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The Diathesis-Stress Model of Corruption by the Ruling Ring:
Nature, Power, and Exposure in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

By

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An Honors Thesis

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In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the One Ring seems to exert power over some characters more than others. Though these differences could seem like an oversight or a lack of continuity, they also offer the opportunity to examine the effects of the differential power of the Ring. If the Ring is addictive, as Tom Shippey claims in *The Road to Middle Earth*, then it is possible to examine the etiology of addiction to the Ring (126). In this thesis, I present a psychological reading of Tolkien that relies on a modern psychological theory, namely the diathesis-stress model. According to David H. Barlow and Mark Durand's *Abnormal Psychology*, the diathesis-stress model is a model of psychopathology that shows interactions between genetics and the environment, such that the development of pathology relies on both genetic predispositions and environmental stressors (34). The diathesis-stress model helps to explain why only some people fall to the addictive power of Ring, and I explore the tendencies and stressors that seem to affect those around the Ring the most, such as affinity with nature or desire for power.

Using the diathesis-stress model represents a fairly major departure from earlier psychological criticism of *The Lord of the Rings*, the majority of which has been Jungian. According to Charles E. Bressler's *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, Jung, a psychoanalytic theorist, proposed the idea of a collective unconscious that all humans have, which contains archetypes, or repeated images of shared human experience (92). Though Jungian and other psychoanalytic theories are fairly outdated in the field of modern psychology, they remain important to literary studies. The first Jungian interpretation of Tolkien's works was Timothy R. O'Neill's *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien, and the Archetypes of Middle*

Earth, in which he explains Middle Earth as a map of the psyche, with the West representing the wholesome aspects of both the conscious and the unconscious, and Mordor representing the unwholesome aspects (94). O'Neill also argues that the Ring is symbolic of the individuated Self (130), so Frodo's destruction of the Ring is a sacrifice of achieving self-actualization (136). However, it is strange that the Ring, an object of evil, would represent the individuated Self, because, as Nathalie Kotowski explains in her article, "Frodo, Sam, and Aragorn in the Light of C. G. Jung," individuation is the goal of Jungian psychotherapy (145-146). Kotowski instead argues that Tolkien emphasizes the union of opposites throughout the work and that Jungian archetypes are prevalent within Middle-earth. Kotowski's description of the Elf-stone as a symbol of the Self is more believable than O'Neill's argument for the Ring, because the Elf-stone represents the union of Elven and human traits in Aragorn (151).

Like Kotowski, Robin Roberson, examines the union of opposites in "Seven Paths of the Hero in *The Lord of the Rings: The Path of Opposites*," but focuses on the relationship between Gimli and Legolas (278). Roberson argues that the union of the solidity of Dwarves and the imagination and spiritual nature of Elves is necessary for psychological health, though she does not offer a symbol of individuation (278). In "Good and Evil in Popular Children's Fantasy Fiction: How Archetypes Become Stereotypes that Cultivate the Next Generation of Sun Readers," C. Neil Robinson argues that the archetypal presentation of good and evil as polar opposites, as they are presented in *The Lord of the Rings*, results in simplistic stereotypes in children (30). Robinson, however, ignores the lack of a polar division between good and evil in *The Lord of the Rings*. There is consistent hope for redemption because "nothing is evil in the beginning" (FR 351). "Lord of the Rings Taps a Gay Archetype" by Roger Kaufman inspects Frodo and Sam's relationship as characteristic of homosexual individuation (32). Kaufman

overstates the homoerotic tension between Frodo and Sam. Additionally, reading a homosexual relationship between Sam and Frodo introduces problems of consent, because Sam is Frodo's servant, but Kaufman fails to comment on this issue.

Of the psychological criticism of *The Lord of the Rings* that is not Jungian, much is still psychoanalytic. In "Orc: The Id in Blake and Tolkien," Randel Helms uses Freudian psychoanalysis to understand *The Lord of the Rings*. Helms argues that sexuality is represented as evil, because the Orcs breed rapidly, and because of the clear sexual imagery of the tower seeking the Ring (33). Helms concludes that Tolkien's conservatism causes him to react with disgust to sexuality and to believe that *Eros*, the sexual instinct, must be fettered to defeat *Thanatos*, the death instinct (31, 35). Though there is little emphasis placed on sexual relations in *The Lord of the Rings*, Helms overlooks the fact that Aragorn's relationship with Arwen helps inspire him to claim the kingship, and thus is vital to the War of the Ring (*RK* Appendix A 425). Paula Jean Manners offers a Kleinian analysis in "Frodo's journey," showing Frodo's maturation throughout *The Lord of the Rings* (98). Michele Novellino also examines Frodo's maturation in "A Transactional Psychoanalysis of Frodo: The Conflict of the Male Adolescent in Becoming a Man" (233). However, these developmental theories fall short, because Frodo is an adult during the entirety of *The Lord of the Rings*. Psychoanalytic interpretations of Tolkien, including Jungian interpretations, offer valuable ways to conceptualize characters' internal struggles, but as psychology continues to make progress, it is useful to apply more modern psychological understandings.

Other psychological critical analyses of *The Lord of the Rings* examine the effects of WWI and WWII on Middle-earth, including Michael Livingston's "The Shell-Shocked Hobbit: The First World War and Tolkien's Trauma of the Ring" and Barton Friedman's "Tolkien and

David Jones: The Great War and the War of the Rings.” These studies highlight the importance of considering psychology at the time that Tolkien was writing. Much psychological study following WWI was devoted to the effects of shell shock. One effect of shell shock was to help establish psychoanalysis in Great Britain, as it helped treat the huge number of psychological casualties, and, as L. S. Hearnshaw explains in *A Short History of British Psychology: 1840-1940*, its emphasis on human nature’s sexual, violent side appealed to those disillusioned by the war (165-167). Peter W. Howorth, in “The Treatment of Shell-Shock. Cognitive Therapy before Its Time,” argues that shell shock also forced people to recognize that stress could be related to insanity, rather than simply explaining insanity through hereditary weakness (225).

Another strain of criticism of *The Lord of the Rings* has explored the nature of evil, a discussion which must involve the nature of the Ring. Richard P. Bullock in “The Importance of Free Will in *The Lord of the Rings*” claims that all Tolkien’s beings have free will and must maintain it for the world to continue to function properly, and that the desire to dominate the will of others is the source of evil, as is surrendering one’s will to another because it is easier than fighting (29). Because free will is so important, one of the greatest temptations of possessing the Ring is to use it to control others, thus more quickly corrupting the user, according to Melanie Rawls in “The Rings of Power” (30-31) and Mason Harris in “The Psychology of Power in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, Orwell’s *1984*, and Le Guin’s *A Wizard of Earthsea*” (47). The Ring serves as an active, malevolent, external force but it also reacts to the internal desires of the bearer, albeit twisting and enlarging them (Rawls 30). Shippey resolves the tension between internal and external actions of the Ring by describing the Ring as addictive, thus explaining how an external force produces and corrupts internal desires (126). It is Shippey’s claim of addiction

that connects the strand of analysis on the nature of evil to psychological criticism. Though analyzing the Ring is necessary for the analysis of evil, addiction is a psychopathology.

If the powers of the Ring function like psychopathology, then the etiology of its effects may follow the same model as the etiology of other psychopathologies. In Chapter 1, I introduce the diathesis-stress model, using alcoholism as an explanatory example. The diathesis-stress model explains disorders using a combination of genetic, inborn predispositions and environmental stressors. Though Tolkien would not have been aware of the model per se, he would have had an idea of its component parts, as psychology after World War II included the competing ideas of inborn tendencies for insanity and stress-caused problems.

In the remainder of the thesis, I examine evidence for each component of the theory separately. In Chapter 2, I offer a definition of nature in *The Lord of the Rings*, and explain how a deep connection to nature is a protective factor against falling to the Ring. Connection to nature functions on a primarily racial, rather than individual, level in determining the Ring's effect.

In Chapter 3, I explain a more individual risk factor to being corrupted by the Ring, namely, a desire for power. I also explore the appropriate uses of power and contrast these uses with the control of others through fear and deceit.

In Chapter 4, I examine the stress component of the model. Possession of, exposure to, and desire for the Ring serve as the primary stressors in *The Lord of the Rings*. As the Ring approaches Mordor, it grows in power, so duration of exposure is not the only important factor.

1. The Diathesis-Stress Model

As O'Neill explains in the preface to *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien, and the Archetypes of Middle Earth*, there are two kinds of people who might be interested in a study like this: those already familiar with the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, and those already familiar with the psychological construct being applied (xii). Like O'Neill, I assume that the majority of my readers come to this work through familiarity with Tolkien and hope that they forgive a brief explanation of the diathesis-stress model.

One of the most debated questions in psychology has been whether our actions stem from genetics or the environment, a question which has been dubbed the nature/nurture debate. The diathesis-stress model answers this question by acknowledging the contributions of both genetics and the environment. According to Barlow and Durand, in the diathesis-stress model, people inherit the tendency toward certain traits, but specific environmental conditions are needed to activate the trait (34). To illustrate this model, Barlow and Durand give the example of a glass filled with liquid (35). If one glass begins with more liquid, less will need to be added to cause it to overflow. The initial amount of liquid is equivalent to the diathesis or genetic vulnerability. Because of genetic differences, some people are innately more likely to develop a disorder than others. The amount of liquid that is added is equivalent to the stressors that people encounter. Some people experience more numerous or more severe stressors, making them more likely to develop a disorder.

Like Barlow and Durand, I will use alcoholism as an example (35). Some people have a predisposition to develop alcoholism. Exposure to alcohol serves as the stressor for developing alcoholism. If Person A has a genetic vulnerability toward developing alcoholism and Person B does not, Person A has a higher diathesis. If Person A and Person B both regularly drink the

same moderately large amount of alcohol, it is likely that this will provide Person A with enough stress to become an alcoholic, while it will not for Person B. However, having a predisposition to alcoholism is not the same as automatically being an alcoholic. If Person C also has a high diathesis, but, knowing this, decides never to drink alcohol in her life, she cannot be defined as an alcoholic. Similarly, not having a high diathesis does not mean that a person is completely safe from developing alcoholism. If Person D has exactly the same diathesis as Person B, but drinks until she passes out every night, Person D is still likely to develop alcoholism.

The diathesis-stress model is a modern theory in psychology, with one landmark study coming as late as 2003 (Barlow and Durand 35)¹. Tolkien, writing *The Lord of the Rings* in the 1930s and 1940s, clearly could not have purposefully included this model in his works, nor was he likely to have desired to do so, as he writes in the Foreword to the Ballantine edition of *The Lord of the Rings* that he “cordially dislike[s] allegory in all its manifestations” (FR xi). Though using a model is not truly the same as writing an allegory, it involves the same “purposed domination of the author” that Tolkien dislikes about allegory (FR xi). Tolkien also writes, however, that he values the “varied applicability” that creating a history allows the readers, which I use to apply the diathesis-stress model (FR xi).

Though it is highly unlikely that Tolkien intentionally incorporated the diathesis-stress model into Middle-earth, it is possible that he was influenced by the psychology of his time. According to Henryk Misiak and Virginia Staudt Sexton in *History of Psychology: An Overview*, the first quarter of the twentieth century saw the rapid expansion of a number of schools of thought in psychology, including structuralism, functionalism, behaviorism and gestalt (314-315). Hearnshaw writes about another school of thought that entered British psychology shortly

¹ Caspi, Avshalom, Karen Sugden, Terrie E. Moffitt, Alan Taylor, Ian W. Craig, HonaLee Harrington, Joseph McClay, Jonathan Mill, Judy Martin, Antony Braithwaite, and Richie Poulto. “Influence of Life Stress on Depression: Moderation by a Polymorphism in the 5-HTT Gene.” *Science* 301.5631 (2003): 386-389. Print.

before WWI, namely psychoanalysis (165). Though psychoanalytic thought was mostly denigrated by the medical community, the war helped stimulate the development and common acceptance of psychoanalysis, because the horrors of WWI caused many to question human nature (Hearnshaw 167).

Shell-shocked soldiers created the need to reconsider masculinity in England. Joanna Bourke, in her article “Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of ‘Shell-Shocked’ Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-1939,” argues that shell-shock was seen as unmanly, because aggression was considered a masculine trait, and abhorrence to violence was seen as effeminate (59-60). The idea that shell-shock was considered an expression of feminine nature is also espoused by Jessica Meyer in her article “Separating the Men from the Boys: Masculinity and Maturity in Understandings of Shell Shock in Britain” (2). Meyer, however, also considers that masculinity is not just the opposite of femininity, but also the opposite of the bestial and the childlike (5). Breaking down under the pressure of war showed a soldier to be immature, and the proper development of boys to men became a national concern, since immature boys clearly could not meet the demands of soldiering (Meyer 7-9). Because, to some extent, psychological problems were considered to be within the control of the patient, treatment could be extremely disciplinary, using quick cures such as shaming and pain (Meyer 12). One cure considered for shell shock was recovery of the masculinity of affected men through work (Bourke 65-66).

However, according to Michael Roper in his article “Between Manliness and Masculinity: The ‘War Generation’ and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950,” it became obvious that the effects of trauma could not be overcome by strenuous physical activity nor would they go away if simply ignored (352). The ineffective treatments and the sheer

number of psychological casualties created a need to reconsider the classification of mental illness. Treatments changed before theory as military psychiatrists attempted to keep soldiers available to fight. Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, in *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War*, explain that the epidemic proportions of psychological losses caused professionals to try new measures for the treatment of shell shock, including immediate treatment close to the front line with the expectation of recovery (21). Howorth explains that these treatments and the encouragement to re-experience events to resolve trauma mirror modern cognitive treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder (226). However, Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, in their article “Shell-Shock,” respond to Howorth by arguing that the gains made in cognitive treatments during WWI were lost during the interwar period and had to be recovered in 1939 (353).

Before WWI, the popularity of the study of genetics led to an emphasis on hereditary insanity, but, by 1905, there was also acknowledgement that worry and stress might be indirect causes of mental illness (Hearnshaw 147). The prevalence of shell shock forced authorities to recognize that healthy individuals break down under enough stress (Howorth 225). However, Jones and Wessely argue that the idea that highly trained soldiers could break down was not accepted until WWII (“Shell-Shock” 353). At the latest by WWII, then, the acknowledgement of the dual contributions of heredity and the stress of war to the development of shell shock shows that the components of the diathesis-stress model were both available at this time, though the model itself had not been formally advanced. In Tolkien’s works, the diathesis-stress model explains corruption by the Ring, rather than shell shock, and the diatheses include disconnection from nature and desire for power, whereas the stressor is the power of the Ring.

2. Connection to Nature

One major difference in predisposition to falling under the Ring's power is how connected a character is to the natural world. Being more aligned with nature seems to serve as a protective factor against corruption, thus serving to lower the diathesis of characters that are in touch with the natural world. However, before examining the way interacting with nature serves as a part of the diathesis-stress model, it is necessary to define the natural world. Defining nature is more complicated than it might seem. Frederick Turner in his essay "Cultivating the American Garden" highlights the difficulties of providing an appropriate definition. If nature is defined as the opposite of humanity, it becomes necessary to ignore the fact that humans are a part of the animal kingdom, having evolved from the same process as all other living things (Turner 40). To define nature as the opposite of society and culture, we must accept that "human kind is naturally solitary and unsocial, a theory that all of the human sciences – anthropology, psychology, paleoanthropology, linguistics, ethology – emphatically deny" (Turner 41). Though defining nature as the opposite of culture is problematic, all cultures have some distinction between nature and culture, though the type of the division is quite different between cultures (Turner 41). Turner writes that in American consciousness, culture comes to mean technology, leaving technology to absorb the negative connotations of being the opposite of nature:

If nature, in our myth, is eternal, unchanging, pure, gentle, wise, innocent, balanced, harmonious, and good, then culture (*qua* technology) must be temporary, progressive, polluting, violent, blind, sophisticated, distorted, destructive, and evil. [...] Our "gut" meaning for technology is machines of metal, oil, and electricity; we often forget that technology [...] also includes the

violins of Stradivarius, horsebreeding, handwriting, yeast baking, orchards, cheese making, and villanelles. (45)

Though Turner explores the problems of this dichotomy specifically for an American audience, images of romanticized nature as the opposite of technology that has been limited in meaning to polluting machines appear repeatedly throughout both American and European literature.

Acknowledging that defining nature as the opposite of culture is somewhat problematic, I nevertheless use this as the general definition in Tolkien's works. The landscape, non-humanoid animals, and plants, especially trees, are some of the main building blocks of nature in *The Lord of the Rings*. The basic theme involving nature in *The Lord of the Rings* is that it is good, and, not only do those who are evil delight in destroying nature, but nature itself abandons evil places.

Animals are part of the natural world, and they dislike and flee from the forces of evil. Additionally, mistreating animals is often a sign that a person is untrustworthy. Other than the horses they ride in the beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, animals react with fear to the Nazgûl, the wraith-like remnants of the Nine Men given rings of power. Farmer Maggot's dog runs, howling, from the Rider, "as if he had been stung" (*FR* 135), and when the Nazgûl inquire in Bree, Butterbur asserts, "all the dogs were yammering and the geese screaming. Uncanny, I called it" (*FR* 228). Horses are particularly important moral barometers in *The Lord of the Rings*. Horses seem instinctually to be able to avoid danger. After saving the Hobbits from the Barrow-wight, Tom Bombadil asserts to the Hobbits that their ponies "sniff danger ahead which you walk right into; and if they run to save themselves, then they run the right way," showing the ponies as being innately able to distinguish between good and evil (*FR* 199). The way people interact with horses reveals much about their personalities. Bill Ferny, who is one of the first people in Bree to work with the Nazgûl, mistreats his horse, later Bill the Pony, until it becomes

“a bony, underfed, and dispirited animal” (*FR* 242). By contrast, Aragorn and Legolas are both able to understand at least the emotional sense of horses’ neighs (*TT* 116), and Gandalf cares so deeply about Shadowfax that he sends Pippin to check on his conditions (*RK* 35). It is rumored that Sauron levies taxes of horses on the Rohirrim, but Boromir leaps to their defense, stating with absolute certainty that they would not “buy their lives with horses. They love their horses next to their kin” (*FR* 343-344). Éomer also angrily refutes the claim that Rohan pays tributes of horses to Mordor, saying “We do not, and we never have, [...] though it comes to my ears that the lie has been told. Some years ago the Lord of the Black Land wished to purchase horses of us at a great price, but we refused him, for he puts beasts to evil use” (*TT* 47). The Rohirrim refuse to sell to Sauron because of his mistreatment of animals, showing how highly they value their horses.

However, horses do end up in the service of Sauron, as steeds for the Nazgûl and for lesser riders. Éomer explains that when the Rohirrim refused to sell, Sauron “sent plundering Orcs, and they carry off what they can, choosing always the black horses [...]. For that reason our feud with the Orcs is bitter” (*TT* 47). The originally honorable horses of Rohan that are abducted by the Orcs are then brought into Mordor and twisted into animals that will serve Sauron’s purpose. More than their willingness to support their unnatural riders marks the corrupted horses as having lost their affinity with true nature. For example, the horse of the Mouth of Sauron “was huge and hideous, and its face was a frightful mask, more like a skull than a living head, and in the sockets of its eyes and in its nostrils there burned a flame” (*RK* 202), which David Day, in *A Tolkien Bestiary*, claims shows how completely Sauron manipulates the animal (140-141).

Horses are not the only animal to interact with evil. Wargs allow Orcs to ride on their backs into battle, and “where the warg howls, there also the orc prowls” (*FR* 389). Day describes Wargs as a breed of wolves that are particularly aligned with Orcs and claims that all wolves are evil, without giving an explanation of how they came to be that way (271-273). After the Fellowship encounters Wargs on the outskirts of Moria, all the bodies of the dead wargs disappear, leaving the arrows of Legolas intact (*FR* 391). Gandalf, somewhat cryptically, announces that “these were no ordinary wolves hunting for food in the wilderness,” showing the unnaturalness of beasts that align themselves with Sauron (*FR* 391). Birds are also capable of being corrupted, and the *crebain*, a variety of crow, are used as spies for Saruman (*FR* 248, 373). Day also describes crows as being allied with darkness, and, since their spy work leads to battles, this alliance provides carrion for them to eat (54). Again, there is not a description of how birds came to be corrupted, but it is clear that they use the war between good and evil to their own advantage.

There are also creatures that are evil, but may or may not wholly qualify as animals, or as part of the natural world. The Balrog is part fire, one of the classical four elements of nature. However, Gandalf differentiates between himself as a “servant of Secret Fire” and the Balrog as attempting to use dark fire, perhaps an establishment of different varieties of fire, only some of which are natural (*FR* 429). Furthermore, the Balrog is described as a “dreadful spirit of the underworld” (*TT* 9). Its spiritual essence marks the Balrog as a creature beyond the realm of nature, as does its connection with the underworld. Another creature that may be an animal is the Watcher outside of Moria. The Watcher definitely destroys the surrounding environment, flooding the valley by the Walls of Moria with “dark, unclean water” (*FR* 394). The water of the lake kills many of the holly trees that marked the friendship between Dwarves and Elves, leaving

only “stumps and dead boughs [...] rotting in the shallows” (*FR* 395). Bill the Pony flees in terror when the Watcher emerges from the water, and its first point of attack is Frodo, who, perhaps not coincidentally, bears the Ring (*FR* 402). But can this creature be considered natural? Gandalf explains that it has come “from the dark waters under the mountains. There are older and fouler things than Orcs in the deep places of the world” (*FR* 403). The comparison to Orcs implies that the creature may, like the Orcs, be a conscious being, acting with a “purpose” rather than on instinct (*FR* 403). In *The Return of the Shadow*, a collection of his father’s notes and previous versions of *The Lord of the Rings*, Christopher Tolkien shows that the earlier version of this scene makes the Watcher even less animalistic, as the fingers of the dweller are attached to limbs that are as “sinuous as a tentacle” (452). However, these limbs are definitively arms and not snake-like tentacles, as they are in the final version (*FR* 402-403). Additionally, if the creature is a “fouler [thing] than Orcs” (*FR* 403), which are corrupted versions of Elves, then it too must be corrupted (*TT* 113).

The plant kingdom also shows how the natural world abandons places associated with evil. It is not difficult to observe the differences between the wild power of Fanghorn Forest or the stainless realm of Lothlórien and the land of Mordor:

Even to the Mere of Dead Faces some haggard phantom of green spring would come; but here neither spring nor summer would ever come again. Here nothing lived, not even the leprous growths that feed on rottenness. The gasping pools were chocked with ash and crawling muds, sickly white and grey, as if the mountains had vomited the filth of their entrails upon the lands about. (*TT* 302).

Plants, even the “leprous growths,” abandon Mordor, and the remaining vomitus landscape is so sullied by evil that it may never be restored to purity (*TT* 302).

But again, the plants and landscapes of Middle Earth may not be absolutely good, as they present many dangers to the Fellowship. Even in the Old Forest on the outskirts of the Shire, the Hobbits “got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with disapproval, deepening to dislike and even enmity” from the trees (*FR* 158). The trees continue to feel menacing, as the Hobbits make their way to Old Man Willow, who attempts to eat Merry and Pippin (*FR* 166). In her article, “The Unique Representation of Trees in *The Lord of the Rings*,” Cynthia M. Cohen explains that the actions of Old Man Willow are not the actions of the tree per se, but rather the actions of a spirit that lives within the tree, that, without killing the tree, has corrupted its heart (111). The menace of the forest stems from this spirit. While Cohen uses “The Adventures of Tom Bombadil” to support her point that Old Man Willow is distinct from the tree, no such distinction is made in *The Lord of the Rings* itself, causing the forest to retain its own menacing power (111). The trees in Fanghorn Forest are also quite angry and watchful, a result of the harm that’s been inflicted by Saruman and his Orcs on the forest (*TT* 119-120). Merry describes the terrifying power of the Huorns:

They are Ents that have become almost like trees, at least to look at. [...] There is great power in them, and they seem to be able to wrap themselves in shadow: it is difficult to see them moving. But they do. [...] They still have voices, and can speak with the Ents [...] but they have become queer and wild. Dangerous. I should be terrified of meeting them, if there were no true Ents about to look after them. (*TT* 217)

The Huorns, are indeed dangerous, as they appear on the Deepening Coomb at the end of the battle of Helm’s Deep, fought between the Rohirrim and the Orcs in the service of Saruman (*TT* 186). The soldiers of Rohan chase the Orc army into the forest, and “from that shadow none ever

came again,” though exactly how the Huorns defeat the Orcs is left unexplained (*TT* 187).

Legolas asserts, however, that the Huorns do not hate “all that go on two legs,” but only hate Orcs (*TT* 193).

The power of nature is not limited to the power that trees have. When the Fellowship decides to attempt to cross through the Redhorn Gate rather than aim for the Gap of Rohan, they must scale the mountain Caradhras (*FR* 375). While on the mountain, heavy snow fall prevents their crossing, and even threatens their lives (*FR* 379). Boromir accuses the wind of being a “fell [voice],” and suggests that the storm may stem from Sauron (*FR* 377-378). However, Gimli reminds the Fellowship that “Caradhras was called the Cruel, and had an ill name [...] long years ago, when rumour of Sauron had not been heard in these lands” (*FR* 378). Like the trees in the Old Forest, Caradhras has his own “ill will” that he uses to “fling” snow at the Fellowship and to create a particularly thick drift that would have “cut off their escape,” had Aragorn and Boromir not been able to dig through it (*FR* 381-382). Even once the Fellowship gives up and returns down the mountain, there is a huge “fall of stones and slithering snow [that] half [blinds] the Company,” which seems to be a “last stroke of the malice of the mountain” (*FR* 383). Therefore, Caradhras seems to impede the progress of the Fellowship with ill will, but without a connection to evil.

Nature retains its power in Tolkien’s work for two reasons. First, Tolkien was a medievalist, and, as Shandi Stevenson points out in “The Shadow Beyond the Firelight: Pre-Christian Archetypes and Imagery Meet Christian Theology in Tolkien’s Treatment of Evil and Horror,” England at the introduction of Christianity was dark, cold, and dangerous much of the time (95-98). Mountains and forests are not inherently evil, but both are perilous and uncanny places (Stevenson 101-103). Secondly, as Patrick Curry shows in “‘Less Noise and More Green’:

Tolkien's Ideology for England," nature in *The Lord of the Rings* is not cleansed or "denatur[ed]," nor does Tolkien try to "prettify 'the hearts of trees and their thoughts, which were often dark and strange, and filled with hatred of things that free upon the earth'" (130). Curry continues that there is a cry for appreciation of nature for itself, not as a commodity (132). Nature in *The Lord of the Rings* therefore has dark and scary elements, even though it is inherently not evil, because it is not designed to simply serve the purposes of the Fellowship or all those who oppose Sauron, but to be its own entity.

Tolkien creates several races of sentient² creatures that inhabit Middle-earth. Certain of these races seem more intimately connected with nature than others, and this connection serves as protection from the Ring's corruption. Though the diathesis-stress model usually focuses on individual differences, I include this mostly racial difference because, in *The Lord of the Rings*, race, or species, is the characteristic that can most comfortably be called genetic. Tolkien would certainly have been aware of theories of racial differences in susceptibility to disease. Bourke explains that the Irish troops in WWI were considered to be disproportionately more prone to developing shell shock than English, Welsh, or Scottish troops (60). This difference in propensity towards shell shock was explained by stereotypes, such as Irish people being generally more predisposed to insanity "because of the long-standing 'cerebral excitement' caused by questions about land and politics" (Bourke 61). Additionally, the Irish were considered to be childlike, making them uncivilized (Bourke 61). Even though the explanations for the increased tendency toward developing shell shock were unfounded, the belief that racial characteristics might make one predisposed to developing a disease was clearly present.

² I acknowledge that using the word "sentient" can be problematic. Sentience can refer to being able to experience sensory phenomena, which arguably can apply to nonhuman animals. However, in this thesis, I use sentience to refer to a quality of consciousness and self-awareness that may apply more to humans (and their fictional peers, such as Elves and Dwarves) than to nonhuman animals.

In his catalogue of Living Creatures, Treebeard lists “the four, the free peoples” as “Ent the earthborn,” “the elf-children,” “Dwarf the delver,” and “Man the mortal,” though Pippin petitions him to add “Half-grown hobbits” (*TT* 84-85). I consider each of these peoples in terms of their connection to nature and how it helps or hinders their resistance to corruption. Of Tolkien’s races, the one most intimately connected with living nature seems to be the Ents, though the Elves are also contenders for the title. Because the Ents are “the shepherds of the trees,” they are the most connected to this aspect of nature, which is one of the most important in *The Lord of the Rings*, from the holly trees outside the gates of Moria to the White Tree of Gondor (*TT* 197). The name “earthborn” shows that the Ents retain a vital connection to the earth itself (*TT* 84), reflecting the Ents’ shared history with trees. More than being treeherds, Ents are linked to trees through once having been trees; as Treebeard explains, “Elves began it, of course, waking trees up and teaching them to speak and learning their tree-talk” (*TT* 90). Additionally, Tolkien does not rule out the possibility that the Ents’ divergence from trees is not permanent:

Some of us are still true Ents, and lively enough in our fashion, but many are growing sleepy, going tree-ish, as you might say. Most of the trees are just trees, of course; but many are half awake. Some are quite wide awake, and a few are, well, ah, well getting *Entish*. [...] Sheep get like shepherds, and shepherds like sheep, it is said [...]. It is quicker and closer with trees and Ents. (*TT* 89)

However, Cohen argues that Tolkien makes an ontological distinction between Ents and trees, such that, though Ents are tree-like, they are definitively not trees (92). If this is true, the only difference between them is how active they are, or, the Ents’ capacity for culture, in the form of language, literature, and government (Cohen 115).

That Ents ceased to be trees due to the civilizing force of language supports the idea that nature is primarily the opposite of civilization in *The Lord of the Rings*. It is only through developing their culture that the Ents cease to be fully a part of the landscape and begin to be a people. In terms of civilization, however, the Ents are less developed, and thus more natural, than many other races. In contrast to the Entwives, who favored cultivation, the Ents “loved the great trees, and the wild woods, and the slopes of the high hills; and they drank of the mountain-streams, and ate only such fruit as the trees let fall in their path” (*TT* 99). Though Treebeard does have an “ent-house,” it is very simple compared to the elaborate halls of Elves, Dwarves, and humans, since it is located behind a waterfall and contains few possessions (*TT* 93).

By the time part of the Fellowship reaches Fanghorn Forest, Frodo and Sam have already taken the Ring by a different route, so the direct influence of the Ring on Ents is impossible to discern. Of the four free peoples, only the Ents have no rings of power. Additionally, the Ents seem to maintain a policy of noninvolvement. Treebeard asserts that he stays out of the Great Wars, because “they mostly concern Elves and Men. That is the business of wizards” (*TT* 95). Treebeard also asserts his independence from the war by saying “I don’t know about *sides*. I go my own way; but your way may go along with mine for a while” (*TT* 86). Treebeard later reveals that his reluctance to take sides reflects both sides failing to consider the war’s impact on the Ents (and nature in general):

I am 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, not even Elves nowadays. [...] And there are some things, of course, whose side I am altogether *not* on; I am against them altogether: these – *burárum*’ (he again made a deep rumble of disgust) ‘ – these Orcs, and their masters. (*TT* 95)

The Ents' hatred for the orcs shows their dislike of evil, though it is difficult to spur them to anger and action, because they only become roused when "it is clear to us that our trees and our lives are in great danger" (*TT* 113). Though many of the Ents' actions can be viewed through the filter of self-preservation, the fact that the endangerment of their trees is listed before their own lives as a reason to go to war shows the Ents as good herders of their flocks. Eventually, the Ents do go to war, because of "the orc-work, the wanton hewing [...] and the treachery of a neighbor, who should have helped us" (*TT* 113). The Ents help defeat Saruman, making the final stand against Sauron more feasible, which aligns them with good, despite their affirmation that they do not take sides. Therefore, though the power of the Ring to corrupt is not directly tested with the Ents, it is likely that they would have been able to resist fairly well due to their general lack of desire to be involved and to only caring about the preservation of nature.

Elves are also deeply connected to the natural world. The race of Elves, born in the starlight before the coming of the Sun, is the first created species to use language (*The Silmarillion* 49). The Elves "walked the Earth in wonder" (*The Silmarillion* 49) and do not like the first humans they encounter because they are "hewers of trees and hunters of beasts" (*The Silmarillion* 142). The Elves' connection to trees is shown through the origins of the Ents, as the Elves woke them up and learned their language (*TT* 90). Though this relationship seems to have lessened, Elves still surround themselves with nature, and Sam notes of the Elves in Lothlórien, "they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they've made the land or the land's made them, it's hard to say" (*FR* 467). Next to Ents, Elves seem to be the primary caretakers of the flora of Middle Earth. As Margarita Carretero-González writes in "When Nature Responds to Evil Practices: A Warning from the Ents of J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth," the Elves "devot[e] most of their time to music, learning, and caring for nature. In the

middle of all the chaos and destruction spreading through Middle-earth, the Elvish communities of Rivendell and Lothlórien appear as natural sanctuaries, with a lavish and fertile vegetation” (152).

Not only do the Elves live in beautiful landscapes, they are also able to use nature to combat evil forces. It is repeatedly stated that the only evil in the realm of Lothlórien is that which visitors bring in with them (*FR* 449; 453; 455; 464). Elrond commands the river in the valley near Rivendell, and “it will rise in anger when he has great need to bar the Ford. As soon as the captain of the Ringwraiths rode into the water the flood was released” (*FR* 296). The nature-resembling cloaks that the members of the Fellowship receive from Galadriel help protect them from Orc attacks (*FR* 500; implied *RK* 258). The starlight from the Phial of Galadriel helps Sam and Frodo overcome both Shelob (*TT* 419; 431) and the Watchers (*RK* 218; 235).

The Elves’ connection with the natural world extends to their rings of power. Elven-smiths make all nineteen rings of power under the guidance of Sauron, while he secretly forged the One to “rule all the others,” which gave him the power to see and rule the thoughts of those wearing the other rings (*The Silmarillion* 287). However, the Elves became aware that Sauron sought to control them, and stopped wearing their rings (*The Silmarillion* 288). The Elven Three are the only rings of power connected to the powers of nature. As Jason Fisher explains in “Three Rings for – Whom Exactly? And Why?: Justifying the Disposition of the Three Elven Rings,” Gandalf’s ring is associated with fire (100)³, Elrond’s with air (101), and Galadriel’s with water (103). Many readers assume that Elrond’s ring is the water ring, because he raises the

³ Gandalf is not an Elf, but he comes to be in possession of one of the Three. (For what Gandalf actually is, see note 5.) Círdan, who had possession of the Ring of Fire, gives his to Gandalf, because he “saw further and deeper than any other in Middle-earth, and he welcomed Mithrandir at the Grey Havens, knowing whence he came and whither he would return. ‘Take this ring, Master,’ he said, ‘for your labours will be heavy; but it will support you in the weariness that you have taken upon yourself. For this is the Ring of Fire, and with it you may rekindle hearts in a world that grows chill’” (*RK* Appendix B 456).

waters of the Bruinen against the Nazgûl, but Fisher explains that this is unrelated to the powers of his ring, because the Elven rings are designed to preserve, not destroy (107n10). The powers of these rings for preservation make them qualitatively different from the other rings.

Additionally, because the Elves hide the Three after Celebrimbor discovers Sauron's plot to make the Ruling Ring, the Elven rings are never fully under the power of the One Ring (*RK*, Appendix B 453-454). The One is the master of the Three, but the possessors of the Three do not use them while Sauron possesses the One, so they remain "unsullied" (*The Silmarillion* 288).

Galadriel explains that when the One Ring is destroyed, "our power is diminished, and Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten" (*FR* 472). The destruction of the Ring is the Elves' own doom, but they continue to aid in its destruction because of their desire that "what should be shall be" (*FR* 473). "The love of the Elves for their land and their works is deeper than the deeps of the Sea," but they must abandon their works, in order to prevent them from being destroyed by Sauron (*FR* 473). After the One is destroyed, "it was made plain that the power of the Three Rings also was ended, and to the Firstborn [Elves] the world grew old and grey. In that time the last of the Noldor [Elves] set sail from the Havens and left Middle-earth for ever" (*The Silmarillion* 304), and the fading of the Elves that has been occurring throughout the Third Age⁴ is complete (*RK* Appendix B 455).

The nature that is associated with Elves is the wild, powerful nature of roaring waterfalls, starlit mountains, and dense forests, but Hobbits are connected to the tamer nature of rolling fields and Party Trees. The argument between the Ents and the Entwives seems to imply that

⁴ "In after days, [...] those of the Elven-race that lived still in Middle-earth waned and faded, and Men usurped the sunlight. Then the Quendi [Elves] wandered in the lonely places of the great lands and the isles, and took to the moonlight and the starlight, and to the woods and caves, becoming as shadows and memories, save those who ever and anon set sail into the West and vanished from Middle-earth" (*The Silmarillion* 105).

wilderness is more natural than cultivated areas, but the Hobbits' agricultural society does not prevent them from sustaining "a close friendship with the earth" (*FR*, Prologue 20). As Chris Brawley notes in "The Fading of the World: Tolkien's Ecology and Loss in *The Lord of the Rings*," the Hobbits' dwellings in the ground and preference for bare feet connect them intimately to the earth (304). Hobbits are skilled with tools, but "they do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom" (*FR*, Prologue 19). Therefore, the agrarian Hobbits are somewhat in-between forest-dwelling Elves and industrializing men.

Like Ents, Hobbits are not given rings of power, but unlike Ents, Hobbits rapidly become involved with the most powerful Ring of all. Throughout the entirety of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, the only people to possess the One Ring are four Hobbits (or proto-hobbits): Gollum, Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam. I discuss the effects of the One Ring in Chapter Four, so I do not go into much detail here, but I will note one trend. Gandalf warns:

A mortal [...] who keeps one of the Great Rings does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he *fades*: he becomes in the end invisible permanently [...]. Yes, sooner or later – later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last – sooner or later the dark power will devour him. (*FR* 76)

However, though Bilbo begins to feel "thin and stretched," and Gollum is certainly twisted by his long possession of the Ring, neither fades into a wraith, perhaps showing the endurance of Hobbits and their ability to oppose corruption (*FR* 77).

Bilbo and Frodo, however, are far from being typical Hobbits, so their reactions to the One Ring may not indicate the ability of Hobbits in general to resist corruption. In Frodo's absence, the Shire is exposed to evil, the very presence of which reaffirms the Hobbits' connection to nature. As Carretero-González notes, "when evil crosses the threshold of their quasi-utopian existence, it does so in the form of brick and machinery" (152). It seems like the Shire falls easily into industrialized corruption, and some of the Hobbits agree to be spies for the new regime out of a sense of self-importance (*RK* 348). Merry, however, asserts that the Hobbits hate Saruman's regime, "but Shire-folk have been so comfortable so long they don't know what to do. They just want a match, though, and they'll go up in fire" (*RK* 353). Once the four Hobbits of the Fellowship show the others that they can resist, the whole Shire rises against and overthrows Saruman. Unilaterally, the Hobbits work to restore the Shire to its pastoral perfection:

Now there were thousands of willing hands of all ages, from the small but nimble ones of the hobbit lads and lasses to the well-worn and horny ones of the gaffers and gammers. Before Yule not a brick was left standing of the new Shirriff-houses or of anything that had been built by 'Sharkey's Men' [...]. One of the first things done in Hobbiton, before even the removal of the new mill, was the clearing of the Hill and Bag End, and the restoration of Bagshot Row. (373)

The Hobbits dismantle every trace of Saruman's industrialization and make it a priority to restore cultivated nature that they love.

Dwarves seem much less connected to living nature than Ents, Elves, and Hobbits. Instead of living in ancient forests or grassy hills, the Dwarves live in deep underground caves. Dwarves bring forth stone and precious metals from the earth, instead of crops and other plants.

Mining is connected to Sauron, as he has his own “mines and forges” in the center of his war operations (*RK* 246). Additionally, the Dwarves are shown to be inherently greedy. Because of their desire for *mithril*, the Dwarves of Moria “[delve] too greedily and too deep and [disturb] that from which they fled, Durin’s Bane” (*FR* 413). It seems as though the Dwarves, then, would be easily persuaded to join Sauron, especially under the influence of the Seven Rings. However, stone is part of the natural world, and the minerals within stone help to nourish life. In Hollin, “the trees and the grass” forget the presence of Elves, but the stones still remember them, and Legolas hears them lament, “*deep they delved us, fair they wrought us, high they builded us; but they are gone*” (*FR* 371). The stone retains a memory of the Elves for longer than the plant life, marking it as an even deeper part of nature. Treebeard proclaims that “Wood and water, stock and stone, I can master,” showing that all elements of nature, including rocks, are interconnected (*TT* 223). Therefore, even though the Dwarves are not connected to living things, there is still a link between them and an essential element of nature.

However, this connection to stone is not as protective as the connection to plants seems to be for Elves. The Seven Rings are not shielded as the Three are, and thus are under the power of Sauron, even the ring given to Durin’s Folk directly by the Elvensmiths, “since he [Sauron] had aided in the forging of all the Seven” (*RK*, Appendix A 445). The Dwarves use the Seven to increase their wealth. Thrór leaves his ring to Thráin, with the promise that it “may prove the foundation of new fortune for you yet, though that seems unlikely. But it needs gold to breed gold” (*RK*, Appendix A 441). However, even if the rings were not under Sauron’s influence, the accumulation of vast amounts of wealth could be dangerous, as it attracts dragons, which is shown through four of the Seven being consumed in dragon fire (*FR* 82).⁵

⁵ The dangers of wealth and dragons can further be seen in *The Hobbit* and *Beowulf*, especially lines 2269-2276.

In addition to exposing the Dwarves to the dangers of hoarding wealth, the Seven exacerbate the Dwarves' tendency for greed and "inflare [the Dwarves'] hearts with a greed of gold and precious things, so that if they lacked them all other good things seemed profitless, and they were filled with wrath and desire for vengeance on all who deprived them" (*RK*, Appendix A 446). The Seven also call their bearers into dangerous situations that lead to their own destruction and the return of the rings to their master, so Sauron recovers the three that are not destroyed (*FR* 82). After Thrór gives the last remaining ring to Thráin, he returns to Moria, because "he was a little crazed perhaps with age and misfortune and long brooding on the splendour of Moria in his forefathers' days; or the Ring, it may be, was turning to evil now that its master was awake, driving him to folly and destruction" (*RK*, Appendix A 441). The ring produces a similar madness in Thráin, as "partly by the malice of the Ring," he becomes "restless and discontented. The lust for gold [is] ever in his mind," and, on his way to Erebor, he is captured into Dol Guldur (*RK*, Appendix A 446). Even the chance of finding the last of the Seven is enough to provoke a "shadow of disquiet" on the Dwarves and to persuade Balin to return to Moria (*FR* 316; 351).

Though the Dwarves are affected by their rings more so than the Elves, they do not fall to the powers of their rings and become wraithlike servants of Sauron. When a messenger from Mordor promises to return the Dwarves' rings in exchange for knowledge about Hobbits, particularly Bilbo, the Dwarves turn him away without an answer (*FR* 316). The Dwarves "proved untameable" by means of the Seven, because they "resist most steadfastly any domination. Though they [can] be slain or broken, they [can] not be reduced to shadows enslaved to another will" (*RK*, Appendix A 446). Therefore, the dwarves are more susceptible to

the powers of Sauron than the Elves or the Ents, but their corruption leads to their own destruction, rather than to giving into evil.

Of Tolkien's races, Men are arguably the least connected to the natural world⁶. In the catalogue of Living Creatures, Treebeard lists humans under "Man the mortal" (*TT* 84). If nature is "eternal," then the emphasis on the mortality of men already shows them as less natural than the Elves (Turner 45). This mortality also causes the race of Men to undervalue nature, as their "transience [makes] them eager to leave an imprint in the world in order to make future generations remember them after their death" (Carretero-González 152). Humans in Middle Earth, as in the world today, are prone to view the natural world in terms only of its utility, and fail to place value on it for itself (Curry 132). Out of the Fellowship, only Boromir suggests bringing firewood onto Caradhras (*FR* 376). Hobbits are close relatives of humans, but they are distinct from "the Big Folk," and can disappear in a way that "may seem magical," but is actually only due to "a professional skill that heredity and practice, and a close friendship with the earth, have rendered inimitable by bigger and clumsier races" (*FR*, Prologue 19-20). The relationship between Hobbits and the earth, then, is missing from humans. At the founding of Gondor, though Men decide not to live in nature and build "high towers [...] and strong places," they are still involved with nature (*FR* 321). The towers they build are named Minas Ithil, the Tower of the Moon, and Minas Anor, the Tower of the Setting Sun, and they are able to keep the

⁶ Though Wizards appear "in the likeness of Men," they are not human, but are missionaries sent from "over the Sea" to "contest the power of Sauron, if he should arise again, and to move Elves and Men and all living things of good will to valiant deeds" (*The Silmarillion* 299). After Gandalf becomes the chief of the Wizards (*TT* 125), he asserts that "all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task, though Gondor should perish, if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit and flower again in days to come. For I also am a steward" (*RK* 33). Wizards are supposed to be connected to nature through their role as protector of "all living things." Gandalf, at least, takes this role seriously. Treebeard asserts that Gandalf is the "only wizard that really cares about trees" (*TT* 86), marking him as particularly connected to nature, though Radagast also knows "much lore of herbs and beasts, and birds are especially his friends" (*FR* 337). It is only Saruman who abandons the care of "all living things" (*The Silmarillion* 299) and develops a "mind of metal and wheels" (*TT* 96).

white tree “from the seed of that tree which Isildur brought over the deep waters” alive (*FR* 321). However, “in the wearing of the swift years of Middle-earth,” Men have failed to maintain this connection with nature (*FR* 321). Minas Anor becomes Minas Tirith, the Tower of the Guard (*FR* 321) and the white tree dies (*RK* 27).

There are obvious exceptions to the rule that men are not connected to nature. Aragorn is a skilled tracker, and “though [he] cannot disappear, [... he] can usually avoid being seen” (*FR* 223). The ability to avoid being seen but not to truly disappear is similar to the skill that the Hobbits have, implying that Aragorn also shares “a close friendship with the earth,” as this is the power that allows Hobbits to avoid being seen (*FR*, Prologue 20). Like Aragorn, Faramir’s mourning for the sundering of the relationship between the Men of Gondor and Elves (*TT* 366) and his desire to avoid slaying beasts needlessly (*TT* 346) mark him as connected to nature. However, these exceptions serve to highlight how disconnected from the natural world the rest of humanity is. Boromir has clear disdain for Aragorn’s outdoor lifestyle, as he looks “in wonder at the lean face of the Ranger and his weather-stained cloak” (*FR* 324). Even though Faramir wishes that Men and Elves were reunited, he expresses fear and mistrust for Galadriel, showing the prevailing attitude toward Elves among the people of Gondor (*TT* 349).

Another group that showcases the separation between Men and nature is the “Woses, the Wild Men of the Woods,” a kind of primitive humans that “live[d] here before Stone-houses; before Tall Men come up out of Water” (*RK* 128-129). The Wild Men are “remnants of an older time, [...] living few and secretly, wild and wary as the beasts” (*RK* 128). Because Ghân-buri-Ghân and his people fear the return of the Dark Years (*RK* 128), they are willing to help the Riders of Rohan reach Gondor through a secret path so that they can “drive away bad dark with bright iron and Wild Men can go back to sleep in the wild woods” (*RK* 130). The Wild Men’s

dislike of darkness and Orcs mark them as good, and their desire to return to the natural cycle of light and dark and peaceful inhabitation of the woods marks them as intimately connected with nature. Ghân-buri-Ghân knows more about the cycle of the sun than the Riders:

“What is the hour now?”

“Who knows?” said Théoden. “All is night now.”

“It is all dark, but it is not all night,” said Ghân. “When Sun comes we feel her, even when she is hidden. Already she climbs over East-mountains. It is the opening of day in the sky-fields.” (*RK* 131)

The Rider’s inability to feel the Sun shows that they are more easily fooled by Sauron’s deception of darkness than the more primitive Wild Men, showing that the Riders are distanced from the nature in which the Wild Men live, and that this makes them more susceptible to Sauron. The Riders of Rohan are considered less civilized than the people of Gondor, so the Rider’s distance from nature serves to further show how very separate the people of Gondor are (*TT* 364).

Of the races to receive Rings of Power, only Men fall completely to their Rings. Rawls explains that “because the Nine Rings for Mortal Man were constructed to give dominion in worldly affairs, we may speculate that these rings worked as a lesser kind of Ruling Ring” (30). The Nine were able to use their Rings to “[obtain] glory and great wealth,” but “according to their native strength and to the good or evil of their wills in the beginning, they fell under the thralldom of the ring that they bore and under the domination of the One, which was Sauron’s. And they became for ever invisible save to him that wore the Ruling Ring, and they entered into the realm of shadows” (*The Silmarillion* 289). In using the Nine, the Men are “devoured” by Sauron and become wraiths or “living ghosts” (*TT* 382). These wraiths are decidedly unnatural;

it is hinted several times that they are no longer really alive. Gandalf says the cloaks they wear “give shape to their nothingness when they have dealings with the living,” implying that they are not living (*FR* 293), and Merry cuts through the “undead flesh” of the Captain of the Nazgûl, “breaking the spell that knit his unseen sinews to his will” (*RK* 146). Not only are the Nazgûl unnatural, nature shuns them. When they re-enter Minas Ithil after the first fall on Sauron, they “[fill] it, and all the valley about, with decay” (*TT* 382) and all “animals are terrified when they draw near” (*FR* 293).

There are sentient races that are decidedly evil and that delight in destroying nature. Orcs and Trolls are part of Sauron’s “chattel” (*FR* 293). Legolas remarks that “it seems their delight to slash and beat down growing things that are not even in their way” (*TT* 26). A major part of the Ents’ dislike for the Orcs stems from “the orc-work, the wanton hewing” (*TT* 113). However, these are not natural creatures. Instead, they are corrupted versions of other sentient beings. Treebeard explains that “Trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as Orcs were of Elves” (*TT* 113).⁷ Because they are already corrupted, it is unnecessary to examine in what ways they are likely to fall to the power of Sauron, as they are already his servants.

Thus, some races, like Elves, Ents, and Hobbits, are more connected to the natural world than others, like humans. Because nature rejects evil and is almost always good, a connection with nature helps prevent characters from becoming evil, thus lowering their predisposition to fall to the power of the Ring. Those who are more distanced from nature lack this protection, so their diathesis for corruption is high. Additionally, those who actively work to destroy nature, rather than just lacking an intimate connection, are usually already corrupted. The corruption of those who revel in the destruction of nature connects the racial and individual diatheses. The

⁷ For an account of how the Elves were corrupted into Orcs, see *The Silmarillion* (50).

rampant destruction of nature demonstrates a desire for power, as the domination of nature shows one's superiority to it. Carretero-González argues that Saruman falls "from a desire to understand nature's complexity into a yearning to dominate it, using his new mind of 'metal and wheels' to adapt the environment to his warfare purposes" (156). In forcing the environment to conform to his own purpose, Saruman exerts great power over it, whereas those who love nature for what it is, like Ents and Elves, deliberately renounce the power to control nature. This dichotomy between demanding power and refusing it is also important in relationships between people, not just between people and nature.

3. Desire for Power

Unlike a connection with nature, which seems to affect character's likelihood of corruption on a primarily racial level, the desire to gain power seems to work on an individual level, which means it is closer to traits that are typically considered by the diathesis-stress model. However, it is much more difficult to be sure that differences in levels of wanting power are hereditary. Tolkien does not give readers the results of carefully controlled twin and adoption studies, so it is impossible to know whether Boromir resembles his father Denethor because of genetics or because of the environment in which he was raised⁸. However, Sir Francis Galton proposed that individual differences in ability and psychological characteristics might be hereditary in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Hearnshaw 56-63). Therefore, I will include desire for power as a personality characteristic that is innate, an idea which would have been available to Tolkien as he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. Additionally due to the time of his writing, the problems of the desire to achieve absolute power must have been abundantly clear to Tolkien. However, in an effort to avoid ascribing particular allegorical meaning to the importance of power, I, like Harris, assert that "the relevance of Tolkien's epic to the politics of the thirties and forties lies not in any specific reference to modern history but in its depiction of both the intimidating effect and seductiveness of absolute power" (46). Because of Tolkien's negative association with the mad grab for power that surrounded the two World Wars, desire for power serves as an individual diathesis that increases the likelihood of corruption by the Ring.

Free will is one of the most important concepts in *The Lord of the Rings*, and an unwillingness to control others by force is often the mark of the most powerful forces of good. As Devin Brown notes in "From Isolation to Community: Frodo's Incomplete Personal Quest in

⁸ For more on Boromir's resemblance to Denethor, see Chapter 4: Desire for, Exposure to, and Possession of the One Ring.

The Lord of the Rings,” good characters are frequently even reluctant to give advice, so as not to force their opinions on others (167). The Fellowship is created from people who pledge to accompany Frodo, but Elrond explicitly states that “on [Frodo] alone is any charge laid [...] The others go with him as free companions, to help him on his way. You may tarry, or come back, or turn aside to other paths, as chance allows. The further you go, the less easy will it be to withdraw; yet no oath or bond is laid on you to go further than you will” (*FR* 367). As Bullock explains, Frodo seems to be divinely appointed to become the Ringbearer, but had he refused his duty, someone else would have been found who would undertake the burden (29). Therefore, Frodo is bound to the task only because he accepts his duty and volunteers to take the Ring to Mordor (*FR* 354).

At the end of the Second Age, Sauron is overthrown by the Last Alliance of Men and Elves (*RK* Appendix B 455). However, about 1000 years into the Third Age, his shadow begins to grow again, and as a result, the *Istari* or Wizards come to Middle-earth “out of the Far West [as] messengers sent to contest the power of Sauron, and to unite all those who had the will to resist him” (*RK* Appendix B 455)⁹. These Wizards include Gandalf and Saruman, and they are all “forbidden to match [Sauron’s] power with power, or to seek to dominate Elves or Men by force and fear” (*RK* Appendix B 455). Gandalf follows this command and frequently renounces the opportunity to exploit others to further his own power. When Frodo offers him the Ring, Gandalf reacts with horror:

“No!” cried Gandalf, springing to his feet. “With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly.” His eyes flashed and his face was lit as by a fire within. “Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of

⁹ See also note 5.

the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me!” (*FR* 95)

Gandalf does not just fear corruption by the Ring; he fears the grand total of power that he would gain by its ownership. Gandalf explicitly states that he does not wish to become another Sauron, and, to avoid this, he must make the conscious decision to reject the power the Ring would give him. Interestingly, his face flashes with fire as he rejects the Ring, showing his affiliation with this element through his Elven Ring and his magical powers as helping him resist corruption.

Frodo also offers the Ring to Galadriel, and she admits that her “heart has greatly desired to ask” him for it (*FR* 473). Galadriel envisions the power she could have if she possessed the Ring:

You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair! (*FR* 473)

Being Queen of Middle-earth is the culmination of Galadriel’s desires, for she first comes to Middle-earth yearning “to see the wide unguarded lands and to rule there a realm at her own will” (*The Silmarillion* 84). Though Galadriel is eager at first to come to Middle-earth, she later comes to see the exile as woeful (*The Silmarillion* 127). Thus, it may be that Galadriel recognizes that attempting to gain power leads to negative consequences, prompting her to reject the Ring, so she can “diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel” (*FR* 474). Because she rejects the Ring, she is able to “go into the West,” thus rejecting power to end the exile that began through a desire for power. Galadriel centers the descriptions of the power she would have

on elements of nature, and these natural elements may remind Galadriel why she must forsake the Ring: to protect nature from the dangers of Sauron and the Ring.

Unlike Gandalf, Saruman fails to follow the command to not seek power, and becomes obsessed with gaining the power of the Ring and making himself a dark lord in the place of Sauron (see Chapter 4). Therefore, when Gandalf is resurrected after he falls fighting the Balrog in Moria, he returns as Gandalf the White, rather than Gandalf the Grey, signifying his new position as chief of the Wizards (*TT* 125). He becomes “Saruman as he should have been” (*TT* 125). However, Gandalf does not use his new position to exert power over, punish, or humiliate the defeated Saruman. Gandalf affirms that he “will do nothing to [Saruman]. [He] do[es] not wish for mastery” (*TT* 243), though it is clear that he has the power to control Saruman:

“Come back, Saruman!” said Gandalf in a commanding voice. To the amazement of the others, Saruman turned again, and as if dragged against his will, he came slowly back to the iron rail.

“I did not give you leave to go,” said Gandalf sternly. (*TT* 240-241)

Saruman is forced to heed his command to return to the balcony and Gandalf breaks his staff with the power of his word, but still Gandalf attempts to allow Saruman to follow his own will, even if it means he will go directly to Sauron (*TT* 241). After the defeat of Sauron, Gandalf tells Saruman he has no interest in controlling him, even though Saruman refuses his mercy (*RK* 323).

Though Wizards must relinquish power, there are appropriate uses of power within the kingdoms of the other races of Middle-earth. With the exception of the Shire, in which Hobbits have “hardly any ‘government’” (*FR* Prologue 30), the majority of Middle-earth is arranged in vaguely feudal monarchies. Dáin is King of the Dwarves of the Lonely Mountains, and under him serve chieftains (*FR* 316-317). Several “Captains of the Outlands” serve the Kingdom of

Gondor and send soldiers when Gondor calls for aid (*RK* 48-49). Kings, then, are expected to exert some amount of power in order to appropriately lead their people. Therefore, Aragorn has the right to much power, though he avoids using it. Because Aragorn is the rightful king of Arnor, and because there is no rightful king of Gondor, Aragorn is the only heir of Elendil, making him the rightful ruler of a reunified kingdom.¹⁰ However, instead of claiming the Kingship of Gondor, Aragorn prefers to remain in the north as chief of the Dúnedain, keeping what peace can be maintained:

Lonely men are we, Rangers of the wild, hunters – but hunters ever of the servants of the Enemy; for they are found in many places, not in Mordor only. [...] And yet less thanks we have than you. Travelers scowl at us and countrymen give us scornful names. “Strider” I am to one fat man who lives within a day’s march of foes that would freeze his heart, or lay his little town in ruin, if he were not guarded ceaselessly. Yet we would not have it otherwise. (*FR* 326)

Instead of living a life of lordly praise and admiration, Aragorn and the remnants of his people live mostly in the wild, secretly fighting the forces of evil for the benefit of people who do not appreciate it at all. Aragorn does not want to challenge the authority of the stewards, and camps on the fields rather than enter the city, refusing to claim the kingship, and allowing Gandalf to orchestrate affairs (*RK* 167-169).

¹⁰ The Kingdom of Númenor was founded for Men as a reward for helping the Valar defeat Morgoth (*RK* Appendix A 390). However, Sauron convinces Ar-Pharazôn that he should have access to the Undying Lands, and in jealousy, Ar-Pharazôn prepares to sail there, but the Valar do not allow this and sink Númenor into the sea (*RK* Appendix A 392). Only the Faithful, led by Elendil and his sons, escape to Middle-earth to form two new kingdoms in exile: Arnor in the North and Gondor in the South (*RK* Appendix A 392-393). Over many years, the Northern kingdom diminishes, and its people are killed through infighting and attacks by the Witch-King of Angmar, however, the line of kings is preserved and the role of the heir of the king is to be the chief of the Dúnedain (*RK* Appendix A 396-401). Gondor remains strong and populous for the most part, but its line of Kings is reduced because the kings grew suspicious and jealous of their close kin (*RK* Appendix A 413). When Eärnur is presumed to fall in battle, leaving no heir, his steward, Mardil, reigned in his name (*RK* Appendix A 413). From that time, the Steward ruled in Gondor (*RK* Appendix A 413).

However, even in northern exile, Aragorn has authority, as chief of the Dúnedain. Though Aragorn makes it clear to Legolas and Gimli that he only wants them to traverse the Paths of the Dead with him through their own free will, no similar assurance is made to the Dúnedain (*RK* 64). After commanding his company to follow him, “Aragorn led the way, and such was the strength of his will in that hour that all the Dúnedain and their horses followed him. And indeed, the love that the horses of the Rangers bore for their riders was so great that they were willing to face even the terror of the Door, if their masters’ hearts were steady as they walked beside them” (*RK* 70). It is the strength of Aragorn’s will that allows his Rangers to begin and to endure the journey (*RK* 75). However, it is not just Aragorn’s willpower that keeps his companions on the road, but “the love of him also. [...] For all those who come to know him come to love him after their own fashion” (*RK* 184). Aragorn does not intimidate or force his fellow Rangers to follow him, they choose to because he inspires love.

Other powers in Middle Earth, however, control their followers through fear instead of love. Sauron acquires food for his troops from “great slave-worked fields” and also brings in slaves to work in the mines and forges of his war effort (*RK* 246). In Middle-earth, there is no good force that uses slave labor. In addition to true slavery, Sauron controls all his followers with fear and the threat of violence. As Sam spies on Orcs, he hears them debate whether they are receiving all the information (*RK* 248). The Orcs also fear constant surveillance, as Shagrat insists that Gorbag not speak dissent so openly, by saying, “they’ve got eyes and ears everywhere; some among my lot, as like as not” (*TT* 440). These same Orcs show how they are kept in the dark regarding the plans, because they “don’t enquire” as it is “safest not to” (*TT* 441). The threat of death is constant on the servants of Sauron, as Gorbag is likely to “be for the pot or for Shelob,” if he does not improve his performance (*TT* 444). However, the threatened

violence against his servants is not just to keep them working hard. As Harris describes, “torture is a leading entertainment on the evil side,” which allows the torturer to completely dominate the tortured (47).

Many orcs serve Sauron as soldiers who are closer to slaves, since “gangs of the smaller breeds [of orcs are] driven unwilling to their Dark Lord’s wars; all they cared for was to get the march over and escape the whip” (*RK* 255). Men, in addition to Orcs, serve Sauron, but again it may be through coercion or force. When Sam sees Faramir’s rangers fight the Southrons, he “wonder[s] what the man’s name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart, or what lies or threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would not really rather have stayed there in peace” (*TT* 341). This line may simply reflect Sam’s naïveté and his fear at seeing a man die for the first time, perhaps paralleling the thoughts of a young soldier exposed for the first time to the violence of a World War. However, Sam usually speaks with common sense wisdom, implying that many of the Southrons were indeed part of Sauron’s forces unwillingly.

The “lies” may have led the Southron to join Sauron show another way in which evil exerts power: dishonesty (*TT* 341). Saruman tends to use deception more than Sauron, who simply uses force. Saruman uses his voice to delude and manipulate friend and foe alike. Aragorn asserts that “he had a power over the minds of others. The wise he could persuade, and the smaller folk he could daunt. That power he certainly still keeps. There are not many in Middle-earth that I should say were safe, if they were left alone to talk with him” (*TT* 220). In order to keep the Men of the Mark occupied and out of his plans, Saruman incites the Dulaners against Rohan (*TT* 191). When those who surrendered themselves are allowed to return to

Dunland under the condition that they never return, they are “amazed, for Saruman had told them that the men of Rohan were cruel and burned their captives alive” (*TT* 191).

Though Saruman is usually more subtle than Sauron, Sauron is not above using deception. The original creation of the Rings of Power illustrates Sauron’s betrayal of the Elven-smiths, through inspiring them to create the Rings and secretly forging “the One Ring to be their master” (*FR* 318). Additionally, the servant of Mordor who come to the Dwarves calls the Ring “a trifle that Sauron fancies,” and makes unrealistic promises about returning the remaining three of the Seven rings to the Dwarves (*FR* 317). The promise of rewards backed by the threat of punishment shows the pattern of recruitment for Sauron: lure in servants with promises of riches and power and then trap them and turn them into slaves, under the fear of death. As Sam realizes, the defenses of Mordor are built “not to keep enemies out of Mordor, but to keep them in. [...] Sauron had found it useful; for he had few servants, but many slaves of fear, and still its chief purpose as of old was to prevent escape from Mordor” (*RK* 215).

In addition to coercion, threats, deception, and defenses that prevent escape, Sauron may control his servants through the force of his will. When Sauron realizes that the Ring is about to be destroyed,¹¹ his “whole mind and purpose [...] bends] with overwhelming force upon the Mountain,” leaving his forces directionless (*RK* 275). Even before Sauron is destroyed, when his “will was removed from them,” his forces lose their “hate and fury” (*RK* 279). Once Sauron is destroyed and all remnants of his power disappear from the assembled Orcs and Men, they scatter:

As when death smites the swollen brooding thing that inhabits their crawling hill
and holds them all in sway, ants will wander witless and purposeless and then

¹¹ When Frodo claims the Ring, “the Power of Barad-dûr [is] shaken” and “The Dark Lord [is] suddenly aware of” Frodo (*RK* 275). “All the devices of his enemies were at last laid bare,” and Sauron realizes that Frodo has been sent to destroy the Ring (*RK* 275).

feebly die, so the creatures of Sauron, orc or troll or beast spell-enslaved, ran hither and thither mindless; and some slew themselves, or cast themselves in pits, or fled wailing back to hide in holes and dark lightless places far from hope.” (RK 280)

Comparing the Orcs to ants emphasizes how much like beasts Sauron treated his troops. Like beasts, the Orcs have been spell-enslaved to Sauron’s will. Harris also describes the Orc’s behavior as an “animal frenzy [...] in battle, [which] consists of a projection of Sauron’s will combined with terror” (48). The Orcs’ desertion after the destruction of the Ring, according to Harris, shows “the difference between creatures motivated entirely by an external will and humans who, however mistaken, remain self-motivated” (49). Submitting entirely to Sauron’s will degrades the Orcs to the level of animals, and they lose the ability to think for themselves. The idea that people who had once been controlled by fear would become uncontrollable once the feared object was removed, as the Orcs do when Sauron is defeated, existed while Tolkien was writing *The Lord of the Rings*. “Juvenile Delinquency during the First World War Notes on the British Experience, 1914-18” by Edith Abbott, a journal article written in 1919, but published in 1943 (192n*), describes that juvenile delinquency was a bigger problem in Germany than England because “in the German family, the father had ruled the boys often through fear, and the mother in his absence was not able to command the same respect” (208). Though this statement reveals problematic cultural and gendered perspectives, it also illuminates an understanding of the effect of removing the center of power, especially a power that rules by fear.

Even though there are appropriate uses of power, those who rely too much on power are at risk for corruption, especially when they aspire to power beyond what would be appropriate.

Denethor is the Steward of Gondor, ruling in the name of the King and not in his own right.¹² However, Denethor asserts to Gandalf that “the rule of Gondor [...] is mine and no other man’s” (RK 33). He continually resists Gandalf’s helpful advice, and maintains that he is not answerable to Gandalf (RK 156). Accusing Gandalf of attempting to “supplant” him with a “Ranger of the North,” Denethor refuses to yield his stewardship to “such a one, last of a ragged house long bereft of lordship and dignity,” showing that he considers himself the rightful king, rather than Aragorn (RK 158). Denethor devalues the worth of his people, calling his soldiers “servants,” for him to command as he pleases (RK 156). Sauron, according to Denethor, “will not come save only to triumph over [Denethor] when all is won. He uses others as his weapons. So do all great lords, if they are wise, Master Halfling. Or why should I sit here in my tower and think, at watch, and wait, spending even my sons?” (RK 111). Not only does Denethor advocate using and sacrificing others, including his own children, to fulfill his own purpose, he also elevates himself to Sauron’s level by implying that they are both great lords, and by assuming that when Sauron comes to Gondor it will be to defeat him personally.

Because Denethor believes he is equal in power to Sauron, he feels entitled to use the *palantír*. This presumption of power is what ultimately leads to Denethor’s destruction. Sauron shows Denethor “vision[s] of the great might of Mordor that [...] feed] the despair of his heart until it [overthrows] his mind” (RK 161). He is overly confident in his ability to understand what he sees in the *palantír*, the seeing stone, calling Gandalf “Grey Fool” when he attempts to encourage him to continue in the face of apparent hopelessness:

Go forth and fight! Vanity. For a little space you may triumph on the field, for a day. But against the Power that now arises there is no victory. To this City only the first finger of its hand has yet been stretched. All the East is moving. And

¹² See note 8 for more information about how Gondor came to be under control of the Stewards.

even now the wind of thy hope cheats thee and wafts up Anduin a fleet with black sails. The West has failed. It is time for all to depart who would not be slaves.”

(*RK* 157)

This reaction is exactly what Sauron would hope to create; in giving in to visions of futility, Denethor could create the very circumstances of utter defeat that he fears.

In a way, Denethor is correct. It would be impossible to defeat Sauron by might alone. In order to defeat him, the Fellowship must seek to destroy the one weapon that could possibly work against him, the One Ring. Using the Ring as “both a symbol of and an instrument of absolute power,” Tolkien expresses “in his own manner the statement that absolute power corrupts absolutely,” according to Rawls (29). In order for the good to truly renounce power, the Ring must be destroyed. Aragorn’s final assault on the gates of Mordor is not an attempt to defeat him by force, but to “keep his Eye from his true peril [... and] give the Ring-bearer his only chance” (*RK* 191). Gandalf predicts that Sauron “will take that bait, in hope and in greed, for he will think that in such rashness he sees the pride of the new Ringlord: and he will say: ‘So! He pushes out his neck too soon and too far. [...] There I will crush him, and what he has taken in his insolence shall be mine again forever’” (*RK* 191). Even as the Ring makes the final approach to Mount Doom, Sauron assumes that the other side is preparing to challenge him because it is inspiring them to challenge him, so that it can finally return to its master. In “Love: ‘The Gift of Death,’” Linda Greenwood cites W. H. Auden’s assertion that “Good can imagine what it would be like to be Evil, [but] Evil cannot imagine what it would be like to be Good” (180). Accordingly, Sauron is limited in his ability to imagine alternative outcomes, especially those that do not involve domination and amassing power (Greenwood 180-181).

Because constant renunciation of power is necessary to defeat evil, the attempt to increase one's power makes one much more likely to be corrupted by the Ring. Levels of desire for power seem to vary across individuals. For example, though Gandalf and Galadriel both eventually reject the Ring (*FR* 95; 474), Galadriel seems to be much more tempted by it, showing that her individual desire for power remains relatively stable over time, since it was desire to rule a kingdom that caused her to come to Middle-earth (*The Silmarillion* 84). On the other hand, Gandalf remains relatively undesirous of power throughout the trilogy, marking him as having a lower diathesis than Galadriel, as shown by his fairly easy rejection of the Ring. Part of the reason that desire for power increases the likelihood of falling to the Ring, is that the Ring is an object of immense power, meaning that claiming the Ring, and thus opening oneself to corruption, would drastically increase the claimant's power.

4. Desire for, Exposure to, and Possession of the One Ring

Distance from nature and desire for power may make a character evil, but alone these characteristics are not enough to categorize a character as having fallen to the Ring. Just as consumption of alcohol is a necessary stressor in alcoholism, desire for, exposure to, and use of the Ring serve as necessary stressors for corruption by it. The contribution of stressors to mental illness was recognized by WWII, if not by WWI, as the extremely high rates of shell shock forced the acknowledgement of the stress of war as a cause (Hearnshaw 147; Howorth 225). Additionally, the addictive nature of drugs became an important discussion during WWI. In her article “Drugs and Social Policy: The Establishment of Drug Control in Britain 1900-1930,” Virginia Berridge writes that, though the drug problem in England was small, the perceived needs of the war effort, such as fears that the soldiers’ efficiency would suffer through exposure to drugs, led to stricter governmental control of drugs (20-21). Though I certainly do not imply that the Ring is a metaphor for drugs or drug addiction, I do contend that the Ring has some addictive properties that may reflect the concern over drugs during and after the World Wars¹³.

When Gandalf tells Frodo that Bilbo’s ring might be the One Ring, he first warns Frodo that the Ring is dangerous, saying “it is far more powerful than I ever dared to think at first, so powerful that in the end it would utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it. It would possess him,” showing the Ring’s power to change its possessor (*FR* 76). Gandalf also explains that Sauron put into the Ring “a great part of his own former power [...] so that he could rule all the others,” showing the purpose of the Ring for control (*FR* 82). Because so much of Sauron’s power is in the Ring, it is almost sentient; Gandalf tells Frodo that “a Ring of Power looks after itself, Frodo. *It* may slip off treacherously, but its keeper never abandons it. [...] It was not Gollum, Frodo, but the Ring itself that decided things. The Ring left *him*” (*FR* 87). The

¹³ This claim was inspired by Shippey’s analysis of the Ring’s addictive powers (126).

Ring's power to "suddenly slip off a finger" (*FR* 77) allows it to attempt to accomplish its aim of "get[ting] back to its master" (*FR* 87). Thus, with the goal of returning to Sauron, the Ring not only chooses its possessor, but then "possesses him" and corrupts the bearer in order to accomplish its goal. Rawls writes that the Ring "takes self-knowledge and distorts it. Using its power of insight, it seizes upon the dearest desires of the wearer and twists and inflates these desires. [...] The Ruling ring makes all grandiose wishes seem possible" (30). The Ring actively encourages its own use, by showing the bearer what can be accomplished through it. The use increases the Ring's power over the bearer, which makes it again more likely to be used. This cycle resembles a cycle of addiction.

Typically, one must actually physically come into contact with a drug one can be considered addicted to it. If a person has never used cocaine, he or she cannot be addicted to cocaine. However, Shippey claims that the Ring's addictive properties include desire for it because "use has to be preceded by desire" (126). The Ring's power to corrupt without being in contact with a person is clear throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. During the Council of Elrond, Elrond explains that "the very desire of it corrupts the heart" (*FR* 350). Saruman falls to the Ring without possessing it. Though he is too strong a wizard to be tricked by the Ring into doing Sauron's bidding, he is corrupted by the desire to be a new dark lord. Gandalf observes that Saruman "was mustering a great force on his own account, in rivalry of Sauron and not in his service yet" (*FR* 341). That Saruman's forces are not "yet" under Sauron's control shows that Saruman's desire to rival Sauron makes him susceptible to corruption.

However, Saruman knows that no matter how much power he accumulates, he cannot face Sauron without the Ring (*TT* 129), and it is his longing for the Ring that causes him to fall under "the shadow of Mordor" (*FR* 344). Saruman reveals his desire for the Ring to Gandalf:

‘The Ruling Ring? If we could command that, then the Power would pass to *us*. That is in truth why I brought you here. For I have many eyes in my service, and I believe that you know where this precious thing now lies. Is it not so? Or why do the Nine ask for the Shire, and what is your business there?’ As he said this a lust which he could not conceal shone suddenly in his eyes. (*FR* 340)

Saruman cannot be tempted by physical proximity to the Ring: he does not even know where it is. But, it is clear that he already “lust[s]” for the Ring (*FR* 340). His speech mirrors that of “emissaries sent from Mordor to deceive the ignorant” (*FR* 340), and Treebeard accuses him of “plotting to become a Power” (*TT* 96). Saruman’s adoration of power, along with his wanton destruction of the trees near Orthanc (*TT* 96), marks him as evil, but it is his obsession with gaining the Ring that shows him as under Sauron’s power.

Desire for the Ring is strengthened when a person susceptible to the Ring’s power is in close proximity to it. Though Boromir never possesses the Ring, he is clearly affected by its presence. During the Council of Elrond, Boromir opposes the destruction of the Ring and instead advocates its use against Sauron:

Why do you speak ever of hiding and destroying? Why should we not think that the Great Ring has come into our hands to serve us in the very hour of need? Wielding it, the Free Lords of the free may surely defeat the Enemy. [...] The Men of Gondor are valiant, and they will never submit; but they may be beaten down. Valour needs first strength, and then a weapon. (*FR* 350)

Boromir’s reliance on strength of arms shows that he puts his trust in power, and his desire to use the Ring marks him as unwilling to purposefully abdicate power. Because of his desire to use the Ring’s power, he falls under it, much like Saruman. After the Council of Elrond, Boromir leaves

off his discussion of using the Ring and, other than suggesting the Gap of Rohan rather than Caradhras or Moria (*FR* 386), goes along with the decisions of Gandalf, Aragorn, and Frodo. However, being around the Ring for an extended period of time causes Boromir to dwell on the folly of the destruction of the Ring. As the Fellowship prepares to leave Lothlórien, Boromir asserts that “if you wish to destroy the armed might of the Dark Lord, then it is folly to go without force into his domain; and folly to throw away” the Ring, though he hastily covers this up by saying it would be “folly to throw lives away” (*FR* 477-478). It is clear, therefore, that Boromir’s desire for the Ring stems from “patriotism and love of Gondor, but when this leads him to exalt ‘strength to defend ourselves, strength in a just cause’, our modern experience of dictators immediately tells us that matters would not stay there” (Shippey 125).

After an even longer exposure to the Ring, Boromir decides to confront Frodo and ask to borrow the Ring, not keep it (*FR* 516). Boromir does not see that taking the Ring will lead to his own corruption. During his confrontation with Frodo, he defends against Frodo’s accusation that “what is done with [the Ring] turns to evil,” by asserting the goodness of Men:

These elves and half-elves and wizards, they would come to grief, perhaps. Yet often I doubt if they are wise and not merely timid. But each to his own kind. True-hearted Men, they will not be corrupted. We of Minas Tirith have been staunch through long years of trial. We do not desire the power of wizard-lords, only strength to defend ourselves. (*FR* 515)

In marginalizing the necessary strength of will it takes for the wise to resist the Ring, Boromir raises his own self-image, implying that he is more capable than Gandalf or Elrond in limiting the power of the Ring. However, Men have proven to be the most easily corruptible of races;

they are the only race to fall to the lesser Rings, yet Boromir insists that they will not fall to the One.

Boromir's trust in his own ability to resist the Ring and in the might of arms read similarly to the actions of his father, Denethor, who also places too much trust in his ability to resist Sauron.¹⁴ Denethor's consideration of himself as king also appears in Boromir, as "always it displeased him that his father was not king. 'How may hundreds of years need it to make a steward a king, if the king returns not?' he asked" in his childhood (*TT* 352). Boromir is like Denethor "in face and pride," suggesting that this sense of being able to resist Sauron may be somewhat hereditary (*RK* Appendix A 419).¹⁵

Because Boromir's hereditary pride lures him into a false sense of security about being able to resist the Ring and because he is "ever anxious for the victory of Minas Tirith (and his own glory therein)," he is extremely vulnerable to it (*TT* 354). He asserts his own claim to the Ring, saying "It might have been mine. It should be mine. Give it to me!" (*FR* 516). In claiming the Ring, and then exerting violence against Frodo in an attempt to gain it, Boromir shows that he is corrupted by the Ring (*FR* 517). However, unlike Saruman or the Nazgûl, Boromir is able to redeem himself by feeling remorse (*FR* 517; 523) and by dying in defense of Merry and Pippin (*TT* 18). Therefore, Boromir does not permanently fall to the Ring, but his corruption is enough to demonstrate the power the Ring works through mere proximity, especially in those with a high diathesis, such as Boromir's trust in power.

The final and most powerful way the Ring functions as a stressor is through use of the Ring. The four Ringbearers, Gollum, Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam, are the clearest examples of the effects of use of the Ring. All four bear the Ring for varying amounts of time and use the Ring to

¹⁴ See Chapter 3: Desire for Power for more about Denethor's overestimation of his own skill and about heredity.

¹⁵ However, Faramir is certainly different from Boromir and Denethor. See below for more information about Faramir's ability to resist the Ring.

varying degrees, so their behavior differentially reflects the power of the Ring, though, arguably, none is fully corrupted. Of all the Ringbearers, Gollum is the most clearly corrupted by the Ring. Gollum bears the Ring for 478 years (*RK* Appendix B 459-461). The Ring works its powers on Gollum extraordinarily quickly: within minutes of Déagol pulling the Ring out of the river, Sméagol murders him in order to gain access to the Ring (*FR* 85). Using the Ring gives Sméagol “power according to his stature,” and he uses it to spy on his neighbors and spread mischief (*FR* 85). However, once Gollum enters his exile under the mountains, he rarely uses the Ring; thus he is consumed and tortured by the Ring, but he never fades into a wraith (*FR* 87). Even after the Ring is taken, Gollum’s “longing for the Ring proved greater than his fear of the Orcs, or even the light” (*FR* 89), and he emerges as a “ghost that [drinks] blood” (*FR* 91). Inevitably, Gollum makes his way to Mordor, unable to avoid the summons of the master of his Ring (*FR* 91).

However, in the face of all this evidence, Gandalf maintains that Gollum is not wholly lost:

He had proved tougher than even one of the Wise would have guessed – as a Hobbit might. There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark: a light from the past. [...]
But that, of course, would only make the evil part of him angrier in the end – unless it could be conquered. Unless it could be cured. (*FR* 86).

Gandalf admits that there is little hope of curing Gollum, but the fact that this hope remains shows that even Gollum’s exceptionally long possession of the Ring does not guarantee that irredeemable corruption will occur.

Bilbo and Gollum both easily come to believe that they own the Ring, and both name it “my precious” (*FR* 59-60). Both also create stories of how they came into possession of the Ring

that “put [their] claims[s] to the ring beyond doubt” (*FR* 77). Gollum claims that the Ring was a “birthday present” even though he murdered Déagol for it (*FR* 89) and Bilbo makes up a story about winning the Ring, when he really found it before the beginning of the Riddle Game (*FR* 77).¹⁶ That both Bilbo and Gollum want to establish their rightful claim to the Ring almost immediately after gaining possession of it shows how quickly the Ring acts to create the desire to keep it. Additionally, inspiring thoughts of ownership allows the Ring to tempt its possessor into using it. If Bilbo, or Gollum, truly owns the Ring, then he can use it as much as and however he wishes.

Bilbo’s possession of the Ring takes only limited space in *The Lord of the Rings*, having been told more fully in *The Hobbit*. However, three key incidents in *The Lord of the Rings* show the effect the Ring has on Bilbo. After using the Ring’s power of invisibility to create a spectacle at his birthday party by disappearing at the end of his speech, Bilbo describes feeling “all thin, sort of *stretched*, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been spread over too much bread” (*FR* 58). As shown in Chapter 2, this feeling of being not quite all there is the beginning of fading into a wraith, which Bilbo exhibits because of the frequency with which he has used the Ring to become invisible (*FR* 76). During this same scene, Bilbo demonstrates marked reluctance to give the Ring to Gandalf. Gandalf explains that the Ring has “far too much hold” on Bilbo, but Bilbo angrily accuses Gandalf of trying to steal the Ring for himself, and threatens him by laying a hand on the hilt of his sword (*FR* 60). This reluctance to part from the Ring shows its addictive properties.

Gandalf warns Frodo that Bilbo “possessed the ring for many years, and used it, so it might take a long while for the influence to wear off – before it was safe for him to see it again,

¹⁶ For more information about Bilbo’s finding of the Ring and the Riddle Game with Gollum, see *The Hobbit* (68-96).

for instance” (*FR* 79). This fear proves to be apt, as when Bilbo convinces Frodo to show him the Ring in Rivendell, and Frodo refuses to give it to him, Bilbo suddenly becomes to Frodo “a wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony groping hands” (*FR* 306). When Bilbo realizes what is happening he tells Frodo to “Put it away!,” showing that, though the Ring has somewhat caused him to fade, he retains sufficient self-control to resist the Ring (*FR* 306). When the Ring is destroyed, the powers that were preserving Bilbo also end, so he becomes ancient, though he is no longer in danger of fading (*RK* 311). However, even after the Ring is destroyed, it remains important to Bilbo, and he asks Frodo if he can see it on the way to the Grey Havens (*RK* 328).

Frodo demonstrates most clearly the development of the Ring’s control. Even though he possesses it for a relatively short time, especially compared to Gollum, he possesses the Ring as Sauron gains strength and as he increases in proximity to Mordor. The Ring grows heavier in Mordor, symbolizing its growth in strength, which speeds up the process of Frodo’s corruption and eventual fall to the power of the Ring (*FR* 406, *TT* 300-301). Almost immediately after receiving the Ring, Frodo begins to be tempted to use it to avoid inconvenient situations, such as interacting with his cousins the Sackville-Bagginses (*FR* 68). He first wears it after Tom Bombadil has made it vanish and reappear to make sure that it is still “his own ring,” showing that he is already possessive of it (*FR* 184-185). Several more times, he either uses it or is tempted to use it for its power of invisibility: to escape the Barrow-wight (*FR* 195), to avoid the crowd at the Prancing Pony (*FR* 216), in a futile attempt to escape the Nazgûl on Weathertop (*FR* 262-263), and to elude Boromir (*FR* 517). As Frodo approaches Mordor, the desire to wear the Ring becomes greater, and twice, he cannot help moving his hand to put it on. It is only through grabbing the phial of Galadriel (*TT* 401) and through Sam physically restraining his hands that Frodo avoids wearing the Ring within the realm of Mordor (*RK* 270).

Brown argues that invisibility is only the secondary power of the Ring, with the ability to control others being the primary power (165-166). Brown also argues that Bilbo, Frodo, and Gollum all use the invisibility power of the Ring out of a desire for solitude, but that they do not use the power of the Ring to control others (165-166). However, Frodo is certainly intrigued by the possibility of using the Ring to control others. He asks Galadriel why he cannot “see all the [other Rings] and know the thoughts of those that wear them,” to which she responds that he “would need to become far stronger, and to train [his] will to the domination of others” (*FR* 474).

In order to assure Gollum’s trustworthiness as a guide, Frodo threatens to “put on the Precious; and the Precious mastered you long ago. If I, wearing it, were to command you, you would obey, even if it were to leap from a precipice or cast yourself into the fire. And such would be my command” (*TT* 314). Though here Frodo is only threatening Gollum, his reliance on the Ring to control Gollum and the violence that he threatens show the Ring working in his personality. Frodo again threatens to “take Precious, and [...] say: make him swallow the bones and choke. Never taste fish again. Come, Precious is waiting” (*TT* 376). This later example of Frodo threatening Gollum is even more problematic than the first, as he commands him explicitly in the name of the Ring, and because he is deceiving Gollum and leading him into a trap by Faramir’s men (*TT* 376-377). Deception, as seen earlier, is one of Sauron’s means of manipulating obedience, and that Frodo now uses the Ring to accomplish deception shows the corrupting effect the Ring has had on him.

Eventually, Frodo does use the power of the Ring to directly control Gollum, clutching it through his shirt and exclaiming “Begone, and trouble me no more! If you touch me ever again, you shall be cast yourself into the Fire of Doom” (*RK* 272). This command, which he threatened earlier, comes to fruition, as the next time Gollum touches him, he bites off Frodo’s finger,

regains the Ring, and topples into Mount Doom (*RK* 275-276). That Frodo's command is carried out, but in a way that is detrimental to Frodo shows the power of the Ring to twist the desires of the wearer. Robert A. Hall, Jr., in "Who is the Master of the 'Precious'?", argues that Frodo gives a second command to Gollum, this time to "bite off his, Frodo's, finger with the 'Precious' on it and to hurl himself into the fire" (34). However, I find this explanation unlikely, as Frodo falls to the Ring and abandons his quest. He states "I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" (*RK* 274).¹⁷ In choosing to not destroy the Ring, claiming it as his own, and putting it on within the very heart of Mordor, Frodo clearly demonstrates his desire to master the Ring himself and challenge Sauron, a decision the wise have been intentionally avoiding throughout the book by constantly refusing the Ring (*RK* 274). Therefore, it seems unlikely that he would command Gollum to destroy the Ring. Instead, Frodo's earlier command that to touch him would lead to being thrown into the Fires of Doom is realized (*RK* 272).

Sam bears the Ring for the shortest amount of time, but bears it exclusively on the very border of or within the land of Mordor, where it should be at its greatest power. Sam takes the Ring because he believes Frodo to be dead and that it is up to him to finish the quest (*TT* 433). Even so, he debates for a long time before taking the Ring. He says, "No chance to go back with It and get advice or permission. No, it's sit here till they come and kill me over master's body, and get It; or take It and go. [...] Then take It, it is!" (*TT* 434). Sam's reluctance to take the Ring demonstrates his lack of desire for it. Once Sam takes the Ring, he begins to use it, first out of the necessity to avoid being seen by Orcs (*TT* 436). However, Sam uses the Ring again as he is about to cross the border into Mordor, without "any clear purpose" (*RK* 213). This desire to wear the Ring shows its powers beginning to work on Sam.

¹⁷ Frodo's claiming of the Ring parallels Isildur's claim at the End of the Second Age (*FR* 319-320).

Though Sam does not wear the Ring within the realm of Mordor, he does use it. Even clutching it to his chest instead of wearing it is enough to cause Sam to appear to an Orc as “a great silent shape, cloaked in a grey shadow, looming against the wavering light behind; in one hand it held a sword, the very light of which was a bitter pain, the other was clutched at its breast, but held concealed some nameless menace of power and doom” (*RK* 220). Sam then taps into the Ring’s power to make the Orc see him as a great warrior, bearing the “nameless menace” of the Ring. Using the Ring to trick the Orc is a manner of using the Ring to control another through deception. However, even though Sam takes the Ring, wears the Ring, and uses the Ring within Mordor, he is seemingly uncorrupted by the Ring. He is “reluctant to give up the Ring,” but only because he does not want to “burden his master with it again” (*RK* 230).

Why is Sam so resistant to the Ring’s powers? First, Sam is a Hobbit, so he is deeply connected to the earth by virtue of his race. However, Frodo is also a Hobbit. It may be argued that Sam is more deeply connected to the earth through his profession as a gardener. The “wild fantasies” that the Ring shows Sam portray his connection to nature, as “at his command the vale of Gorgoroth became a garden of flowers and trees and brought forth fruit” (*RK* 216). Additionally, Sam bears the Ring for a much shorter period of time than Frodo. Sam also has much less power than Frodo; in fact, he is Frodo’s servant. Ultimately, Sam does not want more power, for “deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him” (*RK* 216). Because Sam retains his hobbit-sense (a marker of his racial diathesis) and because he does not desire power beyond “one small garden of a free gardener,” his brief, though intense, exposure to the Ring is not enough to cause Sam to become corrupted.

Sam is not the only character to successfully resist the powers of the Ring. In fact, Shippey explains that almost too many characters are able to resist the Ring:

The problem comes from the apparent immunity of so many other characters. [...] Pippin and Merry, who show no desire for it at all, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, who display the same indifference with the excuse of ignorance, and Boromir's brother Faramir [...]. One sees the beginnings of a serious criticism of the very basis of *The Lord of the Rings* here: the author appears to have presented a set of rules and then observed them only partially, reserving as it were the right to exceptions and miracles. (126)

Indeed, every member of the Fellowship, except Boromir and later Frodo, is able to resist the Ring, even though they all have the same exposure to the Ring as Boromir, except Frodo who is more exposed because he bears the Ring. Because the members of the Fellowship share a similar level of exposure, the difference between Boromir and the other members must be based in differences in diatheses. For the Hobbits, Legolas, and Gimli, their racial connection to nature is likely to serve as a protective factor against their relatively brief, second-hand exposure to the Ring. As seen earlier, Gandalf is closely tied to nature through his Elven Ring and his love for trees and, though he is extremely powerful, he does not attempt to control others with it and takes seriously his command to avoid “match[ing] his [Sauron's] power with power” (*RK* Appendix B 455). Because Gandalf constantly renounces power, he is able to forcefully reject Frodo's offer of the Ring, and to avoid corruption while he travels with the Fellowship (*FR* 95).

Boromir, Faramir, and Aragorn are all men and all have the opportunity to claim the Ring, meaning their racial connection to nature and their exposures to the Ring are roughly equivalent. The only remaining difference, then, is individual desire for power, though there are

some individual differences in connection to nature, as seen above. Boromir is overly trusting of the might of arms, a trait either inherited or learned from his father. However, Faramir does not show this same tendency. Faramir bemoans the way that Gondor has come to “esteem a warrior [...] above men of other crafts” (*TT* 364), and Denethor berates him as a “wizard’s pupil” (*RK* 104). Faramir sees that there are more ways to win a battle than through sheer exertion of power, and he asserts to Frodo that he “would not take [the Ring], if it lay by the highway. Not were Minas Tirith falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory. No, I do not wish for such triumphs” (*TT* 354). Faramir’s renunciation of personal glory, then, allows him to resist taking the Ring. In fact, he tells Sam that he “had no lure or desire to do other than [he] has done” in choosing not to take the Ring (*TT* 368).

Aragorn, as seen above, is reluctant to claim his rightful power, and this lack of desire for personal advancement continues into Aragorn’s interactions with the Ring. During the Council of Elrond, Aragorn reveals himself as Isildur’s heir, and Frodo declares “Then it belongs to you, and not to me at all!” (*FR* 324), because Isildur had claimed the Ring at Sauron’s first defeat.¹⁸ However, Aragorn asserts that “it does not belong to either of us,” showing that he does not consider Isildur’s claim to the Ring to be authentic (*FR* 324). Additionally, Aragorn explains that he helped Gandalf find Gollum because “it seemed fit that Isildur’s heir should labour to repair Isildur’s fault,” showing that he thinks Isildur was not justified in taking the Ring, as it was a “fault” (*FR* 330). That Aragorn, as “Isildur’s heir,” feels responsible for amending Isildur’s error shows that he believes there is some potential hereditary involvement in claiming the Ring, which strengthens his resolve to avoid it (*FR* 330).

¹⁸ At the end of the Second Age, Sauron is defeated by Isildur who “cut he Ring from his hand with the hilt-shard of his father’s sword and took it for his own. [...] Isildur took it, as should not have been. It should have been cast then into Orodruin’s fire night at hand where it was made. [...] But Isildur would not listen to our counsel. ‘This I will have as weregild for my father, and my brother,’ he said; and therefore whether we would or not, he took it to treasure it” (*FR* 319-320).

One of the most interesting instances of resisting the Power of the Rings comes from a character outside of the Fellowship, Tom Bombadil. Tom lives in the Old Forest on the borders of the Shire. What exactly Tom is is not clear. When Frodo asks Goldberry who he is, she simply answers that “he is” (*FR* 173), and later when Tom himself is asked, he answers “Don’t you know my name yet? That’s the only answer” (*FR* 182). Eventually, the Hobbits are given the answer that he is the “Eldest” living thing in Middle-earth, existing even before the Elves (*FR* 182). Tom wields an immense amount of power. He is able to stop Frodo and Sam “as if they had been struck stiff,” with the simple command of “Whoa! Whoa! steady there!” and a wave of his hand (*FR* 168). Tom commands Old Man Willow to relinquish Merry and Pippin (*FR* 169), and through the power of his words he rescues all four Hobbits from the barrow-wight (*FR* 197). However, possibly Tom’s greatest and most surprising power is his seeming unaffectedness by the Ring. He can still see Frodo when he wears the Ring, and when Tom puts it on his own finger, he does not turn invisible (*FR* 184-185).

Tom’s ability to resist the Ring is tied into the question of what he is. Curry quotes Tolkien as claiming Tom is “the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside” (131), and Carretero-González asserts that “his identity is not that important; what is clear is that he represents the spirit of the natural world that precedes all the races of Middle-earth” (153). Therefore, it may be that Tom’s lack of reaction to the Ring is part of his extraordinarily strong connection to the natural world. However, Gandalf asserts that his power to resist the Ring stems from being “his own master” (*FR* 348). The idea of mastery is strongly connected to Tom, as he is also “the Master of wood, water, and hill” (*FR* 174). When Frodo understands his mastery to mean that the land belongs to him, Goldberry explains:

“No indeed!” she answered, and her smile faded. “That would indeed be a burden,” she added in a low voice, as if to herself. “The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves. Tom Bombadil is the Master. No one has ever caught old Tom walking in the forest, wading in the water, leaping on the hill-tops under light and shadow. He has no fear. Tom Bombadil is master.” (*FR* 174)

Perhaps “caretaker”¹⁹ would be a better word for Tom’s role than “master,” because he does not consider anything to belong to him, rather he acknowledges that each belong to themselves. This is the opposite of the forceful domination that Sauron uses to control his subjects, and it may be that this recognition of each thing’s sovereignty that he is able to resist the Ring’s attempt to dominate him.

Tom’s ability to ignore the Ring prompts members of the Council of Elrond to ask if he could keep the Ring safe, but Gandalf asserts that not only would Tom not want the Ring, but he would have such disregard for it that it would be dangerous to give it to him, because “he would not understand the need. And if he were given the Ring, he would soon forget it, or most likely throw it away. Such things have no hold on his mind. He would be a most unsafe guardian” (*FR* 348). Tom has such little desire to own others or things that he does not understand the danger of the Ring, so would not guard it with the intensity that would be necessary. Additionally, though Tom is unaffected by the Ring, “he cannot alter the Ring itself, nor break its power over others,” so giving it to him would “only postpone the day of evil” (*FR* 348). Tom is not powerful enough to resist Sauron singlehandedly, and, left to defend the Ring alone, he “will fall, Last as he was First; and then Night will come” (*FR* 348). Tom’s power may originate through a deep

¹⁹ For another example of a caretaker, see Beorn, who seems to be more involved with animals than plants (*The Hobbit* 115-136).

connection with nature, but the power to resist Sauron's full might is absent as Sauron "can torture and destroy the very hills" (*FR* 348). Thus, Tom Bombadil shows both nature's power to resist the Ring, and nature's failure to completely overcome Sauron.

Though many people seem fairly unaffected by the Ring, it is important to remember that they also face relatively little exposure to the Ring. Other than Frodo, the members of the Fellowship are equally near the Ring, without coming into true contact with it. This lack of contact proves to be too little exposure to elicit the Ring's call, for everyone but Boromir. Because the Ring is an environmental stressor that triggers corruption, the only real danger is for those who possess and use the Ring, and those who attempt to gain the Ring's power from afar, like Saruman. Therefore, the only real surprises in the ability to resist come from Sam, who resists even though he uses the Ring, and Tom Bombadil who is immune even from the Ring's power of invisibility. Both these characters have extremely low diatheses for corruption, as both are intimately connected with the natural world and contented with the powers they have, so even wearing the Ring is not enough to trigger corruption.

The diathesis-stress model is applicable to *The Lord of the Rings*, but does this understanding lend anything important to the reading of *The Lord of the Rings*? This model adds complexity to the understanding of how the Ring works to corrupt people. Without characteristics that lead to a differential rate of corruption, the powers of the Ring become riddled with “exceptions and miracles” (Shippey 126). However, the framework of the diathesis-stress model helps to explain why so many characters are able to resist the Ring’s power, and causes four main character types to emerge. Those with a high diathesis and high exposure have a very low likelihood of escaping the draw of the Ring, just as someone with a family history of alcoholism who drinks large quantities of alcohol is likely to become an alcoholic. This type is exemplified by Boromir, whose lack of connection with the natural world and trust in the strength of arms make him unable to resist the Ring once he is exposed to it over the course of the journey. Characters with a low diathesis and low exposure, such as Hobbits in the Shire or Ghân-buri-Ghân, are mostly safe from the power of the Ring, similarly to people without a family history of alcoholism who drink responsibly. Characters with a low diathesis do fall to the Ring, but only under extremely high exposure, which parallels people who do not have a family history of alcoholism but consistently drink to excess. Frodo is the best example of this type of character; the stress of possessing the Ring for the duration of the journey while it is gaining power through proximity to Sauron is enough to overcome his initially low diathesis. Gollum also experiences exposure that is long and severe enough to overcome the low diathesis he had as a proto-Hobbit.

The fourth type of character is particularly interesting because it does not fit with the predictions of the diathesis-stress model. Those with high diatheses but low exposure should be predicted to avoid corruption, just as people with a family history of alcoholism who

purposefully avoid consuming alcohol do not become alcoholics. However, this prediction only partially plays out in *The Lord of the Rings*. Aragorn and Théoden, who as powerful humans may have a high diathesis, seem uncorrupted, but Saruman clearly falls to the Ring without ever knowing its precise location. The power the Ring exerts beyond its physical sphere is difficult to fit into a model that does not account for magical powers. However, it may show more widespread environmental influences than the simple stress of consumption, such as advertising and propaganda that encourage consumption. Additionally, it is possible that the stressor responsible for Saruman's fall is not proximity to the Ring itself, but proximity to Mordor, and thus the source of the Ring's power.

In addition to modernizing psychological criticism of Tolkien's works, this analysis serves to bring together psychological criticism with eco-criticism and the study of the nature of evil and free will. Bringing together these lines of criticism allows a deeper level of comparison between them. Possibly, the Ring's evil reflects Tolkien's experiences in WWI with the dangers of the addictive desire for absolute power and the huge costs the attempts to achieve this desire had in human life and environmental destruction. One aspect of the desire for power is rampant environmental destruction, but the reverse is also true: those who are the most natural scorn personal power. Indeed some of the characters most connected with nature, like Ents, Tom Bombadil, and Ghân-buri-Ghân, refuse to become involved in the War of the Ring, even though they oppose Sauron. Perhaps the negative correlation between power and nature shows that the quest for power, and perhaps warfare itself, as a violation of nature.

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