TOLKIEN'S EMPATHY FOR THE REFUGEE: CONFLICT-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT, HOSPITALITY, AND THE ULTIMATE QUEST FOR HOME IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

by

Elaine Ries

An essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

in the Department of English and Creative Writing

We accept this essay as conforming to the required standard:

Dr. Laura Van Dyke, Supervisor

Dr. Monika Hilder, Second Reader

Trinity Western University

December 2022

Abstract

Matthew Dickerson's essay "Welcoming Strangers: On Refugees, Walls, and the Writings of J. R. R. Tolkien" opens the door for a new kind of study of Tolkien's writings. In his essay Dickerson identifies connections to the plight of refugees and the value of hospitality in many of Tolkien's works; however, only the last few paragraphs begin to touch on how these themes are evident in *The Lord of the Rings*. This topic deserves further study, especially when considering the current global prominence of the refugee crisis. By employing a methodology of textual analysis and applying to the texts an interdisciplinary framework that draws from anthropological and sociological studies, this essay aims to further explore how studying *The Lord of the Rings* through the lens of conflict-induced displacement reveals Tolkien's empathy for the refugee, his belief in the moral necessity of hospitality, and, ultimately, his engagement with what it means to be human.

Today's understanding of conflict-induced displacement largely stems from the unparalleled number of people who were displaced during and after the global catastrophe of World War II. As Matthew Dickerson points out in his essay, J. R. R. Tolkien himself was aware of this appalling issue, but perhaps most extraordinary is the fact that Tolkien's sympathy extends beyond the refugees of Allied countries to include those from the opposing side. In one of his letters to his son Christopher, Tolkien writes with dismay how

> . . . people gloat to hear of the endless lines, 40 miles long, of miserable refugees, women and children pouring West, dying on the way. There seem no bowels of mercy or compassion, no imagination, left in this diabolic hour . . . why gloat! We were supposed to have reached a stage of civilization in which it might still be necessary to execute a criminal, but not to gloat, or to hang his wife and child by him while the orc-crowd hooted. The destruction of Germany, be it 100 times merited, is one of the most appalling world-catastrophes. (Carpenter 111)

Tolkien is not the only one to express such sentiments over the staggering number of refugees produced by WWII. The sudden movement of people after the war prompted governing authorities from around the globe to begin to craft policies for organizing and helping refugees who were forced to leave their homes; however, this reaction was not immediate. For many displaced persons the actions of world governments amounted to too little too late. As Susan Martin notes, the international community initially failed in saving refugees from Nazi Germany (6). That failure acted as the catalyst for the later effort that sought to make reparations for this earlier neglect: "much of the current international system for the protection of refugees" was organized and established in the wake of that staggering number of WWII refugees who died unaided (6). The international community realized that such failure was unacceptable, and in

1950 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) "was established to protect and find solutions for the remaining refugees in Europe" (6). The UNHCR continues to operate today and is the primary international support for people who have been displaced by conflict.

Though WWII was the primary catalyst that increased support for refugees, the problem continues to this day. In 2021 the UNHCR reported that 89.3 million people had been displaced by violent conflict and fears of persecution—"this is more than double the 42.7 million people who remained forcibly displaced a decade ago and the most since World War II" ("Global Trends"). This number, astounding on its own, does not convey the entire extent of the current magnitude of the problem. The 2021 UNHCR report also specified that "the question is no longer *if* forced displacement will exceed 100 million people—but rather when" ("Global Trends," emphasis mine). The war in Ukraine and other recent violent conflicts has pushed the world into that when. The number of "total forced displacement now exceeds 100 million people. This means 1 in every 78 people on earth has been forced to flee—a dramatic milestone that few would have expected a decade ago" ("Global Trends"). The issue of conflict-induced displacement is pressing and overwhelming, and it may seem that a solution is unreachable, at least on the individual level. Yet I assert that Tolkien has valuable advice for us in *The Lord of the Rings*. In many ways, Frodo's quest to destroy the Ring parallels the experience of those impacted by conflict-induced displacement; furthermore, the tale as a whole illustrates the virtues of hospitality that aid Frodo on his journey, painting a picture of Tolkien's conviction that all refugees deserve empathy and relief. Tolkien's novel inspires even greater empathy with refugees by connecting these themes to the symbolic displacement of all humanity, conveyed in our longing for belonging that can only be satisfied in our true home.

In beginning this study it must be noted that Tolkien famously dislikes allegory. In the forward to the 2nd Edition of *The Lord of the Rings* he explicitly notes that he "much prefer[s] history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers" (Tolkien, Forward). In the hopes of honouring Tolkien's intentions for his work, and in light of the long debate regarding allegory and Tolkien's writings, I will not attempt to argue that Frodo's journey is an allegory for the plight of the refugee or for an ultimate quest for home; however, I do consider there to be clear applications between *The Lord of the Rings* and these themes, and I intend to explore them more fully in order to gain a deeper appreciation for Tolkien himself and his story of the end of the Third Age of Middle-earth.

This kind of application has merit when one takes into account Tolkien's first-hand experience of both World Wars, and his awareness of the refugee crisis following World War II. While Tolkien has explicitly rejected any direct allegorical relationship between either war and *The Lord of the Rings*,[1] it is undeniable that his involvement in both influenced his work, and many scholars today agree that Tolkien's novel can at least be ranked among the deluge of "war writing" that came from the World Wars (Buck 698). With a new wife at home, Tolkien served as a signals specialist in World War I, a position that mostly kept him away from the dangers of front line fighting (Garth 713). Three weeks after completing his training, however, saw Tolkien five miles behind the front line, and after the devasting loss of a full company in early July 1916 Tolkien's own unit advanced (713). Tolkien describes what he witnessed on the battlefield of the Somme, one of the bloodiest battles of World War I, as "the animal horror of active service"; not long after he would learn of the death of his close friend R. Q. Gilson, and by October he had

[1] *Celebrating Middle-Earth:* The Lord of the Rings *as a Defence of Western Civilization*, edited by John G. West, Jr., is a helpful resource that offers a deeper study of Tolkien's awareness that, while his novel is not an allegorical artefact pointing directly to either of the World Wars, it does critique the very real tyrannical political forces at work in his time.

fallen ill with trench fever, a sickness that would plague him for the remainder of the war (713). In World War II, while Tolkien's sons Michael and Christopher actively served, Tolkien "served as an Air Raid Warden and a member of the Firewatching Service. Oxford was not bombed, but Coventry, forty miles away, certainly was, and Tolkien returned home that night to tell [his wife and daughter] of the ever-increasing fiery glow over the horizon" (Lobdell 716). Tolkien himself has acknowledged that these wartime experiences impacted his writing. He says that his "taste for fairy-stories was 'quickened to full life by war,'" and "that the approaches to Mordor had been coloured by the Somme battlefield landscape" (Garth 714). Apart from these direct inspirations, John Garth notes that World War I "showed [Tolkien] a world in fear and undergoing cataclysmic change; large-scale military actions; fellowships built and broken; individual heroism and despair; men, trees and villages destroyed with the aid of the machine" (714). Both wars, perhaps World War I especially, shaped Tolkien and informed these larger literary themes to such an extent that *The Lord of the Rings* would not exist as it does today if Tolkien had not been directly impacted by these historical events. These experiences laid the groundwork for the novel, and for the themes of conflict-induced displacement, virtuous hospitality, and the longing for home that are so deeply ingrained in the tale.

Scholars have connected *The Lord of the Rings* to themes of war before. Michael Livingston argues that Frodo clearly embodies a veteran solider with PTSD—while I do not disagree with this reading, my aim is to point to a different point of application, namely, Frodo as an embodiment of the experiences of refugees displaced by violent conflict. The forced displacement of people has been considered a global issue since World War II, and there are many parallels between Frodo's journey in *The Lord of the Rings* and the psychological experiences of those impacted by conflict-induced displacement. Excerpts from a 1947 report

titled “Displaced Persons: A Human Tragedy of World War II” provides valuable insights into the effects of displacement on the wellbeing of families and individuals. Loss is the primary impact seen in WWII refugees. The report observes that in the wake of the war “one or more members of nearly all . . . [families] were killed, lost, or separated in some way,” and “although no statistics are available, it is known that large numbers of [displaced] children are roaming around the country, lost and abandoned, while others are being brought up in German homes, unknown to their families” (Berger 48). This level of loss is unsurprising when one considers the horrors of war, though it does not make it any less moving. The second impact noted by the report is the visible decline in mental wellbeing among persons displaced by WWII. Though the establishment of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) camps enabled refugees to gradually improve their physical condition, “in the matter of morale, unfortunately, there has been little, if any, improvement . . . the average [displaced person] lives in a constant state of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty” (48-9). It is this uncertainty that most plagues the displaced individual: “of all the factors contributing to the steady demoralization of the displaced persons, undoubtedly the most important is their complete uncertainty as to their future” (50). The psychological effect of uncertainty continues to be a defining trait of refugees to this day. A 2015 study dedicated to this ramification of displacement comments that, while all human beings experience uncertainty at some level, the uncertainty produced in situations of conflict-induced displacement is both “radical” and “protracted” (Horst 1). The uncertainty experienced by refugees is abnormal and immensely stress-inducing: “the radical uncertainty associated with conflict and exile—with the risk of dying and the unpredictability of the future—creates feelings of insecurity and fear, of ambiguity and contradiction, of psychological stress” (9). Such extreme fear and uncertainty are unimaginable to those untouched by violent conflict,

but Tolkien's firsthand experience of war gives him unique insight into these psychological states and informs his characterizations of the protagonists in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Of all Tolkien's characters, Frodo's experience in *The Lord of the Rings* most directly parallels that of people affected by conflict-induced displacement. He begins the story as the largely contented master of Bag End; thoughts of Bilbo and the occasional wanderlust are the only troubles that plague him. It is only when he learns of the true nature of the Ring, and the impending threat of the violence of Sauron, that he is forced to leave the Shire, his home. This knowledge begins Frodo's journey of displacement, and his psychological uncertainty and fear follow him until the end of his days on Middle-earth. Gandalf reveals this terrible knowledge several years after Frodo has inherited the Ring from Bilbo in a passage which Tolkien himself described as "the crucial chapter" and "one of the oldest parts of the tale" (Tolkien, Forward). As Frodo learns of the evil nature of the Ring and its ability to reunite Sauron with the fullness of his dreadful power, "fear seem[s] to stretch out" towards him "like a dark cloud rising in the East and looming up to engulf him" (Tolkien 50).[2] Later, this fear transforms into the fuller realization of what Frodo must do: leave the Shire, and embark on a quest riddled with danger and doom. As Frodo says, "This [decision] would mean exile, a flight from danger into danger" (62). As a refugee suddenly displaced by violent conflict, Frodo admits to Gandalf that in the face of this revelation he "feel[s] very small, and very *uprooted*, and well—desperate" (62, emphasis mine). As with the prolonged psychological stress experienced by displaced persons, Frodo's fear and uncertainty continues throughout his journey to Mordor. Frodo receives a brief respite in Rivendell, and the depths of his relief are shown when he confesses, "So far my only thought has been to get here; and I hope I shan't have to go any further. It is very pleasant just to

[2] As Frodo so memorably remarks, "I wish it need not have happened in my time" (Tolkien 51).

rest. I have had a month of exile and adventure, and I find that has been as much as I want" (221). Unhappily, Frodo realizes that the burden of the Ring is destined to be his until the bitter end, and with this realization

> A great dread [falls] on him, as if he was awaiting the pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped would never come. An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At last with an effort he spoke [to the Council], and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice. "I will take the Ring," he said, "though I do not know the way." (Tolkien 270)

It is Frodo's immense bravery in the face of such dread that makes him such a beloved character of the novel and does credit to the millions of refugees continuing on in bravery today.

When individuals have been displaced by violent conflict and are suffering from the psychological stresses of extreme fear and uncertainty, many use nostalgia as a coping mechanism. The 2015 study on uncertainty and displacement mentioned earlier found that the spatial aspect of conflict-induced displacement—the characteristic of displacement that requires the constant movement of an individual in order to escape danger—leads to the displacement itself becoming a distinct point in time for individuals (Horst 7). This, along with the dramatic and often sudden nature of conflict-induced displacement, causes refugees "to long for a 'before' that is also an 'elsewhere', as time and place often get intertwined in their memories of the past and/or hopes for the future" (7). In other words, because of the extreme uncertainties refugees face during displacement, they often cannot imagine a peaceful future; instead, their hopes become rooted in their fond memories of the past (11). This "future elsewhere," the abstract possibility that finds solidity in the past reality of home, "allows [refugees] to hold on to the idea

of temporariness" (11). This is an essential coping mechanism for people impacted by conflict-induced displacement because it enables them to continue on in the conviction that their present, volatile situation will not last forever. Furthermore, the presence of hope is invaluable for preserving the mental wellbeing of refugees. Horst concludes: "The hope that a better future exists somewhere other than where they are now is what keeps people going, and the loss of such hope can lead to . . . severe depression and other psychological problems" (11).

Using nostalgia as a coping mechanism and inspiration for hope in the midst of fear and uncertainty is something that can be seen in Frodo throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. For Frodo, his nostalgia is for the Shire—in some of his darkest experiences during his quest to destroy the Ring, his memories of the Shire are what give him the hope and strength to continue. Frodo expresses this explicitly at the very beginning of his journey when he first decides to set out for Rivendell with the Ring. He says, "I should like to save the Shire, if I could . . . I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again" (Tolkien 62). Frodo's hope, rooted in the memories of his home, comes back to him again and again. When Frodo and his friends reach Weathertop, "in that lonely place Frodo for the first time fully realize[s] his homelessness and danger" (188). These sentiments place Frodo directly in the mindset of a refugee fleeing danger. Additionally, in the midst of his dreadful fear Frodo nostalgically remembers his home and "wishe[s] bitterly that his fortune had left him in the quiet and beloved Shire" (188). Further on in his journey, when the Fellowship is besieged in the depths of Moria and must fight an army of orcs, the Shire becomes Frodo's battle-cry that strengthens him for action. Though such a battle is frightening and unfamiliar to Frodo, in the midst of the chaos "suddenly, and to his own surprise," he feels "a hot wrath blaze up in his

heart. 'The Shire!' he crie[s] . . . stabb[ing] . . . at the hideous foot" of the nearest enemy (324). Another key moment in which memories of the Shire enable Frodo to continue on with his quest occurs in Book Four when he, Sam, and Gollum reach the stairs of Cirith Ungol. The gates of Minas Morgul have just opened, and as the terrifying army of the Wraith-king leaves the fortress Frodo is overcome with fear and despair. "Then at a great distance, as if it came out of memories of the Shire, some sunlit early morning, when the day called and the doors were opening, he heard Sam's voice speaking, 'Wake up, Mr. Frodo! Wake up!'" (707). This is a beautiful moment in which, in the midst of Frodo's complete desolation, his dear friend Sam, himself a physical manifestation of the nostalgia and hope of home, calls Frodo out of his hopelessness and renews his strength for the next stage of the journey.

Frodo's displacement due to the impending violent conflict instigated by Sauron is trying enough for the hobbit, yet his journey is made all the more difficult because of his duty as the Ring-bearer. No other member of the Fellowship can take this weight from Frodo, and the Ring presents a constant source of danger for him during his quest. By the final book of *The Lord of the Rings* Frodo is nearly overcome by this heavy burden, and it is only Sam, his physical embodiment of home, who empowers him to reach Mount Doom.[3] Sam's characterization as a manifestation of the Shire accompanying Frodo begins to forcefully take shape in the watchtower beyond Shelob's lair. Sam, in misery, believes that his master has been killed and that the quest has failed. At this, his lowest moment, Sam finds hope in nostalgia for his home, just as Frodo had done:

[3] Notably, when Frodo first leaves the Fellowship he intends to continue his journey entirely alone. If Sam had not pursued him, the quest would surely have failed. Frodo himself seems to realize this when Sam catches up to him, saying, "So all my plan is spoilt! . . . It is no good trying to escape you. But I'm glad, Sam. I cannot tell you how glad. Come along! It is plain that we were meant to go together" (Tolkien 406).

> As last, weary and feeling finally defeated, [Sam] sat on the step . . . and bowed his head into his hands. It was quiet, horribly quiet . . . and he felt the darkness cover him like a tide. And then softly, to his own surprise, there at the vain end of his long journey and his grief, moved by what thought in his heart he could not tell, Sam began to sing . . . He mumbled old childish tunes out of the Shire, and snatches of Mr. Bilbo's rhymes that came into his mind like fleeting glimpses of the country of his home. And then suddenly a new strength rose in him. (Tolkien 908)

Sam's strength, renewed by memories of his home, gives him the power to stand once more, save his master (who is in fact alive) from the orcs, and support Frodo in the final legs of the journey. Mark Eddy Smith, in *Tolkien's Ordinary Virtues*, summarizes it well: "in the end Frodo has no hope left of his own and at times must rely entirely on Sam's" (121). Frodo himself remarks earlier in the journey how important Sam is to his quest, saying, "Frodo wouldn't have got far without Sam" (712). Indeed, in Frodo and Sam's final march across Mordor Sam is the one whose strength and hope continue when Frodo's is long gone. Amazingly, Sam's hope seems to be in limitless supply: "even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam's plain hobbit face grew stern . . . as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue" (934). Halfway across that last barren trek Frodo physically cannot walk farther, and Sam, out of his seemingly endless hope and strength, literally carries Frodo to the foot of Mount Doom. "I said I'd carry him if it broke my back," Sam says, "and I will!" (940). And he does. Laying his master and his burden across his shoulders, Sam, the physical embodiment of hope, carries Frodo to the end of the journey.

In the characterization of Sam, Tolkien reveals another element of what it means for the refugee to be sustained by nostalgia: in Sam, Tolkien implies that one's home is made up of both land and people. While the physical geography of one's home is a powerful nostalgic force, all people need some form of community to thrive, and conflict-induced displacement heightens this necessity; unfortunately, because conflict-induced displacement frequently leads to the separation of families, this need often goes unmet for refugees. Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* in the context of two World Wars, which is right around the time that, as Tara Zahra comments, it began to be widely acknowledged that "the separation of families represented wartime tragedy, an abrogation of human rights, and for children, an irreparable form of trauma" (37). When violent conflict disrupts a person's life, displacement and separation from family go hand in hand. Tolkien gives voice to this reality in *The Lord of the Rings*. A significant element of Frodo's journey is that, as he leaves his physical home behind, he begins to find a kinetic type of home in his newfound family of travelling companions. This is seen most poignantly in his fellow hobbits, who exclaim that "if [Frodo] ha[s] to go [to Mordor], then it will be a punishment . . . to be left behind, even in Rivendell" (272). Though Frodo is tragically separated from all but one of the members of the original Fellowship, Sam's unending companionship and reminders of home carry Frodo through the uncertainty, fear, and stress of displacement.

Tolkien shows clear empathy for people impacted by conflict-induced displacement in his characterization of Frodo and Sam; and yet, Tolkien's message does not end there. While this empathy for the refugee is important, it requires an answer on the individual level as well as the national. The issue of conflict-induced displacement is so large that it often seems to have no answer, especially for those whose lives are far from the conflicts that drive refugees from their homes. I propose that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* offers an answer to this dilemma, one that

challenges readers to be part of the solution no matter their distance from conflict. Tolkien's treatment of the theme of hospitality, and the moral necessity of hospitality, is his answer: that if people, regardless of their status or situation, regard others with a sense of generous hospitality, the world will be made a better place on such a level that hospitality will become an answer to the issue of increasing conflict-induced displacement.

In order to discuss hospitality, especially on the ethical level in which it is presented in Tolkien's novel, one must seek to define and understand hospitality. In "Modern Hospitality: Lessons from the Past," Kevin O'Gorman notes that some elements of the idea of hospitality come from "archaic societies," societies in which "hospitality was seen as essentially organic, as a vital and integral part . . . revealing much about . . . cultural values and beliefs" (141). This idea of hospitality as a natural inclination extends beyond pre-agrarian cultures and can be found embedded in the writings of Ancient Greece. There are many "hospitality scenes" in Homeric writings, scenes in which the travelling character finds him or herself in need of the assistance of a stranger (141). In these scenes it is often implied that the travelling character seeking such hospitality is "on some mission" of great importance, perhaps even at the behest of the gods; as such, there is a cultural expectation for the host to assist the traveler (141-42). Furthermore, it can be argued that the habit of Greek gods to disguise themselves in human form and seek the hospitality of mortals gave further credence to the cultural call for hospitality. Certainly, it is seen in these Homeric hospitality scenes that "generous hospitality freely given to the [traveler]" was valued just as highly as if that hospitality was indeed "given to a god" (141-42). The idea that showing hospitality to the stranger is comparable to showing hospitality to the divine has roots in more traditions that just Ancient Greece, and one in particular is especially meaningful for Tolkien.

Tolkien's Catholic faith has been the subject of extensive study, and the time it would take to delve into that body of scholarly work is beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is relevant to my discussion to note that Tolkien was known among his inner, and even outer, circle for his "admitted . . . fondness for scripture" (Birzer 87). That fondness can be seen in the many biblical allusions and themes in his writings, including his representation of hospitality. In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus discusses hospitality, and one can clearly identify the commonalities between this biblical description of hospitality and those present in pre-agrarian cultures and Ancient Greece. In the passage Jesus describes the day when He, as the Son of God, will ascend to His throne and judge the world. He separates the people gathered before Him and says to those on His right:

> Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. (Matthew 25:34-36)

Confused, the people ask Jesus when they saw Him and helped Him. Jesus replies, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Just as with the hospitality of Ancient Greece, here Jesus presents the idea that offering hospitality to a stranger is comparable to offering hospitality to the divine. Tolkien would have been intimately acquainted with the historical grounding for hospitality as a moral and divine endeavor; even more relevant, the idea has religious grounding in the spiritual doctrine closest to Tolkien's heart. Whether Tolkien drew from the historical examples of hospitality, his own religious beliefs, or both, the importance of hospitality in *The Lord of the*

Rings reveals that Tolkien's moral imagination was certainly inspired by this long human tradition of recognizing hospitality as a sign of virtue.

Dickerson engages with the theme of hospitality in *The Lord of the Rings* in his book *A Hobbit Journey*. In his discussion of the treatment of prisoners throughout the novel, Dickerson identifies that the virtues of mercy and gentleness are highly valued according to the ethics of Middle-earth (22, 29, 77). The core ethical code that drives the forces of good in their treatment of the enemy is the belief that "it is never acceptable to defeat an enemy, no matter how cruel that enemy is, by resorting to the practices of the enemy" (22). As Dickerson notes, this is seen most clearly in the refusal of the many good and powerful characters to use the Ring as a means for defeating Sauron (22). This ethic can be summarized as a striving for mercy and peace, which "[is] central to the wisdom of Tolkien's wise" characters (79). In Dickerson's essay "Welcoming the Stranger" he points to the connection between mercy, hospitality, and the treatment of refugees. It useful to remember Tolkien's letter to his son regarding the British mocking of refugees escaping from their homes, homes which happen to belong to 'enemy' countries (Carpenter 111). Tolkien condemns this mindset as morally reprehensible, and, as Dickerson illustrates in *A Hobbit Journey*, the strength of Tolkien's conviction is clearly seen in how his moral characters treat their enemy prisoners. The idea extends to giving hospitality to the stranger. As Dickerson points out, "Tolkien never suggests it is wisdom . . . to exclude strangers or refugees in need," even if those refugees are from enemy lines ("Welcoming" 301). Exploring Dickerson's ideas further, I will endeavor to more fully unpack the significance of hospitality in Tolkien's novel.

There is much to be said about hospitality as shown in *The Lord of the Rings*, and Richard Kearney's studies on the subject of hospitality are a helpful starting point. Kearney

observes that the etymological origin of *hospitality* is remarkably close to that of *hostility*; in fact, a striking relationship between the two words can be found in most Indo-European languages (O'Rourke 28). This "duality" reveals an important aspect of the nature of hospitality: rather than merely being hospitable to one's friends, true hospitality requires opening one's home to the stranger, to the potential enemy, and to the "risk" that one's hospitality could be met with hostility at any moment (33-4). This definition provides an important qualifier to the study of hospitality in *The Lord of the Rings*; while many characters are certainly generous with the people they know, it is those who open their homes to strangers, especially dangerous strangers, who exhibit the true virtue of hospitality.

The moral necessity for this kind of hospitality is first demonstrated in the assistance that Tom Bombadil and Goldberry offer to Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin on their journey to Bree. At this point in their journey the four hobbits have just encountered their first close brush with danger in the form of Old Man Willow. Just before the sinister tree can kill Merry and Pippin, Tom Bombadil rescues the hobbits and invites them all to the safety of his home (Tolkien 119-20). There the hobbits are refreshed by the hospitality of Tom and Goldberry as they enjoy the gifts of food, rest, and stories. When the hobbits have bathed and cleaned away the grime of the dangerous road, they are beckoned by their hosts to a wonderful meal and, "though the hobbits ate, as only famished hobbits can eat, there was no lack" (125). After the meal they sleep upon "mattresses and pillows . . . soft as down," a rejuvenating change from the toils of the road (127). The next morning Tom extends his hospitality further by allowing the hobbits to rest in his home for an additional day. He eases their minds by distracting them from their perilous journey by telling them "many remarkable stories . . . tales of bees and flowers, the ways of trees, and the strange creatures of the Forest" (129). The hospitality of Tom and Goldberry not only saves the

hobbits from the danger of Old Man Willow, but it extends beyond their stay and saves them from the Barrow-wights. When the hobbits are captured by the Barrow-wights and Frodo awakes to find his friends under the enchantment of a deathly sleep, the memory of Tom's hospitality equips him with a means of escape: "All at once back into [Frodo's] mind, from which it had disappeared with the first coming of the fog [of the Barrow-wights], came the memory of the house down under the Hill, and of Tom singing. He remembered the rhyme that Tom had taught them" (141-42). Armed with the memory of Tom and Goldberry's hospitality, Frodo calls out to Tom Bombadil, who comes and rescues the hobbits once more.

Another example of hospitality in *The Lord of the Rings* is found in Rivendell, the elven city often referred to as "the Last Homely House" (Tolkien 225). Here, the descriptor of "homely" clearly refers to the presence of hospitality in Rivendell, and it is indeed a place where guests find rest and comfort. Feasts, healing, and song are foundational to the city, and the travelling hobbits are welcomed graciously (225). As mentioned earlier, in the hospitality of Rivendell Frodo is sustained by the hope that the city will be a place where he can "rest . . . a long while, perhaps for good" (272). If Frodo and his friends had not found such hospitality in Rivendell, they may not have had the strength to continue their journey.[4]

Rivendell acts as an example of the moral necessity for hospitality, and it also provides a window into Tolkien's views on one's sense of home. Rivendell's title as The Last Homely House not only speaks to the hospitable virtue of the place, it also points to the importance of home itself. Northrop Frye identifies "the central myth of literature" as "the quest-myth" (107).

[4] The same holds true for the Fellowship when they escape Moria and find refuge in Lothlórien. When Galadriel and Celeborn allow the Fellowship into the wood, they take on the great danger that accompanies the Fellowship. Furthermore, the welcoming of Gimli the Dwarf into the elven city marks the beginning of the end of many long years of hostility between Elves and Dwarves. Celeborn and Galadriel's hospitality also acts as a necessary catalyst for the intimate intercultural friendship that grows between Gimli and Legolas. Lynnette R. Porter explores the hospitality embedded in this friendship more fully in *Unsung Heroes of* The Lord of the Rings.

The Lord of the Rings certainly follows the pattern of a quest story, but its resonance with Frye's idea goes even further. Frye proposes that all stories are quest stories in the sense that each one conveys a human longing for "a world in which the inner desire and the outward circumstance coincide" (107). "The central myth of art," of literature, is "the vision of the end of social effort, the innocent world of fulfilled desires, the free human society" (107-8). In other words, the ultimate quest of the human spirit is to return to a perfect home, a home where all conflict is replaced by contentment. Once again, this theme in *The Lord of the Rings* cannot be fully understood without considering Tolkien's faith. Tolkien himself had his own ideas about the 'ultimate myth,' and for him that universal story was of the story Christianity tells (Pearce 98). The story of Christ, "the myth that really happened," is, for Tolkien, "the myth that gives ultimate meaning to all the lesser myths" (98). The story of Christ, greatly summarized, is the story of humanity's corruption, separation from God, and eventual salvation when God condescends to humanity in the Incarnation of Christ. The beauty of this real myth for the Christian is that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Christian, and undoubtedly Tolkien himself, believes that this life, and the end of this life, is not the true end; remarkably similar to Frye's proposal, eternal life in Jesus means a homecoming to a paradisal city in which all has been renewed and made whole.

As Frye suggests, this quest for the paradisal city is found in all Western literature and can therefore also be seen in *The Lord of the Rings*. The quest for paradise begins with departing from evil, and there is undeniably great evil in the villains of Middle-earth: Sauron, Saruman, the orcs, and the Nazgûl are all terrible, frightening foes. As Bradley Birzer notes in *J. R. R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth*,

> Evil, for Tolkien . . . is very real and perilous, whether in fairy tales, in the trenches of World War I, or in the Soviet gulags. The monsters of fiction and nightmares are merely the manifestations of the true, original evil—the perversion and mocking of God's creation. (91)

It is this true, real-world evil that inspires the evil in Tolkien's writing, and in light of the global conflicts and displacement of today, it is clear that the inspirations for the nation-devouring evil of Sauron and his forces are present throughout history. It is this enduring evil that causes characters in literature to search for that paradisal city where evil has found its final end, and for readers to long for those characters to find such a place.

At its heart, Frodo's quest to destroy the Ring is a quest to rid his world of this evil in the hopes that a paradisal age can begin. Fortunately for Middle-earth, the Ring is destroyed, Sauron is defeated, and the coronation of Aragorn inaugurates a new age of peace; however, the story does not end there (Tolkien 968). The tale continues for Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, and before they may enter into a new age they must save and rebuild the Shire. Yet even when this is done, and Frodo's home is renewed, he still cannot rest—he still has not found his paradisal home. Despite the Ring's destruction, Frodo's long burden as the Ring-bearer weighs heavily upon him. In the peace following Saruman's defeat in the Shire Frodo is often ill, and during these sicknesses he is "found . . . clutching a white gem that [hangs] on a chain about his neck," a poignant gift from Arwen that has become Frodo's imitation of the Ring he bore for so long, "muttering feverishly, 'It is gone for ever . . . and now all is dark and empty'" (1024). Sadly, the evil of the Ring has left a traumatic imprint upon Frodo. When Sam questions Frodo about his strange behaviour, Frodo replies, "I am wounded . . . it will never really heal" (1025). One of the greatest tragedies of *The Lord of the Rings* is that the memory of Frodo's home, the Shire, is

what sustains him for the majority of his journey and yet, when his task is finished, Frodo finds that the Shire can no longer satisfy his longing for home. In keeping with Frye, one can rightly conclude that Frodo's journey has only heightened his need to find the paradisal home in which all hurts are healed. It is for this reason that Frodo accepts the invitation of the elves and sails with Bilbo, Gandalf, Elrond, and Galadriel to the Grey Havens:

> Then Frodo kissed Merry and Pippin, and last of all Sam, and went aboard; and the sails were drawn up, and the wind blew, and slowly the ship slipped away down the long grey firth; and the light of the glass of Galadriel that Frodo bore glimmered and was lost. And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise. (1030)

This passage, which marks the end of Frodo's journey, is bittersweet: it is a tragic parting between Frodo and his friends, and yet it shows Frodo's journey away from hurt and sorrow into the paradisal city, the final and wholly fulfilling home that all long for.[5] With this ending *The Lord of the Rings* follows the pattern that Frye astutely describes: the setting out of a hero on a quest, the dangerous battle against evil in the effort to drive it from the world, and the final finding of that paradisal home where the hero can live free from evil.

[5] Because different interpretations of the Grey Havens can be drawn from the extensive supplementary material connected to Tolkien's novel, this aspect of the novel invites further research; however, in this essay I treat *The Lord of the Rings* as a discrete and complete work within Tolkien's legendarium, and I propose that within the scope of the novel Tolkien presents Frodo's final journey as a kind of exodus delivering him from the fallen world into a paradisal afterlife.

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* deals profoundly with many deeply human themes: the issue of conflict-induced displacement, and its solution in the moral necessity of hospitality, are just two of the many themes in Tolkien's novel that can be applied to the very real struggles of our world. These applications are important, and Tolkien's engagement with them conveys his belief that ignoring the hurt in the world is just as damaging as actively perpetuating it. While it may seem impossible for one person to make any positive impact on such big issues, Tolkien invites readers of *The Lord of the Rings* to see that everyone has a role to play, even if that role is as simple as offering hospitality to a stranger. Yet Tolkien also acknowledges that these global issues may never be fully eradicated despite the best efforts of humanity; it is in this knowledge that the longing for a true, paradisal home finds its root. Decades after the publication of Tolkien's novel Frodo is still an inspirational hero, a refugee who is displaced from his home, thrust into conflict, and must bravely fight against evil until the bitter end. Frodo's story is even more profound because his departure to the Grey Havens offers a glimpse of the end that we all hope for, the end in which our searching is satisfied and we find our final home. After all, we are all refugees searching for home, journeying forward in the conviction that our current situation is not the end, persevering in the hope that there is something better elsewhere. Knowing Tolkien's religious background provides the insight that for him, this 'better elsewhere' is the promise of Heaven through salvation in Christ Jesus. It seems that the end of Frodo's journey, his arrival to the Grey Havens, reveals that this is Tolkien's hope for us: that at the end of our journeys, we too will find contentment in our true, Heavenly home.

Works Cited

Berger, Joseph A. "Displaced Persons: A Human Tragedy of World War II." *Social Research*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1947, pp. 45–58. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40969176. Accessed 17 September, 2022.

Birzer, Bradley J. "Catholicism, Roman." *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, edited by Michael D. C. Drout, Routledge, 2007, pp. 85-9.

---. *J. R. R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-earth*. Wilmington, ISI Books, 2004. pp. 89-109.

Buck, Claire. "War." *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, edited by Michael D. C. Drout, Routledge, 2007, pp. 698-700.

Carpenter, Humphrey, editor. *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981. pp. 111.

Dickerson, Matthew. *A Hobbit Journey: Discovering the Enchantment of J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-Earth*. Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2012. pp. 19-35, 62-79.

---. "Welcoming the Stranger: On Refugees, Walls, and the Writings of J. R. R. Tolkien." *The Inklings and Culture: A Harvest of Scholarship from the Inklings Institute of Canada*, edited by Monika B. Hilder, et al. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. pp. 290-303.

Frye, Northrop. "The Archetypes of Literature." *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1951, pp. 92–110. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4333216. Accessed 7 September 2022.

Garth, John. "World War I." *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, edited by Michael D. C. Drout, Routledge, 2007, pp. 712-15.

"Global Trends." *UNHCR*, https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends.html. Accessed 21 October 2022.

Horst, Cindy, and Katarzyna Grabska. "Flight and Exile—Uncertainty in the Context of Conflict-Induced Displacement." *Social Analysis*, vol. 59, no. 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 1–18. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2015.590101. 17 September 2022.

"John 3:16 – New International Version." *Bible Gateway*, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203%3A16&version=NIV. Accessed 17 November 2022.

Livingston, Michael. "The Shell-shocked Hobbit: The First World War and Tolkien's Trauma of the Ring." *Mythlore*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2006, pp.77-92. *Mythopoetic Society*, https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol25/iss1/6, Accessed 21 October 2022.

Lobdell, Jared. "World War II." *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, edited by Michael D. C. Drout, Routledge, 2007, pp. 715-17.

Martin, Susan F. "The Global Refugee Crisis." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2016, pp. 5–11. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26396147. Accessed 17 September 2022.

"Matthew 25:31-46 – New International Version." *Bible Gateway*, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+25%3A31-46&version=NIV. Accessed 28 October 2022.

O'Gorman, Kevin D. "Modern Hospitality: Lessons from the Past." *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2005, pp. 141-51. *University of Strathclyde*, https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/5843/. Accessed 28 October 2022.

O'Rourke, Breffni. "Intercultural Encounters as Hospitality. An Interview with Richard Kearney." *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, vol. 1, Apr. 2018, pp. 25–39, https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2018.jve.2. Accessed 25 November 2022.

Pearce, Joseph. “Christ.” *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, edited by Michael D. C. Drout, Routledge, 2007, pp. 97-8.

Porter, Lynnette R. *Unsung Heroes of the Lord of the Rings*. London, Praeger, 2005. pp. 144-66.

Smith, Mark Eddy. *Tolkien’s Ordinary Virtues: Exploring the Spiritual Themes of The Lord of the Rings*. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2002. pp. 121.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Lord of the Rings*. Ebook, Harper Collins, 2005.

West, Jr., John G., editor. *Celebrating Middle-Earth: The Lord of the Rings as a Defence of Western Civilization*. Seattle, Inkling Books, 2002.

Zahra, Tara. “‘The Psychological Marshall Plan’: Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II.” *Central European History*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2011, pp. 37–62. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938910001172. Accessed 17 September 2022.