, I demonstrated how Frodo's struggle to reacclimate to the Shire recalls the struggles that the British soldiers faced when returning home, misunderstood by their countrymen and uncomfortable in their former homes.

These connections between Frodo's experience and First World War experience demonstrate yet again that *The Lord of Rings* insistently recalls real life war. Frodo's adventures in the trilogy dramatize a soldier's journey through a war that permanently

changes him. These parallels also demonstrate the profound effect Tolkien's personal experience in the Great War had on his writing. While the trilogy does not represent a direct dramatization of World War I, it provides a vivid war narrative that confronts and examines the dark truths and consequences of warfare, for individuals and world. Since this trilogy powerfully recalls the facets of modern war through its fantasy medium, it creates the opportunity to reveal and analyze the commentary on war that the story produces. Fantasy provides Tolkien the conventions to depict a war of good versus evil, heightening the ethics at stake in war and thus clarifying what conduct and actions in war are morally acceptable actions. In the following chapters, I examine how Tolkien describes war, studying his depiction of specific battles and the terrible consequences of warfare. By analyzing Tolkien's portrayal of the War of the Ring and its ramifications, I will reveal the critical commentary that *The Lord of the Rings* presents of warfare and the qualifications for justifying war demonstrated by that critique.

## **Chapter 2: The War of the Ring: Tolkien's Grim Depictions of Battle and the Requirements for Just War and Moral Military Leadership**

There are two major battles depicted in *The Lord of the Rings*. These are the Battle of Helm's Deep and the Siege of Gondor which features within it the Battle of Pelennor Fields. There are multiple other violent conflicts depicted in the trilogy including the attack by the Uruk-hai on the Fellowship, the Rohirrim ambushing the Uruk-hai, Faramir's party ambushing the Easterlings in Ithilien, and the Battle at the Black Gate, but none of these are shown to the extent of the former two. Most of these appear as brief scenes no more than a page or two within the story. Entire chapters are devoted to Helm's Deep and the Siege of Gondor and they are the two largest battles by number of combatants. Each fight falls under dire circumstances, if the forces of good lose, evil will dominate Middle-earth. The tone of these scenes is dark, grim, and terse. The battles lack glory or flourishing displays; they are harsh, to the point, and filled with death. These chapters dramatize the critique of war that the entire trilogy portrays. Through the depictions of Helm's Deep and the Siege of Gondor, Tolkien highlights the tragic nature of death in battle and the urgency of protecting lives through combat. With the importance of human life as their center-piece, these battles demonstrate that people seeking to enact just war, must conduct it with the protection of people as a foremost requirement.

In discussing Tolkien's depictions of war and the critical commentary they reveal, two pieces of scholarship are especially relevant. The first is *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* by Janet Brennan Croft which looks at the influences of World War I on Tolkien's writing, as well as the effects of World War II, and engages with the

depiction of military leadership in *The Lord of the Rings*. Croft also studies battlefield tactics in Tolkien's narratives and concludes her book with a brief analysis of Tolkien's philosophy on war. The second important piece of scholarship is *Following Gandalf: Epic Battles and Moral Victory in The Lord of the Rings* by Matthew Dickerson. Dickerson analyzes how Tolkien depicts warfare and rejects the notion that Tolkien's battles glorify war, instead arguing that Tolkien places significance on the individual rather than the battle itself. Dickerson also discusses free will, morality, and moral victory, and examines the Christian themes in the trilogy. While the latter portion of his book does not pertain to my arguments, Dickerson's analysis of how Tolkien describes violence engages with the same material that I analyze. These two texts will be useful as I expand my discussion on Tolkien's portrayal of the War of the Ring.

Central to the scholarly commentary on war in the trilogy is the significance of human life. The trilogy criticizes war because it takes people lives and not just the lives of the soldiers on one side; Tolkien portrays the life of every soldier as important. This emphasis on the importance of life is shown by Gandalf at the very beginning of the trilogy. When Gandalf tells Frodo of the history of the Ring, and of Bilbo's encounter with Gollum, Frodo condemns Gollum saying that he deserves death. However, Gandalf cautions Frodo, saying, "Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends" (*Fellowship* 65). Gandalf is a very wise character, and he articulates this sentiment about the importance of life stressed throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. Gandalf knows that one man should not have the power or knowledge to control the lives of many. Such an understanding is essential in

war because commanders have the power and responsibility for ordering their troops into deadly battle. As we will see in Tolkien's depictions of these battles, Tolkien stresses commanders' moral responsibility to care for their soldiers' welfare; this responsibility in turn underscores the importance of human life. The portrayal of just war in this trilogy requires that it defends human life.

Furthermore, in emphasizing the importance of life and the justification of war to protect it, Tolkien draws a distinction between the innocent people and the guilty. People are going to die in war, so it becomes necessary to determine who is worth saving. Tolkien understands this notion and presents the distinction in *The Lord of the Rings*, which manifests in the dichotomy of good and evil. And while distinguishing between good and evil may be difficult, Tolkien provides the grounds for making that distinction: non-combatants and people who neither desire nor enjoy war are portrayed as good while the aggressors who initiate and enjoy violence are rendered as evil. Sauron prevails as the example of pure evil as he desires dominion over all life and sparks war for his own selfish purposes with no care for the destruction it causes. Sauron is not alone in his evil however; his Orcs also display evil behavior as they show no care for loss of life, burning and killing as they go. Additionally, Saruman and his Orcs, the Uruk-hai, display the characteristics of evil. He orders the Uruk-hai to conquer Rohan as he seeks mastery over others through violence, and the Uruk-hai demonstrate no care for innocent life, destroying everything in their path. Lastly, the Steward of Gondor, Denethor, under the corrupting influence of Sauron, demonstrates evil as he orders his soldiers on suicide missions showing no care for the lives of others. As I will discuss below, Tolkien also defines the difference between good and evil leaders, with

Sauron, Saruman, and Denethor as evil examples. These distinctions between good and evil play a key role in defining the characteristics of just war presented by *The Lord of the Rings*.

### **Defining Just War**

Central to understanding the framework for the war critique in *The Lord of the Rings* is just war theory. This doctrine argues that war while terrible is sometimes necessary and therefore studies the criteria under which war can be justified. Croft studies how Tolkien's wars adhere to just war doctrine which she defines: "*Bellum justum* is generally divided into two components: *jus ad bellum*, which deals with when it is morally allowable to resort to war, and *jus in bello*, which defines the moral conduct of war after it has been initiated" (140). Tolkien's battles present both the conditions that justify resorting to war and the conduct in war that is morally approvable. Gondor and Rohan are morally justified to turn to war because Sauron, motivated by an evil desire for conquest and destruction, attacks their kingdoms unprovoked. Sauron intends to claim dominion over all Middle-Earth and rule as a tyrant. There is no other way to stop the Dark Lord; war is the only answer. These circumstances establish the *jus ad bellum* for the War of the Ring. I will analyze more fully how the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* conduct war below, but overall, their conduct is morally supportable because they do not kill non-combatants, their commanders lead their troops from the front, risking their lives to the same degree they ask their men to, and they use violence primarily to protect civilians and non-combatants. As I progress in this chapter, I will not only analyze more fully how Tolkien portrays the War of the Ring as just, but I will also show that Tolkien depicts

war so as to avoid glorification and to lament the brutal nature of warfare. The following section analyzes key moments in the narrative when Tolkien inhibits the glorification of war by emphasizing its brutality.

### **Helm's Deep: Dark Description and the Defense of Civilians**

In *The Two Towers*, the Orc forces of Saruman, known as the Uruk-hai, besiege the last host of Rohan at the stronghold in Helm's Deep, a fortress built in a valley in the mountains in the north-western Rohan. The fortress is known as the Hornburg, and roughly 3,000 Rohirrim forces defend the walls and gate from 10,000 Uruk-hai and men from Dunland, the entirety of Saruman's army. Among the Rohirrim are also members of the Fellowship: Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli. The battle begins in the dark of night and lasts through the morning. The Uruk-hai are close to victory when Gandalf arrives with reinforcements and the Rohirrim commander Erkenbrand. Their arrival, along with the sudden appearance of a "forest of Huorns," trees that can move and communicate, helps turn the tide of the battle. The Orcs are defeated and wiped out entirely when they flee into the forest of Huorns. This is the first major battle featured in *The Lord of the Rings* and takes up an entire chapter in *The Two Towers*. The details of the siege are described in succinct and matter of fact language. The fight is comprised mostly of hand-to-hand combat and archery. Tolkien's descriptions of hand-to-hand fighting are concise and harsh. There are no glorious or extravagant details, no mention of fancy swordplay or beautiful skill with weaponry. Orcs are hewn or cut down or shot.

Instead of portraying killing in great detail, the narrative of Helm's Deep is primarily dedicated to summarizing the movements of the battle: where the Orcs are attacking, the status of the walls and gate, and the movements of the primary characters.

Tolkien emphasizes these elements because the narrative is more concerned with the purpose of the battle rather than the fight itself. Helm's Deep must be defended to protect the people of Rohan. Tolkien does not disillusion readers with extravagant detail because the war is about defeating evil and protecting people. If Tolkien were to depict the skill of Aragorn with his sword Andúril and Legolas with his bow, the tone of the battle would be inspiring and exciting. But in the trilogy war is not inspiring or exciting; it is devastating. Thus, the lengthier descriptions of the battle for Helm's Deep summarize the major events such as when Aragorn and Legolas defend the walls near the end of the battle. Describing Aragorn leading the men, Tolkien writes,

Taking his leave, he returned to the walls, and passed round all their circuit, enheartening the men, and lending aid wherever the assault was hot. Legolas went with him. Blasts of fire leaped up from below shaking the stones. Grappling-hooks were hurled, and ladders raised. Again and again the Orcs gained the summit of the outer wall, and again the defenders cast them down. (*Two Towers* 156)

There is no description of Aragorn or Legolas fighting. This description is more concerned with how the battle is going, defining the peril that the forces for good face and the state of their defenses because Tolkien cares more about the people who conduct armed conflict than the conflict itself.

Tolkien's concern with the individuals fighting the battle is shared by Dickerson in his analysis of how Tolkien portrays violence. While scrutinizing the Battle of the Five Armies, the climactic battle of *The Hobbit*, Dickerson shows how Tolkien switches the point of view from omniscient narration to Bilbo's perspective. As Dickerson notes, this shift changes how the battle is perceived, "the switch from an omniscient overview to Bilbo's perspective—personalizes the battle while adding distance to it. That is, the focus of Tolkien's narrative at this point, rather than being on the details of the fighting,

shifts to the feelings of one individual” (*Following Gandalf* 23). I agree with Dickerson’s account here. Tolkien’s shift in narrative point of view emphasizes people rather than violence. Dickerson goes on to say that “Tolkien is more concerned with those involved in the battle than the battle itself” (*Following Gandalf* 23). And while I would agree with Dickerson that Tolkien is more concerned with those involved in war, I would argue that in the trilogy Tolkien’s focus on the individual presents the importance of individuals in war without diminishing from the importance of the battle. While Dickerson’s analysis is on a battle from *The Hobbit*, he repeats his assertion when discussing *The Lord of the Rings*. However, his emphasis on individuals leads him to underestimate how much *The Lord of the Rings* is in fact concerned with the battle, particularly its outcome. Tolkien’s focus on individual combatants does not detract from his emphasis on the battle, but rather, shows the importance of the battle by highlighting the individuals at risk in the violence. So while Tolkien does indeed describe the events of the battle, his narrative resists portraying the violence excessively, refusing to give any glory to killing. The outcome of the battle is important precisely because the individuals that Tolkien highlights, good people, must be protected.

The justification for fighting in *The Lord of the Rings* is to protect the lives of good people. Thus, as Tolkien describes Helm’s Deep, the details emphasize the consequences of war to remind the reader what is at stake in the battle. The Rohirrim are heroes not because they are killing enemies, but because they are defending their country from destruction. Tolkien understands that war is sometimes necessary, as with the War of the Ring, and as long as the violence itself is not celebrated, directed against

evil, and defends people, it is acceptable. Thus, victory at Helm's Deep is portrayed as just because in winning that battle, the Rohirrim save innocent lives from slaughter.

However, the narrative does not celebrate war, and avoids doing so by presenting the horrific nature of violence. The descriptions of the Battle of Helm's Deep demonstrate that war is a horrid and brutal affair and deserves no reverence. Tolkien sets the grim tone of the battle with a description of setting, "The sky was utterly dark, and the stillness of the heavy air foreboded storm. Suddenly the clouds were seared by a blinding flash. Branched lightning smote down upon the eastward hills" (*Two Towers* 148). The words in this passage convey a dark mood. It is night, the weather is fowl and volatile. Nature appears to reflect the violent conflict happening below and Tolkien builds this violent tone with words like "seared" and "smote." Rain is described as "lashing down from the sky" (148) as would a sword in battle. Tolkien locates his characters in a setting that matches the grimness of war. Everything about this battle is dark. The sky is dark, the enemy is described as a "dark tide" and a "dark field of corn" (184).

The first physical violence in Helm's Deep is a volley of arrows from the Orcs, "Arrows as thick as the rain came whistling over the battlements, and fell clinking and glancing on the stones. Some found a mark" (*Two Towers* 184). Tolkien's contrived craft shows through two elements of this quotation. The first aspect is the simile describing the "arrows as thick as the rain" which emphasizes the number of arrows shot at the defenders characterizing the missiles like rain: filling the air and unrelenting. Like a person outside during a heavy rain guaranteed to get wet, the defenders of Helm's Deep are bound to be shot. The second aspect of Tolkien's craft evident in this

passage is the impersonality and detachment of the phrase “Some found a mark” which depicts the first casualties of the battle. The narrator refuses to give an explicit description of arrows penetrating bodies, and instead, detaches from the violence, referencing it only briefly. This impersonality prevents the passage from glorifying war as the narrator’s description shows little emotion, no extravagance, nothing celebrated, only the plain honesty of violence occurring and causing casualties.

Further portrayal of violence in the chapter includes descriptions that demonstrate the grimness of combat. Such depictions come when the Orcs reach the gate of the Hornburg. The Uruk-hai and wild men charge forward with tree trunks as battering rams and begin bashing down the gates. Aragorn and Éomer run to defend the gates and hand-to-hand combat ensues:

Andúril rose and fell, gleaming with white fire [...] Dismayed the rammers let fall the trees and turned to fight; but the wall of their shields was broken as by a lightning-stroke, and they were swept away, hewn down, or cast over the Rock into the stony stream below. (149)

The most substantial description in this passage is of Andúril, Aragorn’s sword, reflecting the light of the lightning. There is no beauty in the description, however, Andúril gleams, reflecting lightning, not shining nor brilliant. The sword is deadly and powerful not beautiful. Furthermore, Aragorn’s sword seems to be acting on its own, detached from its wielder. This impersonality helps prevent Aragorn’s fighting from being viewed as heroic as he and his sword appear as two separate entities. Aragorn is detached from his sword so Tolkien can highlight the terrifying aspects of such a deadly weapon. Later in the battle, Andúril is described as terrifying, “In his hand still Andúril gleamed, and the terror of the sword for a while held back the enemy” (153). Aragorn’s famous and kingly sword is portrayed not as a mighty and gorgeous weapon, but as

terrifying. The Orcs and wild men are an evil enemy, but they are not mindless. They feel the fear inspired by Aragorn's deadly weapon. Moreover, the description of Andúril is again terse but sharp: no extravagance, no detail of how Aragorn wields the sword, only the terror that his skill instills.

These kinds of terse but brutal details of the battle are prevalent in the description of Aragorn and Éomer killing the Orcs at the gate. The Orcs are cut down or thrown over the edge of the ramp. There is no glamorous language, no mention of heroism, Aragorn and Éomer are simply fighting and killing. This succinct description returns again when Gimli rescues Éomer, "An axe swung and swept back. Two Orcs fell headless. The rest fled" (150). Gimli's attack is vicious and brutal, but the narration is impersonal, matter of fact, and presented with a grim tone. The only detail necessary is that the Orcs have been beheaded. Notably, Tolkien's phrasing makes it seem as if no one wields the axe that beheads the Uruks. Once again, Tolkien disassociates the person committing the violence from the violence itself. Gimli is not presented heroically because his axe seems to be acting on its own. Pairing the grim and general description with the impersonalizing of the soldiers shows that war is not inspirational or exciting, but instead is terrible. The scene depicts gruesome casualties and death. Such description prevents these scenes of battle from inspiring any feelings of glory or heroism in readers.

Extending the description of the gruesomeness of battle, Tolkien also depicts the consequences of the violence: corpses. A powerful image of the battle comes when Tolkien describes a pile of Orc bodies at the base of the wall, "Before the wall's foot the dead and broken were piled like shingle in a storm; ever higher rose the hideous

mounds, and still the enemy came on” (*Two Towers* 151). Tolkien returns to the use of simile in this portrayal, emphasizing the magnitude of this pile of bodies. The comparison of the pile to shingles falling off roofs during a storm conjures an image of an endless pile of indistinguishable objects. Combined with the words “hideous mounds,” Tolkien presents a horrifying image of a mass of corpses. This detail shows the reality of battle; there are bodies everywhere. This depiction is again, grim and concise. Tolkien shows that war produces corpses, but he does not provide lurid details that might celebrate the killing. There is genuine disdain for the pile of the enemy shown by the word hideous. Even though the enemy are thrown back and killed, there is nothing pleasant about it: just ghastly piles of dead.

Importantly, Tolkien’s portrayal of this mound of bodies recalls the experience of a soldiers fighting in the trenches during World War I. In her critical work examining the relationship between modernism and World War I experience, Allyson Booth describes the trenches in ways that resonate with Tolkien’s portrayal: “Trench soldiers in the Great War inhabited a world constructed, literally, of corpses. Dead men at the front blended with the mud and duckboard landscape, emerging through the surface of the ground and through the dirt floors of dugouts” (*Postcards from the Trenches* 50). The trenches were filled with piles of the dead, a constant reminder of fallen companions and the gruesomeness of battle. As Booth points out, the dead did not stay in the ground. Those who live through war must do so with the dead always around them. The trenches of World War I were a setting filled with death and corpses, unrelenting and constantly growing just like Tolkien’s mound of Orc corpses.

The volume of corpses produced by war is a phenomenon echoed by trench poet Siegfried Sassoon in his poem "The Effect." The poem describes the aftermath of a British bombardment strike and focuses around the narrator's reaction to a man remarking at the number of dead bodies: "*He'd never seen so many dead before.*" / They sprawled in yellow daylight while he swore [...] "*He'd never seen so many dead before*" / The lilted words danced up and down his brain, / While corpses jumped and capered in the rain" (*War Poems* 58). Sassoon produces a striking image of dead bodies spread everywhere in the daytime, surrounding the soldiers performing their duties. Moreover, these corpses "jump" and "caper." These words describe bodies flying through the air after being hit by artillery. Sassoon's description is satirical, using the word caper which means playful leaping to emphasize the absurdity and horror of bodies parts flying everywhere. The bodies do not disappear in Sassoon's poem, they sprawl in the daylight. In both World War I poetry and Tolkien's trilogy, war fills the battlefield with corpses.

Tolkien translates the "world of corpses" that became a constant during World War I, a reality that he witnessed during his service, into his depictions of war in *Lord of the Rings*. The Battle of Helm's Deep renders war using the same strategies of realism used by poets like Sassoon, showing the hideous consequences of violence. The brief discussion of the pile of Orc corpses offers strong evidence that Tolkien draws on his experience of war when portraying this scene and others like it. His use of realism supports the condemnation of war: there is nothing celebratory about a pile of corpses, even if that pile contains bodies of the enemy. The death and destruction of war is terrible.

Even though the Orcs are evil and fight for an evil cause, their deaths are never celebrated or portrayed as glorious: their deaths are brutal. The end of the Battle of Helm's Deep arrives in the morning. Inspired by the dawn and the rising sun and fed up with hiding behind the walls waiting to be overrun, Théoden, King of Rohan, leads a cavalry charge of the remaining Rohirrim out of the Hornburg. This counterattack drives the Orc army back and as the Rohirrim charge, Gandalf and Erkenbrand suddenly arrive with reinforcements. This two-headed charge is devastating, the Orcs and wild men are terrified and turn and flee. Despite the excitement of the Rohirrim victory, the depiction of this victorious charge is macabre, "On they rode, the king and his companions. Captains and champions fell or fled before them. Neither orc nor man withstood them. Their backs were to the swords and spears of the Riders, and their faces to the valley. They cried and wailed" (*Two Towers* 157-58). The passage shows, in concise detail, a brutal cavalry charge that slaughters everything in its path. The Orcs are crushed, stabbed in the back, and cry out in pain and despair. This passage does not have a glorious tone, even though it is a moment of victory for the protagonists. The charge represents a triumph over evil, but the description of it is brutal because killing people is always brutal.

Tolkien continues to emphasize the horror of war's violence even in moments of victory over evil. As the heroic charge advances, Gandalf and Erkenbrand's forces crash into the enemy and the power and violence of the wizard is terrifying:

The White Rider was upon them, and the terror of his coming filled the enemy with madness. The wild men fell on their faces before him. The Orcs reeled and screamed and cast aside both sword and spear. Like a black smoke driven by a mounting wind they fled. Wailing they passed

under the waiting shadow of the trees; and from that shadow none ever came again. (*Two Towers* 159)

Gandalf appears in this passage as a devastating force that crushes all in his path.

Tolkien describes his arrival as bringing terror and says that it drives men to madness.

There is nothing heroic about terror and madness. The wild men fall on their knees and beg for mercy as soon as Gandalf appears. This description presents a dominant warrior

devastating his enemy, not a heroic leader gloriously coming to save the day. The

brutality of this charge of the Rohirrim is confirmed by the Orcs reaction, reeling and

screaming, two words that portray a feeling of terror and panic. This passage is

frightening; there is death and fear and madness. The only indication that this charge is

commendable comes from the simile in the middle of the passage. The Orcs are a black

smoke driven off by the wind. Blackness and smoke can carry a connotation of evil

while the wind denotes freshness and change. Tolkien uses the simile to display the

significance of this action while surrounding the simile with frightening detail to

maintain the passage's grim tone. The charge of the Rohirrim should be appreciated

because it cleanses away evil like the wind blowing away foul smoke, but there is no

direct detail of glory or cheer. Gandalf and the Rohirrim slaughter the Uruk-hai and the

scene is disturbing. The violence is brutal, but the narrative welcomes the protection of

innocent people and defeat of evil.

Although Tolkien's descriptions of physical violence at Helm's Deep are abrupt

and frightening to avoid glorifying battle and instead honestly depict the horrid nature

of war, certain scenes from the Battle of the Hornburg are thrilling. But these passages

only occur at the end of the battle and during moments between scenes of violence, as

when Théoden emerges to lead the last charge:

And with that shout the king came. His horse was white as snow, golden was his shield, and his spear was long. At his right hand was Aragorn, Elendil's heir, behind him rode the lords of the House of Eorl the Young. Light sprang in the sky. Night departed. (*Two Towers* 157)

Or when Gandalf and the Rohirrim reinforcements arrive,

There suddenly upon a ridge appeared a rider, clad in white, shining in the rising sun. Over the low hills the horns were sounding. Behind him, hastening down the long slopes, were a thousand men on foot; their swords were in their hands. Amid them strode a man tall and strong. His shield was red. As he came to the valley's brink, he set his lips to a great black horn and blew a ringing blast. (*Two Towers* 158)

The tone of these passages is exciting. Words like "shining" along with the images of the sun rising and light springing in the sky convey an uplifting and inspiring feeling.

The details depicting Théoden, his golden shield and the white beauty of his horse emphasized by the simile comparing it to snow, portray the king's magnificence.

Erkenbrand is also mighty, bearing a red shield, tall and strong, and delivering the great horn blast announcing his arrival. Additionally, Gandalf shines with the sun and his white apparel conveys a feeling of goodness and purity.

These depictions of the battle are thrilling in part because they portray no death or violence but moments of victory for the people protecting innocent lives. Théoden's charge brings victory over evil and Gandalf's arrival provides aid for the forces of good. These passages signify the battle coming to an end and can be exciting because they signal the victory of the forces of good and the prevention of further needless casualties. The narration celebrates Théoden's charge and Gandalf's arrival not because they are about to kill Orcs, but because they will complete the protection of people.

Tolkien portrays the Battle of Helm's Deep as justifiable because it defends good people. This is an essential part of the war commentary displayed in *The Lord of*

*the Rings*. War can only be justified if it aims to defeat evil and protect innocent people. Before the battle begins, Théoden despairs over the desolation caused by the Uruk-Hai, “‘They bring fire,’ said Théoden, ‘and they are burning as they come, rick, cot, and tree. This was a rich vale and had many homesteads. Alas for my folk!’” (*Two Towers* 145). The Uruk-hai want only to destroy everything in their path, including civilian homes. This passage reminds readers what the Rohirrim are fighting for. They fight and kill so they can prevent further destruction of their homeland. That is the only justification for war that Tolkien’s narrative accepts. The Uruk-hai fight for conquest and mastery; Saruman intends to conquer and rule Rohan. The Battle of Helm’s Deep portrays a moral dichotomy, one side fighting to protect innocent people, the other fighting to annihilate them, and the narrative includes moments that remind readers of this significance.

One of the aspects of the Battle of Helm’s Deep that demonstrates the importance of defending good people is the contest between Legolas and Gimli. During the battle, Legolas and Gimli keep a tally of how many kills they achieve, competing to see who can kill more enemies, “‘Twenty-one!’ said Gimli. / ‘Good!’ said Legolas. ‘But my count is now two dozen’” (*Two Towers* 152). While this practice might initially seem contrary to the disdainful tone of war presented in the narrative, this competition highlights what their violence protects: people and friendship. Gimli and Legolas, during their quest and the War of the Ring, have become close friends, and their competition in battle symbolizes their friendship. When the battle is over, Legolas and Gimli exchange totals, “‘You have passed my score by one,’ answered Legolas. ‘But I do not grudge you the game, so glad am I to see you on your legs!’” (160). The

competition is not important, what matters is that Gimli is alive. This exchange reminds readers again why this killing was justified: to protect people and friends. Gimli and Legolas' competition exemplifies the values they defend.

Dickerson also discusses the contest between Legolas and Gimli, coming to the same conclusion that this competition does not glorify the violence of war. Dickerson notes that while the dialogue announcing Legolas and Gimli's total appears frequently in the battle, very few of the kills themselves are shown (*Following Gandalf* 42).

Dickerson agrees that the significance of the contest is not the content of the competition, but rather the friendship it demonstrates: "The point here is that one may glorify the friendship that is born in the context of war, and see the goodness in that friendship, without glorifying the violence out of which that good came" (*Following Gandalf* 44). Dickerson closes his analysis of the contest with the astute point that the competition actually emphasizes the horror of war: "however grim [the contest] may be, [it] acts to lighten the heavy load and may even be necessary to the survival of those forced to endure war as soldiers. That such a contest is required of Legolas and Gimli serves to show the horror of war, not glory" (*Following Gandalf* 44-45). I agree with Dickerson that this contest displays the horrific nature of war by presenting the grim things soldiers must do to endure it. Additionally, Legolas and Gimli's competition portrays the friendships that war can produce, thereby supporting the justification of this war. Their friendship exemplifies an admirable part of life and their violence in defense of that comradeship demonstrates a justifiable kind of war, one that protects people so good things like friendship may continue.

Immediately following the victory at Helm's Deep, Tolkien shifts his narration in subject and tone to confirm that war can be justified for the protection of people. He identifies this significance by providing a lamentation for the dead. This reminder of the people who died to help achieve victory shows that what is important is not some glorious victory or a mighty battle but defending good people. The most terrible reality of war is the loss of life. As soon as the battle concludes, the Rohirrim turn to caring for the dead, "In the midst of the field before the Hornburg two mounds were raised, and beneath them were laid all the Riders of the Mark who fell in the defence, those of the East Dales upon one side, and those of the Westfold upon the other" (*Two Towers* 163). This passage shows that the Rohirrim care deeply for their fellow soldiers. There is no scene of the Rohirrim cheering or singing in victory, only the description of them caring for the dead. This action again shows that Tolkien's narrative does not celebrate violence, but mourns its effects, especially the loss of life. The scene once again provides the acceptable justification of war: the protection of human life.

The Battle of Helm's Deep features grim and concise descriptions of combat that avoid glorifying war by presenting violence tersely and forthrightly. There is no glamorous depiction of violence, only dark and disdainful narration. The battle highlights that the protection of people and friendship can be justifications for war and as long as the violence is in defense of those things, it is acceptable. The chapter celebrates the moments that signal the defeat of evil and preservation of life. It presents an example of genuine friendship to remind readers why the battle is fought. Helm's Deep displays Tolkien's disdain for destructive war through his use of dark tone and grim depiction of violence, but it also clarifies Tolkien's understanding that war is not

inherently wrong. As with the Battle of Helm's Deep, war is sometimes necessary to defeat evil; but for war's violence to be justified, it must be used to protect innocent people.

### **The Siege of Gondor: Defeating Evil, Triumphant Arrivals, and Brutal Violence**

After the Battle of Helm's Deep and the overthrow of Saruman, Gandalf advises Théoden to prepare his Rohirrim to ride to Gondor to aid the capitol of Minas Tirith from the impending assault by Mordor. Gondor also expressly calls for help using the system of beacons that run from Minas Tirith through the White Mountains to Edoras, the capitol of Rohan. Théoden musters his men, and the Rohirrim ride furiously to Gondor. Along the way, they are met by the sons of Elrond who accompany Aragorn's ranger companions, the Dúnedain. This arrival prompts Aragorn, along with Legolas and Gimli, to take an ancient cursed path through the mountains to rally a ghost army that owes an oath of allegiance to Gondor. Assuming his place as the heir to the throne of Gondor, Aragorn requests and acquires the aid of the ghost army and takes them to the south of Gondor wiping out a fleet of pirates sent by Sauron to surprise attack Minas Tirith from the south. With their oaths to Gondor now fulfilled, the ghost army fades away, and Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli hurry to Minas Tirith, rallying the soldiers of Gondor they can find along the way. These complicated events are significant because the arrival of the Rohirrim and the return of Aragorn play crucial roles in The Siege of Gondor.

The Siege of Gondor is the one of the last battles of *The Lord of the Rings* and the largest battle in the War of the Ring. Sauron unleashes his strongest army on the capitol of Gondor, Minas Tirith. The outer defenses of Minas Tirith, the ancient city of

Osgiliath and the wall protecting the Pelennor Fields called the Rammas Echor, are breached and Sauron's forces begin their siege of the city. Gandalf organizes and leads the defense of the city. He arrives in Minas Tirith shortly before the siege begins accompanied by Pippin Took. Victory for the soldiers of Gondor seems hopeless as they are completely cut off from all aid and the Orcs are commanded by the powerful Witch-King of Angmar, the Lord of the Nazgûl. The Orcs break down the gates of Minas Tirith and enter the city. All hope seems lost at this moment. But then the Rohirrim arrive. This event begins the Battle of Pelennor Fields, the fields outside Minas Tirith. During this battle, King Théoden dies at the hands of the Witch-King of Angmar but is avenged by his niece Éowyn, who kills the Lord of the Nazgûl with the help of Merry Brandybuck. The charge of the Rohirrim stops the Siege of Gondor and breaks the Orc lines, but the battle would still be lost if it were not for Aragorn, who appears at the last moment, using the captured pirate fleet to surprise Sauron's army from behind. Aragorn leads a force of soldiers of southern Gondor and his coming routs the forces of Mordor, ending the battle.

The victory at the Siege of Gondor is a major triumph for the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* and the most significant battle in the trilogy. Tolkien devotes twice as much time to the Siege of Gondor than to the Battle of Helm's Deep and provides the most extensive depiction of war in the trilogy. He portrays the battle using the same dark elements as Helm's Deep. The tone of these chapters is bleak and grim, disdainful of war and violence, and mournful of death. Furthermore, the arrivals of the Rohirrim and Aragorn are narrated with the same triumphant tone as Gandalf's coming at Helm's

Deep. The narrative celebrates the moments of victory for good and the end of battle while dealing with physical violence in a grim and restrained dark manner.

The Siege of Gondor also features Tolkien's disdain for commanders like Sauron and Denethor who sit behind the lines and direct their troops without joining the fighting themselves. This disdain of commanders who do not participate in violence likens Tolkien to fellow British writers who served in World War I such as the trench poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. Furthermore, consistent with his other depictions of battle, Tolkien continues to focus on the people and events of the battle rather than spending time glorifying violence with flashy detail. As with the Battle of Helm's Deep, the Siege of Gondor also concludes with a lamentation for the dead which further promotes the significance of human life and emphasizes the deadly consequences of war.

Tolkien's disdain for war is expressed through the dark tone used in his depiction of the Siege of Gondor. This dark tone manifests in a literal shadow of war that spreads over Gondor during the build up to the siege. Sauron uses his power to alter the weather of Gondor, casting dust and shadows over the sun so that all of Gondor is shrouded in darkness. This darkness symbolizes the sadness and gloom that war causes. The men of Gondor are filled with apprehension and fear at the sight of the oncoming darkness, "The next day, though the darkness had reached its full and grew no deeper, it weighed heavier on men's hearts, and a great dread was on them" (*Return of the King* 99). This symbolic darkness shows that to go to war is to fall into shadow, a shadow from which there may be no return. Furthermore, the darkness covers the sunrise, "But the sun has not risen, yet," said Merry. "No, and it will not rise today, Master Holbytla.

Not ever again, one would think under this cloud” (*Return of the King* 80). This lack of morning light is significant because the sunrise provides relief for these soldiers; morning brought hope and victory at Helm’s Deep. But the Shadow of Mordor prevents the morning. The shadow embodies the dark tone that Tolkien establishes for the Siege of Gondor. There is no hope, all are filled with dread, and darkness consumes the world.

By depicting a literal shadow of war symbolizing the devastation war brings, Tolkien parallels the trench poet Wilfred Owen who wrote extensively of his disdain for war. In the poem “1914,” Owen describes his mood following the outbreak of the Great War, using the same symbol of a shadow of war to convey his disdain for the conflict, “War broke: and now the Winter of the world / With perishing darkness closes in” (*Three Poets* 77, 1-2). Owen’s use of alliteration describing this symbolic darkness highlights the dreadful feeling kindled by the war. These opening lines convey sadness and gloom, as war plunges the world into winter, a season carrying the connotation of cold, darkness, and the death of natural living things. The word “perishing” affiliates the darkness of war with the imminent death that it brings. The darkness will consume and destroy. Owen’s poem expresses a hopeless tone similar to that Tolkien evokes during the build-up to the Siege of Gondor. Owen’s “perishing darkness” presents a fear of the end of all things, an level of destruction that would come to Middle-earth should Sauron win.

Tolkien furthers his depiction of the cruel nature of war through the gruesome and terrifying events of the Siege of Gondor. He establishes a hopeless feeling in the people of Gondor, using the Shadow of Mordor and the hopeless circumstances of the battle. The city is besieged, the outer defenses are broken, and reinforcements in Rohan

have not come. Tolkien portrays a dark setting and evokes feelings of fear to emphasize the horror of war. The cruelty of the army of Mordor intensifies that horror. As the Siege begins, the Orcs use catapults to hurl the decapitated heads of fallen Gondor soldiers over the walls and into the city:

For the enemy was flinging into the city all the heads of those who had fallen fighting at Osgiliath, or on the Rammas, or in the fields. They were grim to look on; for though some were crushed and shapeless, and some had been cruelly hewn, yet many had features that could be told, and it seemed that they had died in pain. (*Return of the King* 105)

These shocking images of the mutilated heads of fallen soldiers confirms the brutality of Mordor's army. Tolkien compounds these descriptions to depict the horridness of war. As gritty as is Tolkien's depiction of the Battle of Helm's Deep, that description does not reach the same horrifying detail of the Siege of Gondor. This grim violence is extended to both sides of the battle, the Rohirrim are especially vicious when they charge on the Fields of Pelennor. As at Helm's Deep, Tolkien here includes description of the pile of corpses that battle produces. "All before the walls on either side of the Gate the ground was choked with wreck and with bodies of the slain" (*Return of the King* 112). The men of Gondor are "stout" and "hardy" but their defense is not described as noble; instead, they produce a pile of Orc bodies that mingles with Gondorian dead. Moreover, the word "choked" suggests that this mass of dead is overwhelming the city. These piles of dead have grown so substantially that the soldiers lose space to move and fight and must clamber past dead to maneuver. Tolkien reminds readers that to be in battle is to see and be surrounded by death.

Through this depiction of mounds of dead bodies, the Siege of Gondor mirrors Tolkien's experience in World War I. As trench poet Isaac Rosenberg writes in "Dead

Man's Dump," depicting soldiers wheeling barbed wire to reinforce trench defenses, the dead litter the battlefield, "The wheels lurched over sprawled dead / But pained them not, though their bones crunched, / Their shut mouths made no moan, / They lie there huddled, friend and foeman" (*Three Poets* 63, 7-10). The word "sprawled" emphasizes the number of corpses; they are everywhere. There are so many dead bodies that the soldiers cannot avoid wheeling the cart over them. Like the fallen in the Siege of Gondor, the dead fill spaces and obstruct the movement of soldiers. Rosenberg's poem demonstrates that war accumulates mounds of corpses that do not get removed. The dead get lumped together regardless of which side they fought for, and the living must fight surrounded by dead. The Siege of Gondor includes similar images of death and wreckage. The defense of the city holds but produces a continual piling of corpses.

This brutal portrayal of battle continues when the Rohirrim arrive. The Riders are filled with rage and bloodlust as they head toward their enemy. Théoden's rousing battle cry to his men before they charge on the Orcs illustrates the brutal nature of combat that his men are entering, "*Arise, arise, Riders of Théoden! / Fell deeds awake: fire and slaughter! / spear shall be shaken, shield be splintered, / a sword-day, a red day, ere the sun rises! / Ride now, ride now! Ride to Gondor!*" (*Return of the King* 123; original italics). The repetition of the words "arise" and "ride" calls attention to this passage. These verbs depict the impending action and motion of the Rohirrim, creating a tone of forcefulness and forward movement. The alliteration of the sounds "sh" and "sp" gives the speech a heightened style that recalls epic sagas and establishes this passage as of paramount significance. Moreover, the words that get alliterated describe specific elements of violence and while this description is elevated, it serves to

emphasize the certainty of bloodshed. Furthermore, the imagery of “fire and slaughter” and the symbolism of the “red day” imply the brutality of this imminent charge. Fire denotes destruction and pain and the pairing of such imagery with the word “slaughter” emphasizes the extent of the ensuing horrific violence. The symbol of “red day” carries the connotation of a mass of bloodshed further cementing that this charge will be brutal, bloody, and vicious. All these literary devices individualize Théoden’s speech because it is so stylistically different from the usual prose of the narrative. This distinctiveness asserts the passage’s importance. The images that Théoden conjures characterize the entire battle and the war and his words make those images memorable. Théoden commands his men to awaken their sinister and violent tendencies. “Fell deeds awake” is a command to become brutal and vicious. This command appears in a stylistically thrilling passage and during an exciting moment in the story: the Rohirrim have arrived to save Minas Tirith, but they must be violent because they are at war. Théoden’s speech shows that war is inherently brutal, and even in moments where good is about to triumph, the nature of war is still cruel.

Tolkien continues to depict the violent nature of war when the Rohirrim reach the Orc army. The Riders’ charge, like at Helm’s Deep, is an unstoppable wave and the Orcs are slaughtered. Tolkien describes the Rohirrim riding straight through their enemy, “the hosts of Mordor wailed, and terror took them, and they fled, and died, and the hoofs of wrath rode over them” (*Return of the King* 124). This description portrays the fear the Orcs feel facing the cavalry charge indicated by their wailing and “terror took them.” The Rohirrim are terrifying. Moreover, the Orcs put up no resistance to this charge, they run away and die. This arrival of reinforcements that will defeat evil no

longer appears as exciting. As soon as the violence begins, Tolkien's narration depicts fear and death. The imagery of the "hoofs of wrath" is particularly brutal, depicting a menacing cluster of horse hooves trampling helpless Orcs. Furthermore, the phrase "hoofs of wrath" detaches from the Rohirrim, describing only their horses' hooves and the brutal trampling. As with similar depiction at Helm's Deep, this disassociation of violence from the men who enact it prevents the narration from glorifying violence, instead only showing the brutality of combat. The Rohirrim may be saving the day, but their actions are gruesome.

Tolkien continues to highlight the Rohirrim's ferociousness to avoid glorifying war as the charge advances. Describing the effectiveness of Théoden's riders, Tolkien writes, "Ahead nearer the walls Elfhelm's men were among the siege engines, hewing, slaying, driving their foes into the fire-pits [...] orcs were flying towards the River like herds before the hunters; and Rohirrim went hither and thither at their will" (*Return of the King* 125). Tolkien associates violent verbs such as "hewing" and "slaying" with the Rohirrim. These words characterize the riders as fierce and vicious. Rather than presenting this army that fights for good as heroic, Tolkien associates the riders with death, slaughter, and carnage. This vicious depiction is shown by the ruthless pushing of orcs into their own fire-pits. Such behavior demonstrates that the Rohirrim have become murderous, they cut their enemy down and push them into trenches where they burn alive. Moreover, Tolkien uses a simile that demonstrates the unstoppable power of the Rohirrim. The image of orcs being hunted like prey gives a gruesome feeling to the effect of this charge. By depicting the heroic army of the story as violent and vicious, Tolkien shows that there is no glory in killing. This battle demonstrates that war is hell.

Horses plow through people and trample them, and soldiers slice through their enemy without concern.

Tolkien's violent portrayal of the Siege of Gondor shows his disdain for war and extends the critique of war in the trilogy. By showing that war is terrible, *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates that war is a course of action that must be carefully considered before undertaking. The Battle of Pelennor Fields presents a situation where going to war is justifiable, but it also displays that war is no glorious thing. The Rohirrim must go to war to defeat evil, but they fight to protect the city and the people of Minas Tirith. The Rohirrim can justify their violence because it is once again in defense of innocent, peaceful people.

As with the Battle of Helm's Deep, the triumphant appearance of the Rohirrim on the Pelennor and Aragorn's surprise reinforcements may appear to contradict my argument that the Battle of Pelennor Fields does not glorify war. However, these moments are described in a triumphant tone because of their narrative importance, not because of the violence intertwined within them. This passage does not celebrate war but the salvation of the people of Minas Tirith and the conclusion of battle brought by Aragorn's arrival. This tonal shift is indicated by a change in the weather as the Rohirrim reach Minas Tirith. The winds shift, and the Shadow of Mordor that was cast over Gondor is pushed away, revealing sunlight and a new hope for the Free Peoples of Middle-earth, "Then suddenly Merry felt it at last, beyond doubt: a change. Wind was in his face! Light was glimmering. Far, far away, in the South the clouds could be dimly seen as grey shapes, rolling up, drifting: morning lay beyond them" (*Return of the King* 123). Again, Tolkien portrays his setting to reflect the pivotal moment that alters the

course of the battle. Sauron's shadow of war is driven off by nature just as his forces will be driven off by the Rohirrim. Additionally, Tolkien accentuates this new tone of hopefulness by using elements of nature, wind and sunlight, that have connotations of hope and change. Sunrise and morning specifically have brought hope in the trilogy already, during the Battle of Helm's Deep the sunrise signaled Gandalf's arrival. This symbolic shift from darkness to sunlight alters the narrative tone of the battle from gloomy to hopeful as Tolkien prepares to depict the charge of the Rohirrim.

As long as the Riders of Rohan represent salvation and the protection of innocent people, their appearance in the battle is celebrated. The triumphant and hopeful tone indicated by the morning continues as the Rohirrim charge with Théoden leading the way, "His golden shield was uncovered and lo! it shone like an image of the Sun, and the grass flamed green about the white feed of his steed. For morning came, morning and a wind from the sea; and darkness was removed" (*Return of the King* 124). This passage is scintillating, filled with imagery of sunlight and the morning and bright colours. The theme of dawn carrying hope and new beginnings is present and Théoden appears glorious and kingly. Tolkien's use of the archaic word "lo" gives this passage a feeling akin to a great legend of heroic kings from the Middle Ages. The narrative celebrates the Rohirrim because they charge to defeat evil and ensure the safety of good and innocent people.

This heroic tone changes as soon as the Rohirrim begin their violent attack however, demonstrating that it is only the promise of the triumph of good over evil and the salvation of a city that is celebrated. As soon as the Riders of Rohan partake in combat, they appear wrathful and work to hew and slay. Théoden too, no longer seems

magnificent, leading the charge, but instead appears vicious. He takes the captain of the Haradrim head on and Tolkien again shows how war makes men brutal:

But the white fury of the North-men burned the hotter, and more skilled was their knighthood with long spears and bitter. Fewer they were but they clove through the Southrons like a fire-bolt in a forest. Right through the press rose Théoden Thengel's son, and his spear was shivered as he threw down their chieftain. Out swept his sword, and he spurred to the standard, hewed staff and bearer. (*Return of the King* 126)

The Rohirrim are full of fury and the imagery in this passage is not of morning and sunlight but fire and lightning. Their mood is characterized as “hot” and “bitter” emphasizing their rage and maliciousness. The simile of a “fire-bolt in a forest” demonstrates the destructiveness of the Rohirrim, they are ripping through their enemy unchecked just like a forest fire wreaking unstoppable havoc. The narration is distinctly brutal, Tolkien uses words like “clove” and “hewn” to show that the Rohirrim are literally cutting these Haradrim men in half, but he does so sparingly to avoid overly explicit gruesomeness. Moreover, after portraying Théoden so magnificently during the charge, Tolkien once more detaches the king’s weapons from him when describing his violence, minimizing glory while Théoden fights. Théoden does not thrust his spear, “his spear was shivered,” and his sword seems to act on its own will. This description is passive and impersonal, Tolkien does not depict Théoden acting violently, instead presenting the grim effects of his violence. War is brutal, so that is the language Tolkien uses to describe it. This harsh diction is juxtaposed by the gallant depiction of Théoden and the Rohirrim upon their arrival and this dichotomy shows that Tolkien glorifies not violence, but the defeat of evil.

But the Rohirrim’s charge does not lead to immediate victory. The Battle of the Pelennor Fields would be lost if it were not for Aragorn’s coming. Aragorn and his

forces arrive in the ships formerly of the defeated allies of Sauron, the Corsairs of Umbar. When the fleet is first seen, the Free Peoples of Middle-earth despair, for they fear that Sauron's reinforcements have arrived and the battle will be lost. But as Aragorn unfurls his standard, the same jubilant tone evoked at the Rohirrim's coming announces the return of the king:

Thus came Aragorn son of Arathorn, Elessar, Isildur's heir, out of the Paths of the Dead, borne upon a wind from the Sea to the kingdom of Gondor; and the mirth of the Rohirrim was a torrent of laughter and a flashing of swords, and the joy and wonder of the City was a music of trumpets and a ringing of bells. (*Return of the King* 135)

Tolkien elevates this scene using an archaic and formal style that evokes epics and the Bible. He announces Aragorn's entire lineage and declares his noteworthy feats that have brought him to Minas Tirith. This formulation presents Aragorn as kingly and acknowledges his rightful claim to the throne giving his arrival a heroic feeling. Tolkien also includes words like "mirth," "laughter," and "joy" in the description to characterize the feeling of the people witnessing Aragorn's arrival. Reinforcements for the forces of good are arriving, along with the king, and evil is about to be defeated. What is celebrated is not violence but the promise of the end of battle.

While Aragorn and his men are depicted heroically upon arrival, when they begin fighting, Tolkien again shifts to the concise and grim diction portraying the brutal nature of combat. Aragorn leads the attack and even the revered heir of Isildur is associated with death and bloodshed, "For now men leapt from the ships ... and swept north like a storm [...] But before all lead Aragorn with the Flame of the West, Andúril like a new fire kindled, Narsil re-forged as deadly as of old" (*Return of the King* 135) Tolkien uses the simile of a storm to show that battle makes men vicious and returns to

the depiction of the fierceness of Aragorn's sword. The image of a storm connotes images of destruction and chaos. The second simile associates Aragorn's sword with fire, another element that causes pain, destruction, and death. Instead of producing laughter and joy, Aragorn now generates fire and carries a weapon associated with death. Even though the narration rejoices in the arrival of these troops, the depiction of their violence is not revered. Tolkien's imagery is dark and volatile because there is nothing bright about combat.

This grim portrayal of combat is conclusively depicted in the final paragraph of the battle. The Easterlings, men from the Far East of Middle-earth that Sauron corrupts to fight for him, refuse to surrender, and the battle concludes in one last vicious struggle, narrated with dark and bloody imagery depicting acts of violence and death:

Then the Sun went at last behind Mindolluin and filled all the sky with a great burning, so that the hills and the mountains were dyed as with blood; fire glowed in the River, and the grass of the Pelennor lay red in the nightfall. And in that hour the great battle of the field of Gondor was over; and not one living foe was left within the circuit of the Rammas. All were slain save those who fled to die, or to drown in the red foam of the River. Few ever came eastward to Morgul or Mordor; and to the land of Haradrim came only a tale from far off: a rumour of the wrath and terror of Gondor. (*Return of the King* 136)

Tolkien again portrays the natural settings of Middle-earth symbolically to reflect the violence of the characters. The sky burns, covering the mountains in an image of blood and the water of the Anduin River catches fire. Every part of nature in this area becomes red, the sky, the mountains, the river, and the grass. These symbolic changes in nature mirror the bloodiness of this combat and the imagery of fire evokes its violence and destruction. The heroes of the story literally slaughter every single enemy who does not flee and the few Easterling survivors return to their homes traumatized.

This passage demonstrates that both sides' soldiers are frightening in battle. The victorious men of Gondor as terrifying, fire-like, and wrathful. This is a victory for good, but the violence itself is not glorious, it is brutal. Tolkien demonstrates that there is no joy to be found in combat. He does not endorse violence, instead presenting war's horridness honestly.

Corresponding with the Battle of Helm's Deep, the Siege of Gondor is immediately followed by the mass mourning of the good people killed in the battle. The important theme of this battle, for Tolkien, is the protection of human life, and he stresses the significance of those innocent people war destroys by portraying a recognition of and mourning for the dead. Tolkien names each of the lords of Gondor and Rohan who died in the fight, then the narration states, "No few had fallen, renowned or nameless, captain or soldier; for it was a great battle and the full count of it no tale has told" (*Return of the King* 136). This lamentation for the dead weighs every soldier's importance equally as Tolkien acknowledges that both lords and common men died in the battle. The "renowned" and "nameless" are mourned in the same sentence and this pairing demonstrates that all of these soldiers matter equally. This passage highlights that the extent of death of war reaches everyone. One of the prevalent themes in *The Lord of the Rings* is the duty of the common man. The diminutive Hobbits are literal manifestations of such little people doing their duty to defeat evil. This theme is again expressed in the grieving of the losses at the Siege of Gondor. The nameless common men are valorized for their sacrifice.

Tolkien continues the mourning of the deaths of the Siege by sharing a Rohirrim song commemorating the battle. This song of lamentation becomes a form of Middle-

earth war poetry, and within it are the themes of loss and death, as with the lines, “Death in the morning and at day’s ending / lords took and lowly” (*Return of the King* 137). This song epitomizes the importance of the theme of human life in the trilogy. The song and Tolkien’s narrative memorialize the sacrifice of the common man. This conclusion of the battle centered around the mourning of the dead displays what the battle was about: protecting innocent people from death and tyranny. The War of the Ring, at its center, is an endeavour to defeat evil so that the Free People of Middle-earth can survive and live in peace. The battles of the War thus focus on the significance of human life because the War itself ultimate aims to protect life.

### **Military Leadership: The Distinction Between Moral Leaders and the Despicable**

Consistent with his justification of war to protect innocent life, Tolkien presents a specific commentary on military leadership through his depiction of battlefield leaders. Since just wars should be fought to protect people, the leaders who command military forces must hold this same attitude towards their troops. Soldiers are people themselves, and the worst things commanders can do is sit back and carelessly order their troops forward to the slaughter. Tolkien presents and condemns commanders who follow this immoral way of leading: Sauron, Saruman, and Denethor. Each of these leaders are represented as evil characters, confirming that their kind of military leadership should be condemned. Conversely, Aragorn and Théoden, the leaders who do not sit back and watch, instead choosing to fight on the front lines of combat with their soldiers, are the type of leaders that Tolkien admires. For Tolkien, no one is more contemptible than the leaders who avoid joining in the battle. This opinion was shared by other British men who served during World War I, such as Sassoon and Owen,

whose poetry expresses similar thoughts and attitudes towards military leadership. In fact, by portraying this commentary on military leaders, Tolkien dramatizes the opinion of soldiers in the trenches in his trilogy: admiration for leaders who join their soldiers on the front lines and contempt for the generals who avoid combat and carelessly order men forward. The commander's life is not more important than any one of the soldiers' because all human life is valuable. Thus, leaders who consider themselves more important than their soldiers are despicable.

Contempt for leaders who avoid fighting alongside their troops is evident in the poems of Sassoon and Owen. Both men experienced trench life as officers and witnessed the devastation of careless leadership and expressed bitterness towards the commanders ordering troops to attack enemy positions without putting themselves at any risk. This bitterness appears, for example, in Sassoon's poem "The General" which criticizes a commander for lacking concern for his troops' lives: "Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead, / And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine. / 'He's a cheery old card,' grunted Harry to Jack / As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack. / But he did for them both by his plan of attack" (*War Poems* 71). This poem demonstrates the opinion soldiers in the trenches had for their commanders through their cursing of the general and his staff. Their contempt is emphasized by the words "incompetent" and "swine." Sassoon highlights the contemptible aspects of this general's approach to leadership: he has sat back and ordered the men forward carelessly, and now those men are dead. Moreover, Sassoon focuses on the individual soldiers who die, the commoners harmed by this general calling two of the dead by name. In contrast, the poem's speaker values the lives of these two men and views their

deaths as tragic. Sassoon's poem condemns the general's carelessness for their soldiers' deaths and casts such leaders as despicable.

Another poem that demonstrates the disdain soldiers felt for their commanders during World War I is Owen's "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young." Owen retells the Bible story of Abraham and Isaac to construct a parable condemning the leaders of World War I whose commands resulted in the slaughter of young men:

Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
And builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son  
When lo! An Angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him, thy son.  
Behold! Caught in a thicket by its horns,  
A Ram. Offer the Ram of Pride instead.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son, / And half the seed of  
Europe, one by one" (*Three Poets* 99, 7-16).

Abraham represents the nations' leaders who decided to go to war as well as the commanders who construct the battle plans. Isaac represents the common soldier doomed to be killed by the decisions of his superiors. The "belts and straps" that bind Isaac refer to soldiers' equipment, evoking an image of soldiers trapped in the trenches. This parable, which reverses the biblical story, demonstrates that the decisions of careless leaders results in the death of the common men. Like Abraham willfully sacrificing Isaac in Owen's poem, these commanders condemned their soldiers to fight a war in which they are doomed to die. Owen's poem, like Sassoon's, expresses the trench poet's contempt for commanders who show little care for the lives of their soldiers. The closing lines of Owen's poem evoke a tone of despair and loathing as Owen depicts and protests the costs of the war.

This disdain for apathetic commanders among soldiers during World War I is echoed in the depiction of the villainous leaders of *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien portrays these evil leaders using leadership styles that resemble those of the contemptible commanders that Sassoon and Owen condemn. Foremost of all these vile leaders is Sauron, the master manipulator, who sits back in his tower of Barad-Dûr and sends the Orcs forward to kill and burn. Sauron is Tolkien's premier example of a despicable leader. He does not care for the lives of others, or the lives of his own troops. He desires only victory and dominion over the world and uses his soldiers and others as puppets to do his bidding. Denethor describes Sauron's methods to Gandalf and Pippin while they prepare for the Siege of Gondor, "He uses others as his weapons. So do all great lords, if they are wise" (*Return of the King* 100). Denethor's opinion about Sauron's leadership differs from Tolkien's, however. That the supreme villain of this trilogy is a leader who initiates war but never joins in the battle shows that the trilogy critiques leaders who behave in this way.

Second to Sauron in cruel and heartless leadership is Denethor, the Steward of Gondor. Denethor does not play a role as widely impactful as Théoden, Gandalf, or Aragorn, but he still commands the soldiers of Gondor for a time. Yet Denethor never once joins in a battle; instead he orders his soldiers to protect Osgiliath and the Rammas Echor from Sauron's armies. The most poignant example of Denethor's compassionless leadership is his order to his son Faramir to lead a counterattack on the Orc forces that take over Osgiliath shortly before the Siege of Gondor begins. Despite the dangerousness of the mission, Denethor orders Faramir to go saying, "Much must be risked in war,' ... 'Cair Andros is manned, and no more can be sent so far. But I will

not yield the River and the Pelennor unfought—not if there is a captain here who has still the courage to do his lord’s will”” (*Return of the King* 98). The irony of Denethor’s statement demonstrates his contemptible leadership. The Steward says that he will not allow the outer defenses to be taken without a fight even though he has not and will not participate in any fighting over those defenses himself. Moreover, the risk that Denethor says must be taken in war is not any risk of his own. Instead, he commands his own son to risk his life for Denethor’s benefit. Denethor’s command to Faramir to go on this suicide mission is heartbreaking. In *Two Towers* we are endeared to Faramir through his wise demeanor, his refusal of the Ring, and his kindness to Frodo and Sam. Yet now Denethor commands his only living son to lead a charge that will certainly lead to his death. There is no more contemptible form of leadership than the kind Denethor displays here. He is heartless, irrational, and does not care for human life, not even his own son’s.

When Faramir returns from this mission mortally injured, Denethor loses his mind and decides to burn himself alive with Faramir. Locking himself away, Denethor refuses to take part in the Siege of Gondor, even when his soldiers beg him to lead the command of the city’s defense. Denethor’s unwillingness to partake in the war demonstrates his irresponsible form of leadership. He is willing to enter into war but unwilling to risk his own life in it. For Denethor, his soldiers are only valuable as tools for his use. Tolkien condemns this form of leadership in the trilogy, emphasizing that the lives of people are valuable and while war must be conducted, it must always be done in the interest of saving lives, including the lives of soldiers.

Tolkien understands that leaders play a crucial role in determining how wars are fought. Thus, he presents the leaders of the Free Peoples of Middle-earth as epitomizing how leaders ought to conduct war. Such leaders in the trilogy are Gandalf, Aragorn, and Théoden, as well as Faramir, Éomer, and, by the end of the narrative, Frodo and the Hobbits. These leaders always fight at the front of their armies, ready to sacrifice their lives just like any other soldier. They are the first to throw themselves into the path of danger to protect their men. During the Battle of Helm's Deep, Aragorn and Éomer defend the front gate of the Hornburg by themselves, holding off the Uruk-hai advance as long as they can. During the charges of the Rohirrim at Helm's Deep and Minas Tirith, Théoden always leads the charge. This leading from the front is exalted especially during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. As the Rohirrim charge, Théoden takes the lead, "After him thundered the knights of his house, but he was ever before them. Éomer rode there, the white horsetail on his helm floating in his speed, and the front of the first *éored* roared like a breaker foaming to the shore, but Théoden could not be overtaken" (*Return of the King* 123-4). This description of the lords of Rohan presents them gloriously. The comparison of the first group of the Rohirrim to a wave associates the Riders with a powerful and beautiful part of nature. The sound of their hooves resembles the pleasing sound of waves. This simile depicts the charging Rohirrim heroically. While the battle itself is not revered, Théoden's bravery is. Théoden is a wise leader who has expressed compassion for his people and mourned over the loss of life in his previous victory. Through this heroic portrayal of Théoden and his responsible style of leadership, Tolkien demonstrates how military leaders should behave.

Aragorn is another leader who practices this bravery and leadership from the front of the army. He joins Théoden at the head of the charge at Helm's Deep and he leads the lines when he arrives with reinforcements at Pelennor. Even as early as Moria, we are presented with Aragorn's bravery in battle when he fights and kills the Orc chieftain that stabs Frodo. Perhaps the greatest demonstration of Aragorn's willingness to risk his life for others comes when he faces the Nazgûl at Weathertop by himself and chases them off. In another moment that shows his strong leadership, Aragorn is the first to support Gandalf's plan to march on the Black Gate and distract Sauron so Frodo can cross Mordor and destroy the Ring. In supporting this plan, Aragorn explains, "As I have begun, so I will go on. We come now to the very brink, where hope and despair are akin. To waver is to fall" (*Return of the King* 173). Aragorn knows that they must be decisive, bold, and brave to beat Sauron. As Gandalf says, they cannot achieve ultimate victory through war, but they can give Frodo enough time to destroy the Ring. The march on the Black Gate is dangerous and extremely risky, but necessary. Aragorn, as one of the prime examples of strong and brave leadership, supports the idea knowing that his support as heir to Gondor will ensure that the others agree to the plan. Aragorn epitomizes this admirable kind of leadership: wise, considerate, but understanding of what's at stake and willing to be the first to jump into danger to protect others.

Croft analyzes Tolkien's leaders, especially Aragorn in her chapter on military leadership in *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*. She reaches the same conclusions as I do regarding Tolkien's commentary on leadership and the distinction between admirable and contemptible leaders. Discussing how Tolkien presents Aragorn, Croft writes, "In Aragorn, Tolkien presents an ideal king, proven worthy by his long *cursus*

*honorum* and by his battlefield experience; an able and responsible leader, without hubris or the overmastering desire for conquest or power” (*War and the Works* 91). *Cursus honorum* refers to Aragorn’s experiences before *The Lord of the Rings* that have helped shape him as the man he is. Croft argues that leaders in the trilogy must prove themselves through life experience before claiming power as it is this *cursus honorum* that teaches them how to be good leaders. As Croft shows, Aragorn exemplifies an ideal king because of his humility, responsibility, and lack of desire to control others. I agree with Croft that Aragorn’s humility presents a significant trait that leaders must have as his humbleness allows Aragorn to respect his troops’ lives as equal to his own.

Moreover, Croft and I reach the same conclusion that Aragorn’s leadership demonstrates Tolkien’s belief that commanders must fight alongside their men. Concluding her analysis of military leadership, Croft writes, “If Aragorn is Tolkien’s ideal leader, then what is he saying about military leadership? First and foremost, he says that a leader must be prepared to lead from in front” (*War and the Works* 100). As Croft shows, Aragorn exemplifies an ideal leader in the trilogy and his actions demonstrate that leaders should join their troops in combat. I agree with Croft that Aragorn represents an admirable leader, and while Croft does not analyze Théoden, the King of Rohan displays many of the same characteristics of leadership as Aragorn. What Croft does not stress in her account of Aragorn is that, in addition to his demonstration of good moral character, his actions, as well as those of Théoden, reflect the other key aspect of Tolkien’s vision of just war, most notably that it must be conducted in defense of innocent people.

The leaders that Tolkien celebrates also adhere to the view of war that the trilogy defends. Aragorn and Théoden care deeply for their people and act on the battlefield and in war strategy in ways that seek to protect others. Furthermore, both care for the natural environment. Théoden mourns the loss of Rohan's nature at the hands of the Uruk-hai and Aragorn shows constant appreciation for the natural places of Middle-earth, especially Lothlórien and Rivendell. However, the commander who articulates most directly the war commentary of *The Lord of the Rings* is Faramir, Captain of Gondor, younger brother to Boromir, and son of Denethor. Faramir is first introduced when he ambushes a party of Haradrim marching to Mordor through Ithilien during *The Two Towers*. Frodo and Sam witness this ambush and the two Hobbits are soon discovered by the men of Gondor. Frodo and Sam spend time in Faramir's camp while he decides whether to take them back to Minas Tirith or to set them free. During this encounter, Frodo and Faramir have many conversations during which Faramir shares his ideas on war and leadership.

Faramir is revered by the men of Minas Tirith, especially the men he commands. This adoration of Faramir is best displayed by Beregond, a member of the Guard of Minas Tirith who weeps when seeing Faramir's wounded body after the failed assault on Osgiliath. But before the narrative even arrives at Minas Tirith, Faramir is commended and portrayed as wise, caring, and a voice to listen to during his time with Frodo in *Two Towers*. Frodo views Faramir positively, even when he has just met him, thinking, "Yet he felt in his heart that Faramir, though much like his brother in looks, was a man less self-regarding, both sterner and wiser" (*Two Towers* 307). Faramir's brother Boromir tries to take the Ring from Frodo at the end of *The Fellowship of the*

*Ring*, so Frodo has every reason to be wary of Faramir. But Faramir shows himself to be different than Boromir, and, as Frodo reasons, wiser. Thus, Faramir is presented as a character whom readers should respect and admire.

Faramir's comments to Frodo before releasing him and Sam reveal his intelligence, and his thoughts on war parallel the war commentary presented in *The Lord of the Rings*. Faramir expresses distaste for needless killing, saying, "But I do not slay man or beast needlessly, and not gladly even when it is needed" (*Two Towers* 307). Faramir knows that killing is sometimes necessary, but he does not enjoy violence. He also emphasizes the importance of sparing life when possible through his statement on needless killing. Faramir understands and follows his duty, but he does not find enjoyment in the violence he must participate in. Faramir repeats his thoughts on war just a few pages later when he delivers what is the clearest and most eloquent singular statement made on war in the trilogy:

"War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend: the city and the Men of Númenor." (*Two Towers* 314)

Faramir does not enjoy war, he does not believe in glorifying it: he cares only to defend his country and the people within it. He understands that war is sometimes necessary, as it is to defeat Sauron. But he does not appreciate war, and he cares more about people than finding glory in war. These words exemplify Tolkien's views on military leadership and the values that leaders should hold when fighting in war. As Croft explains regarding this same quotation, "It is possible that [Faramir] speaks with Tolkien's own voice" (*War and the Works* 101). Faramir summarizes the critique of war

in the trilogy, identifying the necessity of the War of the Ring while defining the things that the war must defend: good, innocent people and the beautiful places of the world.

## **Conclusion**

*The Lord of the Rings* presents war as a gritty, harsh, and brutal phenomenon filled with death and completely lacking glory. War produces hideous piles of corpses and features constant grim violence. The trilogy demonstrates that the loss of human life in war is deeply saddening, and that war is dreadful because of the heavy loss of human life it causes. However, the trilogy also demonstrates that war is sometimes necessary such as when a great evil is threatening to destroy innocent life. The battles in *The Lord of the Rings* emphasize the importance of human life and clarify that war is justified when it defends human lives. Furthermore, battlefield commanders must understand that the lives of their troops are just as important as their own lives and be willing to risk themselves if they ask their soldiers to do so. As Croft writes, “The heart of the morality of leadership, for Tolkien, was the willingness of a leader to take the same risks as those he leads—to lead from the front rather than from behind” (*War and the Works* 146). Croft is right; Tolkien’s narrative demonstrates that the best leaders fight on the front lines with their troops. Commanders must value life and be willing to participate in the battle that they are ordering others to join. War is brutal. But when war is necessary, it must be done to defend human life and commanders must seek to protect human life as best as they are able.

## **Chapter 3: Nature's Significance and the Necessity of Protecting Natural Spaces from War**

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Tolkien establishes the importance of human life in *The Lord the Rings*. The heroism of Tolkien's protagonists stems from their courage and sacrifice in the defense of their people. However, innocent life is not the only significant and beautiful part of the world that Tolkien explores. The beauty and power of nature is significant as well, especially the relief and refuge nature offers from the destruction of war. Throughout the trilogy, Tolkien constantly emphasizes nature through numerous descriptions of beautiful landscapes and locations. *The Fellowship of the Ring* features a multitude of pleasing landscapes that help establish the significance of nature in the trilogy. In *The Two Towers*, Tolkien shows what happens to landscapes when they are damaged by war, using Saruman's bleak and destructive industrialization of Isengard and the festering Dead Marshes on the outskirts of Mordor as examples. In contrast, *Two Towers* features additional beautiful places of Middle-earth that are worth protecting from Sauron such as Rohan. *The Return of the King* includes another depiction of a beautiful landscape, the White City of Minas Tirith, as well as the first encounter with Mordor, the antithesis of natural beauty and another example of the scars war inflicts on nature. Each one of these places of natural beauty that Tolkien depicts serve as additional reasons for defeating Sauron, for the Dark Lord's victory would mean certain destruction for green and natural beauty. These portrayals confirm that the War of the Ring is as much about protecting unsullied nature as about defending innocent people.

Many critics have discussed the significance of nature in Tolkien's works, examining pastoral imagery and other descriptions of the environment. Some critics have also drawn parallels to the desolate landscapes of the trilogy and the battlefields of World War I. Mordor and the Dead Marshes have inspired particular interest for critics looking for themes of the Great War in Tolkien's work. Among these critics is Rebekah Long, whose essay "Fantastic Medievalism and the Great War" reads Tolkien's trilogy in conjunction with the major post-war poem *In Parenthesis* by David Jones and analyzes their depictions of war and the parallels to "The Knight's Tale," from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. In her essay, Long analyzes Tolkien's depiction of the Dead Marshes, scrutinizing the meaning behind a battlefield war never left. Another Tolkien scholar who comments on the war-torn landscapes is Hugh Brogan, whose essay "Tolkien's Great War" examines how the First World War manifests in Tolkien's writing. Brogan identifies thematic elements of the trilogy that parallel First World War experience and provides examples of places like Mordor where the Great War appears in the trilogy. Janet Croft also inspects themes of nature in *The Lord of the Rings in War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*, predominantly examining what she calls the "pastoral oasis," a place where nature provides relief in the midst of war. Croft draws connections between the relief Tolkien's characters find in these pastoral moments and that of soldiers during the First World War. I will engage with Croft's analysis of these pastoral oases to show the healing powers of nature in the trilogy. Additionally, I will use Long and Brogan's essays to confirm the influence of Tolkien's World War I experience on the devastated landscapes in *The Lord of the Rings*.

## **The Shire: The Beauty of Home as the Inspiration for the Quest**

The significance of nature is established early in the trilogy, with the joyful descriptions of the beautiful and peaceful Shire, a place well worth saving through the Hobbits' efforts in the War. The day after Bilbo's one-hundred-eleventh birthday party, a bright morning dawns that showcases the natural beauty of the Shire, "Everything looked fresh, and the new green of Spring was shimmering in the fields and on the tips of the trees' fingers" (*Fellowship* 50). The descriptive words in this passage indicate admiration of this place and this idea of freshness and greenness becomes a repeated motif when Tolkien describes beautiful landscapes. Additionally, there is the mention of Spring with its connotation of newness and hope. This description shows that the Shire is a hopeful and wonderful place that is so beautiful it shimmers.

The Shire's significance is accentuated through prominent characters' thoughts on the region as well. Gandalf perhaps best states the prominence of the Shire while teaching Frodo about Sauron and the One Ring saying, "It would be a grievous blow to the world, if the Dark Power overcame the Shire; if all your kind, jolly, stupid Bolgers, Hornblowers, Boffins, Bracegirdles, and the rest, not to mention the ridiculous Bagginses, became enslaved" (*Fellowship* 53). While Gandalf lightheartedly criticizes the Shire's natives for their ignorance, it is that very ignorance that makes the Shire so wonderful. The Shire is an isolated and love-filled area, free from the horridness of war and conflict. But it is also the natural beauty of the Shire, as well as its people, that matters to Gandalf. As I will discuss later in this chapter, one of the ways Tolkien shows the negative effects of war on nature is through the industrialization of Saruman's rule and his armies. Thus, when Gandalf insists that it would be a blow to

the world if the Shire fell under the dominion of Sauron, he shows that the Shire is one of the world's places safe from the industrialization that war requires. Tolkien will return to this theme at the end of the trilogy when he poignantly shows the costs of war through the chapter "The Scouring of the Shire," which features the four Hobbits returning home to find the Shire industrialized.

Another character who recognizes the importance and natural beauty of the Shire is Frodo Baggins. Frodo's love for the Shire motivates him to continue on his quest: his desire to protect the home he loves inspires him to be courageous and attempt this near-impossible task of destroying the Ring. In fact, Frodo feels more duty towards the Shire than to Middle-earth in general, "I should like to save the Shire, if I could ... I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again" (*Fellowship* 68). Frodo's desire in this passage, with its heavy emphasis on feet and footholds that are quintessentially Hobbit-like, demonstrates the connection he has to his home. The Shire is dear to Frodo's heart, its natural beauty and its people, and this statement by the story's protagonist helps to endear the Shire to the reader and further cement the Shire's importance throughout the trilogy.

The Shire, as Humphrey Carpenter explains in his biography of Tolkien, is based on the West Midlands of England, an area that was very dear to Tolkien, "Worcestershire, the county from which the Suffields [Tolkien's mother's family] had come ... is of all West Midland counties the Shire from which the Hobbits come; Tolkien wrote of it: 'Any corner of that county (however fair or squalid) is an indefinable way "home" to me'" (Carpenter, *Tolkien A Biography* 176). This inspiration

for the Shire shows that Tolkien was concerned with protecting places like it from war. Perhaps one of the more poignantly ironic details in *Fellowship of the Ring* is the gorgeous weather in the Shire during the summer and autumn before Frodo must leave: “The Shire had seldom seen so fair a summer, or so rich an autumn: the trees were laden with apples, honey was dripping in the combs, and the corn was tall and full” (*Fellowship* 75). Because Frodo’s final summer in the Shire before he begins his quest is one of the most perfect he has ever lived through, his departure is all the harder. The juxtaposition of the perils that Frodo will face and the loveliness of the Shire also accentuates its beauty and value. Furthermore, the fact that Frodo leaves when the weather is as good as it has ever been adds urgency to his mission and shows what his mission is going to save. The Shire is fair and rich, but it is in great danger and Frodo must save this beautiful landscape from doom.

Tolkien is not the only former soldier to hold the English countryside dearly. The idealization of home and its natural beauty as Frodo prepares to leave the Shire resembles the views of many soldiers leaving home to fight in World War I. One of these soldiers was the poet Ivor Gurney, who displays this idealization of England in the poem “Strange Service” which expresses a soldier’s longing for home, “Your hills, not only hills, but friends of mine and kindly, / Your tiny knolls and orchards hidden beside the river / Muddy and strongly-flowing, with shy and tiny streamlets / Safe in its bosom” (*Three Poets* 3, 9-12). Gurney personifies England, characterizing his home as a mother and evoking a feeling of safety and protection. The cherishing of the hills, knolls, and orchards as friends cements the significance of this quintessentially English landscape. The narrator’s longing tone also expresses regret at his inability to be in this

place he loves. Gurney's depiction of England and his admiration of the landscape resembles Tolkien's portrayal of the Shire. Additionally, the affection that Gurney's narrator expresses for England mirrors the love Frodo has for his home and his regretful tone also parallels Frodo's feelings as he of remorse when he knows he must leave the Shire. This longing for nature during war that Gurney and Tolkien portray confirms nature's significance in the discussion of war's consequences.

As Frodo's journey begins, Tolkien continues to depict places of natural beauty that the Hobbits pass through. These places remind readers about the significance of nature and, when placed in conjunction with Frodo's quest, show that the Fellowship's determination to defeat Sauron is inspired in part by the desire to defend natural beauty. When the Hobbits leave the Shire and reach the Old Forest, Tolkien again describes a place of greenness and natural beauty, "The leaves of trees were glistening, and every twig was dripping; the grass was grey with cold dew. Everything was still, and far-away noises seemed near and clear" (*Fellowship* 123). Tolkien's adjectives in this passage exude the admiring tone that the narrator uses when describing undisturbed nature. The trees in this forest are almost surreal, they glisten and their twigs drip. There is a sense of elegance in this forest, a place that while at times seems unsettling, is filled with pleasant natural beauties. Further confirmation of the Old Forest's significance comes from Tom Bombadil, one of the most peculiar and yet powerful characters in the trilogy. Bombadil is perhaps the only character whom the Ring has no power over (*Fellowship* 298). In fact, Bombadil's ability to withstand the Ring's power results from his intimacy with nature. His only concern is for natural spaces and their protection, he has no desire for power or to mingle in the affairs of the outside world. He spends all

his time roaming and caring for the Old Forest. This intimacy with nature protects Bombadil from the Ring. His role as the protector of the Old Forest also helps establish the Forest as another significant place of natural beauty. This place becomes the second landscape teeming with natural beauty that Frodo passes through even though his adventure has only just begun.

### **Rivendell and Lothlórien: Pristine Spaces that Provide Relief and Refuge**

Two landscapes particularly significant in *The Fellowship of the Ring* are Rivendell and Lothlórien, the last strongholds of the Elven people. The Elves are an ancient race, and they have a deep appreciation for nature and the earth. As the first peoples to set foot on Middle-earth, they are wise and revered by all the Free Peoples. Yet, by the time of *The Lord of the Rings*, the power of the Elves is failing, and they have shut themselves off, for the most part, from the rest of the world. However, the Hobbits show the old admiration and wonder for the Elves, particularly Sam, who is exhilarated upon first seeing them (*Fellowship* 88). The Elves deeply love the natural world, and thus reside in locations of the utmost natural beauty. Scenes in these Elven places demonstrate the power of nature in the trilogy with particular force.

When the Hobbits arrive in Rivendell, they are refreshed and feel safe for the first time since leaving the Shire. They experience a healing quality in the Valley of Imladris where Rivendell is situated. It is no coincidence that Frodo recovers from his horrible wound from the Morgul-blade while in Rivendell. His injury at the hands of the Witch-King of Angmar wounds both his soul and spirit, and these Elven places of the greatest natural beauty provide the most relief for his damaged body and spirit.

Tolkien's narrator acknowledges this power of Rivendell when Frodo regains consciousness and begins to recover from his injury:

Frodo was now safe in the Last Homely House east of the Sea. That house was, as Bilbo had long ago reported, "a perfect house, whether you like food or sleep or story-telling or singing, or just sitting and thinking best, or a pleasant mixture of them all." Merely to be there was a cure for weariness, fear, and sadness. (*Fellowship* 252)

Just by being in Rivendell, Frodo begins to feel cured of his pain and woe. As Bilbo describes it, Rivendell is perfect, all of the cheers of life can be found there. The Elven home inspires contentment: Bilbo spends the remainder of his life in Rivendell and begins to heal from the toll of the Ring in the valley. Croft identifies this healing power: "Rivendell restores and heals the hobbits and Strider after their flight from Weathertop" (*War and the Works* 37). In characterizing Rivendell as a pastoral oasis, Croft pinpoints why these havens are so powerful in the narrative. The Valley of Imladris is a place of restoration because of the atmosphere produced by its natural beauty. Tolkien depicts a space with so much natural beauty that the feeling of relief created by nature actually heals the pains of war. The pleasantness of Rivendell helps solidify its significance and the significance of Elven homes in the trilogy.

Rivendell's significance is further emphasized because the Fellowship of the Ring is formed there during the Council of Elrond. Such places of natural beauty in Middle-earth are also places of progress and healing, and Rivendell is one of the most pristine of the many magnificent landscapes shown in the trilogy:

[Frodo] walked along the terraces above the loud-flowing Bruinen and watched the pale, cool sun rise above the far mountains, and shine down, slanting through the thin silver mist; the dew upon the yellow leaves was glimmering, and the woven nets of gossamer twinkled on every bush. (*Fellowship* 268)

Rivendell has the Bruinen river, the river that helped save Frodo from the Nazgûl, a plethora of beautiful trees, and is surrounded by shining mountains. Rivendell glimmers and shines and twinkles. Moreover, the relaxed tone of this passage shows Frodo recovering from the constant fear of the road, at least for the time being. Frodo feels no fear of hooves and unexpected sounds in Rivendell; he is at peace and feels safe. But while he feels protected in Rivendell, he is also inspired by its wonders to continue his quest. As noted earlier, Frodo's journey begins with his resolution to save the beauty of the Shire, but in Rivendell he comes to fully understand his duty and decides to go all the way to Mordor. That this place is so rich with nature and serves as a focal point for the beginning of the Fellowship confirms that nature has immense power. And as we will see later in the trilogy, nature provides relief for the physical desolation caused by war. This power to heal, restore, and inspire confirms the importance of protecting nature for the protagonists.

While the impact of Rivendell is undeniable, Lothlórien, the other Elven home that shelters the Fellowship in the first installment of the trilogy, plays an even greater role in demonstrating the power of natural environments. The Fellowship reach Lothlórien after escaping Moria, the ancient kingdom of the dwarves, where they suffer one of the most traumatizing experiences, the death of Gandalf. The Fellowship, especially the Hobbits, are heartbroken and grieving over the loss of Gandalf. But Lothlórien provides them relief from the grief of war that they desperately need. Legolas is the first to identify Lothlórien's natural beauty when he sees the woods from afar:

“That is the fairest of all the dwellings of my people. There are no trees like the trees of that land. For in the autumn their leaves fall not, but turn to gold. Not till the spring comes and the new green opens do they fall, and then the boughs are laden with yellow flowers; and the floor of the wood is golden, and golden is the roof, and its pillars are of silver, for the bark of the trees is smooth and grey.” (*Fellowship* 375)

Legolas’s words identify Lothlórien as a place of incredible natural beauty. His description of Lórien’s autumn reveals that the Elven wood is a place free of decay. The trees do not lose their leaves and wither in winter, instead they turn to gold, a color synonymous with richness and beauty. The numerous colors evoke an image of vibrance and brightness and this imagery produces a feeling of warmth and loveliness. Legolas’ statement that Lothlórien is the fairest of all Elven homes is especially significant given that Rivendell has already been presented so splendidly. Fairer than Rivendell, Lothlórien is a place of extraordinary beauty and power. Lothlórien is the last haven the Fellowship will visit. Once they leave Lothlórien, the Fellowship begins to splinter, and their adventures are henceforth filled with danger, battles, and little rest.

Furthermore, Tolkien spends more time describing the beauty of Lothlórien than any other place, devoting a full page to depict Cerin Amroth, the heart of the wood. The paragraph provides another powerful example of Tolkien idealizing natural beauty. The more significant passage in Cerin Amroth, however, showcases Frodo recovering from his grief, lost in wonderment at the beauty of the Elven realm:

Frodo stood awhile still lost in wonder. It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured forever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful. In winter here no heart could mourn for summer or for

spring. No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lórien there was no stain.  
(*Fellowship* 393)

This passage is surreal and ethereal. The beauty of Lothlórien is almost too remarkable to believe, and yet, it is real. Frodo's amazement lets him forget his grief, and he is filled with feelings of wonder. The details of this quotation portray Lothlórien as a completely unique and perfect place, natural beauty so incredible that it could only be from a "vanished world." Descriptors such as "shapely" highlight Lórien's perfection. Frodo has been to Rivendell, and yet this place appears "fresh" and "new and wonderful" to him, unlike anything he has even seen. This uniqueness emphasizes Lothlórien's natural beauty. Moreover, the Elven wood is a place undamaged by time, the one constant that causes everything to decay has no effect on Lothlórien; it is pure natural beauty, and the power of this nature is unmatched. No other landscape in *Fellowship of the Ring* equals Lothlórien. The wood is unblemished and everlasting. There is no sense that doom or the end of the world is near, only wonderment at the heart of a timeless wood.

Frodo is not the only member of the Fellowship whose stay in Lothlórien provides therapy. In fact, all the members of the Fellowship feel refreshed from their time in the Elven realm. While still in Cerin Amroth, Frodo notices Lothlórien's power in giving Aragorn relief, "At the hill's foot Frodo found Aragorn, standing still and silent as a tree; but in his hand was a small golden bloom of *elanor*, and a light was in his eyes. He was wrapped in some fair memory ... For the grim years were removed from the face of Aragorn" (*Fellowship* 395). With the loss of Gandalf, Aragorn has become the new leader of the Fellowship entrusted with the protection and decision

making of the group. Yet while he is in Lothlórien, Aragorn's troubling thoughts disappear and he feels at peace, enjoying an old and happy memory of a better time. Aragorn's mere presence in Lothlórien alleviates the grimness of his life for a while. This power of the Elven wood shows just how influential nature can be.

One of the most endearing and wonderful places in the entire trilogy, Lothlórien is depicted as the fairest of all natural places. The fact that this majestic place heals the Fellowship of their grief demonstrates the significance of the environment in Middle-earth and nature's thematic importance in *The Lord of the Rings*. *The Fellowship of the Ring* devotes considerable time to celebrating magnificent natural environments, but the importance of these landscapes is not fully showcased until the later books of the trilogy. While the Hobbits and the Fellowship face numerous deadly perils and the loss of their beloved Gandalf in the first installment of the trilogy, the context of the War of the Ring and war's destructive effect on nature depicted in *Two Towers* and *Return of the King* confirms that these natural places must be protected from war.

### **Rohan: Nature Worth Protecting**

*The Lord of the Rings* repeatedly juxtaposes war with the natural landscapes that the battles are fought upon. *The Two Towers* begins with the death of Boromir and the kidnapping of Merry and Pippin by the Uruk-hai commanded by Saruman. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli decide not to follow Frodo, who has gone with Sam to Mordor, and instead chase after the group of Orcs who have kidnapped their other hobbit friends. The chase brings them to Rohan, the realm of the Rohirrim which will soon become the location for the first of the major battles in this trilogy: The Battle of Helm's Deep. This battle will decide the survival of Rohan, its kingdom, its people, and its landscapes. The

Uruk-hai burn and pillage everything in their path as they march through Rohan (*Two Towers* 145). This destruction the Orcs cause is especially saddening because Tolkien spends so much time establishing the beauty and pleasantness of Rohan's landscapes. As the characters enter Rohan for the first time, the narration depicts Rohan's natural beauty, and beyond, the gorgeous mountains Gondor:

the shadows of night melted, the colours of the waking earth returned: green flowed over the wide meads of Rohan; the white mists shimmered in the water-vales; and far off to the left, thirty leagues or more, blue and purple stood the White Mountains, rising into peaks of jet, tipped with glimmering snows, flushed with the rose of morning. (*Two Towers* 15)

Tolkien uses colorful imagery to present the splendor of this land. These colors portray Rohan as bright and shining and the vast green meadows convey a feeling of goodness. A place of colour, greenness, and shimmering views, Rohan is also bordered by Gondor, another revered kingdom, and its glorious mountains. These "rising" and "glimmering" mountains complete the image of a magnificent and shining landscape. Such vivid description asserts this country's significance.

The first half of *The Two Towers* portrays the defense of Rohan from Saruman and his Orc armies. The narrative stresses Rohan's natural beauty because protecting Rohan is as much about protecting its landscapes as its people. Readers encounter the stunning landscapes of Rohan before even meeting the kingdom's people. Tolkien briefly describes Gondor as well, which will become the location of the greatest battle in *The War of the Ring*. Here the narration calls attention to the natural landscapes that are threatened by Sauron, his influence, and the destruction of war.

The prominence of Rohan's environmental splendor intensifies as the characters move through the country. When Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli arrive at Edoras, led by

Gandalf who has recently been reborn as Gandalf the White, they are awed by the region's natural magnificence: "The land was green: in the wet meads and along the grassy borders of the stream grew many willow trees. Already in this southern land they were blushing red at their fingertips, feeling the approach of spring" (*Two Towers* 117). This description associates Rohan with the colour green, a color synonymous with goodness in the trilogy. Tolkien repeatedly portrays the Shire with green imagery and the affiliation between green and nature supports this symbolic significance of goodness. The ensuing imagery of the countryside accentuates that valuation through the presentation of Rohan's natural beauty. Before meeting Rohan's king, the narration shows us the land this king must protect. Furthermore, because Tolkien has so clearly established the natural beauty of Rohan, when the battle draws near, readers, like the characters, fear for the destruction of its natural landscapes. By establishing Rohan's natural beauty shortly before the Battle of Helm's Deep, the narrative identifies what the Rohirrim are protecting when they defend their kingdom.

### **War's Threat to Nature and the Urgency of Defending Natural Places in War**

Many characters in *Two Towers* speak of the relationship between war and the earth and the desolation that the enemy causes when conducting war. One of the ways Tolkien shows how war damages nature is through an image of a red dawn. Legolas first identifies this image when he sees the sun rise over Rohan the night after Éomer and his Rohirrim have killed the Uruks who kidnapped Merry and Pippin, "'Awake! Awake!' he cried. 'It is a red dawn'" (*Two Towers* 21). Legolas recognizes that the sun is rising red, which in Middle-earth signifies that a battle was fought during the night. This image figuratively manifests the blood spilled in battle permeating the natural

cycles of the earth. The blood of the dead literally covers the grass, but the death of war also effects the rising sun and sky. Théoden references this image of the red dawn caused by battle when he gives his speech before the Fields of Pelennor in *Return of the King*. These red sunrises symbolize war's deadly impact on the environment.

However, the trilogy features other, even more powerful descriptions of war's destructive effect on nature. Some of these descriptions come from Treebeard, the foremost of the Ents, the protectors of Fangorn Forest, when he speaks of the darkness and destruction of nature that Sauron causes. While sheltering Merry and Pippin after they have escaped from the Uruk-hai, Treebeard warns of the peril that nature faces, "the withering of all woods may be drawing near" (*Two Towers* 75). Treebeard predicts that Sauron will bring about the end of nature if he achieves dominion over Middle-earth. That an Ent gives this statement makes it even more significant because they are the beings charged with protecting the forests and ensuring the everlasting survival of Middle-earth's trees. The Ents are resilient and powerful beings and their strength and love of nature symbolizes the power of nature in Middle-earth. They play a pivotal role in defeating Saruman when they assault Isengard while the Battle of Helm's Deep rages miles away. The Ents are inspired to complete this act only because of the destruction of nature Sauron and Saruman cause. As Treebeard says, "For if Sauron of old destroyed the gardens, the Enemy today seems likely to wither all the woods" (*Two Towers* 80). Treebeard knows that the enemy's war will cause the destruction of all the forests in Middle-earth. Treebeard has seen first-hand war's desolation, which he describes to Merry and Pippin when he recalls when the Ents searched for the Entwives, "We crossed over Anduin and came to their land; but we found a desert: it was all burned

and uprooted, for war had passed over it” (*Two Towers* 79). Treebeard describes the east of Middle-earth, the region where Sauron has the most control. The land is a desert, desolate, and lifeless. As Treebeard confirms, war caused this devastation.

All of this discussion of the destructive power of war over nature comes before the Battle of Helm’s Deep begins. When these images of environmental destruction are paired with the numerous descriptions of majestic landscapes and natural beauty, war and nature become intertwined. Furthermore, the Battle for Helm’s Deep occurs just after these chapters featuring Treebeard’s comments. This juxtaposition of a discussion of nature and the battle that follows emphasizes the narrative’s concern with war’s terrible effect on beautiful places. Because Tolkien depicts the natural landscapes that make Rohan special, by the time the battle begins, Rohan’s environment has clearly been established as one of the key stakes of the battle. The Rohirrim fight the Orcs to protect their homeland, which prominently includes these landscapes.

Gimli confirms the notion that the Battle of Helm’s Deep is fought to protect the beautiful places of Rohan when he announces his discovery of the Glittering Caves of Aglarond. These caves are the caverns underneath the mountains that surround Helm’s Dike, and Gimli takes refuge in them shortly before the final counterattack that wins the battle. In the immediate aftermath of the battle, Gimli asks Legolas, “do you know that the caverns of Helm’s Deep are vast and beautiful? There would be an endless pilgrimage of Dwarves, merely to gaze at them, if such things were known to be” (*Two Towers* 165). Gimli delivers a lengthy speech to Legolas describing the caves’ beauty in wondrous detail and it is clear that Gimli is awestruck by his new discovery. His statement that Dwarves would come from all over Middle-earth to see them cements

just how incredible these caverns are, since the Dwarves are a race obsessed with mountains and the ores and gems that lie beneath. Gimli's explicit adoration of these caves immediately after the battle shows that one of the things they fought to defend was this beautiful place, the Caves of Aglarond. While the Orcs would have little appreciation for these caves, the Dwarves would be amazed by them and gaze in wonder. Furthermore, the Dwarves are known for their delight and skill in extracting ores and jewels, but Gimli suggests that these caves are so wonderful his people would not mine them, instead they would maintain them. This sentiment further emphasizes these caves' significant beauty. Gimli's statements indicate that this war against evil is motivated in part to protect the beautiful places of Middle-earth. This relationship between the protagonists' war efforts and the protection of nature indicates that one key way war can be justified is to defend nature from needless destruction.

### **The Destruction of Isengard: Displaying War's Impact on Nature**

While Helm's Deep displays a battle that defends nature from destruction, the fall of Isengard under the industrialization of Saruman and his Orc armies portrays the danger that war poses to the environment. After winning the Battle of Helm's Deep, Théoden and Gandalf lead a small party to Isengard, intending to deal with Saruman once and for all. When they arrive, the King's party discovers the devastating change to the landscape that Saruman has caused. In producing his Uruk-hai army, Saruman has industrialized Isengard, using its natural resources as fuel. The first example of the destructive effect of Saruman's industrialization is Nan Curunir, also known as the Wizard's Vale, the valley surrounding Isengard. To emphasize the extent of the environmental damage Saruman inflicts, Tolkien first recalls Nan Curunir's prior

beauty and fertility: “Once it had been fair and green, and through it the Isen flowed, already deep and strong before it found the plains; for it was fed by many springs and lesser streams among the rain-washed hills, and all about it there had lain a pleasant, fertile land” (*Two Towers* 172-173). Tolkien shows how the Wizard’s Vale used to be a place of natural beauty akin to Rohan, fertile and pleasant and green. However, Saruman and the industrialization of war have changed all that:

It was not so now. Beneath the walls of Isengard there still were acres tilled by the slaves of Saruman; but most of the valley had become a wilderness of weeds and thorns. Brambles trailed upon the ground, or clambering over bush and bank, made shaggy caves where small beasts housed. No trees grew there; but among the grasses could still be seen the burned and axe-hewn stumps of ancient groves. It was a sad country, silent now but for the stony noise of quick waters. (*Two Towers* 173)

This is the desolation caused by Saruman. He has devastated a once beautiful natural landscape to fuel the production of his army. The trees are cut down and the once pleasant landscape is now disheveled. What remains is barren and silent: no noise of animal life can be heard. The destruction of this once beautiful place is saddening especially when compared to the beauty of Rohan that so many men died to defend. The desolation of Nan Curunir shows that the victory at Helm’s Deep was crucial, for if the Uruk-hai had won, all of Rohan would soon look like this desolated valley.

Moreover, the ruin of the Wizard’s Vale shows only a part of the scars left on nature by Saruman’s industrialization and war. As Théoden, Gandalf, and the party that follows them enter Isengard, they are shocked to see the devastating change that has come to the area:

Once it had been green and filled with avenues, and groves of fruitful trees, watered by streams that flowed from the mountains to a lake. But no green thing grew there in the latter days of Saruman. The roads were

paved with stone flags, dark and hard; and beside their borders instead of trees there marched long lines of pillars, some marble, some of copper and of iron, joined by heavy chains. (*Two Towers* 174).

Saruman has replaced the verdant natural beauty of Isengard with paved stone roads and metal pillars and chains. The Ring of Isengard surrounding the tower of Orthanc is no longer green and watery, instead it is dark and hard, and nothing grows. Saruman has destroyed the once beautiful region. His desire for power and construction of an army consumed all the nature in Isengard. What remains are wholly unnatural things like stone roads and metal pillars and chains. Isengard stands as a symbol for the effect that war has on natural places: they are consumed utterly.

This negative portrayal of war's destruction of nature suggests that *The Two Towers* presents a clear anti-war argument. But as I have discussed, the trilogy presents a more nuanced understanding of war. Sometimes war must be fought. Sauron is an unrelenting evil, and war must be conducted to defeat him. There is no other option. If the Free Peoples of Middle-earth were pacifist and refused to fight, the Orc armies would consume the natural landscapes, rampaging, pillaging, and burning everything they could. While the narrative condemns the industrialization of war that consumes the environment, it also reveals an understanding that war can sometimes serve to defend and preserve nature. The victory at Helm's Deep accentuates this doctrine as the landscapes of Rohan are protected from the destruction that Isengard suffered through the Rohirrim's triumph in battle.

### **Gondor and Minas Tirith: A Kingdom and Landscapes to Defend**

The theme of protecting beautiful places through war continues in the representation of Gondor and the Siege of Gondor. The capitol of Gondor, the White

City Minas Tirith, represents another beautiful place that must be protected from Sauron. As with Rohan, Gondor's natural beauty is foregrounded. The first depiction of Gondor's beauty is the White Mountains. These mountains are described in a passage I previously referenced from *Two Towers*: "far off to the left, thirty leagues or more, blue and purple stood the White Mountains, rising into peaks of jet, tipped with glimmering snows, flushed with the rose of morning" (*Two Towers* 15). These mountains are pinnacles of Gondor's natural beauty. Before any character has stepped foot in the heart of Gondor, Tolkien provides a portrayal of its amazing landscapes, which helps show why Gondor must be protected from Sauron.

While the White Mountains provide one example of the natural beauty of Gondor, the city of Minas Tirith displays a different sort of elegance through its splendor. Minas Tirith is not a natural environment, but it is wonderful to look at, and symbolizes the might of Gondor, a kingdom filled with natural beauty. When Gandalf brings Pippin to the White City in the beginning of *Return of the King*, Pippin marvels at his first sight of the city: "Then Pippin cried aloud, for the Tower of Ecthelion, standing high within the topmost wall, shone out against the sky, glimmering like a spike of pearl and silver, tall and fair and shapely, and its pinnacle glittered as if it were wrought of crystals" (*Return of the King* 24). Minas Tirith might be man-made, but the city's beauty causes Pippin to cry in amazement. The beauty of the city is pleasing to look upon and its wonderful elements like the Tower of Ecthelion resemble things of natural beauty like pearl, silver, and crystal as Tolkien's similes confirm. This depiction of the glory of Minas Tirith recalls Frodo's first sight of the city when he stands atop the hill of Amon Hen just before the breaking of the Fellowship, "Then turning south

again he beheld Minas Tirith. Far away it seemed, and beautiful: white-walled, many-towered, proud and fair upon its mountain-seat; its battlements glittered with steel, and its turrets were bright with many banners. Hope leaped in his heart” (*Fellowship* 451). The White City is an inspiring place to look upon, demonstrated by descriptors like “fair,” “bright,” and “glitter.” The city’s beauty blends with the natural landscape around it as Minas Tirith is built on the mountainside. This juxtaposition displays Minas Tirith as a sort of eternal city, strong and rising like the mountains. Even a view from far off makes Frodo feel hopeful. Both Frodo and Pippin are stunned by Minas Tirith, they have never seen a place so magnificent, and the wonder that the city gives these Hobbits cements the city’s significance.

Minas Tirith is a mighty city, and Tolkien devotes an entire chapter at the start of *Return of the King* introducing Pippin to the city and its people. By the time the chapter ends, Minas Tirith has been established as a significant place that inspires and delights. This endearing introduction confirms that Minas Tirith and Gondor deserve protection from darkness. In addition to the beauty of the city, Tolkien displays the natural beauty surrounding Gondor’s capitol and the lands beyond in the South of Gondor. As Pippin and Gandalf pass through the Rammas Echor, the wall that defends the Fields of Pelennor, the narrator describes the surrounding townlands: “The townlands were rich, with wide tilth and many orchards, and many homesteads there were with oast and garner, fold and byre, and many rills rippling through the green from the highlands down to Anduin” (*Return of the King* 23). These cultivated fields, orchards, and other signs of agriculture exemplify the natural beauty and bounty of Gondor. These fields will be burned and blackened and destroyed during the Battle of

the Pelennor Fields and Tolkien's careful portrayal of their pleasantness before the battle serves to intensify their value and the terrible costs of war.

The juxtaposition of natural places on either side of the major battles in *The Lord of the Rings* creates a connection between the devastation of the battles and the places they are fought upon and over. Before each battle, at least one army of the Free Peoples of Middle-earth crosses over some beautiful landscape on their way to the battlefield. These landscapes the armies move across serve to remind readers of the destruction war can cause to natural landscapes and also to celebrate the beautiful places that these armies are fighting to defend. As the Rohirrim ride to Minas Tirith, Merry is awestruck at the beauty he sees in the nature of southern Rohan,

Merry looked out in wonder at this strange country [...] his eye, through dim gulfs of shadowy air, saw only ever-mounting slopes, great walls, and frowning precipices wreathed in mist. He sat for a moment half-dreaming, listening to the noise of water, the whisper of dark trees, the crack of stone, and the vast waiting silence that brooded behind all sound. (*Return of the King* 69-70)

Surrounded by the rivers and mountains of Harrowdale, Merry is engulfed by the bliss of this natural place. He can drift away from his grim reality, riding to the certain doom of battle. This reminder of Rohan's natural beauty as the Rohirrim ride to war highlights what the Riders are protecting in battling Sauron. This passage also mentions the dark cloud that Sauron is spreading over Middle-earth in preparation for the battle. This shadow serves as a warning of what would become of Middle-earth should Sauron win: everything will be shrouded in darkness. The juxtaposition of this beautiful environment and the shadow threatening to consume it accentuates the urgency of the Rohirrim's mission. They must win this battle so they can defend natural places like Harrowdale from Sauron and the shadow of war.

The connection between war and natural places continues after the Siege of Gondor is concluded and the army of Sauron defeated. Legolas and Gimli tell Merry and Pippin how they journeyed to the battlefield, led by Aragorn, travelling through the Paths of the Dead in the mountains and then the West and South of Gondor. These three, whom Tolkien calls the Grey Company, take this route in order to raise the Ghost Army to defeat Sauron's secret reinforcements, the Corsairs of Umbar, and then use Aragorn's power as heir of Isildur to rally the troops of southern Gondor to provide reinforcements for the battle. As Legolas and Gimli recount the story of their journey, Legolas mentions Lebennin, the region of southern Gondor that the Elves cherish. Legolas recites a song about Lebennin, singing,

“Silver flow the streams from Celos to Erui  
In the green fields of Lebennin!  
Tall grows the grass there. In the wind from the Sea  
The white lilies sway,  
And the golden bells are shaken of mallos and alfirin  
In the green fields of Lebennin,  
In the wind from the Sea!” (*Return of the King* 167)

The Elven ode to Lebennin expresses the extent of the natural beauty of Gondor. Gondor is filled with places of beauty, not just Minas Tirith and its surrounding mountains and fields. By placing this hymn to nature in the aftermath of the great battle, and the recognition that the Grey Company led an army of reinforcements across it, Tolkien once again intertwines war and nature. These natural landscapes are wonderful, but they are always at risk of being damaged by war. Moreover, Legolas' expression of the Elven love of this landscape through song provides another example of how the victory over Sauron's army serves to defend verdant natural places like Lebennin. Unfortunately, not all landscapes survive war, as the destruction of Isengard

at the hands of Saruman confirms. Indeed, Isengard is not the only natural place in *The Lord of the Rings* to be ravaged by war. The Dead Marshes and Mordor showcase the devastation of natural landscapes in constant war.

### **The Dead Marshes: A Landscape Where the Scars of War Never Fade**

The Dead Marshes are the swamplands on the northwestern edge of Mordor that border the Plains of Dagorlad where the Last Alliance of Elves and Men defeated Sauron for the first time. Many of the dead from that battle were buried in the marshes and in the time since, the marshes have grown and consumed the bodies of the dead. Frodo and Sam must cross these marshes on their journey to Mordor and, during their passage, they see first-hand the desolation war can inflict on nature. Verily, the Dead Marshes serve as Tolkien's primary example of a landscape where war and the scars of war have never healed and continue to fester and grow. Tolkien himself acknowledged that the marshes were inspired by World War I battlefields in a letter written in 1960, "The Dead Marshes and the approach to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme" (*Letters* 303). Tolkien's inspiration from the fields of the Somme in depicting the Dead Marshes confirms the centrality of the idea of the terrible effects of war on landscapes to the depiction of the marshes:

It was dreary and wearisome. Cold clammy winter still held sway in the forsaken country. The only green was the scum of livid weed on the dark greasy surfaces of the sullen waters. Dead grasses and rotting reeds loomed up in the mists like ragged shadows of long-forgotten summers. (*Two Towers* 259)

Gone are descriptions of pleasant green fields and shimmering grasses and tall trees. This place, this festering swamp, is dreary and cold and dead. The great battle that was fought here has left the marshes to rot and wither in decay. This is no beautiful

landscape that the Free Peoples marvel over and wish to defend from Sauron, but a place of death and decay, corrupted by the struggle of war and its aftermath.

Doubtless the most striking and shocking proof of war's terrible impacts on nature among the Dead Marshes are the corpses that lie underneath its foul pools of water, the bodies of the soldiers who died in the Battle of Dagorlad. Sam and Frodo discover these bodies as they near the end of their passage through the marshes. Sam is the first to speak of the corpses, but Frodo delivers the most chilling description: "They lie in all the pools, pale faces, deep deep under the dark water. I saw them: grim faces and evil, noble faces and sad. Many faces proud and fair, and weeds in their silver hair. But all foul, all rotting, all dead" (*Two Towers* 261). The dead are everywhere, fallen soldiers from both sides of the battle. And yet, whether the faces are noble or grim does not matter; they are all foul, rotting and dead. The Dead Marshes show the grave cost of war, the endless dead left to rot in a corrupted landscape. The victors of the battle are irrelevant in the Dead Marshes, there is no glory to be found rotting away in this swamp. Through these marshes, Tolkien shows how gruesomely war can transform a landscape. The Dead Marshes are foul, and the dead are everywhere. The people who lie in this swamp are forgotten, their bodies consumed by the water and muck. Nature should be a place of peace, wonder, and happiness, but war has turned this natural environment into a foul, reeking, and rotting place.

Rebekah Long discusses the Dead Marshes' significance in her essay "Fantastic Medievalism and the Great War." Long argues that Tolkien challenges the glorification of war by depicting a landscape that refuses to let war's costs fade into memory, "The Dead Marshes act as a sort of war memorial, as a textual actualization of the processes

of memory, in which the dead refuse to be resolved into statuelike icons, idealized narratives of victory or defeat traced across their frozen surfaces. Instead, the dead *accuse*” (*Tolkien’s Modern Middle Ages* 128). Tolkien’s portrayal of the marshes prevents an old war from fading into memory, and as Long acutely identifies, this depiction challenges any glorifying perception of war. Tolkien depicts the Dead Marshes to avoid ignoring the war’s consequences, instead presenting them vividly. Long continues, “In the Dead Marshes, the dead demand recognition, not for what was accomplished, but because they suffered” (129). I agree that the Dead Marshes reinforce Tolkien’s confrontation of the destructive ramifications of war. Expanding on Long’s analysis, I argue that the environmental devastation of the Dead Marshes accentuates the potency of their meaning. The corpses of the Dead Marshes demand recognition, but their position in a destroyed natural landscape emphasizes an equally terrible effect of war. This ancient battle permanently destroyed a natural landscape and that is just as terrible a cost as the death of fallen soldiers.

The Dead Marshes show how battles can permanently damage landscapes, leaving the traces of the conflict to fester and corrupt the area. The combination of murky water, foul earth, and rotting corpses resembles the descriptions of the Somme during World War I, the site of one of the War’s most destructive and deadly battles, lending realism to Tolkien’s description of post-battle environment. Several poems from the trench poets parallel Tolkien’s portrayal of the Dead Marshes, including Sassoon’s “Counter-Attack,” which describes the devastating aftermath of a successful assault:

The place was rotten with dead; green clumsy legs  
High-booted, sprawled and grovelled along the saps

And trunks, face downward in the sucking mud,  
Wallowed like trodden and bags loosely filled;  
And naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,  
Bulged, clotted heads, slept in plastering slime  
And then the rain began, —the jolly old rain! (*War Poems* 54-55)

Like the Dead Marshes, this battlefield is filled with rotting corpses. Sassoon depicts slime, muck, and mud with bodies sinking into them. This description recalls the Dead Marshes; the dead sink into murky water and filth and lie there rotting. The striking resemblance between these landscapes confirms that the Dead Marshes evoke the battlefields of World War I. Tolkien portrays a landscape that recalls actual war-torn battlefields and this verisimilitude reinforces the trilogy's commentary that natural spaces must be protected from war's devastation. What cements the significance of the Dead Marshes is that the land has never healed. The Dead Marshes remain a permanent foul place, a constant reminder of the destructive reality of war and its devastating impacts on nature.

### **Mordor: Desolation from the Constant Preparations of War**

Sauron's land of Mordor displays another landscape permanently scarred by war. Nothing green grows in Mordor. It is a barren wasteland full of evil and despair. The only things that do grow are harsh and dry and withering. There are numerous descriptions of the desolation of Sauron's dominion as Sam and Frodo walk through the land, all of which convey feelings of hopelessness, danger, and evil. War is always brewing in Mordor, and the landscape bears the wounds of this endless war preparation. As Sam and Frodo move towards Mount Doom, the narrator describes the scarred plains of Gorgoroth where Sauron's forces gather: "Here in the northward regions were the mines and forges, and the musterings of long-planned war" (*Return of the King* 222).

Sauron's armies have industrialized the region. This passage insinuates that the Orcs of Mordor have carved apart the rock and earth with their mining and filled the air with smoke and fire from their forges. The phrase "the musterings of long-planned war" confirms that Sauron's armies regularly gather and prepare for battle. Such preparations demonstrate that the effects of war on nature are perpetual in Mordor, transforming the region into a barren wasteland.

Mordor is the antithesis of the Shire. While the Shire is green, cheerful, and full of potential, Mordor is dark, dreary, barren, and full of despair. While crossing the Land of Shadow, "Frodo and Sam gazed out in mingled loathing and wonder on this hateful land. Between them and the smoking mountain, and about it north and south, all seemed ruinous and dead, a desert burned and choked" (*Return of the King* 221). Frodo and Sam's grim reaction to the landscape emphasizes how horrible Mordor is. A desert filled with dead and burned things, this land does not provide any natural beauty or relief; it is a place that sucks away goodness. Instead of breeding life and color as nature should, Mordor produces ruin and death, epitomizing the destruction Sauron has caused with his schemes. Because the industrialization of war is always present in Mordor, the land has become a desolate wasteland, "only a grey light came to the dreary fields of Gorgoroth. There smokes trailed on the ground and lurked in hollows, and fumes leaked from fissures in the earth" (*Return of the King* 221). The descriptive elements of this passage connote evil and darkness; the personification of the smoke lurking in holes in the land gives Mordor a sinister quality. The fumes coming out of the ground suggest that the land itself is poisonous and deadly. These foul descriptions associate Mordor with death and destruction. All living things are either withering, burned, or dead. By

combining Sauron's ceaseless organization of war with the depiction of Mordor's ruin, Tolkien portrays a dramatic culmination of war's effect on nature. This foul place serves to remind readers why the defense of Rohan, Gondor and everywhere else is important. If Sauron won, all natural places would become like Mordor.

Mordor's dreariness makes Sam and Frodo miss the Shire all the more and this longing reinforces nature's significance. As the darkness of Mordor further engulfs them, the Hobbits realize that they will likely die when they have completed their mission, "when the task was done, there they would come to an end, alone, houseless, food-less in the midst of a terrible desert. There could be no return" (*Return of the King* 234). While languishing over their certain death, Sam thinks, "But I would dearly like to see the Bywater again, and Rosie Cotton and her brothers, and the Gaffer and Marigold and all" (*Return of the King* 234). Despite the hopelessness of their mission, Sam still longs for home and to see the beauty of the Shire again. This longing reminds readers again of the significance of nature. In the midst of utter despair, Sam seeks comfort in the memory of his home and the Shire's natural beauty. Moreover, his desire to return home shows that this whole endeavor has been motivated to defend home and the beautiful places of Middle-earth. Defeating Sauron will preserve the natural places of the world and Sam's desire for the Shire serves as a warning that the beautiful natural places of Middle-earth will become like Mordor if they fail. Sam's yearning for the Shire also demonstrates again nature's power to alleviate the harshness of war. Even "in the midst of a terrible desert," the memory of the Shire relieves Sam of some of his pain and woe.

The desolation of Mordor exemplifies another aspect of the trilogy where Tolkien draws on his experience in the First World War. The scholar Hugh Brogan highlights this notion in his essay “Tolkien’s Great War”: “Mordor—one of the many landscapes in *The Lord of the Rings* that, in their pitiless desolation, recall the wasteland of the Western Front” (*Children and their Books* 362). Brogan continues to emphasize links between Mordor and the realities of the Great War, arguing that the Orcs’ activity during the night recalls trench duty during World War I. But Brogan does not examine extensively how Mordor parallels the Great War’s battlefields specifically through the appearance of the natural landscape. To stress these resemblances between the battlefield landscapes of World War I and the grim landscapes of Mordor, I turn to the poetry of Owen, who describes a vision of No Man’s Land in “The Show”: “a sad land, weak with sweats of dearth, / Grey, cratered like the moon with hollow woe, / And pitted with great pocks and scabs of plagues” (*Three Poets* 91, 3-5). Owen’s No Man’s Land is sad, scarce and dreary. The disdainful tone he presents this landscape with recalls the loathsome feelings of Sam and Frodo as they suffer through Mordor. Owen’s scarred battlefield of craters, pits, and “scabs of plagues” resembles the cracked and fissured Mordor, empty and desolate. These stark similarities between Owen’s ruinous No Man’s Land and Tolkien’s desolate Mordor confirm that Tolkien dramatizes the battlefields of World War I in the landscape of Mordor. Moreover, Mordor’s resemblance to the scarred and barren battlefields of World War I reinforces the understanding that Sauron’s war produces such environments. The striking parallels between the devastation of Mordor and World War I once more highlights the importance of defeating the Dark Lord to protect nature.

Furthermore, the spreading destruction of Mordor as Sauron's power grows emphasizes the terror of the Black Land. As Frodo and Sam approach the edge of Mordor during *Two Towers*, they encounter horrid desolation:

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 graveyard in endless rows. (*Two Towers* 265-266)

The tone of this passage emphasizes the hideousness of this region, each descriptor gives a feeling of loathing and disgust. Tolkien describes images of sickness, vomit, filth, fire, and poison that together produce an understanding of how horrible this area is. Moreover, this ghastly desolation surrounds Mordor; Sauron's destruction has spread beyond the edges of his dominion. This advance of corruption and wreckage epitomizes the terrible effects of Sauron and his war on nature. If Sauron wins the War of the Ring, all of Middle-earth will become this foul environment, destroyed by the impact of war.

## **Conclusion**

Tolkien repeatedly connects nature and war in *The Lord of the Rings*. War destroys nature, but nature provides relief to the horrors and destruction of war. As Tolkien's characters fight in The War of the Ring, they are constantly surrounded with the natural beauty that they strive to protect. Upon the conclusion of battles, nature's beauties and powers reaffirm the importance of the natural environment. War may be a destructive force, but it is sometimes necessary to fight to defend nature. While the Dead Marshes and Mordor are atrocious, war must be fought to prevent further marshes from growing and to maintain landscapes rather than turn them into wastelands. This

need to maintain and protect nature from war is exemplified by the Ents when they rebuild Isengard after the defeat of Saruman: “All the stone circle had been thrown down and removed, and the land within was made into a garden filled with orchards and trees, and a stream ran through it; but in the midst of all there was a lake of clear water, and out of it the Tower of Orthanc rose still” (*Return of the King* 286). The Ents determination to restore Isengard to its former natural beauty emphasizes the significance of protecting natural spaces through war. After Saruman is defeated in battle, the Ents can restore the nature Saruman’s industrialization destroyed. Therefore, the protection and appreciation of this natural space is only possible because of victory in war. However, the Ents do not erase the existence of war altogether. The Tower of Orthanc, now a symbol of Saruman’s former power, still stands, a reminder of the war that permeated Isengard, now surrounded by natural beauty that signifies what the war protected.

*The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates and condemns the destruction that war causes in nature. But the trilogy also shows the importance of protecting and restoring nature and shows that war is sometimes necessary to protect natural landscapes. Beautiful places in the world inspire hope, are wonderful to look upon, and, perhaps most importantly, can heal people. The natural environment provides relief from the trauma of war, and this power of nature exemplifies its importance to the world. Tolkien’s vision of nature and war is complex and nuanced: while war can destroy nature, war is also justifiable if it serves to protect nature.

## Chapter 4: The Ring's Corruptive Powers and Military Significance

The final element of the commentary on war in *The Lord of the Rings* comes through Tolkien's portrayal of the use of weapons of war. I have already discussed how the trilogy demonstrates that war is sometimes necessary and highlighted the circumstances under which war can justifiably be fought. With the understanding that war is sometimes necessary and justifiable when opposing evil and protecting people and beautiful spaces, this chapter examines how *The Lord of the Rings* portrays the use of weaponry. Tolkien's nuanced representation of the wielding of the Ring defines the criteria for the justifiable use of weapons: possessing a full understanding their power, carefully considering the consequences of their use, and using them only when completely necessary.

The trilogy presents the importance of using weapons of war responsibly. Foremost in this demonstration is the One Ring, the mightiest of Sauron's weapons of evil and the most dangerous item in Middle-earth. As Croft points out, early Tolkien critics interpreted the Ring as an explicit symbol or even an allegory for the atom bomb, since the trilogy was released in the early 1950s shortly after the end of World War II (Croft, *War and the Works* 58). However, I argue that the Ring only symbolizes the bomb insofar as it functions like any other excessively powerful weapon used in war. Tolkien conceived of Middle-earth as early as the 1910s and did the vast majority of the planning and outlining of the story in the 1930s, long before the atom bomb's existence was public knowledge (*Fellowship* viii-xii). The Ring should not be read exclusively as an allegory for the atom bomb because the Ring, its design, powers, and effects, were already well established in drafts of the trilogy before Tolkien even knew the bomb

existed (*Fellowship* x). As he writes, “I think that many confuse ‘applicability’ with ‘allegory’; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author” (*Fellowship* x-xi). The Ring certainly applies to the atomic bomb. But given Tolkien’s words and the trilogy’s composition history, the Ring is better understood to symbolize any weapon of war that can cause devastation and destruction. There are numerous forms of cruel weaponry in war, no matter the time period, and Tolkien witnessed first-hand the terrible power of weapons during World War I. Look no further than the gas, artillery, tanks, airplanes, and machine guns used in the Great War to find examples of weapons with such devastating power. The Ring comes from the creativity of Tolkien’s mind, regardless of potential associations later in the twentieth century and applies to any powerful weapon of war.

Croft also discusses the significance of the Ring and its applicability to the atomic bomb and reaches the same conclusion that I do, refuting the theory that the Ring allegorizes the bomb but acknowledging the parallels between the two: “The Ring may not be an allegory for the Bomb, but it does have symbolic applicability. It is the weapon by which either side could totally destroy the other—and in it are also the seeds of the spiritual destruction (at the very least) of the victor” (*War and the Works* 104). Certainly, the aspects of the Ring that Croft highlights connect to the atomic bomb, but they can also apply to other deadly weapons of war. The atomic bomb is one of the most devastating weapons of war ever created, but that does not mean that the destructive properties of the Ring do not also apply to weapons of lesser yet still destructive power. Croft astutely argues that the more significant aspect of the Ring is the moral dilemma its power and existence raise. The problem of when and how to use

the Ring plays a much more prominent role in the trilogy than the demonstration of its terrible power.

The Ring symbolizes far more than weapons themselves because it shows the corruptive power of the desire to achieve victory in war. In fact, the Ring's dangerous power results more from its corruptive impacts than from its demonstrated physical power in support of violence. This emphasis on the corrosive power of corruption intertwines with Tolkien's commentary on war in the trilogy. All evil in *The Lord of the Rings* stems from corruption, even the Dark Lord Sauron. Elrond states this truth during the Council of Elrond: "For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (*Fellowship* 300). Elrond suggests that even the major antagonist presented as the epitome of evil, did not begin as evil; he became evil as a result of his corruption. Further examples of the malignant dynamics of corruption are numerous in the trilogy. The Nazgûl were once lords of men before they were corrupted by the powers of Sauron. Saruman was a wise and mighty wizard before he was corrupted by his desire for the Ring and his study into Sauron and Ring lore. Gollum was a peaceful and pleasant Hobbit-like person before the Ring corrupted his heart. Even the brutal and bestial Orcs were initially Elves who were captured, tortured, and deformed into Orcs. The trilogy repeatedly demonstrates not only that corruption causes evil, but also that corruption often contributes to war. In Tolkien's trilogy, indeed, corruption plays an essential role in wars of good versus evil such as the War of the Ring, as the Free Peoples of Middle-earth must resist the temptation to use the Ring or risk becoming evil themselves.

The corruptive power of the Ring demonstrates the dangers of the particular desire that plagues war time commanders: the desire to achieve victory. The great and terrible power of the Ring is that it corrupts the bearers' mind through the relentless temptation to use it. The Ring endangers anyone other than Sauron who possesses it, and Gandalf, Elrond, and other characters in the trilogy constantly caution against its use. As Gandalf says, ““odd things happen to people that have such treasures—if they use them. Let it be a warning to you to be very careful with it. It may have other powers than just making you vanish when you wish to”” (*Fellowship* 43). Gandalf alludes to the Ring being far more powerful than it appears and acknowledges that bad things will likely happen to Frodo if he uses the Ring. Gandalf's warning also demonstrates that powerful weapons like the Ring often have other unintended, possibly dangerous effects. The influence of the Ring shows through its corruption of Gollum, Bilbo, and eventually Frodo. In this chapter, I trace the extent of the Ring's corruption of its bearer and argue that the Ring ultimately exemplifies the necessity of responsible use of powerful weaponry.

### **The Ring's Corruption of Gollum**

To begin my analysis of the One Ring, I start by showing how the trilogy presents the danger of the Ring, primarily through its corruption of the characters who have possessed it. The first of these characters is the creature Gollum, who exemplifies the full corruptive dominance of the One Ring. Gollum acquired the Ring over five-hundred years before the trilogy begins. In that time, Gollum was, as Gandalf describes, Hobbit-like, and lived on the banks of the river Anduin with his people. Back then he was called Sméagol, and as Gandalf explains, he was “The most inquisitive and

curious-minded of that family” (*Fellowship* 57). These descriptors of Gollum liken him to the Hobbits depicted in the opening chapters of the trilogy and show that while he appears in the narrative solely as a twisted and tormented creature, he was once innocent and good. Gollum’s “finding” of the Ring comes on a day when he and his friend Déagol stumble across it while fishing. But while Déagol finds the Ring, Sméagol strangles him when he sees the Ring in order to possess it. Sméagol’s deadly action demonstrates the corruptive power of the Ring: it produces desire so strong that it prompts Sméagol to murder his own friend.

Upon acquiring the Ring, Sméagol immediately begins to change into a morally depraved person. As Tolkien writes, “He was very pleased with his discovery and concealed it; and he used it to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful” (*Fellowship* 58). Sméagol becomes sneaky, malicious, and evil despite only possessing the Ring for a short amount of time. The cheerful Sméagol interested in nature disappears, already beginning to be consumed by the Ring’s power. He soon becomes Gollum, named for the sound made by his coughing and spluttering, his mind overtaken by the Ring.

The corruption of Gollum demonstrates the Ring’s power to consume the mind of its bearer. He keeps the Ring for such a long time that he ceases to be himself. His thoughts are consumed by the Ring and his ability to think of anything else vanishes. He becomes the loathsome creature enthralled by the Ring’s dominance. As Frodo and Sam journey with Gollum towards Mordor, we get a glimpse at Gollum’s inner torment: “‘But the Precious holds the promise,’ the voice of Sméagol objected. ‘Then take it,’

said the other, ‘and lets hold it for ourselves! ... ‘We hates Bagginses.’ ‘No, not this Baggins.’ ‘Yes, every Baggins. All peoples that keep the Precious. We must have it!’” (*Two Towers* 267-8). Gollum’s divided mind tortures him. Part of him remains Sméagol, the innocent Hobbit-like man who found the Ring; the other part, completely consumed by the Ring, is wicked and manipulative. Gollum’s madness demonstrates the corrupting effects the Ring can have over people’s minds: free will decreases and the desire to obtain and use the Ring grows ever stronger. Unlike Sauron, Gollum possesses no major power or control over any kingdoms, but the corrosive effect the Ring has over him displays what can happen to someone who uses powerful weapons irresponsibly.

With the understanding that the Ring symbolizes weapons of war, the One Ring’s corruption of Gollum illuminates the downfall of military commanders who irresponsibly misuse deadly weapons. After Sam’s momentary possession of the Ring before rescuing Frodo from the Tower of Cirith Ungol, the Hobbit begins to understand Gollum more clearly: “dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum’s shrivelled mind and body, enslaved to the Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again” (*Return of the King* 246). Gollum’s treachery shows that the use of such weaponry may lead to corruption and that the line between the cruelty of the weapons and the user might disappear. Gollum’s mind is enslaved by the Ring, incapable of breaking free from the clutches of the desire to possess and use it. His treachery at the end of the trilogy demonstrates the terrible risks posed by the temptation of weapons of power.

In *The Two Towers*, Gollum promises to lead Frodo to Mordor and swears on the Ring that he will not harm him in any way. However, Gollum breaks this promise

because his desire for the Ring supersedes all else in his mind. As he leads Frodo and Sam into the caves of the spider Shelob, Gollum schemes: “It may well be, O yes, it may well be that when She throws away the bones and the empty garments, we shall find it, we shall get it, the Precious, a reward for poor Sméagol who brings nice food. And we’ll save the Precious as we promised” (*Two Towers* 376). Gollum’s only concern is reclaiming the Ring. He endures an exhausting journey with the Hobbits just for the chance to recover his Precious. Gollum’s plan fails when Sam fights him off in Shelob’s cave, but while they fight, Shelob poisons Frodo with her stinger, leaving him paralyzed and seemingly lifeless. Because of Gollum’s treachery, the quest to destroy the Ring nearly fails. Only due to Sam’s bravery and determination is Frodo rescued from the Orcs at the Tower of Cirith Ungol and finally able to take the Ring to Mount Doom.

Gollum’s treachery does not end there, however. His final act in the trilogy exemplifies the ultimate danger caused by misusing weapons of power. As Sam and Frodo reach Sammath Naur, the cavern of Mount Doom, Gollum tries to take the Ring one last time: “Suddenly Sam saw Gollum’s long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm’s edge” (*Return of the King* 249). Gollum cannot overcome his desire for the Ring; he breaks his promise, injuring Frodo to reclaim it. The Ring controls Gollum. The desire to recover it dominates his mind and actions. Gollum finally retrieves the Ring, but his victory ends abruptly and terribly: “And with that even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell. Out of the depths

came his last wail *precious*, and he was gone” (*Return of the King* 249). Gollum’s final acts demonstrate the most extreme outcome of the irresponsible use of weapons of war. Gollum was so desperate to reclaim the Ring that he caused his own demise. His destruction along with that of the Ring demonstrates that the reckless use of evil weapons at best may corrupt their users and, at worst, destroy them.

As Gollum’s example shows, to go down the path of using cruel weaponry risks one’s own downfall. But his death also suggests that evil contains the seeds of its own destruction. Sauron is unable to realize that someone could resist the power of the Ring and is caught surprised by the plan to destroy it. Ironically, the Ring was so corruptive and divisive that the people fighting over it caused its destruction. Essentially, the Ring destroys itself. This trilogy thus warns that those who continually use powerful weapons without care for how or why they use them, ultimately risk causing their own demise. Gollum provides an extreme example of the deadly costs of using powerful weapons irresponsibly. However, the Ring’s corruption affects more characters than just Gollum in the trilogy, and these more nuanced demonstrations of the Ring’s power clarify Tolkien’s views on the temptation and manipulation of weapons that promise strength and power.

### **Bilbo Baggins and the Ring’s Control of his Mind**

Bilbo Baggins provides a brief but poignant example of the Ring’s ability to creep into its bearer’s mind and take control. Bilbo only features as a minor character in *The Lord of the Rings*, but his farewell conversation with Gandalf illuminates the extent that the Ring has corrupted his mind. Bilbo possesses the Ring for sixty years after stumbling across it in Gollum’s cave under the Misty Mountains during the events of

*The Hobbit*. In that time, the Ring began to take more and more of a hold over Bilbo. In the opening chapter of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Bilbo pulls a trick on his one-hundred-eleventh birthday, giving a speech at his birthday party in front of most of the Shire during which he announces he is leaving. Then he uses the Ring to disappear in front of all of them. Bilbo returns to his home at Bag End to collect his bags and leave for Rivendell. Before he leaves, however, Bilbo has a conversation with Gandalf that displays the corruption of the Ring on Bilbo's heart and mind.

During this conversation, Gandalf reminds Bilbo to leave the Ring behind for Frodo to take care of, which was part of Bilbo's plan for leaving the Shire. However, when the moment comes for Bilbo to let go of the Ring, the Hobbit says, "Well yes—and no. Now it comes to it, I don't like parting with it at all, I may say. And I don't really see why I should' [...] a curious change came over his voice. It was sharp with suspicion and annoyance" (*Fellowship* 35). This passage shows the detrimental effect the Ring has on Bilbo. He displays a feeling of possessiveness over the object, refusing to give it to anyone else, even his own dear cousin-turned-adopted-son Frodo.

Furthermore, Bilbo feels that the Ring belongs to him, just like Gollum does. This feeling of ownership shows the danger of powerful items like the Ring. Bilbo does not understand the object he possesses, not even remotely. The party trick of disappearing in front of the public shows that Bilbo thinks he can use the Ring whenever he wants without risk. Combined with this feeling of ownership, Bilbo's attitude toward the Ring demonstrates the intoxicating power of such weaponry. Bilbo believes he has only used the Ring for a limited purpose, to disappear. But the Ring's corrupting magic works in many other ways he cannot fully understand.

The Ring has a profound overpowering effect on Bilbo, just as it does over Gollum. Later in the same conversation, Gandalf tells Bilbo he does not need the Ring anymore. This remark angers the Hobbit, “Bilbo flushed, and there was an angry light in his eyes. His kindly face grew hard. ‘Why not?’ he cried. ‘And what business is it of yours, anyway, to know what I do with my own things? It is my own. I found it. It came to me’” (*Fellowship* 35). This passage displays Bilbo’s feeling of ownership over the Ring. The kindly Hobbit lashes out at Gandalf and this surprising change provides a feeling of alarm and concern in readers. He behaves more like Gollum than a Hobbit because the Ring exerts its corrupting power over his mind. Bilbo believes the Ring belongs to him because he has no understanding of where the Ring comes from. This misunderstanding represents a danger of weapons of war. Without understanding the risks and drawbacks of using such weaponry, their wielders may use those weapons recklessly.

Bilbo’s Gollum-like behavior in response to Gandalf shows the corruption of the Ring on his mind. In Bilbo’s final moments at Bag End, Gandalf urges him one last time to leave the Ring behind and Bilbo lashes out, “‘But you won’t get it. I won’t give my precious away, I tell you.’ His hand strayed to the hilt of his small sword” (*Fellowship* 36). In this passage, Bilbo seems the most like Gollum. He calls the Ring his “precious,” a term that Gollum always uses when speaking of the Ring. He nearly attacks Gandalf, his longtime friend and companion, because the Ring has corrupted his mind, making Bilbo forget what matters to him. The desire to possess and use the Ring has enormous manipulative power on Bilbo, and like Gollum, he struggles to let go of his desire for the Ring. The Ring changes and distorts the person who uses it. It makes

the user forget their values, their friends, and their other wants and desires. These qualities demonstrate that the Ring represents the dangers weapons of war pose to their users: their power and potential effectiveness may overcome their users' reasonability and rationality.

Tolkien's portrayal of the Ring reveals that to use dangerous weapons of war, those who wield them must have a full and responsible understanding of their power and risks, otherwise such use may have drastic and unintended consequences. Tolkien witnessed first-hand the naïve misuse of powerful weaponry in World War I during the attack on the Somme. The British strategy relied on launching constant artillery strikes during the assault, but the bombardments failed to break the German line as intended. Fussell provides the statistics of the shelling: "[British General] Haig bombarded the enemy trenches for a full week, firing a million and a half shells from 1537 guns" (*The Great War and Modern Memory* 13). Despite the immense magnitude of this shelling, the strategy was ineffective, and as Fussell describes, resulted in a disastrous assault: "Out of the 110,000 who attacked, 60,000 were killed or wounded on this one day, the record so far. Over 20,000 lay dead between the lines, and it was days before the wounded in No Man's Land stopped crying out" (13). The British commanders used their powerful artillery to try to break the German defenses but their reliance on these weapons backfired, resulting in massive British casualties. Their naïve faith in their weapons resulted in an unimaginative battle plan and unpredicted, horrible consequences.

Bilbo serves as an individual exemplar of such unintended and detrimental consequences of using powerful weapons without fully understanding them. The

Hobbit's use of the Ring results in tremendous personal turmoil for him and his lack of understanding of the Ring's power and its costs contributes to this pain. He pays for this ignorance with the corruption of his mind and the strain on his body. Similarly, the British commanders planning the assault on the Somme foolishly believed that their artillery would be powerful enough to overwhelm the Germans. This naïve use of weaponry resulted in massive casualties for the British with little military achievement to show for it. The artillery used at the Somme serves as an example of a weapon of war the Ring can represent. Reliance on any deadly weapon's pure power alone, without an understanding of the full implications of its use, may result in serious, even deadly consequences for the user.

### **The Transformation of Frodo Through His Possession of the Ring**

While both Gollum and Bilbo represent the power the One Ring has to corrupt and manipulate its bearer, neither one appears in the trilogy long enough to fully portray the descent from goodness into corruption that the Ring causes. Gollum and Bilbo begin the trilogy having already spent significant time in possession of the Ring and thus the reader does not experience their declines under the Ring's power. Frodo Baggins, however, exemplifies the entire transformation of a person from receiving the Ring to the end of his possession. Through this experience, we see the full and terrible power of the Ring's corruption of the mind.

Frodo begins the story characterized as kind, cheerful, thoughtful, and dutiful. He displays strong care for his friends and his home and while he has moments of innocence, Frodo demonstrates a clear understanding that the task of taking the Ring to Mordor is urgent and perilous. For the most part, Frodo follows Gandalf's instructions

to avoid using the Ring, but even he succumbs to the temptation and uses the Ring in moments where he feels helpless. However, the Ring's corrupting effects on Frodo do not begin to show until *The Two Towers*, when he and Sam approach Mordor. As the Hobbits struggle through the Dead Marshes, Tolkien writes, "Frodo seemed to be weary, weary to the point of exhaustion. He said nothing, indeed he hardly spoke at all; and he did not complain, but he walked like one who carries a load, the weight of which is ever increasing" (*Two Towers* 264). This passage, written from the perspective of Samwise Gamgee, displays the physical toil of the Ring on its bearer. The Ring is a burden, mental and physical, and as Frodo progresses, the burden grows only heavier. The physical strain on Frodo resembles how Bilbo feels before he leaves the Shire. However, this physical struggle is just the beginning of the Ring's corruption of Frodo.

As Frodo enters Mordor, the Ring's grip strengthens, and his mind gives in to its terrible power. When Sam saves Frodo from the Tower of Cirith Ungol, he offers to help Frodo carry the Ring the rest of the way. In a moment similar to Bilbo's aggression towards Gandalf, Frodo yells at his companion: "'No, no!' cried Frodo, snatching the Ring and chain from Sam's hands. 'No you won't, you thief!' He panted, staring at Sam with eyes wide with fear and enmity" (*Return of the King* 208). The Ring has corrupted Frodo's mind to a point where he momentarily feels hostility towards his dear and trusted friend Sam. Once again, the Ring demonstrates its corruptive power to turn friend against friend. Sam has been Frodo's steadfast companion throughout the entire journey, but the Ring has power to make Frodo forget who his friends are. Frodo demonstrates incredible resilience and carries on through Mordor despite the burden of the Ring. He knows that the Ring is slowly taking over his mind and that he is

powerless to prevent it. As they near Mount Doom, Frodo tells Sam, “And the Ring is so heavy, Sam. And I begin to see it in my mind all the time, like a great wheel of fire” (*Return of the King* 217). Frodo has begun to obsess over the Ring and his thoughts are consumed by its presence. He is the most responsible user of the Ring in the trilogy but even he cannot resist its temptation and corruption.

Frodo’s surrender to the Ring demonstrates that even if one understands the cruel power of such dangerous weapons, succumbing to their use may still result in corruption. Frodo’s final act while in possession of the Ring cements this notion, as he refuses to destroy the Ring when he reaches Mount Doom. Standing at the precipice inside the mountain, needing only to drop the Ring into the fire to destroy it and complete his quest, Frodo resists: “‘I have come,’ he said. ‘But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!’ And suddenly, as he set it on his finger, he vanished from Sam’s sight” (*Return of the King* 248). Even Frodo, the determined, duty-bound, and courageous Hobbit, cannot resist the Ring’s terrible power. Had Gollum not taken the Ring for himself, Frodo would have been completely consumed by it. Despite knowing the danger of using the Ring, Frodo still puts it on multiple times during his quest. Even this slight usage begins his corruption. Frodo’s surrender to the Ring’s power shows the danger of powerful weaponry: the temptation to use such items risks overwhelming reason.

Together, these representations of Gollum, Bilbo, and Frodo show the dangerous potential that the use of powerful weapons may have on their users. With the understanding that these examples illustrate the risks of using powerful weapons, we can understand that this trilogy demonstrates the necessity of responsible use of

weaponry. People who use weapons irresponsibly turn into beings like Gollum, consumed by the power of the weapon. Bilbo presents a portrayal of someone who uses weapons they do not adequately understand. Lastly, Frodo's failure demonstrates that even the most virtuous, kind, and well-meaning people may be corrupted by using these weapons, even when they do understand the risks of using them. However, *The Lord of the Rings* does not present a pacifist agenda. As I argued in previous chapters, the narrative portrays circumstances in which war can be justified, and the reality of war is that weapons must be used. Thus, the Ring and the portrayal of its use in the trilogy also illuminate Tolkien's view of the criteria under which powerful weaponry can be used.

### **Using the Ring and Responsible Use of Weaponry**

The detrimental effects of the Ring on its bearers presented in *The Lord of the Rings*, I have argued, demonstrate the corruptive power of such an evil and destructive weapon. The wise people of Middle-earth know of this terrible power and throughout the trilogy there are warnings against using the Ring. Gandalf, Elrond, and Galadriel, three of the wisest and powerful characters in the trilogy, all counsel against ever using the Ring. They know that to use the Ring even once allows its corruption to spread. However, in the context of weapons of war, the Ring is an extreme example, epitomizing the most dangerous and terrible of all weapons. So, while the Ring can be understood to represent any destructive weapon of war, this symbolism does not suggest that weaponry should not be used at all. Tolkien understands that in war weapons are necessary. By analyzing the discourse surrounding the Ring and the way the characters in the trilogy use it, I argue in this section that *The Lord of the Rings* shows that

powerful weapons may be used, but only when absolutely necessary, and only with a complete understanding of their capability and consequences.

To understand how the narrative presents the Ring and its proper use, we need to first understand how the wisest inhabitants of Middle-earth view the Ring. At the Council of Elrond, Boromir asks why they cannot just use the Ring to overthrow Sauron. Elrond responds:

“We cannot use the Ruling Ring. That we now know too well. It belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil. Its strength, Boromir, is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart.” (*Fellowship* 300)

Elrond reveals that the Ring is too powerful to be used except by the most powerful of beings. Nonetheless, Elrond counsels against even those powerful enough wielding it due to the Ring’s corruptive power. He alludes to one of the most dangerous powers of the Ring: the more powerful the bearer is, the stronger the Ring’s corruption becomes. If someone powerful enough to control the Ring uses it, they risk becoming the new Dark Lord.

Gandalf echoes this sentiment when he tells Frodo of the Ring and its history before Frodo leaves the Shire. Frodo offers the Ring to Gandalf thinking that it will be safe with the Wizard. Gandalf refuses: ““With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly.’ His eyes flashed and his face was lit as by a fire within. ‘Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord’” (*Fellowship* 67). Gandalf’s refusal highlights the same danger that Elrond warns of. Both Gandalf and Elrond know that the Ring is too powerful and corrupting to be used for good, it is a weapon that only serves evil.

This discourse surrounding the Ring’s ability to turn even the best intentions into evil deeds also applies to weapons of modern warfare. Sir Douglas Haig, the British commander in charge of planning the Somme assault, exemplifies a leader whose irresponsible use of artillery had terrible consequences. Describing Haig, Fussell writes, “He was stubborn, self-righteous, inflexible, intolerant—especially of the French—and quite humorless ... Bullheaded as he was, he was the perfect commander for an enterprise committed to endless abortive assaulting” (*Great War and Modern Memory* 12). These qualities show that Haig was an irresponsible commander, incapable of understanding the potential consequences of his strategies and reckless in his use of soldiers. A commander who is ideal for “endless abortive assaulting” certainly has little to no care for the lives of his troops. Haig’s recklessness shows through his naïve reliance on artillery during the Somme, a battle plan I discussed previously, that resulted in 60,000 British casualties (Fussell 13). Despite his intentions, Haig’s strategy had unexpected and devastating consequences. This blunder resonates with the warning Gandalf and Elrond give regarding the use of the Ring. Such weapons have the potential to give great power to their wielders, but they should not be used, even with good intentions, without carefully considering the risks of their use. Haig did not adequately consider the risks of heavy artillery bombardments and lost 60,000 men because of it.

Haig’s next major assault, at the Battle of Passchendaele, provides another example of the reliance on powerful weaponry going horribly wrong. Fussell describes the plans for the attack: “this assault, beginning on July 31, was aimed, it was said, at the German submarine bases on the Belgian coast. This time the artillery was relied on to prepare the ground for the attack, and with a vengeance: over ten days four million

shells were fired” (17). Once again, Haig relied on heavy weaponry expecting its firepower to achieve victory. He succumbed to the temptation of using powerful weapons without fully understanding what the effects of those weapons would be. As Fussell notes, the artillery strikes backfired disastrously:

The bombardment churned up the ground; rain fell and turned the dirt to mud. In the mud the British assaulted until the attack finally attenuated three and a half months later. Price: 370,000 British dead and wounded and sick and frozen to death. Thousands literally drowned in the mud. It was a reprise of the Somme but worse. (17)

The artillery strikes did not break up the German lines but instead resulted in battlefield conditions that inhibited the British assault which eventually ended in failure. Haig’s continual reliance on powerful weapons resulted in a devastated landscape and hundreds of thousands of British casualties. As I argued in the previous two chapters, *The Lord of the Rings* presents the importance of protecting human life and natural landscapes and highlights those factors as necessary for justifying war. At the Somme and Passchendaele, Haig’s reliance on heavy weaponry resulted in a major loss of human life and vast devastation to the land in France and Belgium. Haig, with his single-minded over-reliance on heavy weapons, evokes the Dark Lord Sauron: a commander who orders his troops into an assault bullheadedly and without concern for casualties.

The parallels between Douglas Haig and Sauron, as well as other commanders during World War I whose orders disregarded the safety of their troops, reveal a potential inspiration for the necessity of responsible use of weaponry in *The Lord of the Rings*. British soldiers during World War I often despised their commanders, feeling that their leaders treated them like cannon fodder. Tolkien’s time as a signaling officer

during the Great War was spent among such common troops, suffering through the disastrous Somme offensive (Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* 83). Siegfried Sassoon evokes the opinion of these soldiers in his poem “The General,” which I have discussed previously: “And we’re cursing his staff for incompetent swine / [...] But he did for them both by his plan of attack” (*War Poems* 71). The blunt and direct contempt expressed in this poem demonstrates the utter hatred such soldiers felt for their commanders. Sassoon highlights how the troops were treated as expendable resources and his attitude towards this “General” characterizes the opinions of many British troops throughout the war.

Tolkien’s involvement in these circumstances illuminates the attitude towards military leaders and the nuanced depiction of powerful weaponry in *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien witnessed the catastrophic strategy of the Somme where the over-reliance on artillery and a reckless assault cost thousands of lives. During this offensive, he may also have experienced—and shared—the resentment of soldiers for commanders who avoided the front and ordered troops into slaughter. Tolkien evokes this attitude through his portrayal of contemptible leaders who avoid fighting in the trilogy. His experience in the Great War also manifests in his nuanced depiction of powerful weaponry. Tolkien observed the potential devastating consequences of military leaders using powerful weapons they did not fully understand. But he also understands that in war weapons must be used, so he constructs a narrative that presents a nuanced portrayal of the wielding of the most powerful weapon, the One Ring.

Given the Ring’s terrible and corrupting power, we might conclude that Tolkien’s trilogy shows that powerful weapons should never be used. But that is not

how *The Lord of the Rings* portrays the use of weaponry. Both Frodo and Sam use the Ring out of necessity and without the Ring's powers of invisibility, the quest certainly would have failed. Frodo uses the Ring to escape the Uruk-hai at the end of *Fellowship of the Ring*, and Sam wears the Ring to hide from the Orcs in Mordor after Frodo is poisoned by Shelob. Frodo uses the Ring several other times in the narrative but not all of those uses help him. His foolish use of the Ring in Bree results in the Nazgûl almost catching them, and his decision to put the Ring on at Weathertop leads to the Witch-King stabbing him. These moments help enforce Tolkien's vision that using powerful weapons may have unintended and destructive consequences. So, while the wise people of Middle-earth counsel Frodo not to use the Ring, he does, and Sam does, and in the end, the Ring's power helps the Hobbits succeed in destroying it. These moments demonstrate that under some circumstances even the most powerful and dangerous weapons must be used.

Overall, *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates the importance of knowing when and how to use deadly weapons. One of the ways that the narrative justifies Frodo's use of the Ring is the Hobbit's understanding of the Ring's power. Frodo fears the Ring; he listens to his advisors and knows that the Ring is perilous to use. Due to this knowledge, he uses the Ring cautiously. The moments where Frodo puts on the Ring occur when he has no other choice. Despite this cautious use, however, Frodo still succumbs to the power of the Ring by the end of the story. As he and Sam struggle through Mordor, Frodo says, "It is too late now, Sam dear. You can't help me in that way again. I am almost in its power now" (*Return of the King* 238). Frodo rejects Sam's offer to help carry the Ring, knowing that the Ring's spell controls his mind too much to let it go. In

this passage, Frodo displays an understanding of the Ring's relentless power and its effect on him. Despite his awareness of the Ring's power, however, Frodo's mind is still consumed by the Ring; it overpowers the Hobbit's will when they reach the fires of Mount Doom. Frodo's surrender to the Ring demonstrates that even fully understanding the risks of using powerful weapons may not be enough to resist their corrupting and destructive influence and effects.

Even though Frodo is the primary user of the Ring in the trilogy, Sam demonstrates the most responsible use of it. While Frodo knows the danger the Ring poses and is cautious in its use, he still recklessly wears it on occasion. Frodo's experience shows that justifiable use of powerful weapons requires more than just an understanding of their power. Such weapons can only be used when completely necessary. Sam's usage of the Ring represents such responsible use of powerful weapons. Sam puts the Ring on twice, the first time to escape the Orcs outside of Shelob's cave, the second time to sneak towards the entrance of the Tower of Cirith Ungol to rescue Frodo. Both times Sam cannot think of any other option and succumbs to the Ring's temptation. However, he also demonstrates restraint and resists the Ring. As the loyal Hobbit approaches Cirith Ungol, he thinks of using the Ring again to rescue Frodo. Narrating from Sam's point of view, Tolkien writes, "He felt that he had from now on only two choices: to forbear the Ring, though it would torment him; or to claim it, and challenge the Power that sat in its dark hold beyond the valley of shadows. Already the Ring tempted him, gnawing at his will and reason" (*Return of the King* 195). Sam displays a complex understanding of the Ring and its manipulative power. Just from wearing the Ring twice Sam already feels the effect of its temptation and

corruption. He knows that merely possessing the Ring troubles his mind and while he has used it for necessity, he knows that even such use is dangerous.

Sam's resistance of the Ring's temptation demonstrates a responsible use of powerful weaponry as he refrains from wearing it even when invisibility would make his task easier. As he makes his decision, Sam says to himself, "Well, all I can say is: things look as hopeless as a frost in spring. Just when being invisible would really be useful; I can't use the Ring!" (*Return of the King* 196). Sam recognizes his hopeless situation; however, his good sense and reason win over the temptation of the Ring. Sam knows the Ring is useful, but not necessary. That distinction of useful rather than necessary separates responsible use of powerful weapons from the irresponsible. Understanding when weapons are necessary justifies using items of such power. Sam makes the correct choice and rescues Frodo from the Tower without the help of the Ring, "deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden" (*Return of the King* 196). Ultimately, it is Sam's humility and common sense that protects him from the Ring. He can resist the Ring's temptation because he knows he is too small to truly wield its power. Sam says to himself, "He'd spot me pretty quick, if I put the Ring on now, in Mordor" (*Return of the King* 196). In recognizing the consequences of putting the Ring on in Mordor, Sam shows his understanding of the Ring's power and the risks of its use. This demonstration of restraint and understanding highlights the most responsible use of the Ring in the trilogy.

In concluding this chapter, I return to the discussion of the Ring's symbolic applicability to atomic bombs and lesser destructive weapons of war. Croft argues that

the presentation of the Ring identifies the ethical dilemma raised by the existence of such devastating weapons: the ability to annihilate the enemy but becoming morally despicable in doing so. She identifies Tolkien's message regarding this problem: "Tolkien's answer to these overturned imperatives is to destroy the Ring—to get rid of the temptation to use a device that negates personal heroism so utterly. But it is not so easy to turn back the clock and eliminate atomic weapons from the arsenals of the world" (*War and the Works* 104). Certainly, in an ideal world, Tolkien would like the Ring, and all the destructive weapons it symbolizes, to be destroyed. But Tolkien understands that these powerful weapons are a reality of modern war. Thus the trilogy does not, as Croft suggests, finally dramatize that such weapons must be destroyed. Tolkien constructs a narrative where the most powerful of all weapons is used responsibly. Samwise Gamgee exemplifies a responsible user of the Ring, demonstrating an understanding of the risks of its use and exercising restraint when he feels the temptation to use it. This portrayal shows that Tolkien's message is not so much to destroy deadly weapons like the Ring; instead, the trilogy shows that while weapons of such power exist, they must be used responsibly, and, like Sam's use of the Ring, only when absolutely necessary.

The fact that both Sam and Frodo use the Ring out of necessity shows that the use of powerful weapons can be justified in certain situations. However, their uses of the Ring also demonstrate that when weapons such as the Ring are used, their wielders must have as complete an understanding of the weapon's capability as possible, as well as having given full consideration to the costs of using such a weapon. Furthermore, these weapons of incredible power must only be relied on when absolutely necessary

and used with serious care for what the outcomes of such use will be. Overall, the nuanced treatment Tolkien gives to the Ring, showing both its terrible risks and its periodic necessity, not only demonstrates the danger of powerful weapons, but also provides a justification for the employing of weapons of equal capability through the criteria of understanding, forbearance, and necessity.

## Conclusion

In *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien draws on his World War I experience, developing a commentary on the justifications for war and the ways wars should be fought. Through the four adventurous Hobbits, Tolkien evokes the common British soldiers of the First World War, recalling their experience through the Hobbits' trauma, determination, and friendship. This realism establishes *The Lord of the Rings* as a war story that examines the effects of war on individuals and the world. Delving into the realm of fantasy, Tolkien explores themes of good and evil, using the clarity the genre allows for such a distinction to depict a war where one side is morally good and the other entirely immoral. The opposing ways that the protagonists and Sauron conduct war demonstrate how wars should and should not be fought. The aspects of life that the heroes fight to protect exemplify what all wars must defend. The trilogy reveals that for a war to be justifiable, it must defend innocent and peaceful people and protect beautiful natural spaces from destruction. Moreover, a just war must be fought with a responsible use of powerful weaponry in which military leaders understand the power and risks of such weapons and refrain from using them unless absolutely necessary.

*The Lord of the Rings* portrays the significance of people and innocent and peaceful life. The story begins in the Shire, a place that exemplifies all the aspects of the world that just wars must protect. Hobbits are kind, generous, and peaceful, and the Shire is a beautiful and green natural space. Certainly, one of the most profound ways that Tolkien demonstrates the profound effects of war is through the transformation of

the Hobbits and the Shire. Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin all return immeasurably changed by their experiences and find returning home more difficult than expected.

The Shire does not remain untouched by war either, the chapter “The Scouring of the Shire” shows that soldiers cannot return home after war and live happily ever after. The Shire will never be the same as before the War of the Ring; this reality manifests in the Elven tree Sam plants in Hobbiton: “It was indeed a *mallorn*, and it was the wonder of the neighbourhood. 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” (*Return of the King* 339). This Elven tree is magnificent and beautiful, but it is not native to the Shire. The *mallorn* inspires people from across Middle-earth to come see it and thus disrupts the isolation and unobtrusiveness that had once made the Shire special. The Shire is not necessarily worse than it was before, but it has changed considerably. Such is the outcome of war.

However, the focus on the Shire also highlights the aspects of life worth celebrating and defending: innocent people and beautiful nature. By concluding with the restoration of the Shire and a return to simple life, the trilogy celebrates the survival of good people through a harsh war and memorializes what the War of the Ring defended. The emphasis on hobbits confirms that war must defend good, innocent, people. Sam’s restoration of the Shire also reaffirms the significance of natural spaces. However, this restoration only provides relief for some. The Ring-bearers, Frodo and Bilbo, serve as reminders of the indelible effects of war. The Ring-bearers cannot find peace and relief in the Shire, despite its pleasantness. They must travel across the sea to the magical land of Valinor, the most beautiful place in the world. Only there can the Ring-bearers find

relief and restoration for their traumatic experiences. Although the war is over, its consequences still remain; Middle-earth and its people have changed dramatically since the war began.

Ultimately, this intertwining of life and war cements the trilogy's critical commentary on war. *The Lord of the Rings* memorializes the First World War and war experience, creating a story that demonstrates the justifications for war and the ways it should be fought. Rather than writing a memoir, however, Tolkien turns to fantasy, weaving his experiences into the world of Middle-earth. As his biographers Humphrey Carpenter, John Garth, and Tom Shippey have all shown, Tolkien's creation of Middle-earth stemmed in part from his philological interests and his love of Anglo-Saxon and Norse legends. *The Lord of the Rings* did not originate as a World War I story, but as Tolkien depicted the War of the Ring and the experiences of his characters, his own war experience influenced that depiction.

In this portrayal, Tolkien does not glorify violence or present heroic figures in combat. Instead, *The Lord of the Rings* celebrates the protection of friends and innocent people, and the determination of dutiful common folk to succeed against all odds. Tolkien's heroes love people and nature and their actions emphasize that just war defends those things. But while *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates that war can be justified to defeat a great evil, it must be fought with a responsible use of weaponry and to minimize the impacts on the innocent and nature. Gandalf's sentiment during the chapter "The Last Debate," when the decision is made to assail the Black Gate, encapsulates the trilogy's critique on conducting war:

“Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till” (*Return of the King* 171).

## Glossary

**The Anduin River:** The great river of Middle-earth. The Anduin runs from the north edge of the continent down to the southern end where it meets the sea. The Anduin marks the eastern borders of both Rohan and Gondor, flows past the woods of Lothlórien, and also provides a natural line of defense against Sauron's armies.

**Aragorn:** One of the protagonists of *The Lord of the Rings*. He is one of Frodo's closest companions and the heir to the throne of the mightiest kingdom of men: Gondor.

**Bag End:** Bilbo and Frodo's Hobbit-hole home in the Shire. It is a comfortable and pleasant house built into the hillside.

**Balrog:** A powerful demon creature created by the ancient Dark Lord Morgoth. They can envelop themselves in fire, darkness, and shadow, and often wield flaming swords and fiery whips. Most of the Balrogs were destroyed in the First Age of Middle-earth during a war with the Elves. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the Fellowship must face the Balrog called Durin's Bane in Moria. Gandalf defeats it but falls into a black abyss.

**The Battle of the Black Gate:** A brief battle after the siege of Gondor where the remaining forces of Gondor and Rohan attack the Black Gate at the entrance to Mordor. They distract Sauron and his Orc armies so Frodo and Sam can cross Mordor and destroy the Ring without detection. Just as defeat to Sauron's army seems certain, the Ring is destroyed and Mordor collapses into ruin.

**The Battle of the Bywater:** The final battle depicted in the trilogy. Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin inspire the Shire Hobbits to rebel against the evil southern men who have taken control of their homeland. The battle features the only occasion where Hobbits other than Frodo's companions commit violence in the trilogy. The Hobbits win the Battle and rid the Shire of the southerners.

**The Battle of Dagorlad:** The great battle fought at the end of the Second Age of Middle-earth between an alliance of Elves and Men the evil Orc forces of Sauron. During the battle, the One Ring is cut from Sauron's hand by Isildur, the son of the King of Gondor, and Sauron is defeated.

**Bilbo Baggins:** The main protagonist of Tolkien's first novel *The Hobbit*. Bilbo plays a supporting role in *The Lord of the Rings*, initiating the events of the story by leaving the Shire on his 111<sup>th</sup> birthday and giving the Ring to Frodo.

**Bree:** A small town east of the Shire and the westernmost settlement of Men in Middle-earth during the War of the Ring. The four Hobbits spend a night at the Inn of the Prancing Pony in Bree where they meet Aragorn and learn the origin of the Nazgûl.

**The Council of Elrond:** The gathering of a small group of Elves, Men, Dwarves, and Hobbits in Rivendell during which Frodo decides to take the Ring to Mordor and the Fellowship of the Ring is formed to assist him.

**The Dead Marshes:** The swamps to the northwest of Mordor where many of the fallen soldiers from the Battle of Dagorlad were buried. Frodo and Sam cross these marshes on their journey to Mordor, discovering the horrifying pools of filth and corpses.

**Denethor:** The Steward of Gondor charged with ruling the kingdom until Isildur's heir claims the throne. Denethor is the father of Boromir and Faramir, two important supporting characters in the trilogy. He succumbs to the influence of Sauron from using a magic seeing stone called a Palantir. He burns himself alive during the Siege of Gondor.

**Dwarves:** One of the ancient races of Middle-earth, Dwarves are shorter than Men and Elves, but stouter and heartier. They dwell under the mountains of Middle-earth and delight in mining ores and jewels. They are skilled craftsmen and fierce warriors.

**Elendil:** The first High King of Gondor who led the army of Men in the Last Alliance during the first war to defeat Sauron. He was killed dueling Sauron during the Battle of Dagorlad and his famous sword Narsil was broken. His son Isildur uses the shards of Narsil to cut the Ring from Sauron's hand.

**Elrond:** One of the Elven rulers in Middle-earth. Elrond is the Lord of Rivendell, heals Frodo's wound from the Nazgûl, and organizes the Council of Elrond and the Fellowship of the Ring. His daughter Arwen marries Aragorn at the end of the trilogy.

**Elves:** The most ancient race in Middle-earth, the Elves were the first race created by the gods in Tolkien's legendarium. They have populated Middle-earth since the First Age and have survived wars against both the original Dark Lord Morgoth and his successor Sauron. The Elves do not age and are immune to sickness, but they can die in battle. They are the fairest and wisest race in Middle-earth.

**Éomer:** The nephew of the King of Rohan, Éomer is a strong leader and a skilled warrior. He is brave and loyal and helps lead his people to victory at the Battle of Helm's Deep and the Siege of Gondor. After the death of King Théoden, Éomer becomes the new King of Rohan.

**Éowen:** The younger sister of Éomer and niece of Théoden, King of Rohan, Éowen is a proud and strong woman. A capable warrior, she refuses to be left behind and secretly joins the Riders of Rohan in the Siege of Gondor. She plays a pivotal role in the battle, helping to kill the Witch-King of Angmar. She marries Faramir at the end of the trilogy and becomes the Lady of Ithilien.

**Ents:** An ancient race of Middle-earth charged with protecting the forests and trees. They are tree-like creatures, wise, and excessively patient. The Ents help defeat

Saruman by attacking Isengard during the Battle of Helm's Deep and trapping the wizard in his tower. The Ents also restore the natural beauty of Isengard and its surrounding area after the conclusion of the War of the Ring.

**Erkenbrand:** The lord of the western region of Rohan, Erkenbrand leads the essential Rohirrim reinforcements that arrive at Helm's Deep, helping to turn the tide of the battle.

**The Eye of Sauron:** The magic eye on top of Sauron's tower of Barad-dûr that the Dark Lord uses to surveil Middle-earth. Sauron's spirit can no longer take physical form, so he uses the Eye to observe and spy on Middle-earth and search for the Ring. The Eye also appears on the armor and banners of Sauron's army.

**Fangorn Forest:** The mysterious forest in the northwest of Rohan that is home to the Ents. Merry and Pippin take refuge there when they escape from Saruman's Uruk-hai.

**Faramir:** The younger son of Denethor, Steward of Gondor, Faramir leads a group of men protecting Ithilien and the borders of Gondor. He discovers Sam and Frodo in Ithilien during *The Two Towers* and after briefly holding them prisoner, counsels the Hobbits before releasing them to continue their journey. Faramir is wise and kind, resists the temptation to take the Ring for himself, and dutifully serves Gondor. He is gravely wounded before the Siege of Gondor but survives, marrying Éowen of Rohan after the war ends.

**The Fellowship of the Ring:** The nine companions who set out from Rivendell planning to enter Mordor and destroy the Ring. The company consists of Frodo, his guardians Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, and Boromir, and his Hobbit friends Sam, Merry, and Pippin.

**Frodo Baggins:** The protagonist of *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo is a kind, courageous, and dutiful Hobbit who inherits the Ring from his uncle Bilbo. Frodo bears the Ring to Rivendell where he decides to continue his quest. He sneaks into Mordor and brings the Ring to Mount Doom, and although he succumbs to its power and cannot destroy the Ring himself, Frodo is the hero of the story.

**Galadriel:** The Lady of Lothlórien and one of the greatest Elven rulers in Middle-earth, Galadriel is fair, wise, and powerful. She provides the Fellowship shelter after they escape Moria and encourages Frodo with hope and counsel. She also gives each member of the Fellowship a gift as they depart Lothlórien.

**Gandalf:** A powerful and kind wizard who helps Frodo begin his quest and is a constant companion and advisor. He is instrumental in helping defeat the forces of Sauron during the War of the Ring.

**Gollum:** A small Hobbit-like creature who lived five-hundred years before the story of *The Lord of the Rings*. He murders his friend Déagol to obtain possession of the Ring.

The Ring extends Gollum's life, corrupting and tormenting his mind. He becomes the loathsome creature named *Gollum* for the gurgling sound he makes while coughing and spluttering.

**Gondor:** The last of the great kingdoms of Men. The kingdom has been ruled by stewards since the line of kings has been absent for hundreds of years. Gondor defends the lands of Middle-earth from the forces of Sauron

**Helm's Deep:** A fortress stronghold nestled in the mountains of southwestern Rohan and the site of the first major battle in the trilogy. The Rohirrim, with help from members of the Fellowship, defend the fortress from Saruman's Uruk-hai, eventually defeating the wizard's Orc army.

**Hobbit:** Small, human-like people who live in an isolated region in the northwest of Middle-earth and play the most significant role in *The Lord of the Rings*. They are peaceful and unobtrusive in nature, but also courageous, determined, and stalwart when needed.

***The Hobbit:*** Tolkien's first novel about Middle-earth. The narrative follows Bilbo Baggins as he joins twelve Dwarves on a quest to recover the Dwarven Kingdom of Erebor underneath the Lonely Mountain. Together, they defeat the dragon Smaug and reclaim the Dwarves' homeland. Along the way, Bilbo stumbles across the Ring, taking it for himself without any knowledge of its power. Bilbo returns to the Shire with the Ring, setting up the events of *The Lord of the Rings*.

**Isengard:** A fortress built by the men of Gondor that becomes the home of the wizard Saruman. A place of natural beauty, Isengard's natural environment is ripped apart when Saruman decides to use the natural resources to raise an Orc army.

**Isildur:** The son of the first High King of Gondor Elendil, Isildur cuts the Ring from Sauron's hand during the Battle of Dagorlad, defeating the Dark Lord. However, Isildur keeps the Ring for himself, allowing Sauron's spirit to survive. Isildur is later ambushed and killed by a party of Orcs at the Gladden Fields and the Ring falls into the Anduin River.

**Ithilien:** A once beautiful and prosperous region east of the Anduin River between Minas Tirith and Mordor. Ithilien was formerly the realm of Isildur but was invaded and devastated by Orcs during Sauron's first war for dominion over Middle-earth. After the War of the Ring, Aragorn appoints Faramir as Lord of Ithilien and the region is restored to its former beauty.

**The Last Alliance of Elves and Men:** The alliance of the armies of Gondor led by Elendil and the Elves led by Gil-Galad. This alliance fought and defeated Sauron at the Battle of Dagorlad, ending the Dark Lord's attempt to conquer Middle-earth in the Second Age.

**Lothlórien:** The Elven forest realm east of the Misty Mountains but west of the Anduin River, Lothlórien is known for its wondrous natural beauty. During the Third Age of Middle-earth, the Elves of Lórien seldom leave their borders and the kingdoms of Men begin to distrust the area. The Fellowship pass through Lothlórien after leaving Moria finding peace and relief there for a short time.

**Meriadoc Brandybuck:** One of Frodo's best friends and Hobbit companions, Meriadoc, commonly called Merry, is a friendly, intelligent, and caring Hobbit. He is one of the nine members of the Fellowship of the Ring. He is kidnapped, along with his friend Pippin, by Saruman's Uruk-hai, but manages to escape a few days later when those same Uruk-hai are ambushed by the Riders of Rohan. Merry helps inspire the Ents to attack Isengard and joins the Rohirrim riding to Gondor's aid in the Siege of Gondor. He also helps Éowen kill the Witch-King of Angmar.

**Middle-earth:** The setting of *The Lord of the Rings*. Middle-earth is a fictitious continent in a medieval time-period where magic and fantastical creatures exist.

**Minas Morgul:** Formerly a city-fortress of Gondor and capitol of Ithilien known as Minas Ithil, Minas Morgul was captured by Sauron's forces during the Second Age and became the domain of the Nazgûl.

**Minas Tirith:** The capitol of Gondor known as the White City. Minas Tirith is a magnificent and impregnable fortress built into the White Mountains of Gondor.

**Mordor:** The dominion of the Dark Lord Sauron. Mordor is a barren wasteland protected by ominous mountains and Sauron's castle Barad-dûr.

**Moria:** An ancient realm of the Dwarves under the Misty Mountains, Moria long ago fell into darkness. Shortly after the events of *The Hobbit*, a group of Dwarves are killed trying to retake Moria. The Fellowship pass through Moria, barely escaping a host of Orcs and the demon-creature the Balrog.

**Mount Doom:** Also known as Orodruin, Mount Doom is a volcano in the heart of Mordor where Sauron forged the One Ring. Frodo and Sam must take the Ring into the volcano and throw it into the lava to destroy the Ring and Sauron forever.

**Nazgûl:** Nine former lords of Men who accepted nine rings of power from Sauron. They fell to the corruption of the One Ring and became Ring-wraiths, evil spirits controlled by the will of Sauron and tied to the fate of the Ring. They take the form of riders cloaked in black and hunt Frodo and the Ring throughout the trilogy. The Nazgûl also lead Sauron's armies during the War of the Ring.

**The Old Forest:** The mysterious forest on the eastern edge of the Shire, most Hobbits fear it and never go in. The forest is home to Tom Bombadil, one of the oldest magical spirits in Middle-earth.

**The One Ring:** A magical and powerful ring created by Sauron. When he possesses it, he has the power to rule all of Middle-earth. To a common user, the Ring, when worn, gives the power of invisibility, but it also corrupts the mind of its bearer.

**Orcs:** The bestial servants of Sauron. Their race was created by Sauron's predecessor who tortured Elves until they became evil. Orcs form the main force of Sauron's armies and are cruel and foul creatures that take pleasure in pillaging and burning.

**Osgiliath:** The ancient and ruined city that guards the crossing of the Anduin River closest to Mordor and Minas Tirith. Osgiliath was once a mighty city but was abandoned long before the events of the trilogy.

**The Paths of the Dead:** An ancient road underneath the White Mountains on the borders of Rohan and Gondor. These paths lead to the domain of a ghost army cursed until they fulfill their oaths to defend Gondor. Aragorn summons this army to help defeat Sauron's reinforcements preparing to assault Minas Tirith at the Siege of Gondor.

**Peregrin Took:** One of Frodo's close friends and Hobbit companions, Peregrin, commonly called Pippin, is a silly and joyful Hobbit who is one of the nine members of the Fellowship of the Ring. He is kidnapped with Merry by Saruman's Uruk-hai, but escapes into Fangorn Forest. After the Battle of Helm's Deep, Gandalf takes Pippin to Minas Tirith where he defends the city during the Siege of Gondor.

**Rivendell:** The westernmost home of the Elves in Middle-earth. Rivendell is a haven nestled in the Valley of Imladris, a place of incredible natural beauty. Rivendell is the site for the Council of Elrond and a resting point for the Hobbits on their journey.

**Rohan:** One of the last kingdoms of Men, Rohan is a vast and open country. The people of Rohan breed the best horses in Middle-earth and are skilled riders.

**Rohirrim:** The people of Rohan. They are strong, proud, and excellent horse riders.

**Samwise Gamgee:** Frodo's closest friend and gardener, he is the first to join Frodo on his journey and the only one to accompany him all the way into Mordor. Sam is kind, caring, loyal, and fiercely protective of Frodo. He bears the Ring briefly after Frodo is temporarily paralyzed by the spider Shelob and captured by Sauron's Orcs. Sam also carries Frodo up Mount Doom when he is too weak to stand.

**Saruman:** A powerful wizard in Middle-earth, he was the head of the Wizard Order until he was corrupted by Sauron and became evil. He breeds a new species of Orcs called Uruk-hai and attempts to conquer Rohan. His army is defeated at the Battle of Helm's Deep while he is captured by the Ents assaulting Isengard. Saruman eventually escapes Isengard and takes control of the Shire. After the Hobbits defeat his forces at the Battle of the Bywater, Saruman is stabbed in the back by his servant Grima Wormtongue.

**Sauron:** The Dark Lord of Middle-earth who seeks to control all life. He is powerful, manipulative, evil, and the main antagonist of *The Lord of the Rings*.

**Shelob:** A giant spider who lives in the passes of the mountains surrounding Mordor. Gollum leads Frodo and Sam into her lair hoping she will kill and eat the Hobbits. Shelob poisons Frodo with her stinger, paralyzing him temporarily, but she is terribly wounded by Sam and never seen again.

**The Shire:** A region in the northwest of Middle-earth that is home to Hobbits. The Shire is an isolated, peaceful, and bountiful place, free from the harsher realities of the outside world.

**The Siege of Gondor:** The penultimate battle against Sauron's armies in the War of the Ring. Sauron's forces besiege the city of Minas Tirith, the capitol of Gondor. The Orcs would have won the battle if not for the arrival of the Riders of Rohan and the reinforcements mustered by Aragorn from southern Gondor. These soldiers turn the tide of the battle and drive off Sauron's army, saving Minas Tirith from destruction.

**Sméagol:** An innocent, Hobbit-like man who lived on the banks of the Anduin River hundreds of years before the events of the trilogy. Sméagol and his friend Déagol discover the Ring in the river while fishing. Sméagol strangles Déagol to take the Ring for himself and slowly becomes the creature Gollum as the Ring's corruption takes hold of him.

**Théoden:** The King of Rohan and a proud and honorable man. He leads his people to victory at Helm's Deep but dies during the Siege of Gondor, killed by the Witch-King of Angmar.

**Tom Bombadil:** An ancient being who lives in the Old Forest on the borders of the Shire. While he takes pleasure in singing nonsensical songs, he has immense power and can control every natural element of the Old Forest. He lets the Hobbits stay in his house for a short time and saves them from the evil spirit the Barrow-wight.

**The Tower of Cirith Ungol:** A stronghold that guards the pass of Cirith Ungol through the mountains on the borders of Mordor. Frodo is taken there by Sauron's Orcs after he is rendered unconscious by the spider Shelob. Sam rescues Frodo from the Tower in *The Return of the King*.

**Treebeard:** The eldest and foremost of the Ents, he is the primary protector of Fangorn Forest. He provides shelter and refuge for Merry and Pippin and leads the attack on Isengard to overthrow Saruman.

**Uruk-hai:** A breed of Orcs created by Saruman to serve as his armies in his conquest of Rohan and Middle-earth. They are faster and stronger than regular Orcs, and possibly more vicious.

**Valinor:** The magical land to the west of Middle-earth across the sea. Valinor is the original home of the Elves and the place that the Elves return to at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam are brought to Valinor as a gift for their service to Middle-earth.

**The War of the Ring:** The war fought during the events of *The Lord of the Rings* between the Free Peoples of Middle-earth (Men, Hobbits, Elves, and Dwarves) and the armies of Sauron (Orcs, Easterlings, and Southrons) as well as Saruman's army of Uruk-hai. Major battles of the War include the Battle of Helm's Deep, the Siege of Gondor, and the Battle at the Black Gate.

**Weathertop:** The former Gondorian watchtower called Amon-Sûl. Weathertop is a hill in the region of Middle-earth called Eriador, west of the Misty Mountains but east of the Shire. The Hobbits spend a night on Weathertop while journeying to Rivendell and are attacked by five Nazgûl.

**The Witch-King of Angmar:** The Lord of the Nazgûl and the most powerful of the Nine. He stabs Frodo at Weathertop with a Morgul-blade and kills King Théoden during the Battle of Pelennor Fields. He is slain by Éowen and Meriadoc Brandybuck during the same battle.

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