

"A CLOSE FRIENDSHIP WITH THE EARTH": PLACE IN *THE HOBBIT* AND *LORD OF THE RINGS*

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English.

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May 2014

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April 25, 2014

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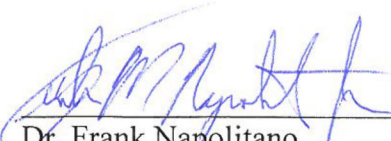
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## Abstract

English author J.R.R. Tolkien's most beloved works, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, are seen mostly as works of fantasy. Some even believe they are primarily for children. However, this thesis argues that these works are not only delightful works of fiction, but also call to some serious issues in our own time. I also strive to prove that there are lessons to be learned from Tolkien's narrative on how to deal with the psychoterratic mental distress known as "solastalgia."

Solastalgia is a term coined by Glenn Albrecht to describe feelings of loss and hopelessness that one might experience when their homes are changed fundamentally or even destroyed by something like deforestation or strip mining. This thesis strives to prove that some of Tolkien's characters exhibit these same traits. Their encounters with solastalgia impact the narrative in different ways, and these characters also deal with these feelings and symptoms in very different ways. In this thesis, I explore how two of the hobbits, Treebeard, and some of the dwarves all deal with solastalgia. I also explore the level of attachment to land, the sense of place, and the way these impact the narrative for several other characters.

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## **Dedication**

For Kevin who loved, pushed, and inspired me

For mom who told me there was always more learning to be done

For the friends who loved and supported me

For the faculty who gave me the knowledge

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Dr. Kim Gainer, my thesis advisor, who helped shape this idea. She pushed me and helped enlighten me. I have learned a great deal through this process. I would like to also thank Dr. Frank Napolitano who has helped shape my thoughts and plans throughout my education at Radford University. I would like to also thank Dr. Justin Askins for your help on this project. My colleagues and friends in the English department here at Radford University have always been a major source of support and ideas without whom I could not have finished this project.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

While some know J.R.R. Tolkien's name as an author, and still more know his most popular works of fiction through the phenomenal success of the film versions directed by Peter Jackson, what many don't realize is that *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* (far from being a fantasy that shouldn't be read seriously) is still relevant today to many modern concerns. One of these concerns is the vanishing space and limited access to natural environments filled with untouched nature. In the reader's world, that can be hard to find. However, Tolkien's narrative focuses heavily on the sprawling environments and nature of Middle-earth. He takes great pains throughout the whole of the story (which begins in *The Hobbit* and comes to a conclusion in *The Lord of the Rings*) to describe the landscape: what parts of the world are dangerous or expansive, are lovely or barren and dead. One thing the reader finds in abundance throughout his work is a great love and observation of nature. One can see that Tolkien's "text comes alive with beautiful passages of landscape description, revealing through details of weather, vegetation, and terrain, a fine power of observation and love of the countryside" (Sabo 92). The love of the countryside that Tolkien exhibits in his texts is something that seems to overtake the narrative to some degree. There is ample opportunity to get lost in the lovely language describing Middle-earth. Getting lost in the language isn't the only kind of loss one encounters when reading Tolkien's two most famous works. There is a great sense of the loss of this beautiful countryside described by Tolkien. I plan to analyze that loss of nature, and even loss of place, felt throughout his works.

Descriptions of land abound in Tolkien, so because there is so much description and careful consideration of the land, it can be argued that "Tolkien's work is thus eco-centric, as opposed to anthropocentric ... There can be little doubt that the eco-centrism of Tolkien's work

is one of the things to which ... readers ... have responded so positively” (Curry 165). In other words, many readers have fallen in love with Tolkien’s beautiful descriptions of a landscape that become one of the largest parts of the narrative. It would also seem that Tolkien’s is a world virtually untouched by technological advances which seem to create opportunities for people in the real world to invade their natural space (except where Tolkien shows these actions in a negative light when they are done by evil characters).

Obviously, nature is one of the main characters of the narrative, and the “natural environment plays a major role in Tolkien’s fiction. It is no mere setting for human ... drama but is treated in a way that clearly conveys a concern for its integrity” (Curry 165). Indeed, I would argue that, at some instances in the narrative, nature literally acts and moves the plot forward, and at others, nature is acted upon for the good and the bad.

Among Tolkien’s descriptions of nature, one finds not only recognizable flora and fauna that can be found in the world outside the text, but also characters created to mimic nature and even nature that is sentient in some way. Nature itself, which is sometimes seen as a place of significance to the characters (or characters past) appears often in the narrative. These “various places of Middle-earth could themselves be said to figure as characters in the stories of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*... Thus, the power of place is paramount.” Place, then, holds a power over the characters since “nature is never abstract” (Curry 165). Though definitions of place can be abstract, place is something that all readers can relate to on some level. We all experience a sense of place (whether we stay put within it, or take the memories of it and the socialization we learned there with us). For my purposes, I will define place by using the following statement by Lawrence Buell:

Place is “space to which meaning has been ascribed”... Places are “centers of felt value”... “discrete if ‘elastic’ areas in which settings for the constitution of social relations are located and with which people can identify” ... and defined by physical markers as well as social consensus... “A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered”... Those who feel a stake in their community think of it as their place (Buell *Future* 63).

The sense of place described here by Buell could be seen as rather abstract. However, it is a good beginning to defining a theoretical sense of place that a character from a literary work might feel. Since it is obviously not a simple thing to grasp, place is still less simple to apply to literature.

It is, therefore, apparent that certain definitions of place must be established now in order to continue to work with it in a recognizable and digestible way. In light of this definition of place provided by Buell, a definition of place must be divided into four main segments. First, it must be a place defined by physical markers (like the borders of the Shire). Second, it must be ascribed meaning or have a “felt value” by a person or people group (in the same way that the Hobbits feel connected to their land and wish to grow old there). Third, it must be possible to experience this place with the senses (“seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved...”). Fourth, the characters seem inextricably tied to their part of the world. Lawrence Buell makes this apparent in stating that “being means being-there, or that ‘to be a body, is to be tied to a certain world’” (qtd. in Buell *Future* 65). By adhering to these four rules to define a sense of place in Middle-earth, I will argue that several different people groups and characters within Tolkien’s setting (which encompasses many different lands and people groups) experience a sense of place, and that most of them would even be unidentifiable if not tied to a place. Every “natural place has a cultural dimension, and vice versa. Thus, the Elves ... are unimaginable without the forests, the



Dwarves without the mountains, the hobbits without the ... Shire” (Curry 165). Because there is such an obvious connection between characters and where they come from, one can understand that a sense of place here is so strong that (as in the world outside the text) culture is developed surrounding a particular place. Even cultural identity of these characters is based on where they come from since their sense of history has a location. In Tolkien’s works, especially *The Lord of the Rings*, “cultural identity is shaped by a shared experience of community whose sense of history is intertwined with a sense of place” (Sabo 92). It appears, then, that place and culture are inextricably tied to one another.

As this is the case, what happens if the environments and nature of Middle-earth (to which its characters and peoples are so closely tied) is destroyed? First, we must determine who is destroying nature in this narrative. Just as the orcs destroy natural spaces in the narrative, and as Saruman destroys the Shire, “[the] instrumental exploitation and destruction of nature is identified as integral to moral evil in this world” (Curry 165). So, it appears that those destroying nature (on a grand scale) are those characters who are identified as “evil.” If this holds true, then it stands to reason that evil is identified because it has no respect for nature or for the sense of place of others. However, there are entities in Middle-earth who are attempting to protect nature and those who stand for it. This can be seen when the characters of Treebeard and Sam protect and even create natural spaces. The reader loves the Shire because it is a natural space which is cared for. Therefore, we can see that (conversely to the treatment of natural environments by those evil parties in *The Lord of the Rings*) “the most enchanted places in Middle-earth are so, at least partly because they are loved and cared for” (Curry 165). Those who are loving and caring for the land and nature are identified as good. Then, if one is identified as “good,” one will also mourn the loss of nature or of place. Dawson explains:

in Middle-earth, whether they be humans, Elves, Dwarves, hobbits or Ents, [all of whom are identified as “good, ”] all feel sadness and distress as they witness the loss and destruction of any part of their universe... There is a pervasive sense of loss throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, of a world which is slipping away before the characters’ (and the readers’) eyes, and which will never return (116).

As mentioned by Dawson, the sense of loss of land and the loss of place is an important aspect of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. For some of the characters I will work with in this text, it creates the sense of “sadness and distress” mentioned above, and some of the characters could even be seen as *part* of the land (and still have a deep sense of place). There seems to be a much “deeper dimensionality to ... nature [in] Tolkien’s work. A similar overlay of spiritual and physical landscapes is seen... such as Weathertop, and the Old and Fangorn Forests [and] in characters such as [Bombadil]...” (Siewers 143). At some instances in the story, however, it isn’t merely that the natural world is acted upon, but that it is a character all its own. This world is “*also* sentient and capable of looking back at them” (qtd. in Vincent 107). It has also been said that “[Tolkien’s heteroglossic] forests, rivers, mountains, and animals become characters, not really anthropomorphized, but representing powers larger than ... the human” (Siewers 144). While this is all very interesting in context, it is important to remember that the job of any good ecocritic is to tie the environmental concerns in the text to something a bit more substantial. One must work to tie the text to reality.

Alun Morgan argues that Tolkien’s worlds and the treatment of the nature within them can relate to the world of the reader as well: “[while Tolkien has written] a self-contained work of fiction ... [the text] provides ... themes ... [applicable] to the contemporary world, and would ... [provide] exploration in ... environmental education” (Morgan 383). The point here is that

Tolkien's major works lend themselves well to application in the real world, the world of the reader. Indeed, Lawrence Buell has made this same point in a different way. He states that "the 'active relationship with the Real,' ... is not ... simply allowing 'reality to persevere inertly in its own being,' but ... of the text drawing 'the Real into its own texture,' 'as its own intrinsic ... subtext.' ... That is part ... of how art registers environmentality" (*Future* 44). Art registering environmentality is important because "all artistic work hinges upon the evocation of imagined worlds that may or may not bear a close resemblance to literal or historical environments" (Buell *Future* 30). If the environments of the "real" world are reflected within a text, it stands to reason that it is necessary to look at those textual environments and decipher their treatment in the same way one would the "real" world outside the text. Buell also states that "[all] inquiry into artistic rendition of physical environment must sooner or later reckon with the meta-question of how to construe the relation between the world of a text and the world of historical or lived experience" (*Future* 30). Essentially, it seems impossible to analyze a textual environment without analyzing it with the same means as one would analyze an environment outside the text. The text cannot replicate the real world, but can represent it. "Language never replicates extratextual landscapes, but it can be bent toward or away from them" (Buell *Future* 33). We can see here that Buell finds that it is necessary to "bend" the language of a text, like *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, toward the world outside the text. One way to do that is through recognizing the idea of a vanishing or drastically altered place/environment.

An example of connection to place and the loss of that place in the world outside of Tolkien's text is the concept of "solastalgia." Coined by Glenn Albrecht to describe the sense of loss and nostalgia for the solace of place which is no longer the same due to environmental disaster or destruction, solastalgia has many different definitions. Perhaps the best is stated by

Albrecht as follows: “As opposed to... the melancholia or homesickness experienced by individuals when separated from a loved home... solastalgia is the distress... produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home” (Albrecht 95). In other words, what happens is that individuals no longer find solace in their place. They become nostalgic for the solace that they once found there. Individuals who are still connected to a place (place as defined by an environment that has physical boundaries, an environment that can be experienced by the senses, an environment to which they feel inextricably tied, and an environment that has “felt value” for the person living there) find that this location no longer holds “felt value” because it has been altered in some way. Perhaps the physical boundaries have changed, or perhaps they no longer feel tied to that area. Either way, they no longer have the same connection to that place.

Another (perhaps deeper, more complex) definition of solastalgia, one that corresponds with the outlined definition of place, is that someone dealing with this mental distress “no longer [knows] what to expect from their environment ... In short, their sense of place has been undermined; even though they have not left home, home has become unfamiliar” (Cordial 202). They can no longer identify themselves by this place because it has been so drastically altered. This has been seen to occur when environments, someone’s place, are impacted by something like the process of mining the minerals from underground by more destructive means (like mountaintop removal which has been happening in Central Appalachia for decades). In these areas, “Central Appalachians living in communities transformed by [mountain top removal] may experience [solastalgia,] ... [or the] place-based distress engendered by unwelcome environmental change” (Cordial 202). The environmental change incurred here is unnatural. It is necessary for environments to change naturally. Buell has stated that “[place] itself changes. It

‘is not entitative – as foundation has to be – but eventmental, something in process’” (qtd. in *Future* 73). While this is true, the changing and morphing of place described by Buell is natural and does not include forced change (i.e., deforestation or destructive mining for the purposes of expansion or economic gain).

Instead of stemming from natural changes, solastalgia comes when changes to the environment are “negatively perceived and felt,” and can be “especially distressing for those who directly witness the destruction of their home environment and who feel intimately connected to the place in which they are rooted” (Cordial 203). This idea that solastalgia comes when someone is “directly witnessing the destruction” of their home is the connection I will use to argue that certain characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are experiencing or have experienced this “psychoterratic” distress.

A “sense of connection to the land” is exactly the kind of language that ecocritics of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* have applied to its characters and people. That “sense of connection to the land,” or sense of place, is what (for many of the characters) drives the plot of the narrative. It has been stated that “[the] best way to understand... *The Lord of the Rings*, is thus as an instance of what Fraser Harrison memorably called ‘radical nostalgia’” (qtd. in Curry 165). This “radical nostalgia” could be termed “solastalgia” instead. This is possible because of the tie that the characters (only those who align with the side of moral good) seem to have to the land. The “places” throughout the narrative “all reflect a similarly dynamic and relatively non-objectified sense of place ... Earth becomes, more powerfully alive than metaphor, a metonymy ... an integrated spirit and body” (Siewers 146).

Throughout the rest of this piece, I will look at several different characters and the connection they have to the land, or sense of place, and how that can be seen as driving the

narrative. I will also explore, where appropriate, how they experience solastalgia, and how that experience also affects the events and connections throughout the narrative.

One of the categories of characters I will explore is that of “shepherds.” There are three different characters (or people groups) I plan to explore here: Treebeard (an Ent), Tom Bombadil, and Elves. All of these characters have such a strong attachment to land that they feel the need to protect it at any cost. Treebeard goes to battle for it, Elves protect the sanctity of the beauty of it, and Bombadil has cloistered himself (and his considerable power) within it.

A second category of exploration is a chapter on three hobbits: Bilbo, Frodo and Sam. Bilbo’s narrative largely takes place within *The Hobbit*, and I will attempt to ascertain his connections to land and (where applicable) how his sense of place drives the narrative. Frodo and Sam are a bit different. I will argue that their attachment to land is so great that when they return from their journey to find the Shire destroyed and fundamentally changed, they both experience solastalgia. However, I will argue that their experiences with that particular mental distress produce very different outcomes.

The third and final category of exploration will be a look at two members of the race of Men, and also a look at the race of Dwarves. Aragorn and Bard (both Men), have an attachment to a certain geographic location. Aragorn has spent his life wandering and returns to conquer his rightful place as king in Gondor and Arnor. However, Bard must return to a place that has been his by lineage, and was never somewhere he physically lived. These men both experience a sense of place to somewhere almost wholly foreign. Dwarves have been wandering for many years when the reader is introduced to them in the narrative of *The Hobbit*. However, they do have a place that they would call their own. They are attempting to return to their home in Erebor, but their sense of place is perhaps one of the most complex.

It is important to understand that this very land-based work ties back to the real land outside of the narrative and can lead readers to think more about their own land attachment. So, in that vein, I will connect the problems of people experiencing solastalgia in the “real” world to how it is experienced by Tolkien’s characters and how their sense of place can drive the narrative.

## Chapter 2: Shepherding Middle-earth

Many characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* can be seen to have a strong sense of place. For example, the hobbits in the narrative are attached to and influenced by their home in the Shire. Throughout all of their journeys, they all constantly remember it and wish to be back there. However, for some characters in the narrative, home is literally part of who they are, and they are never gone from it. They feel a deep and abiding responsibility to the land, and they tend to it regularly. The question I wish to answer is this: how do these characters express that sense of place, and further, how does it affect the narrative? The characters to be covered by this chapter are those characters that are not only influenced by their sense of place, but tend to their place and take seriously the duty of caring for it. I will call them shepherds.

In the narrative of *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, there are very old characters that have been in Middle-earth since its creation. One example of those characters would be Tom Bombadil, who boasts that he is “Eldest... Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the river and the trees” (*Lord* 131). Though we can see that he indeed is an ancient character, he is not a *creator*. He does not create anything in Middle-earth. Instead he tends to the growing and living things around him. It is very important to separate those two roles within this narrative as that could be confusing when discussing other characters (such as the elves discussed here who also tend to the land and do not create it).

Though Bombadil is not a creator, he does have another, very important role to play: shepherd or master of his land. Like Bombadil, Treebeard (an ancient character in his own right who is master and shepherd of Fangorn Forrest) and many of the groups of elves throughout the narrative fulfill a similar role. Michael Brisbois says Tom Bombadil and Treebeard do not have “dominion;” instead, he says they are “stewards” of nature (using the Judeo-Christian language



that he says Tolkien might be familiar with) (203). In this chapter, I will strive to find out what their attachment is to the land, how they experience place, and what their sense of place contributes to the narrative at large.

Tom Bombadil is an interesting character to undertake in and of himself. It has been said that “[some] readers have identified him as a Maia (one of the Ainur who entered into Middle-earth to assist the Valar, which would make him the same class of being as Gandalf and Saruman), a nature spirit... a portion of [our] nature personified” (Vincent 110). To many, it would seem that he is all-powerful. He is able, while the hobbits stay in his home on their way to Bree, to take the One Ring from Frodo and makes it invisible (*Lord* 132). This does not mean, however, that he is either good or evil. Rather, it seems that he has a neutral morality which is “demonstrated several times in the narrative ... He is immune to the power of the Ring, which speaks not only to his lack of evil impulse, but also to his lack of *good* impulse” (Vincent 111). He looks at this very evil object as something that cannot hurt him, but also as something that is unimportant. Gandalf makes the reader aware at the Council in Rivendell that Bombadil has no power over the ring “[rather] the ring has no power over him” (265). However, it is quickly made clear that he only has power within the borders he has drawn for himself within the Old Forest “waiting perhaps for a change of days, and he will not step beyond them” (265). This allows us to understand that Bombadil’s power is relegated to only a small part of Middle-earth.

The reader might wonder why. Why is someone so powerful only concentrating that power on one area? Goldberry, Tom Bombadil’s “lady,” gives the reader a reason. When Frodo asks if Bombadil is master over “all this strange land,” she replies “No indeed! ... That would indeed be a burden.” She also states that the growing things within his borders do not “belong” to Bombadil, but to themselves (*Lord* 124). This leads the reader to believe that taking care of all of

the growing things in the world would be taxing. Being “master,” Bombadil is seemingly responsible for knowing what goes on in his lands and within his borders. His keen and specified knowledge allows him to shepherd the land in which he lives. This knowledge allows him to know “the places of things, meaning by that not where they are or where they can be found, but where they ought to be. He knows, for example, that trees should not be waking” (Herbert 154). Indeed, when he is introduced into the narrative he comes to save the hobbits from being killed by Old Man Willow (whom he knows should not be awake).

Old Man Willow, as stated later in the narrative, is a very ancient tree in a very ancient forest. When the reader enters the Old Forrest, Old Man Willow happens to be within the bounds of Bombadil’s mastery. It is revealed through Bombadil’s knowledge of trees that their “thoughts ... [were] filled with a hatred of things that go free upon the earth, gnawing, biting, breaking, hacking, burning ... But [no trees] were more dangerous than [Old Man Willow]: his heart was rotten ... and his song and thought ran through the woods” (*Lord* 130). Vincent has said that “Tolkien confounds the reader’s moral expectations; when we put aside our presuppositions, we discover that not only are all trees not Good, some aren’t even ‘good’....” She goes on to say that this “first direct threat to the protagonists comes not from any agent of Sauron, but from the self-interested caprice of the natural world – in this case, Old Man Willow” and that this tree is “decidedly a *who*, rather than a *that*” (109). Even as old as this tree is, and even as dark and dangerous as it is, Tom Bombadil is able to aid the hobbits and tells Old Man Willow to “[eat] earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to sleep!” (*Lord* 120). This is not a suggestion, however, that Bombadil is in full control over nature. It isn’t something he has dominion over, but something he aids and puts back in order. He does not condemn the tree but calls it back into order. As Michael Brisbois observes, “Tom’s connection with Essential nature is represented by the fact

that he does not ... reform Old Man Willow; he merely admonishes him (suggesting that there is nothing wrong with Old Man Willow's feelings, only with [his] acts)" (209). He is able to tend to the matters within his borders (to keep things in proper working order), and to help and aid those who wander into it.

In terms of his attachment to the bordered land he has allotted himself, or his sense of place, Bombadil is almost wholly managed and controlled by that sense of place. He is so intrinsically tied to his little bordered land that he does not leave it. He only exists within it, and he is only concerned with what happens there to the living and growing things. Though it might seem that Bombadil would be helpful outside his little corner of the world, he "seems to have no interests at all outside of the boundaries of the land over which he is 'Master.' His protection of the hobbits ends at that border" (Vincent 111). Bombadil cannot even leave his borders to escort the four hobbits through terrain that his power would easily allow him to master. Instead, he relegates himself and his power to one specified area of land. This affects the narrative in that he is only concerned with his place. Nothing outside those borders holds any interest for him. Therefore, he would not make a suitable candidate to take care of The One Ring (though his power allows him to alter The One Ring within his own borders). Gandalf states that anything outside the borders of Bombadil's land, even the major concerns of the world, "have no hold on his mind" (*Lord* 265). So, though he is ancient, and though he is quite powerful and capable, he makes a poor guardian and solution for hiding The One Ring since it is of so little concern to him when compared to shepherding his own place. It is then necessary to abandon the hope of using his power to move the narrative forward due to his strong sense of place, or his willingness to stay there and never leave because that sense of place is so strong.

Tom Bombadil and Treebeard are both caretakers of their respective environments. They give some order to these places in that they control the emotions and impulses of that place. Tom Bombadil and Treebeard both have the ability to communicate with their flock (Tom through singing and Treebeard through the language of “Entish”), and both sense a humor of a place (as when the anger of Old Man Willow affects the entire humor/tenor of the rest of the Old Forest (*Lord* 118)). Treebeard states that he is “not altogether on anybody’s side, because nobody is altogether on my side, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them...” (472). Treebeard the Ent quite literally cares for the woods of Fangorn forest. Treebeard speaks the language (Entish) that the trees speak (as taught to them long ago by elves). He looks like an old, gnarled tree with feet, though he is not a tree at all. As Brisbois explains, “Ents are not trees per se, but they are quite tree-like” (Brisbois 213). Treebeard knows trees well, though, since he is “tree-like,” and has worked with them for many, many years. He lets Merry and Pippin (and in that way, the reader) into the history and lore of the trees.

Treebeard explains that trees will “wake up” and will “fall asleep.” Ents can fall asleep and become more like a regular tree, and a regular tree can wake up and become like an Ent, but a tree who is “awake” and can move is not an Ent, but is called a Huorn (since Ents are technically not trees, but a different kind of sentient being). Trees can “sing,” and Treebeard tells Merry and Pippin that “it was the elves that cured us of dumbness long ago, and that was a great gift that cannot be forgotten, though our ways have parted since” (*Lord* 472). So, in “waking up” the trees, Elves began learning to communicate with them. However, Ents are different from Huorns.

Michael Brisbois helps us to understand that “[the] Huorns are the trees of Fangorn Forest that are fully conscious. They are like Old Man Willow in the fact that they are full of

anger ... but they are more magical than he because they can move” (Brisbois 213). So, if Ents are different from Huorns, and Huorns are different from trees, what *is* the difference? Huorns are trees who have a consciousness and can move, Ents are tree-like, but are a race of people who shepherd trees, and trees are simply that – trees (though it would seem that many have thoughts, “voices,” and/or feelings). Ents love nature, and unlike the Entwives (the female of the species who went missing long before the reader enters the narrative) who garden and attempt to create and cultivate beauty in nature, Ents appreciate nature for what it simply is and try to keep it from harm (Olsen 45).

Treebeard explains the role of Ents to Merry and Pippin by saying “we keep off strangers and the foolhardy; and we train and we teach we walk and we weed. We are tree-herds, we old Ents” (*Lord* 468). The idea here is the same as that of shepherd and sheep (even Treebeard mentions that the relationship is very like that). The Ents care for the trees and Huorns by making sure they are safely able to grow and either sleep or wake up into consciousness. As the narrative progresses, and Merry and Pippin bring word to him from the wide world, Treebeard becomes aware that his woods are no longer safe from outside invasion. Much like a shepherd would protect his flock from a wolf, Treebeard decides it is time to act and protect his forest (within his borders) from harm.

When discussing his (and the other Ents’) sense of place, it is important to note that their sense of place is so strong that it directly affects the narrative. The wizard Saruman is growing in power and strength daily. There was a time when Treebeard felt that Saruman was a friend or ally and understood the beauty that he found inherent in nature. However, Treebeard senses that Saruman is now not so friendly, and is perhaps too close for comfort. “Saruman is a neighbor: I cannot overlook him. I must do something, I suppose... He has a mind of metal and wheels; and

he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment” (*Lord* 473). Here is an example of how an inherently evil character treats nature and has the wrong mindset toward nature. He also is said to not have any interest in preserving nature and “caring” for “growing things” except if it serves his needs. Treebeard is angered by this evil disregard for all good and growing things in nature. The anger of Treebeard and the ultimate decision to “do something about Saruman” comes ultimately from the destructive nature of Orcs and (now that he covets power) Saruman. At one time, he was a friend of nature and (seemingly) appreciated Treebeard’s forest for its beauty; but no longer. He only cares for nature’s utility and its power to feed his productive fires and furnaces in Isengard.

Because of this destruction, many of the trees and of Fangorn forest on the border touching Isengard have been cut down. The destruction of environment here is a classic example of the horrors of deforestation and the changing of a landscape for some profitable gain. A phenomenon happens when one’s place is disrupted and can never be made whole again: solastalgia. What the individual experiences is a nostalgia for the solace that once was. Treebeard experiences this when he sees that Saruman has been destroying his forest (his place). Treebeard explains to Merry and Pippin how terrible this is: “Curse him, root and branch! Many of these trees were my friends... many had voices of their own... And there are wastes of stump and bramble where once there were singing groves. I have been idle. I have let things slip. It must stop!” (*Lord* 474). The solastalgia he feels at the loss of his place, his tie to his forest, and his sense of duty to his “flock” is what ultimately drives Treebeard to seek an “Entmoot” (a meeting of as many Ents as will heed the call) to determine whether they will strike Isengard to stop Saruman’s abuse of the forest of Fangorn. Obviously, this is one instance where nature itself actually affects the narrative directly and actively.

Michael Brisbois has said that “the nature of Middle-earth is classifiable into a binary opposition: Passive/Active ... this binary ... splinters into sub-categories of relation... Essential, Ambient, Independent and Wrathful nature” (Brisbois 203). I would like to specifically focus on the subcategory of Active Nature which is Wrathful Nature. Brisbois gives a definition of Wrathful Nature in saying that whereas “Independent nature is nature that lives apart from culture, but is nonetheless intelligent, ... Wrathful nature is aggressive and takes an often-violent role in *The Lord of the Rings*” (Brisbois 208). Wrathful Nature represents those parts of nature which have a mind and movement of their own in Middle-earth. As represented by the aggression and retribution of the Ents and Huorns, the reader can see that, in some cases, Nature itself is driving the narrative by avenging the abuse of place. The reason for this anger and active aggression is the retribution of the Ents and Huorns against the Orcs and Saruman for the killing of innocent trees in Fangorn. Because their environment has been damaged, the Ents and Huorns of Fangorn take out their wrath on Isengard and Saruman. In acting upon Isengard, the Ents and Huorns demonstrate Brisbois’s point that the reader “can see a cause and effect relationship between environmental damage and Wrathful nature” (Brisbois 212). Wrathful Nature, in this case, angry Ents and Huorns, is acting against an active dismantling of their place.

An example of Active, Wrathful Nature in the narrative is when Treebeard specifies whose “side” he is on. “And there are some things, of course, whose side I am altogether not on; I am against them altogether: these – *burarum* ... - these Orcs, and their masters” (*Lord* 473). Treebeard can be seen here as an avenger of wrongdoing in his place. His sense of place gives him a hatred of those who would seek to damage it (for personal gain or for spite as in the case of the Orcs and Saruman). According to Brisbois “the Ents and Huorns are the two instruments by which Saruman is punished for his transgressions against nature” (or instead of transgressions

against nature, his transgression against the place to which Treebeard and the other Ents and Huorns belong) (Brisbois 213). Also, the Ents and Huorns are “very aware of the destruction of sections of Fangorn Forest and act accordingly, first assaulting the fortress of Orthanc, and then ... flooding Saruman’s diabolical engines and furnaces ... [Nature] acts to strike down those who would abuse it” (Brisbois 213). One can see that, just as Saruman destroyed the growing process of Fangorn Forrester, Treebeard destroys the production of the furnaces of Orthanc (the stronghold of Saruman within Isengard). Just as Saruman destroyed the home/place to which the Huorns, trees and Ents belonged, Treebeard destroyed the home/place to which Saruman belonged and thrived. The vengeance of Wrathful Nature is swift and accurate. It is not only the abuse of nature that is being avenged here, but the specific abuse of the place to which Treebeard belongs. His sense of place is the driving force behind his retribution on Isengard.

The Ents and the Huorns ultimately come together to attack Isengard, kill the Orcs who serve Saruman (and who, incidentally, have created an alliance together to bring down the race of Men starting with Rohan) and end Saruman’s dominion in Orthanc. Some of the Huorns even go and aid in the battle at Helms Deep to kill Orcs. In doing this, they inadvertently allow The One Ring to progress further to its doom. Just as in the case of Tom Bombadil, they were not acting on behalf of any other entity or cause except caring for, shepherding or stewarding, their own place.

Treebeard credits the magic and interest of the elves for “waking up” the trees in Fangorn long before the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* takes place. He says that the “Elves began it, of course, waking trees up and teaching them to speak and learning their tree-talk. They always wished to talk to everything, the old Elves did” (*Lord* 468). Elves play a special role in many of the natural landscapes that the reader encounters. Therefore, it is



important to explore the role they play in shepherding place, and further, to explore their attachment to place (if any) and find out if that attachment affects the narrative.

Elves are a race apart from others in Middle-earth. They are older, wiser, and fairer than any others. They are also “immortal; they were at least as tall, if not taller, than the human race; they were prolific in craftsmanship and music, [and] able to make weapons and songs both powerful and magical” (Eden 150). Any time the reader encounters Elves in the narrative, it is impressed upon them that this is a wholly other kind of people group. They seem angelic and peaceful, and they make the world a beautiful one where trees make cathedrals and keep golden leaves until spring when the flowers bloom so that when they fall, the ground is golden and the trees are in bloom (Stanton 395). Though Elves are different from Men, Dwarves and Hobbits, the Elvish realms are similar to one another, especially where their treatment of place and their relationship to it is concerned. Even though they have their subtle differences, “Elvish communities are still more like one another, especially in their relationship with the earth, than any Elvish kingdom is to any kingdom of Man, Dwarf or Hobbit” (Dickerson 103). Though Elvish communities can be very different from one another, they are all alike when it comes to their relationship with the land, and they are all very different in this one relationship from any other race in Middle-earth.

One interesting way in which Elves impact their environment differently from any other race is the way in which time and environment impact one another, or together are impacted by the magic of the elves (of Lothlorien in particular). It isn't that time affects the environment like it does in the rest of the narrative (or as it naturally would outside the narrative). Rather, the environment (which is affected greatly by the magic of the elves) is in charge of time and makes it bear a different burden. Time passes very slowly within Lothlorien, though it continues to pass

at the same speed outside the forest boundaries. While staying in Lothlorien, “[the] hobbits, and the others, learn ... that time seems to flow differently in the world of the Elves: Sam can remember but a few days there, yet a whole month has apparently passed” (Stanton 395). This lapse in time inside Lothlorien leaves great amounts of time for the Fellowship of the Ring to rest there while they mourn for Gandalf and recuperate from their long and already very tiring journey. It also makes for free time to enjoy the aesthetic side of the natural world which the Elves of Lothlorien (and indeed throughout Middle-earth) strive to protect.

Perhaps even more so than in the cases of Treebeard and Tom Bombadil, “Elves are concerned with the aesthetic qualities... of the created world... It is not merely that the reader is not shown the pragmatic side to their agrarian pursuits; it is that no agrarian pursuits are shown whatsoever” (Dickerson 99). This shows that, though there is no description of their cultivation of land for useful, pragmatic purposes, they have a tie to the beauty of the land like no other race in Middle-earth.

Treebeard protected his place, the area to which he tied his life, from literal destruction from Saruman, and Tom Bombadil was a shepherd to the land only within the borders which he created for himself. However, Elves’ sense of place attachment is something a bit broader and, perhaps, more global than that. They love the earth itself and, specifically, they guard the beauty that it produces. Throughout the narrative, one can see that Elves “see themselves as stewards and guardians of [the beauty of Middle-earth] ... [In the story] of Bilbo’s and Frodo’s quests, the Elves’ main concern is for the beauty of Arda (the earth) and indeed of all Ea (creation)” (Dickerson 99). All of creation falls within the bounds of their watchful eyes. Perhaps this is because so many different kinds of Elves have homes in so many different areas of Middle-earth.

Dickerson calls this kind of stewardship over beauty “sustainable horticulture.” He states that “Elves can be seen as expressing Tolkien’s view of *sustainable horticulture* [the cultivation of plant life for purely aesthetic purposes]... with regard to the Elves, sustainability has more to do with threats *to* horticulture from other sources” (Dickerson 99). An example of those “other sources” could be the “shadow” of Sauron that is always mentioned. Mirkwood, an Elvish realm, is already under this shadow when *The Lord of the Rings* begins. There is a constant fear throughout the narrative that if the shadow spreads, that growing things and the way of the world of “good” will no longer be possible. Dickerson makes us further aware that the land and morals intertwine here: “Elves’ aesthetic preservationism is joined to the moral defense against the evils of ... Sauron. For the Elves, maintenance of the beauty of Middle-earth ... is inseparable from freedom from the enslaving and environmentally destructive objectives of [Sauron]” (Dickerson 101). As an example of this, while in Gondor, Legolas shows concern for the lack of growing things there, much the opposite to what Gimli notices in the lack of quality stonework in the city. Dickerson states “Gardens that grow and are ‘glad’ make glad the hearts of those who perceive their beauty, and gladness of heart is ... [the very] freedom from oppression that ... the Elves ... strive to protect” (Dickerson 101). For Elves, protecting beauty in Middle-earth is the same as protecting the peoples of Middle-earth from oppression and enslavement.

Though Elves impact their environments, and strive to protect the beauty of them in Middle-earth (and within the boundaries they have set for themselves like Lothlorien or Mirkwood) that doesn’t mean that they are most beholden to Middle-earth. As a race/people group, they exhibit a tie to a place that, in the case of more Elves than not, they have never been to. Throughout the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, we come to understand that the Elves are leaving Middle-earth and are going across the sea. Just as in the case of

Legolas, “[the] places that ... [can] define one’s character can [vary]... But the fact that the imaginer hasn’t been there hardly lessens the intensity... to induce longing and loyalty...It’s entirely possible to care more about places you’ve never been...” (Buell *Future* 73). Legolas was warned by the Lady Galadriel that he would eventually be stricken by a call to go to the sea, and that this call would be so great that he would eventually leave Middle-earth. This does come to pass, and it appears that Buell’s theory is correct: Legolas feels more connected to and cares more about a place he has never been and does not remember than his home in Mirkwood. Legolas’s sense of place changes throughout the narrative as Lady Galadriel’s prophecy over his life comes to pass.

Be it Treebeard, Tom Bombadil, the Elves, or some other characters not mentioned here, Tolkien’s narrative is full of characters who wish to protect the environment around them. They strive to make the hearts of those around them glad with the beauty, utility, or joy that nature can bring about. The singing trees and Huorns of Fangorn, the growing things in the Old Forest, and the beauty in Middle-earth all have champions in the narrative as the plot around them thickens. The plot around them, though it might not be immediately obvious, is affected by these shepherds and the actions they all take to protect their place from destruction, peril, and or the shadow of evil.

### Chapter 3: “Peace and Quiet and Good Tilled Earth”

When reading *Lord of the Rings*, the first characters one encounters are hobbits. Indeed, they seem to be one of the characters that the author writes most about throughout the entire narrative; fine tuning, clarifying, describing in detail, giving history to, etc. Obviously, this is necessary as they play a very important role in the narrative; affecting it in the ways that they do (basically being the sole characters moving The One Ring across Middle-earth to the doom of Sauron). However, the heart of their characters is not how far they trekked across Middle-earth or how resilient they could be, but their sense of place. In the prologue to *Lord of the Rings*, specifically “Concerning Hobbits,” Tolkien makes sure the reader is clear on the aims of the Hobbits and their chosen lifestyle:

At once the western Hobbits fell in love with their new land [the Shire], and they remained there ... The land was rich and kindly ... The Hobbits named it the Shire, as the region of the authority of their Thain, and a district of well-ordered business; and there in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living, and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved. (4)

Though the Hobbits were moving to a place that was not already their own, they immediately latched on to it as their own (by the leave of the king at the time). They began settling it and tilling it immediately, creating a “well-ordered” place in which to conduct their “well-ordered” living.

Five hobbits are featured in the narrative (Bilbo Baggins, Frodo Baggins, Sam Gamgee, Pippin Took, and Merry Brandybuck), and three of them (Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam) exhibit differing and shifting levels of attachment to land, and more specifically, to the Shire. This

chapter will strive to determine the depth of the attachment that Bilbo, Frodo and Sam have to their land (or place) and how it plays a significant role in the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*.

Bilbo Baggins is a very typical (even well-to-do) hobbit, except that he has the blood of a Took (on his mother's side) (*Hobbit* 2). This trait supposedly makes him more adventurous than other hobbits. Throughout *The Hobbit*, the reader can see that Bilbo has two distinct sides to his own nature: what Tolkien calls "the Baggins side" and "the Took-ish side." These two natures seem almost constantly at war with one another as Bilbo moves through Middle-earth. Throughout most of the novel, he wishes to go home to the Shire and his own hobbit hole, which "means comfort" (*Hobbit* 1). There are also moments, however, when he wishes for adventure and experiences strong curiosity. This is his Took-ish side, and the side that can be blamed for getting him out of his front door "without a pocket handkerchief!" (*Hobbit* 30). Therefore, I think it is important to judge the attachment of each of Bilbo's natures (Took-ish and Baggins) separately.

The nature which leads him out of his home is the one to begin with. The Took-ish side of his nature is the one which prompts him to want to "go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick" (*Hobbit* 16). It had been long buried, this nature that wished to explore and over whom the land of his heritage held little sway, but it did surface at the mention of far-away lands and the grandeur of adventure. Therefore, it is the Took-ish side that drew him away from Bag-End in the Shire and into foreign lands like the Misty Mountains (where he discovered The One Ring). At one point the narrative asserts that "the Took side had won. He suddenly felt he would go without bed and breakfast to be thought fierce" and Bilbo then proclaims to the dwarves "I will

show you ... Tell me what you want done, and I will try it, if I have to walk from here to the East of East and fight the wild Were-worms in the Last Desert” (*Hobbit* 18). These proclamations are made based on the needs and wishes of the “Took side,” and he does indeed fulfill all these wishes by the end. Throughout much of the narrative, Bilbo continually wishes he were at home, but he continues on. This thought of being thought “fierce” is what continually tugs at the Took side of him and keeps him away from the Shire. Indeed, at some points in the narrative, it would appear that this brush with his Took side has left him changed fundamentally. When facing the dragon, Bilbo “was trembling with fear, but his little face was set and grim. Already he was a very different hobbit from the one that had run out without a pocket handkerchief from Bag-End long ago” (*Hobbit* 214). However, the Took side is not the side that prompts Bilbo to wish to return back to his own home.

Though he does eventually earn the favor of peoples and cultures outside the Shire, at the end of his adventure it seems as though he looks more and more forward to home. He says “‘Snow comes after fire and even dragons have their ending!’ ..., and he turned his back on his adventure. The Tookish part was getting very tired, and the Baggins was daily getting stronger. ‘I wish now only to be in my own armchair!’ he said” (*Hobbit* 296). So, at the end of the narrative, he wishes to return to his own home, his own place. His Took-ish self is becoming tired of the adventure, and the Baggins part of his nature is beginning to get stronger. This would imply that he would go back to the Shire and stay there permanently. However, eventually, the Took-ish side of his nature takes him on one last adventure.

When we encounter the older Bilbo in the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, we are encountering the Took-ish side of him. We can see now that he was changed, as were his interactions with those in his place, once he returned home from his first adventure with the

dwarves as depicted in *The Hobbit*. This new Bilbo said to Gandalf “I’ve made up my mind ... I want to see mountains again ... *mountains*; and then find somewhere where I can *rest*. In peace and quiet, without a lot of relatives prying around ... [and] visitors hanging on the bell” (*Lord* 32). Because of the treasure he brought back with him from his first adventure, the encounters he has with his “prying” relatives and neighbors who are “hanging on the bell” are now very different. They all see him in a different light, and he sees them differently as well.

Indeed, Bilbo returned home a very different hobbit than the one who left Bag-End. Because he changes, and because those people he lives around see him differently, he is not able to remain at Bag-End until the end of his days. He must go somewhere to find “peace and quiet” (presumably away from neighbors and relatives), and he decides to see the Misty Mountains once more but is waylaid by the beauty and peacefulness of Rivendell. This move occurs because his relationship with those around him and even himself are fundamentally changed, but what about in the case of Frodo’s return to the Shire? Frodo’s return to the shire is tainted and vastly different from Bilbo’s, and filled with the devastation of the very land beneath his furry feet. However, like Bilbo, Frodo also finds it impossible to carry on with the life he led before leaving.

Frodo, Bilbo’s nephew and heir of Bag-End, is the hobbit and ring-bearer who takes the long journey across Middle-earth to destroy The One Ring and save Middle-earth from the rule of Sauron. One of Frodo’s most difficult decisions comes when he must leave the Shire. Gandalf explains what The One Ring is and Frodo begins to understand that, in order to save the land and people he loves from a terrible fate, he must leave the Shire. There is a moment when he knows that he has now left the Shire once and for all. As they are about to leave it, they must cross the borders and enter the Old Forrest in Buckland. Merry leads them out:



Merry got down and unlocked the gate, and when they had all passed through he pushed it to again. It shut with a clang, and the lock clicked. The sound was ominous. ‘There!’ said Merry. ‘You have left the Shire, and are now outside.’  
(*Lord* 110)

This is presumably the first time that any of the hobbits have been outside the boundaries of the Shire. Once he leaves the Shire, Frodo begins an irreversible transformation.

The moment that Frodo is changed for good, with the exception of the kind of slow decay that bearing The One Ring brings about in his life, is when he is stabbed by the Morgul Blade of the Witch King of Angmar on Weathertop. It was intended to pierce his heart and make him into a servant of Sauron (*Lord* 222). Gandalf says himself that “some wounds [cannot] be wholly cured” (989). Aragorn doubts even the trusted athelas plant (which has healing virtues for many different ailments) will heal that particular wound. He says to Frodo’s companions that athelas “has great virtues, but over such a wound as this its healing powers may be small” (198). In Moria, Frodo finds that he can see better in the dark than most of his companions, and he finds that he can sense evil more readily (311). This does not seem to be an advantage, but rather something that is unsettling and seems to scare him. This could be some quality left to him from the wound of the Morgul Blade. Indeed, this wound and its effects never heal completely.

This wound is something that plagues Frodo for the rest of his time in the Shire. He is truly never rid of it or the memory of the terrible blade. On the first anniversary of the day when he was stabbed on Weathertop, Frodo feels the sting of the blade again. Gandalf asks him if he is in pain: “‘Well, yes I am,’ said Frodo, ‘It is my shoulder. The wound aches, and the memory of darkness is heavy on me’” (*Lord* 989). He has a similar experience again the next year. Sam asks him what is the matter when he begins to notice Frodo looking off into the distance. Frodo

replies “I am wounded; it will never really heal” (1025). It might seem obvious that his wounds are the reason he leaves Middle-earth, or that it is only a change in him that helps him to make the decision to leave Middle-earth. However, this decision is aided by something else: his experience with solastalgia.

When one reads *The Lord of the Rings*, experiencing Frodo and Sam’s journey right alongside them, one can imagine what a relief it must be (after such a long, horrible journey) to finally come home. Coming home to familiarity, coming home to family, coming home to one’s house with the trees ordered in rows just as they were left at the start of the journey seems inevitable. However, for Frodo and Sam, this is not the way of their homecoming.

When the hobbits return from their adventures, they are returning to a vastly changed Shire from the one they left. This is their “place,” in many different forms of the word. They grew up here, they lived here, they owned property here, they worked to help grow things here, they planned to die here, and they left to save it, only to return to something that still needs to be saved. Perhaps one of the most significant of the many remarkable and terrible changes is when Sam notices that the Party Tree has been cut down. He exclaims, ““They’ve cut it down!’... He pointed to where the tree had stood under which Bilbo had made his Farewell Speech. It was lying lopped and dead in the field” (*Lord* 1017). The text suggests that Sam shouts this, and the expression of such strong emotion allows the reader to understand the importance of the Party Tree to their culture and way of life. The culture of the Shire is so tied to all the land around it, but the Party Tree is a part of the land which they had literally surrounded their culture with. They had many parties after Bilbo’s infamous disappearing act, and many young Hobbits could not remember a time when there was not a party around the Party Tree. This is quite possibly the most significant of all the changes because it is one of the most important pieces of land or living

thing that the Hobbits of the Shire have. It is one of the oldest things there, and it also symbolizes the disregard for which all living and growing things have been treated in the Shire since it was infiltrated by Saruman and his “ruffians.” To top off all the horrible changes, Bag-End had been ruined so that Frodo couldn’t even return to his own house, the house he grew up in and, in Bilbo’s absence, now hoped to grow old in.

Perhaps Sam says it best to describe how the hobbits are feeling upon their return. He says “This is worse than Mordor! ... Much worse in a way. It comes home to you, as they say; because it is home, and you remember it before it was all ruined” (*Lord* 1018). Sam means that it is worse than any danger they have passed because they knew the beauty of their own home better than any other beauty on earth. This is the best example of the language of one experiencing solastalgia. According to Cordial, when one is experiencing solastalgia, one experiences feelings of helplessness and of loss. This idea that Mordor has followed them home implies a feeling of deep loss and helplessness. Frodo replies, “Yes, this is Mordor” (1018). What he meant was that it was the work of Mordor and of Saruman. He knew who had come and destroyed his home.

Frodo and Sam, and even the reader, are left with a feeling that this wrong can never be righted because what once was has been destroyed and will never be whole again. That is the feeling of solastalgia: the feeling that one’s home, one’s place, can never be the same again, and it is the feeling that because that place has been changed so fundamentally, one no longer has a solace there. It becomes obvious that this feeling never heals, even as Frodo’s wound from Weathertop never heals. Frodo explains this to Sam before he goes. He tells Sam “I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me” (*Lord* 1029). This could be seen as a rather enigmatic statement. If one believes he suffers from

solastalgia, however, one can see that the Shire has been saved from oppression and from ruin, but that he believes it can never be the same for him as it once was. Solastalgia and its paralyzing symptoms have set in. Mordor has come to his home, and because of this, so has the helplessness, frustration, and loneliness that was there. That is why, on top of his wound from Weathertop, he must leave Middle-earth. He is also leaving behind his most trusted ally and friend: Sam Gamgee.

Sam is Frodo's gardener at Bag-End. When Bag-End belonged to Bilbo, it had been Sam's father, Hamfast. When he became a bit too old for the job, Sam took over. So, just as much for Bilbo and Frodo, Bag-End had been passed down from Hamfast to Sam as well. This is why Sam feels such an attachment to Bag-End (not completely apart from the fact that Bilbo – a well-to-do hobbit – was kind to the Gamgees who were simpler tradesmen). Sam and his father worked the ground at Bag-End. They spent their lives tilling, digging, planting, tending and growing things from seed to maturity. One could say they made the face of Bag-End what it was, and perhaps the ripping up and burning and cutting that was done in the Shire by Saruman was harder on Sam than any of the other hobbits. Sam experiences solastalgia, but in a vastly different way. Yes, he feels separation from the Shire when he is gone. Yes, he feels the sting of the brutalizing that his home-land has gone through, and he says that experiencing this emotional distress of solastalgia is “worse than Mordor.” However, he is able to replant, repot, redo what has been undone.

Sam does feel the sting of separation from the Shire while on the journey with Frodo to Mount Doom in Mordor. This could be seen as most apparent in two places in the narrative. The first is when the lady Galadriel allows Sam and Frodo to look into “the Mirror.” This Mirror is a tool used for seeing “things unbidden, and those are often stranger and more profitable than

things which [one wishes] to behold ... it shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be" (*Lord* 362). When Sam is asked if he would like to look into the Mirror, he says "I'll have a peep, Lady, if you're willing. And I'd not mind a glimpse of what's going on at home ... It seems a terrible long time that I've been away" (362). Sam is wishing to make sure that he will return to a safe and sound Shire (since Elrond had mentioned that perhaps it needed protecting before they left on their quest (276)). However, what he sees in the Mirror is something that disquiets him enough to say "I must go home" (363). He sees what will befall the Shire in their absence. Sam sees the destruction of Saruman before it happens. He is most upset that "they've dug up Bagshot Row" (363). All his work and toil (and that of his father) would be for naught if the gardens of Bagshot Row and Bag-End were ever disturbed. The anger and terror that this moment reveals in Sam is indicative of the level of attachment he feels for his place.

The other place in the narrative where Sam feels separation from the Shire is when he finally realizes that his journey may lead his master Frodo and himself into certain peril, and that he may never see the Shire again. They are on the very slopes of Mount Doom to get rid of The One Ring within the fires there when he realizes this. Sam is greatly distressed by this, though it does harden his resolve. However, he gives himself one more moment of regret when he thinks to himself that this was "the job I felt I had to do when I started ... to help Mr. Frodo to the last step and then die with him? Well, if that is the job then I must do it. But I would dearly like to see Bywater again, and Rosie Cotton" (*Lord* 934). It is telling that there, in the heart of the evil that is sweeping Middle-earth, right under the nose of Sauron, and right at the end of the quest, he would think of home. He wished, above all, to help his master destroy this evil object, and then for the two of them to be able to return to life as usual, to the Shire, and to their home.

When they return home, however, they find that the Shire is completely and irreversibly altered. Trees have been cut down and left to rot, plants have been uprooted, homes and places of rest have been leveled. It is a very different Shire than the one they left, and Sam expresses his feelings of solastalgia in his very apt way by saying that it is worse than Mordor (as indicated above). The feeling of remembering home “before it was all ruined” is the point to be made here. The beauty the Shire held for Sam was in the trees, and the “trees were the worst loss and damage ... Sam grieved over this more than anything else. For one thing, this hurt would take long to heal, and only his great-grandchildren ... would see the Shire as it ought to be” (1022). Obviously, he is hurt enormously by the loss of beauty, but he is experiencing nostalgia for the solace of what once was his place, his home. It can no longer be what it was. So, he sets about remaking it into something new to be enjoyed and to become a new place for future generations to call their own. I believe that this is a different way to deal with these feelings of emotional distress: to remake ones home into something new and realizing that what you make it into can potentially be more beautiful than it was before.

When the Fellowship of The Ring departs Lothlorien (and the presence of the Lady Galadriel), the Lady gives gifts to each of the nine companions. To Sam, she gives a box full of “grey dust, soft and fine, in the middle of which was a seed” (*Lord* 1022). This seed, though a mystery to Sam at the time, is the seed of a *mallorn* tree (one of the most beautiful and coveted species of tree in all of Middle-earth). He spends some time trying to figure out what he should do with this gift in order to help the Shire. He says to his fellow travelling hobbits that he is “sure the Lady would not like me to keep it all for my own garden, now so many folk have suffered;” then Frodo suggests that he “[use] all the wits and knowledge you have of your own, Sam ... and then use the gift to help your work and better it. And use it sparingly ... . I expect every grain has

a value” (1023). Sam does end up using his knowledge and sparingly using the dust and seed. He does “pay special attention to Hobbiton and Bywater,” and he used all the dust as well as he could to help in replanting as many trees as he could (1023). He even uses his gift from Galadriel to attempt to salvage the Party Tree. “The little silver nut he planted in the Party Field where the tree had once been; and he wondered what would come of it ...” (1023). Because of all of this effort, Sam is rewarded. The trees he plants make a beautiful spring and the growth is extremely quick so that his own generation can enjoy this new place. Even though he thought that the trees would only return for his great-grandchildren, “[spring] surpassed his wildest hopes. His tree began to sprout and grow, as if time was in a hurry and wished to make one year do for twenty” (1023).

Elvish magic is doing its best to try and give Sam his wish. Though he is not able to see the old Party Tree as it once had been, a new *mallorn* tree grows where the old one stood. It surpasses the old one in beauty, and even attracts visitors to the Shire. The beauty of that particular year was marvelous, and the text tells us that “1420 in the Shire was a marvelous year ... [It had an] air of richness and growth, and a gleam of beauty beyond that of mortal summers that flicker and pass upon this Middle-earth ...” (*Lord* 1023). Not only did he restore growth, but Sam also helped (through using his gift to enrich the brokenness of the Shire) to bring about one of the most beautiful and bountiful years in the history of the Shire. His efforts at remaking the Shire into something just as beautiful (if not more so) than it had been before allowed him to move on from his feelings of nostalgia for the solace of the place that once had been. He was able to build and grow new attachments and new beauties for all to enjoy, and was able to move on to what would be in his life instead of living in what had been and was no more.

Though all three of these hobbits experienced attachment to land and place very differently from one another, it is interesting to investigate these ties. It is important to note the extent to which these hobbits are willing to go to be able to save what they love and return safely to it. Bilbo needed to know that the Shire (and his armchair) were there waiting on him in order to get through his very difficult and dangerous (even deadly) journey with Thorin and Company to the mountains and the desolation of Smaug. As long as he knew the Shire waited, he could continue. Frodo needed to keep in mind that the shadow he fought, the hatred of Sauron and Saruman for all things lovely and growing (basically all of the Shire), would spread to his beloved home if he did not complete the task that was set to him: to destroy The One Ring. Sam needed to know that he fought alongside his master to help in this task so that they could each return safe and sound to their beloved Shire. They both fought valiantly, once they returned to the Shire, to see that it was once again free and whole. All three of these Hobbits' attachment to land and place advanced the narratives of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* by leading them through their peril and right to the end. Even Elrond said "This is the hour of the Shire-folk, when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the Great. Who of all the Wise could have foreseen it?" (*Lord* 270). Their love of place is what allows them to shake the towers of the great and return Middle-earth to peace.



## Chapter 4: Back to Lands You Once Did Know

Within the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, we find many valiant people. There are men who fight for honor and truth, and there are Dwarves who fight for valuable gems and mines. Some of these characters have a home that they have never left nor plan to leave. The men in the narrative discuss home and their attachment and fealty to it, wherever it may be and no matter how flawed it may be. Some of them are still hoping for freedom from oppression within their homeland. Some even feel the need to venture to a place that they've never lived, but where their ancestors have lived and come from. In this chapter, I will argue that, though they may have no one single location to call their "place," they still have a tie to land and can develop a sense of place in another geographic location from the one where they grew up. I will look at two members of the race of Men, and also look at the race of Dwarves, to see what their attachment to land is, and I would further like to see how that attachment to land drives the plot of the narrative.

Aragorn, one of the most prominent characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, and one of the most prominent members of the race of Men, has spent his whole life being a Ranger and attempting to protect the various "simple" people of Middle-earth (like Hobbits). Throughout the narrative, Aragorn makes decisions that ultimately lead him to his rightful place as king of Gondor and Arnor. Bard, like Aragorn, must return to a place that has been his by lineage but was never a place he had lived in before. Dwarves, like the Rangers of Middle-earth (whom Aragorn commands), have been wandering for many years when the reader is introduced to them in *The Hobbit*. However, if they could vanquish the dragon that has destroyed much of what they had known before, they could return to the place that they would call their own. They are

attempting to return to their home in Erebor, but their sense of place, like that of Aragorn and Bard, is perhaps one of the most complex of any in Middle-earth since they draw their sense of place not directly from one location, but from the beauty that the earth can produce.

First, it is important to get a very short overview of who Aragorn is. Aragorn II commands the Dunedain of the north who are all descended from the kingdom of Arnor. Aragorn was born in 2931 and crowned king of Gondor in 3019. His life lasted 210 years, 170 of which were spent as king (Armstrong 22). He was born to be a king and was destined for greatness. However, he has much to do before he can walk ceremoniously into Gondor and claim the kingship and the place he is destined to claim.

Aragorn's attachment to land is unique. He has an attachment to the land that can be compared to the Elves in that he doesn't have necessarily one set geographic location (like Tom Bombadil) to look after. He doesn't shepherd the land as much as he shepherds the people living there. He knows the land like the back of his hand, but not for the beauty there (like the Elves). He knows the land because he must. His attachment to land in general is about utility (but not like Saruman to where he would abuse it). He simply reads it to find the information he needs to be able to best aid the people who depend on him.

Aragorn's uncanny ability to read the land aids him in finding and helping others, and he can measure time and distances. He is also knowledgeable in the lore of a particular location. This knowledge allows him to have ties to certain areas of land. Deborah Sabo states that "'Lore' in these instances is not a static recitation but a culturally constitutive act. The landscape itself is read and constantly interpreted as an open text" (108). For Aragorn, lore is not something that is said at random or for no reason. What it does is connect him as a person to a culture, and connect that culture to a particular geographic location, or place. Sabo also mentions that to speak of lore

in a particular location is to tie land to learning of a particular culture; it is a catalyst that brings about “connection to the past, and a context for learning, either a deepening sense of his own heritage and identity, or sympathy for that of another” (108) In this case, the connection is also felt between “‘site’ and ‘lore,’ [and] the intertwining of [a] sense of history with sense of place” (Sabo 108). Twining together a sense of history and a sense of place deepens the connection that one has with one’s cultural heritage by conjuring up the connection of a particular culture to a particular place. Lore, then, (especially for Aragorn) is something that ties all characters in Middle-earth to the heritage in a particular place that their ancestors once had. This is important for Aragorn who is attempting to claim a particular geographic location as his place even though he has never been there.

When they pass by the statues on the river (the Argonath), Frodo sees Aragorn as “a king returning from exile to his own land” instead of a dirty, weather-beaten ranger:

‘Fear not!’ said a strange voice behind him. Frodo turned and saw Strider, and yet not strider; for the weatherworn Ranger was no longer there. In the stern sat Aragorn son of Arathorn, proud and erect, guiding the boat with skillful strokes; his hood was cast back, and his dark hair was blowing in the wind, a light was in his eyes: a king returning from exile to his own land (*Lord* 393).

Obviously, this is only the perception of Frodo, but perhaps Aragorn is changing more into the king he is to become the closer he gets to Gondor (and his attachment to the land grows stronger through his knowledge of the lore of the land). He says he has “[long desired] to look upon the likenesses of ... my sires ... Under their shadow Elessar, the Elfstone son of Arathorn of the House of Valandil Isildur’s son, heir of Elendil, has naught to dread” (*Lord* 393). Here we see again the intersection of lore and land. As he passes the land and invokes the lore attached there,

he becomes more and more like the king he is to be. This drives Aragorn's connection to the land in this particular location: the men carved in stone here are forever reminders of where he comes from (and where he is going).

Aragorn's relationship to land is more complex than many characters in the narrative. It seems that he has a relationship to earth in a general sense, to terra firma, more so than a relationship to any one particular place. This is one aspect of his character which can lead us to believe that he falls into that category of characters that sense a call to another location where they will inevitably make their own place (much like Legolas who feels a call to the land beyond the sea without ever having been there). Lawrence Buell says this about characters who feel that call to unfamiliar places: "The places that haunt one's dreams and to some extent define one's character can [vary] –... [like] the promised land of the ... Israelites imagined ... But the fact that the imaginer hasn't been there ... hardly lessens the intensity of ... places to induce longing" (*Future* 73). One could easily liken Aragorn's attachment to Gondor and his willingness and need to return to the same emotions mentioned in the above statement about the ancient Israelites wishing to go to the promised land. Just because Aragorn has never been there, that doesn't mean he can't be intrinsically tied to that place as if it were his own from birth.

Aragorn's attachment to the particular geographic location of Gondor is that his ancestors were kings there. He knows that his right to be king of Gondor (and even his right to be a citizen of that particular place) comes from his ancestry. We can see that he senses the importance of the lore of the place when he tells stories about a particular location. This lore ties his ancestry and this geographic location to a sense of place. This lore expresses an "intimate knowledge of the land" as indicated by Deborah Sabo:

As [Aragorn] travels past the ruins of the old kingdom and remembers the tales that tell its history in words, he is commemorating his own heritage. He is a descendent of the makers of these ruins and feels that connection keenly. His knowledge about these places is in part the privilege of his ancestry. If the kingdom has been politically truncated and culturally fragmented, he, as its heir, still retains a kind of tenure that is expressed through his intimate knowledge of the land (102).

Because of his knowledge of lore his heritage and cultural ties to the land make it a place that he wishes to go and belong to. He has more attachment to that place than he ever has to anywhere else (even though he has never been there). As he gets closer to Gondor, he begins to change physically. The reader can see that in the moments which are almost like a transfiguration: the people around him see him as high and kingly in a flash that is over momentarily. When he arrives, his body and mind begin to change also since he can then heal people in the Houses of Healing. He has changed in this regard since he could not heal Frodo before arriving. Only Aragorn is present to help those in the Houses of Healing, and his

healing powers ... were not enough to help Frodo when afflicted by the Black Shadow [which is the same affliction Faramir has] ... Aragorn holds his hand on Faramir's forehead and calls him gently to return to life ... He crushes the [athelas into steaming water] ... Faramir stirs, then wakens. He gazes up at Aragorn and says: 'My lord, you have called me. I come. What does the king command' (qtd. in Robertson 336).

This is the most symbolic moment of Aragorn's journey from an eco-critical perspective. Some would say that he becomes a king when he commands the Army of the Dead, and some would

say he becomes king when he ceremoniously enters Gondor. However, this is the moment he becomes king: when he is able to fulfill the prophecy and use the athelas (a plant indigenous to Gondor) to heal his friends and future subjects from the Black Shadow. Just as the prophecy stated, his hands were the hands of a healer, and so, the hands of a king. He could not heal, however, without the land providing the necessary herb. Here is another instance where the land and culture are inextricably tied. Having a knowledge of the land affects a culture's development and success, and a culture's development and success, as we will see, affects the growth and prosperity of the very land beneath its feet.

In still another moment that seems to completely solidify his position as king, a tree comes into play. It had been prophesied that when a king returned to Gondor, then the tree would bloom. However, even though Aragorn, obviously the rightful King of Gondor, had returned, "the symbolic White Tree [was] still dead" (Robertson 338). Aragorn has shown that he is that king, and that all prophecies must come to pass. However, just like in the Shire, sometimes trees need to be replanted. Gandalf is learned in this culturally constitutive lore which states that Gondor must have a tree in bloom once the rightful King of Gondor returns. So, Gandalf "takes Aragorn up to a ... place where traditionally only kings have gone before. There, amidst the snow, where all else is barren, Aragorn sees a small sapling that bears flowers" (338). He then digs it up and brings it back to Gondor to plant it where the old and withered tree had been. Just like when Sam planted new trees in the Shire, "once planted, it soon begins to grow and blossom. Now, in order to once more start a line of kings ... he needs a living symbol" (338). Though I agree he needed a living symbol, he felt he needed to be tied inextricably to the land. Not only for himself, but for the kings that would come in the line after him. Culture, then, in order to thrive, must be tied to the land it calls its own place.

It would seem as if Aragorn is waiting and preparing to go back to Gondor throughout the entire narrative. Once he is finally able to return, and finally able to heal the sick in the Houses of Healing, the very earth blooms in honor of the return of the King of Gondor. It's as if the land is attached to him as well; the plants are in bloom because he arrives. Faramir even makes a statement tying the people of Gondor to the land: "It is long since we had any hope. The sword of [Aragorn's ancestors], if it returns indeed, may rekindle it ... We are a failing people, a springless autumn" (*Lord* 677). This statement makes it sound as if Aragorn's return would not only bring about a spring of hope for this hopeless people in an endless season of death, but it even seems quite literal as the ground does bloom at his arrival. He is now finally king and is now finally in his rightful place.

Bard the Bowman, much like Aragorn, is drawn to a place that is not necessarily his own except through the lore he knows. Like Aragorn, who had never been to Gondor, Bard had never been to Dale. He knew it through legend, and he knew the ruins where the town had once stood (before it had been destroyed by Smaug the dragon) had been home to his ancestors. However, he had been born to refugees of Dale who were living in Lake-town (or Esgaroth). Bard was a captain of the men of Esgaroth. He was "grim-voiced and grim-faced," and his "friends had accused him of prophesying floods and poisoned fish, though they knew his worth and courage. He was a descendant in long line of Girion, Lord of Dale" (*Hobbit* 250). When the dragon first showed up and began destroying the town of Dale, Bard's ancestor, Girion, attempted to bring down the dragon with an arrow to an exposed area on its underside. Girion failed, but Bard eventually succeeded many years later (earning him the title Bard the Bowman). What is most interesting to me, however, is what he does once the dragon is finally vanquished.

Though the place he lived was already settled, and was now newly made safe thanks to efforts by the Dwarves, Bilbo, and himself, Bard the Bowman was still willing to go to the ruins of the town of Dale to remake it into a living and thriving community of his own. What drew him there? The only explanation is, again, that of Lawrence Buell which also applies to Aragorn's situation: "The places that haunt one's dreams and to some extent define one's character can [vary... But the fact that the imaginer hasn't been there... hardly lessens the intensity of such... places to induce longing" (*Future* 73). Bard's sense of place, like Aragorn's, is not in Lake-town where he has lived his whole life. It is in another location, one that needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. Not only rebuilt in the physical sense, but also peopled and repopulated. This differs from Aragorn's situation because Aragorn never had one particular place to call "home" like Bard.

Even though Bard has a physical location to which his life and upbringing has been tied, he still finds that his sense of place is in the, for lack of a better term, Promised Land of Dale. Like Aragorn, he knows the lore surrounding the land, and he knows that it has been prophesied that once the Dwarves return to the Lonely Mountain and begin producing precious metals and goods, Dale can become what it once was. This knowledge of lore, as in the case of Aragorn, is what ties him to the land he wishes to call home/his place. Just as with Aragorn, lore becomes a "culturally constitutive act" where the lore ties the culture of this person to the land, and the land thrives due to the success of the culture (Sabo 108). Bard's sense of duty to place and knowledge of its lore is what drives him to leave Lake-town and settle the new Dale. This new settlement becomes a successful venture that Tolkien mentions again in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Entwined with the story of Bard is the story of the Dwarves who attempt to reclaim Erabor. When one encounters *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, it can be striking just how



much loss is inherent in the text. Some of the most profound loss is felt when the reader encounters the loss of the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* and their collective wanderings without a homeland. They have been a wandering people since Smaug the dragon destroyed their home in his endless and insatiable quest for treasure (since all dragons love treasure). It is theorized that perhaps he was drawn there by rumors of the tremendous treasure hoard that the Dwarves had at the time. This is the way in which their sense of place is exhibited. As a race, Dwarves love treasure and extracting it from the land. Some could see this as “greed”:

Dwarves’ chief temptation is greed ... The Dwarves Bilbo meets ... are jealous to reclaim the treasure hoard accumulated by their ancestors and later usurped by the dragon Smaug. The song describing their mission tells of ancient Dwarves’ hammers ringing in ‘hollow halls beneath the fells’; their forging of bejeweled swords, goblets, and crowns; and their love of ‘pale enchanted gold’ ... The song awakens in Bilbo a similarly ‘fierce and jealous love’ of ‘beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic’ ... (qtd. in Evans 134).

However, inherent in this “greed” described in the above statement is the real and complex attachment to land for the Dwarves. In the character of Gimli the Dwarf (son of one of the Dwarves in Thorin’s company, Gloin), one can see that it isn’t simply the treasure they seek for monetary gain, but the beauty inherent in the treasure as they pull it from the earth. It isn’t the capital they can gain from selling the finery, but the finery itself (which can be seen as a form of place attachment). Gimli is so enamored of the beauty that the earth can produce that he established a Dwarf realm in the Glittering Caves simply to allow the beauty to be appreciated by Dwarves; and “[after] the War of the Ring was ended, Gimli took a group of Dwarves from Erebor and established a new Dwarvish realm in the Glittering Caves. Both Erebor and the

Glittering Caves were established as independent realms ...” (Harper 384). Gimli finds that, next to the Lady Galadriel, the Glittering Caves in Rohan are some of the most beautiful he had seen, and he wished, not to make money from them, but to build a civilization there so that Dwarves could be present to fully appreciate that beauty (as only Dwarves are capable of doing).

Just as in the cases of Aragorn and Bard, some of the Dwarves on the quest to reclaim Erebor had never been there. However, in the case of Thorin Oakenshield, Erebor had originally been his home with his father and grandfather who were both kings under the mountain. As his story goes, Thorin “was born in Erebor ... [and] he saw the devastation of Smaug ... [he] escaped ... with his family ... [and] wandered aimlessly ... Over the next ninety-six years Thorin pondered more and more about the wealth stolen from his kin and the dragon who wronged his house” (Dueck 646). The story of Thorin would inevitably involve solastalgia.

Thorin Oakenshield exhibits the traits of someone attempting to reclaim a lost sense of place. Just like the people of Central Appalachia whose homes are devastated by strip-mining of coal, he witnessed the devastation of his home by an outside force he could not control who was there to seek the riches from the mines of Erebor. Also, much like some people native to these strip-mined areas in Central Appalachia, he and his family choose to leave in order to keep their lives and health. By leaving, however, they are choosing to leave home behind. Even though this was the best choice for their physical well-being at the time, Thorin still needed to return to his home and reclaim it for Dwarf habitation. “Thorin Oakenshield had grown restless in exile after his father had disappeared and became obsessed with the idea of reclaiming Erebor” (Harper 384). Part of the effort of returning home is to seek that solace that he once knew in his home; whether it be a solace he gained from the residence he knew or from the attachment to the finery that the Dwarves there found in the earth. Either way, there was a solace there, and now all that

is left is a melancholy and memories of what used to be (alongside visions of what reality is now).

Just like Treebeard and the Hobbits, Thorin and his company of Dwarves (Durin's folk), choose to fight in order to regain their original homeland from the grasp of the evil and covetous dragon, Smaug. Though it is tempting to see the Dwarves as greedy, I believe that it is just a different, perhaps more complex sense of place and a fierce protective nature over the beauty that that place is capable of producing. Their entire culture is rooted and grounded in mines and in mining, and, if we follow the rules for sense of place, it is obvious that this is the case with the Dwarves (not greed alone, though it is true that greed eventually becomes the downfall of Thorin Oakenshield). The Dwarves in the company of Thorin, without Erebor, are homeless. They are a wandering people without any ties. As Lawrence Buell says, a sense of place is intrinsically tied to a place of being, and "being means being-there, or that 'to be a body, is to be tied to a certain world'"(qtd. in *Future* 65). In the narrative of *The Hobbit*, the Dwarves are tied to Erebor, and when the reader imagines Erebor, it is always intrinsically tied to Dwarves (since, as I have established, cultures affect their place just as place helps to define culture).

Throughout the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, it is apparent that each character comes from a particular place in Middle-earth. However, perhaps the place they live doesn't necessarily mean that that location is their "place." It is entirely possible to have a sense of place tied to a location where one has never been but has a fabled link to that location which creates a very real sense of place. It is also possible to have a tie to a place based on what the land there is capable of producing. A sense of place isn't necessarily always the same as being tied to a location just as a tree is rooted to a spot. Sometimes seemingly rootless characters

have not yet put down roots in their particular place. Once they do, however, they change the narrative in drastic ways.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

J.R.R. Tolkien's works have touched many people for generations. His most popular work could be seen as an ecocentric work for the ages, and it could be said that his beautiful descriptions of enchanting landscapes are what keep readers coming back year after year. *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are still relatable, however, as many of the concerns raised about the environment can still impact the lives of readers today. The stripping of the environment and the total disrespect thereof can be seen in our own time. There is very little access to fresh, open landscape anymore. Most of the land we have has been or will be used for some kind of economic or utilitarian gain. This is why it is important to keep reading *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*: because readers today can benefit from a vision of a purely natural landscape free of machines, technology, and gadgetry. Perhaps if readers can continue to read (and view) this narrative for years to come, some of that love of nature can rub off a bit on future generations.

Obviously, nature is a driving force behind the narrative. I have striven to prove that nature (not only when acted upon, but in some cases, when performing the action) drives the plot and helps Frodo to destroy The One Ring and vanquish the evil of Sauron forever. Some characterizations of nature happen to help move the plot along, some nature can be sentient, and some sentient beings can become more natural. The blurring of these lines between sentient beings and the natural world can be seen in the characters of the Ents, Huorns, and trees of Fangorn and The Old Forests. I have shown that even nature, Huorns and Ents, can have a sense of place.

Not only is nature a player in these stories, but the reader can even recognize some of the vegetation along the way throughout the narrative. This helps the reader to imagine places that

they have ties to. When the destruction of Fangorn takes place, the reader can almost see a forest they played in being destroyed. As previously stated, a sense of place is something that most, if not all, readers can relate to. Place, according to Lawrence Buell is “‘space to which meaning has been ascribed’ ... Places are ‘centers of felt value’ ... ‘discrete if “elastic” areas in which settings for the constitution of social relations are located and with which people can identify’” (*Future* 63). If this definition of place is followed, it can apply to any location, as long as it has “felt value” for some people group.

Just as in the world outside the text, then, a culture is developed in a place just as a place is developed by a culture. In this way, “cultural identity is shaped by a shared experience of community whose sense of history is intertwined with a sense of place” (Sabo 92). If we understand that place is created by culture, and culture by place, and if we understand that certain characters in the text are inextricably tied to a particular geographic location, the question becomes: How does the narrative change and flow when that sense of place is disrupted in some way? How, for example, do the hobbits continue in the narrative once they have discovered that the Shire has been drastically and unrecognizably altered? That seems to be a fairly common occurrence throughout Middle-earth as it seems to be in constant flux. Whether it is deforestation or cyclical, natural change, nature in Middle-earth is never standing still. Its characters must develop ways in which to cope with these changes and find a way to move throughout the narrative when their environments are either altered by other characters or are altered by natural change.

Supposing that the job of any ecocritic is to compare the landscape of a text to the landscape of the “real” world *outside* the text, how, then, do we bring these concepts from the imaginary world of Tolkien’s creation to the reality that deforestation and strip-mining are all

part of the reader's everyday experience? If the text to be analyzed reflects the "real" world outside of itself, then it stands to reason that the same ways in which that "real" environment can be analyzed are the same ways in which we might analyze the environments within the text. I have applied real-world situations and real-world environmental struggles to the world within the narrative of these two very important ecocentric works.

One way in which I was able to tie real world concerns to *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* is through the idea of solastalgia. This is a psychoterratic mental distress that affects individuals who have experienced a loss of place. They may still live in the geographic location that they consider "their place," but it has been so drastically altered that they find no more solace there. They have become nostalgic for that solace. This has been seen and documented across the nation (specifically in Appalachia where the strip-mining practices of big coal companies are changing the face of this one-time paradise) as well as in other countries (in Australia where deforestation is claiming the "places" of many people). Solastalgia, a very real form of mental distress which is inextricably tied to a sense of place, can be applied to some of the literary characters I am working with. Specifically, instances of symptoms that could be termed as solastalgia arise in the characters of Frodo, Sam, and Treebeard. These three characters experience strong moments of nostalgia for the solace that no longer exists in a place so drastically changed that it can never be the same again. Frodo succumbs to these environmentally-induced bouts of melancholy and is forced to leave Middle-earth with the Elves and Gandalf and Bilbo. Sam, however, is able to turn his disgust and melancholy into something much more beautiful. Solastalgia is actually useful to Sam as he seeks to bring about a new Shire that can be enjoyed by the generation that lost the former beauty that had been there. Treebeard's solastalgia occurs very briefly, but it drives him to make changes just like Sam. The wrath of the

Ents actually serves to move the plot along and serve the interests of those who would destroy The One Ring.

Much like Hobbits, Central Appalachians have been keen to lead well-ordered lives in a well-ordered place. Loyal Jones, an Appalachian writer and philosopher, has written in his text *Appalachian Values* that Appalachian people are tied to place in much the same way as Hobbits are depicted in *Lord of the Rings*. Loyal Jones says in *Appalachian Values* that “our place is close on our minds ... Sense of place is one of the unifying values of mountain people, and it makes it hard for us to leave the mountains, and when we do, we long to return” (222). Bearing this in mind, just as Appalachians have experienced the loss of place through strip-mining, the Hobbits also experienced the same kind of loss of place through Saruman’s treachery in the Shire. Paige Cordial wrote about this loss of place which can cause solastalgia. She wrote that:

Like others in largely rural cultures, Appalachians tend to have the keen sense of connection to the land. Many Appalachians have a sense of historical and spiritual place attachment that connects them to family land, to ancestors who have lived on the land before them, and to their children who they hope will live on the land after them. While this place attachment typically serves as a grounding source of strength, it makes the destruction of the land a far more painful blow ... Eco-anxiety can be thought of as the feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty about the future associated with environmental problems. This stress or anxiety can sometimes lead to eco-paralysis, a condition which is characterized by a sense of apathy, disengagement, anger or denial regarding ecological problems (203).



Just like Central Appalachians depicted in Cordial's article, the Hobbits in Tolkien's works are just as tied to place, and so "destruction of the land" can be a "far more painful blow" for them as well.

Solastalgia, for many outside of the narrative (in the "real" world) can cause feelings of hopelessness and despair, even helplessness. In the narrative, characters who experience this psychoterratic mental distress can use it to drive them (and in this case, to drive the narrative as well) into action. Perhaps, instead of "radical nostalgia," we should understand that there is, in some instances, a sense of "radical solastalgia" (qtd. in Curry 165). There could be lessons in this narrative for those suffering from symptoms of solastalgia in the world outside the text. Perhaps one solution to the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness is to attempt to make a new home, a new place.

Throughout the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, several different characters have a deep and abiding connection with the land, or with their place, which can drive the narrative. In the second chapter, I explored the ways in which certain characters shepherd geographical locations throughout Middle-earth. It is apparent that Treebeard is a shepherd of Fangorn forest, and that Tom Bombadil is a shepherd of The Old Forest, on the borders of the Shire. These two very ancient shepherds have a very close sense of place to the living and growing things they protect. Because of their strong attachment to place, they were dedicating all of their existence to one, very rooted, location (sometimes literally fighting to protect it). Elves were another people group explored in the second chapter. I deduced that they are quite different in how they shepherd place, though they do indeed serve as shepherds. They have a more global sense of place, and they feel a deep desire to protect beauty in general. Because of this, they have plotted out their own spaces, each belonging to different groups of Elves (such as Lothlorien,

Rivendell, and Mirkwood) that each group oversees and protects. It could even be said that they create beauty by giving their own beauty and power to the land around them. One very good example of this is Galadriel's gift to Sam of the Elven soil with which he replants, repots, and regrows the Shire into something much more beautiful (if possible) than it was before. Elves are protectors of the beautiful things and places of Middle-earth.

Through analysis of the world outside the text and also the world within, I was able to prove that though Frodo, Sam and Bilbo all have a connection to place (the Shire), and though they all experience this (and carry it with them) in different ways, all are very place-oriented. Sam and Frodo both experience Solastalgia, but both attempt to remediate these feelings in different ways: Frodo leaves, and Sam attempts to make a new home. Just like Treebeard, the Hobbits of the Shire must fight the forces of darkness to win back their place and restore its beauty. Sam uses the soil of Galadriel to make the Shire new. Frodo, however, leaves his attachment to the Shire behind when he leaves Middle-earth and crosses the sea. Though they both experience solastalgia, Sam is the one who is "radical" like Treebeard.

I believe that anyone experiencing feelings of helplessness due to solastalgia can learn a great deal from the efforts of Sam and Treebeard. They both fight, but they fight in different ways. Treebeard is like those folks in Central Appalachia who fight against the coal companies to attempt to make their world and their environment better and different. They seek to end the destruction of their place directly at the source just as Treebeard attacked Saruman in his home base of Isengard. Sam could represent those folks fighting symptoms of solastalgia by attempting to make do with what they are left. Though Sam has the magic of Elves on his side, those of us in the "real" world without that magic can still attempt to repot, replant, and remake the land

around us if it has been scarred or changed by the activities of an outside party. The idea of remaking a home from something destroyed can be found in the fourth chapter as well.

In the fourth chapter, I found the connection with the land for Men and Dwarves. Two men in particular, Bard and Aragorn, have strong connections to a place neither of them grew up in. Both are remaking a land from what seems like nothing: Gondor had been sacked in war, and Dale had been sacked long ago by the dragon Smaug. The Dwarves in Thorin's company need to remake their home in Erebor in order to find that sense of place restored. Though they do have a sense of place, they feel this attachment not only to the land for the sake of the beauty it can provide (like Elves), but for the beautiful things they can extract and make from it. Though their sense of place is no less intense, it is a very different one than from Elves or a character like Treebeard. Dwarves find utility and beauty to be very similar, and almost one and the same.

Though not all characters analyzed here experience the symptoms of solastalgia, they all exhibit close ties with the land they call their own. Tolkien's environments, though diverse and sweeping, seem to all have a history and story. A sense of place is not something that all characters in literature exhibit and it is not simple to achieve this kind of historicity and have it seem to occur naturally. Tolkien is arguably one of the most talented authors to publish, and it can be argued that this is because of the deep dimensionality of his ecocentric text.

What I have discovered is that the most important aspect of Tolkien's work is perhaps the ecocentricity of it. The land and the ways in which the characters experience it play out in vivid details and rich descriptions. Any reader would come away from this text with a new and profound sense of wonder, and most overwhelmingly, a sense of loss. It leads the reader to compare the work to their own lands, and it is essential that this continue to happen. Questions can be raised, and perhaps the answers would shock the populace into action for the better. Some

questions that could be raised by *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* could be like these: what is my responsibility to place? How do I go about adapting to symptoms of solastalgia? Can I prevent the natural environment around me from becoming lost in the relentless search for “resources?” Is it fair to ask for more when I can be content with less? The answers to these types of questions can easily be found within Tolkien’s texts.

The lessons the reader can take from *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are numerous. One can learn to be a good steward of the land around them from the character of Treebeard. There is the lesson that land/nature doesn’t necessarily have to produce something useful in order to be useful. The Elves find beauty to be as productive as anything, and this lesson can go a long way. Tom Bombadil is an example of the joy that can be learned and gained in nature (wide open, uninhibited nature). Bombadil’s joy in his own modest borders (though he has power to *take* more, he only wishes to *shepherd* the amount he can handle) exhibits the idea that contentment is sometimes the most beneficial of all emotions. There can also be a reawakening of the sense of place in our own lives. People can be reminded of the streams they used to frequent or the beauty they once found in the natural world by simply picking up this moving and elaborately detailed, beautifully experiential text. One can also learn to recognize, understand and perhaps even recover from solastalgia by doing what the hobbits did in fighting environmental injustice and attempting to rebuild a new place for themselves. Perhaps there is no other conclusion to draw than that Tolkien’s work can teach us many different things about the land around us, and can teach us how to return to the land we once did know, and develop a close friendship with it.

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