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The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder of Frodo Baggins

Abstract

J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* accurately portrayed the signs and symptoms of what is currently labeled Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Frodo's condition logically follows his experiences of less than a year in the War of the Ring. Tolkien did not have access to a diagnostic manual but apparently used his keen observations from both World Wars to inform his narrative. No fantasy is employed to describe Frodo's condition after the Ring is destroyed. His condition is that of a vet with PTSD. Evidence from the History of Middle-earth demonstrates the deliberate steps taken to show Frodo as broken by his sacrifice.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien; Frodo; PTSD; Lord of the Rings; Posttraumatic Stress Disorder; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Psychological aspects; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Frodo



THE POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER OF FRODO BAGGINS

BRUCE LEONARD

“Faërie contains many things besides elves [...] besides dwarves, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.” (Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories” [OFS] 32)

IF SO *FAËRIE* WOULD ALSO CONTAIN our native psychologies even if it contains tones supposedly alien. Frodo’s experiences as Ring-bearer are certainly alien and certainly traumatic, but his reactions to trauma were neither fanciful nor fantasy. Tolkien had his own personal observations to guide him in portrayal of war trauma.

The focus of this paper is on the clinically recognized phenomena, both medical and psychological, of a person’s possible response to trauma. A common problematic reaction to trauma is labeled Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The criteria used to formally diagnose PTSD are found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (301-3, subsequently *DSM*). This paper is based on the clinical presentation of PTSD, which remains congruent with Tolkien’s decades-older portrayal.¹ My goal in this essay is to make what is implicit in the text explicit.

INTRODUCTION

In *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien plainly describes the signs and symptoms common to PTSD: reliving of past traumas, pain from old wounds, avoidance of trauma reminders, altered states of consciousness, loss of a sense

¹ The paper’s first version was presented in 1996 and somewhat revised in 1997, utilizing an earlier edition of *DSM*. This revision was updated to include the current diagnostic criteria and reference to subsequent publications specifically addressing aspects of Frodo’s trauma, e.g.: Khouzam et al., Krokstrom, Livingston, Milos, Wilkerson, *The Barrow-Downs Discussion Forum*, and the multiple items listed in the bibliography under Flieger, Garth, Klinger, and Shippey. For an accessible Tolkien-related review of the concept of shell shock see Croft 133-8.

of a future, altered sense of self, general hyperreactivity with a paradoxical numbing, social withdrawal, and isolation in general. After Frodo completes his Quest, as he returns and as he helps liberate the Shire, the full effect of the trauma on Frodo is respectfully drawn in a series of vignettes culminating in his leave-taking of Sam at the Havens. In *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* are found explicit statements of Tolkien's thoughts regarding Frodo's sacrifice.

In the *DSM*, Part A of the formal diagnostic criteria for PTSD describes the necessary elements of so-called significant trauma. The first criteria are: "A. Exposure to actual or threatened death [or] serious injury [...] in one (or more) of the following ways: A.1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s). A.2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others" (*DSM* 301).² As a therapist might state in case conference, "Clearly Frodo Baggins has repeatedly been traumatized and experienced a catastrophic level of stress, perhaps equivalent to a concentration camp experience."³ Frodo's traumas are comparable to historical experience except, crucially, for his experience of carrying the Ring, an active malevolent will. The traumatic loss of the Ring was complicated, as by the end it had, in a sense, become part of Frodo; yet it continuously tortured him until he was in some way "broken." Gandalf was explicit in "The Shadow of the Past," saying the Ring is "so powerful that in the end it would utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it. It would possess him" (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings [LotR]* I.2.46).

To be sure we're on the same track regarding traumatic events, besides direct effect of the Ring, below is a list of Frodo's experiences which could traumatize people:

1. Threatened loss of the Ring.
2. Repeatedly chased and in fear of his life and the lives of his companions.
3. Trapped by Old Man Willow.
4. The Barrow-wight encounter.
5. The attack at Bree.
6. Stabbed and 'poisoned' physically and spiritually on Weathertop.
7. The attack at the Ford.

² The pertinent *DSM* diagnostic criteria will be quoted (in the body or footnote) as demonstrated by the text passage. Comments on other elements of PTSD are based on clinical experience, reviewed in *DSM*, Khouzam et al., and from my clinical practice.

³ Trauma being a type of loss. Every trauma involves the losses of autonomy and of safety, or at least threatens the loss of safety. Throughout *LotR* there are issues of loss of wider import than war trauma and beyond the scope of this paper. Some evidence indicates childhood trauma is a risk factor to later PTSD, but Tolkien does not utilize the trauma of parental loss in orphan Frodo's case.

8. The storm on the mountain.
9. Wolves attack.
10. The watcher at the Moria doors.
11. Moria passage.
12. The orc and troll attack. Frodo is struck with loss of consciousness.
13. The Balrog attack.
14. Loss of Gandalf.
15. Flight to Lórien.
16. Threats on the river
17. Boromir's attack.
18. The Eye of Sauron encounter on Amon Hen.
19. The cliff climb.
20. Capture of Gollum.
21. Almost being discovered witnessing the Southron army enter the Black Gate.
22. The ambush in Ithilien.
23. Capture by Faramir.
24. Having to betray Gollum to save him.
25. Threat of discovery by the Witch-king.
26. Encounter with Shelob, poisoned.
27. First loss of the Ring.
28. Capture and torture by orcs.
29. Hunted and caught in orc march.
30. Cumulative effect of starvation and sleep deprivation.
31. Attacked by Gollum on Orodruin.
32. Final loss of the Ring and its destruction.
33. Loss of finger.
34. Lost consciousness on Mount Doom expecting to die.
35. Battle of Bywater.
36. Attacked by Saruman.
37. Loss of home.

I can quibble with the listing of certain of these alleged traumatic events, but Frodo was repeatedly a victim of significant trauma. He certainly responded to these threats with experiences of intense fear, helplessness, and horror, which were former *DSM* Part A diagnostic criteria. Furthermore, most of these events are the external, more visible traumas; they do not clearly show the psychic trauma caused by the Ring as it challenged Frodo's perceptions, thought, and will; a psychological assault by another will.

TEXTUAL SEQUENCE OF TRAUMA REACTIONS

In the passages noted below Tolkien describes some of the prominent symptoms of PTSD. In Frodo's case the signs and symptoms of his traumatic stress disorder manifest as his internal struggle to cope with his experiences of war as they are encountered in space and time. There is a recurrence of Frodo's wound pain when Nazgul are near, as noted by Milos (18). Frodo has a strong reaction when Sam returns the Ring (*LotR* VI.1.912), failing physically and describing what he's lost (*LotR* VI.2.918). On Mount Doom he has little hope and "a great wheel of fire" fills his mind (*LotR* VI.2.919). Further up the mountain his physical condition worsens, he feels hopeless, and the Ring is now an inordinate weight (*LotR* VI.3.937).⁴ After the Ring is destroyed, Frodo is content to stand in the opening to the Cracks of Doom where he would shortly have been killed, which is evidence of lack of appropriate alarm and impaired judgement and functioning. DSM criteria E lists "Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with traumatic events" and E.2 adds "Reckless or self-destructive behavior." Criteria G adds "The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social [...] or other important areas of functioning" (*DSM* 302).

At the victory celebration Frodo states he does "not wish for any sword," though he reluctantly acquiesces (*LotR* VI.4.954). Here Frodo is wanting to withdraw from society, from the role of victor, from the role of hero (*DSM* criteria G). This behavior demonstrates how uncomfortable Frodo is with his supposed heroic role in the war; probably indicating his sense of shame for claiming the Ring in the final moments.⁵

Two chapters later some of the symptoms of Frodo's PTSD are foreshadowed by Arwen: "If your hurts grieve you still and the memory of your burden is heavy, then you may pass into the West." She also gives him a white jewel on a chain. "'When the memory of the fear and the darkness troubles you,' she said, 'this will bring you aid'" (*LotR* VI.6.974-5). Here she clearly describes what does come to pass for Frodo: he still feels "hurt," memories haunt him, "the darkness troubles" him deeply, and grief will not let him rest.

To pause briefly from the textual sequence, it is significant that Tolkien wrote of the elements of psychological war trauma; he described the chronic pain, anniversary reactions, isolation, and "the memory of the fear" that are characteristic of PTSD. There was considerable controversy during WWI and WWII regarding the existence and treatment of war related injuries and dysfunction without visible causative damage. It took decades-long work, but

⁴ Thorough reviews of Frodo's war experience are found in Croft, and Garth, "Frodo and the Great War" ["Frodo"].

⁵ *DSM* Criterion D.4: "Persistent negative emotional state [...] shame."

even after WWI psychological damage was only reluctantly recognized (Loughran, *Shell-shock and Medical Culture* [*Medical Culture*]; Reid, Shephard). Though much of the phenomena of war-trauma PTSD was documented before and during the two World Wars, it was culturally an unacceptable response to trauma (Shephard; Loughran, "Shell Shock, Trauma, and the First World War" ["Shell Shock"]; Reid, Fueshko).⁶

Other characters with trauma, e.g. Sador, Túrin, Gollum, Mím, Merry, Pippin, Éowyn, and Wormtongue, detail the error of considering shell shock (SS) to be equivalent to war-related PTSD (Loughran, "Shell Shock," *Medical Culture* 10). It is perhaps that PTSD of war is a subset of the phenomena of shell shock *vs* shell shock is specific to its historical milieu and PTSD to its, Vietnam era to the present. Shell shock included traumatic brain injury and psychological trauma, but currently we discriminate the two. Tolkien chose to portray the aspects of what now is termed PTSD. He chose not to portray some of the more dramatic presentations of SS except perhaps in, e.g., Gollum, Túrin, and Frodo's blind spell in response to the Nazgûl cry, which is complicated by the Ring.

Above, Arwen uses *grieve* as a verb ("hurts *grieve* you still"), and with the use of "still" tells us the grieving is overlong. But "hurts" can include physical and psychological grieving after the event, different but perhaps including a grievous memory. Frodo's emotional state can be seen as an expression of grief as well as PTSD. The trauma is acknowledged in the word "hurts" and the pathology is alluded to in the use of "if [...] still." Arwen also refers to "the darkness" in a rather generic manner consistent with Sauron's previous presentations. Little was plainly said, and then only reluctantly, at Rivendell or Lórien about what the Ring really represented. Frodo's "burden" was a part of Darkness itself, Sauron, heavy indeed.

As Arwen hands Frodo the jewel she discriminates between "the memory of the fear and the darkness" and says it is for "When [...] the darkness troubles you." The word *darkness* may refer to something for Frodo besides a memory, besides oppressive fear. The fear is a memory but is also a current affect; perhaps similarly the darkness is not past, but still exists in Frodo, and he

⁶ The military was fearful of the loss of combatants due to epidemics of the shell shocked, trench fever, etc. and worked for resolution. Unfortunately, shell shock was beyond the science of the time and was a collection of multiple war-generated effects: filthy trenches which promoted disease, poorly equipped and inexperienced soldiers, unprecedented industrial killing, and years of such war without an end in sight. Medical science of the time knew little of traumatic brain injury and nothing of post-traumatic stress disorder; both were part of shell shock, an accidental term (Jones *et al*, Shephard).

is aware of it. The long burden left a scar of darkness; what might this darkness⁷ be? A temptation to turn away from the light?

To return to the textual sequence of Frodo's behavior, at Cormallen he is uneasy. Back at Rivendell Sam talks of all the things he can experience and enjoy. "'Yes, something of everything, Sam, except the Sea,' Frodo had answered; and he repeated it now to himself: 'Except the Sea'" (*LotR* VI.6.986). Rivendell has everything one could want in Middle-earth, but it does not bring peace to Frodo.⁸ This is not atypical of one who has suffered great trauma; relief in this world can be elusive. Regardless, mental defenses can isolate these traumatic effects from everyday life through overwhelming emotions, shame and fear, and by the process of dissociation.⁹ Isolation, social and mental, does not give present-day life an opportunity to heal the wounds or allow the trauma to be integrated in the psyche. The person behaves as if the trauma was ongoing, still present; mentally it is.

Book VI, Chapter 7 "Homeward Bound" begins and ends with descriptions of Frodo's trauma reactions. The next passage demonstrates several reactions common in people suffering from PTSD.

When they came to the Ford of Bruinen, [Frodo] had halted, and seemed loth to ride into the stream; and they noted that for a while his eyes appeared not to see them or things about him. All that day he was silent. It was the sixth of October.

'Are you in pain, Frodo?' said Gandalf [...]

'Well, yes I am,' said Frodo. 'It is my shoulder. The wound aches, and the *memory of darkness is heavy* on me. It was a year ago today.'

'Alas! there are some wounds that cannot be wholly cured,' said Gandalf.

'I fear it may be so with mine.' said Frodo. 'There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?'

Gandalf did not answer. (*LotR* VI.7.989, emphasis added)

⁷ Milos describes Frodo's wound as a scar (19). Dark, darkness are subject to Tolkien's 'lexicological' technique where the narrative illustrates different uses of the same word elements, e.g. wraith (Shippey, *Road to Middle-earth* 148-150); heroic type (Flieger, *Splintered Light*); fate and free will (Flieger, "The Music and the Task," Tolkien and Hostetter, "Fate and Free Will"). With Hobbit Ring-bearers; choice-chosen, darkness applies to Tolkien's thorough mapping of temptation and betrayal.

⁸ Milos explores the many reasons Frodo cannot find peace upon reaching the Shire.

⁹ In part this is because the problem lies within; possibly genetic variants (almost certainly true) effecting neurochemistry such that a traumatic experience could lead to a persistent pathological reaction altering typical structure and function.

Here Frodo suffers an anniversary reaction to the attack on Weathertop a year before, seemingly compounded by sight of the Ford. From the description, he seems to be reliving his condition from when he had the Morgul-knife splinter in his shoulder. “[H]is eyes appeared not to see them or things about him” suggests a dissociative reaction and response to internal events. The flashback isolates him from his companions. The wound aching is a kind of physical flashback, a somatic memory of the trauma, and is an example of physiological reactivity.¹⁰ From the language in the last paragraph Frodo had little hope. The phrase “Though I may come to the Shire” scans oddly; it’s not the expected ‘I may come *back* to the Shire.’ Then Frodo makes clear why he is not *back*. Frodo is explicit that his future had changed, that he had changed; these are almost universal reactions to severe trauma. The “I” of “I may come” is not the old Frodo; the old Frodo does not come back. It may be Tolkien wanted to contrast “I may come to the Shire” with Sam’s final “Well, I’m back.” The wound of “a long burden” is not described as heavy, secret, deadly, evil, treacherous, or even the more open, an overwhelming burden. Long is Frodo’s perspective; he was a different Frodo entirely a long year ago. He fears he will not be able to find rest, and past savage attacks crowd his mind.¹¹ The war is over, the ring is unmade, Sauron and Gollum are gone; why does he really fear another such assault?

“I shall not be the same.¹² I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden.” Above, Frodo lists the traumas he associates with the changes to him.¹³ Almost being killed in Moria, his torture in Cirith Ungol, caught in the orc march in Mordor, believing he would die, and waiting to die on Orodruin, and many other near misses that do not even make the list. The loss of the Ring and its destruction is probably implied in “tooth,” but “a long burden” is the Ring, “demonic pressure” from an active will, intrusive and coercive temptation. The long burden may also relate to his complaint, “*memory of darkness*,” that was, in part, associated with the attack on Weathertop. Frodo used the Ring, it betrayed him, and the Witch-king was able to disable him with

¹⁰ DSM demonstrations of these criteria: “B. [I]ntrusion symptoms [...]: 1. [I]ntrusive distressing memories. [...] B.3. Dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks) in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring. [...] B.4. Intense [...] distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s). B.5. Marked physiological reactions to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s)” (DSM 301-302).

¹¹ Criteria D: “Negative alterations in cognitions and mood [...] D.2. Persistent and exaggerated beliefs or expectations about oneself, others [...]. D.3. Persistent, distorted cognitions about the [...] consequences of the traumatic events” (DSM 302).

¹² As in D.2, and D.6: “Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others” (DSM 302).

¹³ Livingston proposes an accurate hierarchy: “the primary stressor [...] the One Ring and the secondary stressor of life-threatening physical situations” (84).

a knife fragment, spiritually and physically poisoning him. For Frodo, *wound* encompasses two definitions: an illness, and a separation/intrusion, usually physical; typical Tolkienian lexicological word play. *Darkness* may refer to the perception of the world while wearing the One, the oppressive evil of the Ring, the Witch-king, the Morgul-knife splinter in Frodo, and his shame for having used the Ring and almost losing everything.¹⁴ For many victims of such trauma the evil they perceive is both external and internal.

“By the end of the next day the pain and unease had passed, and Frodo was merry again, *as merry as if he did not remember* the blackness of the day before” (*LotR* VI.7.989, emphasis added). The change to a “merry” affect, the “as” questioning the change, its “as if” quality, and the amnesia all point to a dissociative state the day before when he was reliving the battle with the Witch-king, his reaction, and his subsequent state. Dissociative amnesia is a common phenomenon associated with flashbacks. Frodo did not recall the day before and did not want to remember that “blackness” again. The passage above continues as the company passes by Weathertop and Frodo avoids looking at it; he “begged them to hasten, and he would not look towards the hill, but rode through its shadow with head bowed and cloak drawn close about him” (*LotR* VI.7.989). This is another example of avoidance of trauma reminders and of reactivity to them.¹⁵

By end of the chapter the Hobbits are alone as they ride back home and Merry remarks, “‘We have left all the rest behind [...]. It seems almost like a dream that has slowly faded.’ ‘Not to me,’ said Frodo. ‘To me it feels more like falling asleep again’” (*LotR* VI.7.997). This indicates a numbing, a cardinal feature of PTSD.¹⁶ It demonstrates a disconnection where the trauma replaces the present, and what is now real seems unreal to the sufferer (Criteria B3-dissociation and derealization (303) and C1; see footnote 16). For the person affected, the trauma is still present; it is their internal reality and to a greater or lesser degree overrides the current, common, external reality. The quality of “falling asleep” suggests an altered state of consciousness; altered to defend against intrusion, recall, and threats.

¹⁴ As on Amon Hen, Frodo was supposed to carry the Ring and never use it. Another betrayal driven by the Ring, this time effecting Boromir’s will and tempting Frodo to use it again.

¹⁵ *DSM* criteria C: “Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s) [...]. C.1. Avoidance of or efforts to avoid distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s). C.2. Avoidance of or efforts to avoid external reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, situations) that arouse distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s)” (302, emphasis added).

¹⁶ Milos notes that the phrase “falling asleep” suggests “doubt about his future” (18).

“Where shall I find rest?” (*LotR* VI.7.989), Frodo also asks with little hope (*DSM* criteria D.3, D.7).¹⁷ Exhaustion was noted to be a common and severe symptom of many soldiers labeled with shell shock or war neurosis (Shephard). Request for rest was consistent with medical practice during the Great War for some treatment of shell shock, predicated on the belief that rest brought relief; but in practice, rest alone did not necessarily heal.

The following year he was overwhelmed by an anniversary reaction.

[I]n early March [...] Frodo had been ill. On the thirteenth of that month Farmer Cotton found Frodo lying on his bed; he was clutching a white gem that hung on a chain about his neck and he seemed half in a dream.

‘It is gone for ever,’ he said, ‘and now all is dark and empty.’

But the fit passed, and when Sam got back on the twenty-fifth, Frodo had recovered, and he said nothing about himself. (*LotR* VI.9.1024)

This passage demonstrates again the power of an anniversary reaction. This is a stark picture: “all is dark and empty,” Frodo without the wheel of fire—hopeless, alone, and in pain. The reaction is noted a year later, on the thirteenth of the month, reliving how he felt after losing the Ring the first time¹⁸ and belief Sauron would get the Ring and Middle-earth would become dark and empty. Frodo’s recovery on the twenty-fifth is consistent with his return to mental clarity after the destruction of the Ring the year before. Frodo’s relief also may involve another symptom of PTSD: amnesia concerning significant elements of the trauma. Consistent with *DSM* D.1, “Inability to remember important aspects of the traumatic event(s) [is] typically due to dissociative amnesia” (302). Frodo’s relief on March 25th following his anniversary reaction is significant. He lost a finger and the Ring, and almost died on the slopes of Orodruin. His anniversary reactions do not seem to involve the lost finger or near-death experience at Mount Doom, but primarily the knife wound on Weathertop and the first loss of the Ring.¹⁹ “[O]n the twenty-fifth, Frodo had recovered, and he said nothing about himself.” Relief regained but nothing resolved, based on his silence.

Frodo used Arwen’s jewel for self-soothing to cope with recall and his state of hyper-arousal. “Frodo wore always a white jewel on a chain that he

¹⁷ *DSM* criteria D: “Negative alterations in cognitions and mood [...]. D.2. Persistent and exaggerated beliefs or expectations about oneself [...] or the world. [...] D.7. Persistent inability to experience positive emotions” (302).

¹⁸ Klinger noted his lack of angry, possessive reaction to not having the Ring until Sam reveals that *he* has the Ring (“Hidden Paths of Time” 203n69).

¹⁹ Also toxic fumes on Orodruin’s slope could have led to amnesia concerning his near death and rescue.

would often *finger*" (*LotR* VI.9.1025, emphasis added). It is significant that a jewel replaces the ring on the chain around Frodo's neck. Rings and jewels are often gifts given out of friendship and respect, and each can be symbolic of a vital aspect of a person. Historically, a ring can represent a joining, a bond, and (ironically enough, given Sauron's powers) protection from the evil eye (Herder). Conversely, a gem, a star of the earth, represented heavenly truth. A jewel and a ring echo once more the mythological Middle-earth conflict of the light and truth of Eru versus the dark bonds and lies of Morgoth.

Let us turn to the next two anniversary reactions:

Sam [...] found his master looking very strange. He was very pale and his eyes seemed to see things far away.

'What's the matter, Mr. Frodo?' said Sam.

'I am wounded,' he answered, 'wounded; it will never really heal.' [...]

[A]fterwards [...] Sam recalled that the date was October the sixth. Two years before [...] it was dark in the dell under Weathertop.²⁰

[...] 1421 came in. Frodo was ill again in March, but with great effort he concealed it. (*LotR* VI.9.1025)

Frodo's silent suffering would be fairly typical of veterans with PTSD. In the examples above he was partly isolated with his trauma; for example, he would not talk to the Cottons, non-veterans, about his nightmare/flashback. Perhaps it is curious that Frodo did not seek support from Sam, his fellow Mordor vet. What would account for Frodo's seemingly self-imposed isolation from Sam: his fundamental character,²¹ the issues of class, the Shire culture? In Cirith Ungol Sam did suggest he not talk of his experiences to help with forgetting the traumas. Frodo said, "'I'll never forget their claws and eyes.' 'You won't, if you talk about them, Mr. Frodo,' said Sam" (*LotR* VI.1.910-11). Perhaps the shame for his choice at Sammath Naur would be highlighted, and not in the 'recovery' sense of clearer vision, as it was meant to be seen. Frodo had gone the limit, been broken, and claimed the Ring; Samwise was witness.²² Or was it the fact that Frodo had been broken and he had no hope for himself? A common dialectic of PTSD, as Bonnie Callahan has noted: he did not want to be

²⁰ Again symptoms consistent with "intrusion symptoms" from *DSM* criteria B; see n10 above. Additionally, criteria D: "Negative alterations in cognitions and mood [...]. D.2. Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about oneself, others [...]" and "D.6. Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others" (302).

²¹ Croft argued "it was part of Frodo's personality" (138).

²² "[W]hen it is in the presence of another person that we have been shamed, [it is] against that person that we must defend ourselves" (Nathanson 255).

reminded.²³ Frodo had not forgiven himself and could not, would not, use the fact that Sam had.²⁴

When Frodo and Bilbo meet to journey to Mithlond, Sam is very sad about the impending loss. Sam thinks Frodo should also enjoy life, living in the Shire. Frodo tells him, “You cannot be always torn in two. You will have to be one and whole, for many years. You have so much to enjoy and to be, and to do” (*LotR* VI.9.1029). Implying that he, Frodo, cannot have or be or do, that Frodo is not one and whole; he is torn. “[T]orn in two”: who exactly is torn in two other than himself?²⁵ Frodo has just diagnosed his own condition and revealed astonishingly intimate details, all without referring to himself.²⁶ All Frodo will say directly is, “I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me [...] some one has to give them up, lose them [...] all that I had and might have had I leave to you” (*LotR* VI.9.1029; see also *DSM* C.7: Persistent inability to experience positive emotions). Since his return Sam has been and done and enjoyed much; Frodo has faded from active life.

Again these passages express a sense of hopelessness and damage: “wounded; it will never really heal,” “not for me [...] too deeply hurt”; of loss and of a foreshortened future, “[T]hat I had and might have had I leave to you.” Tolkien’s story is, in part, about one person’s devastating sacrifice and personal losses: loss of self-respect, loss of self, loss of country, and loss of a future. Tolkien presents this in a mature manner that is genuine and without glamour. Through Tolkien’s fairy tale effect of Recovery, losses are made tolerable by what we have found in Middle-earth to temper those losses. To make that internally consistent somebody had to lose, and not by death.²⁷

LATER CONSIDERATIONS

Christopher Tolkien’s note on the manuscript version of the Shire meeting of Bilbo and Frodo, after the War, is very interesting with regard to PTSD.

To Bilbo’s question (RK p. 309) ‘Are you coming?’ Frodo replies here: ‘Yes, I am coming *before the wound returns*. And the Ringbearers should

²³ I would like to thank Bonnie Callahan for this thought-provoking comment at Mythcon XXVII, 1997; she pointed out that talking to Sam would only make the memory clearer.

²⁴ See Gazzolo for a thorough review of Sam’s caretaking.

²⁵ Nancy Martsch notes Frodo physically is not whole, missing a finger, so actually torn in two (Martsch).

²⁶ This is a wonderful example of why Tolkien’s tale of great loss is successful and popular—it is a story that introduces loss after loss in a fashion we can tolerate.

²⁷ Boromir, Théoden, Denethor are characters whose loss to save their homeland ends in death and each is a variation on the trope.

go together.’ Frodo was speaking of the sickness that had come on him on October the sixth, the date of his wounding at Weathertop, in each of the following years. It was now 22 September (Bilbo’s birthday); on the twenty-ninth of the month the ship sailed from the Grey Havens. On the third anniversary of the attack at Weathertop *The Lord of the Rings* ends, for it was on that day, according to *The Tale of Years*, that Sam returned to Bag End.²⁸ (Tolkien, *Sauron Defeated* [SD] 112, emphasis in original)

The phrase “before the wound returns” was not in the *LotR* text as published. Perhaps “before the wound returns” refers to an actual reopening at the site of the Morgul-knife wound. At the Ford Frodo refers to it explicitly: “It is my shoulder. The wound aches.” I do not think *wound* refers only to illnesses in a general sense though *wound* is a rare term for illness.²⁹ Besides a skin break from a weapon, such a “wound” brings to the reader a myriad of associations (maimed kings, the Fisher King, stigmata, The Crucifixion and Christ, Ransom from C.S. Lewis’s *Space Trilogy*), but stigmata are also a controversial sign of PTSD. Such a wound has a mystical quality with divine or diabolical connotations. Such phenomena would contribute to the person’s sense of a foreshortened future as well as add to the fear and the perception of damage and change. The passage “‘I am wounded,’ he answered, ‘wounded; it will never really heal!’” would have a much different connotation if Frodo were speaking of an actual reopening of the Morgul knife wound. Did Tolkien have experience, from either war, with such phenomena? Why was it left out? Wound without stigmata could refer to Frodo’s recurrent illnesses. But given the October 6 date, *wound* probably refers to the recurrent shoulder pain interpreted by Frodo as unhealed. This is a frequent complaint post-trauma/procedure/surgery: persistent site pain as a sign of incomplete healing or scarring.

Curious, perhaps, from flashbacks to daily life, that the issue of Frodo’s lost finger is never a focus after the ballad at Cormallen. It seemingly would be a constant reminder of what happened at the Cracks of Doom, an inescapable memento of Gollum’s statement “He has only four on the Black Hand” (*LotR* IV.3.641). Nine-fingered Frodo and Sauron share that wound, and every day Frodo would wake nine-fingered: a constant reminder of that change.

Nightmares and sleep disturbances are almost ubiquitous symptoms of PTSD. Frodo’s sleep following the war is not clearly described in *The Lord of the Rings*. Farmer Cotton found him “half in a dream,” which may describe disturbed sleep or a flashback. In PTSD the typical sleep disturbances include altered sleep architecture and intrusive, disturbing dreams as well as

²⁸ This note is a wonderful example of Christopher Tolkien’s style that makes reading “The History of Middle-earth” a double joy.

²⁹ Illness is a rare definition of wound per the OED.

nightmares³⁰ which awaken the person (criteria B2 and E6) and others. The poor sleep and energetic dreaming are perhaps part of the state of hyperarousal associated with PTSD. Tolkien points to Frodo's anniversary reactions as he did in "The Tale of Years." The manifest content of dreams/nightmares may or may not describe the traumatic event(s) Frodo experienced. As noted above, Frodo did make remarks about seeking "rest"³¹ which also seemed to mean peace, relief. Relief from what?

In the Preface to *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* the unnamed editor notes that the poem "The Sea-Bell" was written after Sauron's fall, labeled "*Frodo's Dreme*," and " [A]ssociated with the dark and despairing dreams which visited him in March and October during his last three years" (33-4). "The Sea-Bell" tells of one lured by a call; the call leads to *faërie*, but once he arrives no one will speak to the traveler. The traveler claims dominion, demands contact, is harshly rejected,³² and then loses himself. Eventually the traveler returns home and is totally shunned; no one speaks again, ever, to the traveler, who despairs indeed. This is a poem of shame. In the dream perhaps Frodo expects and fears rejection, even from the Valar and even though the Valar would grant him passage to the West. The traveler's claim of dominion would relate to Frodo's claim of the One. The utter isolation that follows in the poem expresses the shame Frodo feels he deserves for his act. In part it demonstrates Frodo's self-rejection; he cannot even talk to himself about his experiences. It is also true to some extent that for many reasons Frodo is left more isolated than the other hobbit adventurers upon his return to the Shire. Sam is dismayed that Frodo is not held in high esteem. Shire folk do not understand his war experience, and do not want to know; a typical experience of most combat veterans, but it mirrors the person's conflict in integrating their experience.

Flieger suggests the term *scrawl* in "scrawled at its head *Frodo's Dreme*" in the preface (34) can lessen the import of the poem (*Splintered Light* 164). As noted in the Scull and Hammond edition, "*The Sea-Bell* is a revised and expanded version of [an earlier poem] *Looney*," (252) which is not as despairing. The traveler does not claim dominion in "*Looney*" and upon return "seldom they speak, men that I meet" (255). But in "*The Sea-Bell*" the line is "still they speak not, men that I meet" (108). Not even seldom — not at all. Again Tolkien is

³⁰ DSM criteria: "B. [I]ntrusion symptoms [...]. B.2. Recurrent distressing dreams [...]. E. Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity [...]. E.6. Sleep disturbance" (301-302).

³¹ Another remark regarding sleep comes from the poem "*Bilbo's Last Song*," where he notes sleep will be "rest" in the true West. This could refer to the experiences of both Bilbo and Frodo.

³² See Long 93-129. Also, compare the incident in *Smith of Wootton Major* where Smith offends Faery, is hunted by the wind, sheltered by the birch, and is rejected: "You do not belong here" (30).

pointing to Frodo's wound. I believe the suggested decrease in authority Flieger postulated is based on the fact it was Frodo's fear and not the actual outcome.

Garth notes Frodo's behavior when Sam shows him the Ring demonstrates the developing "split" in his personality ("Frodo and the Great War"; *Tolkien and the Great War* 50). Flieger notes, "Frodo gradually comes apart, his nature splitting into component light and dark" (*Splintered Light* 149). The Frodo side and what we might call the "Ringlord" side are forming. In his vision Sam becomes an orc thief, harshly denounced by Frodo because his world view is now that of his Ringlord. He switches back to Frodo, still the dominant personality, aware of what he had done to Sam, ashamed; correctly blaming the Ring, he apologizes (*LotR* VI.1.911-912). But in this incident the Ringlord spoke, not Frodo. That split allows Frodo to resist the Ring; Frodo acts one way, the Ringlord another. Frodo and his Ringlord are often not conscious of the same things. This is the saving grace of dissociation: it allows the Frodo part to continue his mission with some protection even as the Ringlord part forms. By this point Sam has experienced what the Ring can do, has seen the result now in both Gollum and Frodo, and he accepts Frodo's split.

Psychiatrically such a split is by dissociation (*DSM* 303), a mental process to protect the self by allowing one to function but limiting conscious awareness, often of events or behaviors intolerable to the self, and in this case coerced by an overwhelming aggressor. Dissociation can be a response to an extreme stress; in *LotR* primarily the Ring, a spiritual stressor, and a controversial stress in the primary world. This scene shows Frodo developing this dissociative defense to save a part of himself while the Ringlord part grows. In Sméagol/Gollum the process is a *fait accompli*, completed before we first encounter him, resulting in two dissociated personalities in one mind, avowed self and shadow. Frodo was on the way to the same fate. It is important to note the Sméagol/Gollum split was caused by carrying the Ring. Seemingly, it did not require other trauma; exposure to the demonic will was sufficient. The hobbitish Sméagol managed to save a part of himself from the Ring; a favorable prognostic sign for Frodo.

The division in Frodo's personality is portrayed at the Quest's end. After Gollum's attack upon Orodruin, the Ringlord part becomes manifest, demonstrated by the change in Frodo's speech and demeanor:

'Down, down! 'he gasped, clutching his hand to his breast, so that beneath the cover of his leather shirt he clasped the Ring. 'Down, you creeping thing, and out of my path! Your time is at an end. You cannot betray me or slay me now.' [...] Sam saw [...] a figure robed in white, but

at its breast it held a wheel of fire. Out of the fire there spoke a commanding voice.³³

‘Begone, and trouble me no more! If you touch me ever again, you shall be cast yourself into the Fire of Doom.’ (*LotR* VI.3.943-4)

Speech unlike any Frodo has spoken before; speech rather similar to the that of the Witch-king (*LotR* V.4.829 and V.6.841). This is the Ringlord speaking, using the Ring. However, at this point the Ringlord part and the Frodo part still share a goal: to get to the Cracks of Doom and destroy the Ring. [“O]ut of my path! Your time is at an end. You cannot betray me or slay me now.” He does not claim the Ring and reveal himself to Sauron. This change in speech, voice, and tone signals the shift to Frodo the Ringlord and leads to the monologue³⁴ on the edge of Doom: “‘I have come,’ he said. ‘But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!’” (*LotR* VI.3.945).³⁵ The reader is stunned: how could this be? Strange words to denounce the Quest. “To be sure, they don’t sound like the Frodo Baggins we have come to know across several hundred pages” (Klinger, “Fallacies of Power” 356). But the *Ringlord* has just given a clear explanation: He has changed his mind. The Ringlord is the five ‘I’s of that monologue: ‘I have, I do, I came, I will, mine.’ It makes little sense for Frodo to state ‘I have come.’ The Ringlord declares himself here now. ‘I have come,’ and *now* he does not choose to do what Frodo and he came to do. Now, he will not throw the Ring in the fire. The Ringlord claims it. If Frodo had been the one speaking, ‘I cannot do this. The Ring is mine!’ would have sufficed.

Often the keystone in the trauma that separates personalities is shame. Here, we see shame in one personality for the actions of another. In the end Frodo was ashamed for the actions of his Ringlord. Kocher noted, “Had he clearly mastered the Ring he would be whole and at peace” (121). Again, Frodo could not accept what he’d done. He could not show himself the compassion he had granted to Gollum since his ‘taming.’ However, this was possibly predicated by Frodo’s lecture after Gollum asks for the Ring back (*LotR* IV.3.637). “Give it back to Sméagol you said. Do not say that again! Do not let that thought grow in you! You will never get it back. But the desire of it may betray

³³ Sam’s vision was an effect of the Ring’s power; and he may have been more susceptible to such altered perception after carrying and using the Ring himself; Frodo as Ringlord could not actually shape shift.

³⁴ Shippey notes the ‘I do not choose’ is perhaps a sign Frodo does not choose (*J.R.R. Tolkien Author of the Century* 140). Klinger describes claiming the Ring speech as a monologue (“Fallacies” 356).

³⁵ *Choice* and *do* are thoroughly explored lexicologically. Klinger notes *do/deed* are here used five times in two consecutive lines (“Fallacies” 356).

you to a bitter end. You will never get it back" (*LotR* IV.3.640, emphasis in original). Empathic Frodo could not tolerate desire for the Ring in Sméagol, just as Frodo did not tolerate desire for it in himself. In clear contrast the other recent Ring-bearer, Sam, did. He understood what the Ring was doing to Frodo, working as it was designed to do. Even though the Ring was destroyed, the effect on Frodo is another bitter betrayal of the Ring, desire remaining as a scar of shame in Frodo.

In Frodo Tolkien focused on a subset of reactions to shell shock: the psychological and social effects. Frodo's reaction to the knife splinter was similar to some symptoms of shell shock, e.g. loss of limb control, or altered mental state without significant visible physical damage. His response also included symptoms of infection common with foreign material in penetrating wounds. But Tolkien emphasized the psychological effect of the knife splinter, which attacked Frodo's will. Later Frodo has anniversary reactions to the attacks at Weathertop and in Mordor, described above, with physical and psychological symptoms typical of the signs and symptoms of PTSD.

In the Shire passage above the postulated wound recurrence was not taken up by Tolkien because the rationale for Frodo leaving Middle-earth becomes more focused on the need for release from all his suffering, not just one unhealing physical wound. The chosen line keeps the focus on the psychological and social consequence of bearing the Ring. This is reflected in other textual choices. Tolkien had the experience in the Great War of losing his closest friends Gilson and Smith. He corrected this in his fairy-tale. Allowing all four of the hobbits of the Fellowship to survive not only attenuated Tolkien's wound, but allows the reader to focus on the damage done to Frodo and not have it overshadowed by death of any of the four.

SECOND THOUGHTS, AFTER THOUGHTS

To clearly portray Frodo as damaged Tolkien made multiple revisions, many in what became the final three chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*. In earlier drafts, Frodo is duly honored in the Shire, even to Sam's satisfaction. Frodo functions as leader of the Shire uprising and is a combatant, *killing* several "ruffians." Tolkien radically altered Frodo's role for the published version, where Merry takes these roles, and now Frodo only urges restraint and nonviolence, never drawing his sword. The revisions are detailed in Chapter IX of *Sauron Defeated* (78-107),³⁶ as Christopher Tolkien explains:

At a late stage of work [...] my father perceived that Frodo's experience had so changed him, so withdrawn him, as to render him incapable of

³⁶ These SD revisions are also noted in Milos and in *The Barrow-Downs Discussion Forum*.

any such rôle in the Scouring of the Shire as had been portrayed. The text as it stood required no large recasting; the entirely different picture of Frodo's part in events was brought about by many small alterations (often by doing no more than changing 'Frodo' to 'Merry') and a few brief additions. (*SD* 103)

The changes highlight Frodo's symptoms and diminished capacity and in part justify his choice to leave Middle-earth. To highlight Frodo's plight, the anniversary reactions were also noted in "The Tale of Years."

Tolkien pointed at the effect of the war on Frodo. But why did Frodo's companions escape war trauma, Croft asked (136)? She proposed it was Tolkien, in part, calquing the hobbits onto his WWI comrades. As models for Merry, Pippin, and Sam this is accurate, and all probably have counterparts in literature. Most combat veterans did not develop shell shock. However, there is also a narrative imperative for their escape. Tolkien makes several choices *en route* to the final version: leave out the wound reopening; all four principal Hobbits must survive; and revise to portray Frodo as functionally impaired, contrasted to his thriving Fellowship companions. To do this Tolkien notes his anniversary reactions in "The Tale of Years," and describes Frodo's long-term psychological sequelae and *select* physical problems, all adding to a clearer view of Frodo's psychological damage, using the terms *wound*, *fit*, or *ill* in the text. The narrative is fine-tuned so nothing eclipses Frodo's primary wound. Frodo's outcome is highlighted by those choices and reflects Tolkien's careful consideration of nearly every word.³⁷

Many people with PTSD struggle to live life with social deficits similar to Frodo's. But Tolkien compared and contrasted the effect of the Ring on all five Hobbit Ring-bearers, showing different outcomes with the Ring as the result of their individual choices. Déagol was murdered shortly after his desire was awakened. Frodo had not been able to—had not been *allowed* to—integrate his shadow, his Ringlord, as Sam had done.³⁸ Gollum had not been able to overcome his own weaknesses or use his opportunities to overcome the effects of the Ring and Sauron's captivity.³⁹ Bilbo struggled to let go of the Ring; his dropping it so Gandalf could intervene without taking the Ring from Bilbo read as the-hand-of-fate (*LotR* I.1.35). Bilbo's act was ambivalent; he too would have rather kept it, and later behaved as if it were still his. Sam was ennobled because he would

³⁷ "Hardly a word in its 600,000 or more has been unconsidered" (*Letters* 160, #131).

³⁸ To be clear, Gollum is not Frodo's shadow. Gollum and Frodo rather were mirrored. Sméagol was shadowed by Gollum Ring-bearer, the dominant personality.

³⁹ Gollum also probably fits the criteria for PTSD. Based on the passage (*LotR* VI.8.714) he also may fit the diagnoses for Dissociative Identity Disorder (*DSM* 330), formerly termed Multiple Personality Disorder.

have carried the Ring just to relieve Frodo: an extraordinary example of co-inherence, to carry the demon, but one refused. In the end he simply carried Frodo. (I feel this is Tolkien's comment on how co-inherence would actually work, mortal to mortal, in the 'primary world': we can be supportive of people, but we cannot actually carry their moral burdens.) Sam had passed his temptation; his only reluctance to return the Ring to Frodo was in the harm it would cause Frodo (*LotR* VI.1.911).⁴⁰ Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, and Gollum demonstrate a spectrum of outcomes. The Ring effect can be viewed through various lenses, whether the agent is seen as the Ring, torture, war trauma, demonic possession, addiction, obsession, brain washing, mind control, or spiritual coercion.

To achieve the Quest, Frodo had to risk the Ring's influence and volunteered to be tempted, tempted beyond his capacity.⁴¹ As Tolkien pointed out, given the characters, the nature of the Ring, and this strategy, the outcome was inevitable. "[A] person of greater native power could probably never have resisted the Ring's lure to power so long; a person of less power could not hope to resist it in the final decision" (*Letters* 233-4, #181). Tolkien referred plainly to the mechanism and the effect on Frodo in a draft letter: "the breaking of his mind and will under demonic pressure after torment" (*Letters* 327, #246).

Frodo's sacrifice led to his so-called 'choice' at Sammath Naur, and after the war left him with emotion and thought unbearable in this world. The fact that he had been "broken" by the Ring was not helpful to Frodo's reality-testing upon his return home:

He appears at first to have had no sense of guilt [...]; he was restored to *sanity* and peace. But then he thought he had given his life in sacrifice: he expected to die very soon. But he did not, and one can observe the disquiet growing in him. Arwen was the first to observe the signs, and gave him her jewel for comfort [...]. I think it is clear on reflection [...] that when his dark times came upon him and he was conscious of being 'wounded by knife sting and tooth and a long burden' [...] it was not only nightmare memories of past horrors that afflicted him, but also unreasoning self-reproach: he saw himself and all that he [had] done as a broken failure. (*Letters* 327-8, #246, emphasis in original)⁴²

⁴⁰ Frodo's responses to Sam in the tower suggest a split, especially with "Give it me at once!" (*LotR* VI.1.911). The Ring is the *it*. The demand becomes, 'Give Ring me at once.' As if the Ring was getting Frodo back. This demonstrates Gandalf's warning in Bag End that "It would possess him" (*LotR* I.2.46).

⁴¹ Klingner ("Fallacies") explores Frodo's battle against the Ring.

⁴² DSM criteria "D. Negative alterations in cognitions and mood [...]. D.2. Persistent and exaggerated beliefs or expectations about oneself, others [...]. D.3. Persistent, distorted cognitions about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s) that lead the

Frodo felt shame; darkness could be another way to describe/label shame. That aspect of his behavior, claiming the Ring, was something that he would not, perhaps could not accept, and which he could see as the whole of him, an “unreasoning self-reproach.” Shame is perhaps the most difficult emotion to tolerate, in ourselves or in others.⁴³ One feels guilt for something wrong. With shame one is the wrong. Frodo did not just feel guilty for claiming the Ring, Frodo believed he was totally responsible for his failure. He ignored or dissociated the demonic Ring’s effect; he did not seem to remember it, except as a darkness or shadow. Believing total responsibility his was a cognitive error not unusual with PTSD. Shame affects the sense of self; shame helps emotionally define who or what we are not. “Shame is intimately tied to our identity, to our very concept of ourselves as human” (Nathanson 149). Shame structures our relationship to our social group, typically isolating one from the group, as in “The Sea-Bell,” but also it isolates part of us from our self. Frodo’s self-concept did not accommodate a “Lord of the Rings” self. Recognition of his shadow, his Ringlord, might have been helpful.⁴⁴ But Frodo did not try. After giving all he had, after having claimed the Ring, losing it, and then not dying, Frodo had to tolerate the contradictions in himself. It was apparently more than Frodo could bear. Darkness may literally refer to his Ringlord, the burden, or to his despair. It may also refer to Frodo’s sense of self: he may have seen his dark desire as a ‘dark’ self, the shadow as the stain of his failure, as much as Sauron’s mark. Carrying such a burden and responding to such a temptation left him with “unreasoning self-reproach,” shame.⁴⁵

Tolkien wrote about Frodo’s struggle from the point of pride, the obverse of shame, in a draft letter.

‘Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same, for I shall not be the same.’ That was actually a temptation out of the Dark, a last flicker of pride: desire to have returned as a ‘hero’ [...]. And it was mixed with another temptation, blacker and yet (in a sense) more merited, for however that may be explained, he had not in fact cast away the Ring by

individual to blame himself/herself or others. D.4. Persistent negative emotional state (e.g. [...] shame)” (302) are demonstrated by Frodo’s “unreasoning self-reproach [seeing] all that he [had] done as a broken failure.”

⁴³ “[S]hame strikes deepest into the heart of man” (Tomkins 118). Of course, Hobbits too.

⁴⁴ Within the story the Ringlord part was bereft of Sauron’s power with the Ring’s destruction. This left Frodo with an awareness of his apostate side, but without the Ring’s active will. With the Ring destroyed the shame of it was still left, a memory of darkness.

⁴⁵ Milos labels the “unreasoning self-reproach” as survivor guilt [typically from loss of comrades] and reviews Frodo’s elements of guilt. Milos notes by not throwing the Ring away Gollum was lost (19-20). Kocher notes Frodo’s possible guilt over the Quest’s lose/lose outcome for the Elves (92-3).

a voluntary act: he was tempted to regret its destruction, and still to desire it. (*Letters* 328, # 246)

Tolkien linked this to the illness of March 1420: “[N]ow all is dark and empty.” There was grief over the loss, which is understandable given our nature, yet Frodo also felt shame over the grief, for truly having desired the thing. However, what actually followed Tolkien’s above quotation of “for I shall not be the same” was Frodo’s litany of trauma: “I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden.” Psychologically this implies these traumas were his primary associations with his sense of not being the same. The Ring induced desire, grandiosity, and covetousness, altered his sense of self, replaced external reality, consumed him; yet still the Hobbit felt shame for his mortal limitations. “‘It is gone for ever, and now all is dark and empty,’ he said as he awakened from his sickness in 1420. This is a plain statement of how the Ring had altered Frodo’s perception of reality, replacing the common, external reality with darkness and emptiness.⁴⁶ Given the nature of the Ring, Frodo’s response makes perfect sense. In our real world, however, it would be a different story.

Tolkien certainly had experience with war and its effects on people. He was a survivor of the Battle of the Somme. In a 1941 letter to son Michael he claimed, “One War is enough for any man. [...] Either the bitterness of youth or that of middle-age is enough for a life-time: both is too much” (*Letters* 54, #45). Three years later he says, “I have at the moment another son, a much damaged soldier, at Trinity trying to do some work and recover a shadow of his old health” (86, #74). Referring to the effect of WWI Tolkien wrote, “By 1918 all but one of my close friends were dead” (*LotR* Foreword.xxiv). His published letters⁴⁷ do not reveal much about his experience or his direct response to the life events of either World War. Tolkien wrote to Christopher, “I shall never write any ordered biography – it is against my nature, which expresses itself about things deepest felt in tales and myths” (*Letters* 420-1, #340).⁴⁸ Indeed.

⁴⁶ Klinger proposes the lost “It” is the road West (“Hidden Paths of Time” 202, 204) and the disruption to linear time which triggers the anniversary reactions in March. Tolkien noted the “It” was the Ring (*Letters* 328, #246 above). Klinger notes “Frodo mourns neither the Ring’s unmaking nor the loss of his finger” (“Hidden” 146). Along with Gollum, a piece of Frodo, flesh, blood, and bone, went into the fire. I have wondered if such a blood sacrifice was required to forge the One as well as destroy it, not just the specific location and its volcanic heat.

⁴⁷ *n.b.* We will soon see more than the current 16% or so.

⁴⁸ Outside the Middle-earth canon “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son,” with regard to war, is an excellent example of this statement. Fliieger references *Letters* 85-86, #74, regarding possible influence of son Michael’s war traumas on Frodo’s portrayal (“The Body in Question” 18). See also Croft, and Garth, *Tolkien in the Great War*.

In achieving the Quest Frodo, by current standards, had been severely and probably permanently damaged. Depending on the circumstances, he could no longer consistently tell the difference between the reality in his mind and the present.⁴⁹ Specifically, to his shame he believed he was totally responsible for claiming the One. Frodo had not recovered a clear view of his traumatic reactions to “knife, sting, and tooth and a long burden.” The Ring had overwhelmed and possessed him. This was the reality he could not cognitively grasp or emotionally accept. Did Tolkien know people could be broken in such a fashion? In 1956 he wrote in a letter draft:

[Frodo] ‘apostatized’ [...]. I did not foresee that before the tale was published we should enter a dark age in which the technique of torture and disruption of the personality would rival that of Mordor and the Ring and present us with the practical problem of honest men of good will broken down into apostates and traitors. (*Letters* 234, #181)

This description of Frodo, “disruption of the personality [...] of good will broken down,” directly attributes the cause to “Mordor and the Ring.”

Tolkien did close Frodo’s journey with hope. The eucatastrophes in “The Grey Havens” are wonderful fulfillment. “Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. [...] He beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise.” Also, the surprise arrival of Merry and Pippin, and Sam’s final words, “Well, I’m back” (*LotR* VI.9.1030-1). Frodo, it seems, will not face the rejection described in “Frodo’s Dreme.” He has his chance for peace.⁵⁰ Companions are present at his departure, with closure for Frodo and support, especially for Sam.⁵¹ The three return home. The end of war brings hope in a new chance, community, and family.

As we must note well, Tolkien did not include signs and symptoms of war trauma based on diagnostic descriptions of PTSD or shell shock. It seems his description was taken from his own observation of those afflicted, probably

⁴⁹ Merry, Pippin, and Sam had full lives but all leave the Shire before they die. Merry and Pippin return to the lands where they had significant war-related connections and renown. Both were almost killed in Gondor. Not many veterans do that, though, Tolkien would revisit war sites (*L* 111, #96). Sam left Middle-earth under his dispensation as Ring-bearer, but he was also clearly trying to find Frodo. Samwise may have carried a scar of the Shadow, best healed in the West and consistent within the Tale.

⁵⁰ Noted by Smol and with qualification by Flieger, “The Body in Question.”

⁵¹ Note that Sam gets his wish; the appendix informs us eventually he does sail West to find Frodo.

from both World Wars. Tolkien's formulation of possible reaction to war validates the current formulation of PTSD.⁵²

CONCLUSION

Frodo seemingly could not, would not deal with his peers and contemporary life. His 'rubber bands' had been stretched till one at a time they broke, until he had only a few left. The bands represent our biology and psychology, which allow us to feel, analyze, cope, and adapt; now referred to as resilience, a cardinal trait of Hobbits and of Tolkien himself. As a metaphor, they are meant to suggest flexibility and the ability to return to a given form when not under tension. And like personalities, if put under enough tension they will break. The factors represented by the bands help us deal with emotional adversity. They help maintain a consistent sense of self. Frodo's few remaining rubber bands kept him alive and from doing harm, but there were not enough left for him to live in the rather intimate social life of the Shire. There were not enough 'rubber bands' left for Frodo to feel like a whole person. And maybe there were not enough 'rubber bands' for Frodo to heal in this world. Certainly Frodo was innocent, without blame for being overwhelmed by the One Ring. It is ironic and profoundly human that those who are innocent victims of overwhelming force, who in truth have nothing of which to be ashamed, are scarred the deepest by shame from their trauma and are rejected, even by themselves.

I do not think Middle-earth could offer Frodo relief equal to the Grace he may have found West of west.

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⁵² I note that material published to date does report traumatic experiences but does not reveal signs and symptoms to justify the diagnosis of PTSD in Tolkien. His description of war trauma does not equate to the diagnosis in himself.

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