

Wounds Unhealed

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It has been said that time heals all wounds, and that may be true for some folks, but not for all, or even most people. The ability to carry our scars and wounds with us as badges of triumph, courage and honor is a very human trait, one which we have practiced for many, many years. Since this is the way most of us live, it is no wonder that our literature occasionally touches on this subject, showing us characters who suffer from similar afflictions and giving us a sense of hope in dealing with our own scars.

One such character is found in *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo is a brave and courageous hobbit who must pursue a great quest and accumulates his share of wounds and scars along the way. He receives both physical and emotional wounds along his journey, though the most discussed are his physical ailments. Frodo's quest takes him into many adventures as he tried to deliver the One Ring to the Cracks of Doom for its destruction and the salvation of Middle-earth. But no salvation can be attained with some sacrifice, and while Frodo's is not the only sacrifice made, his may be the greatest.

Frodo receives three wounds upon his quest. The first occurs at Weathertop, where he has his first face-to-face encounter with the Nazgûl. Here he actually enters into hand to hand combat with the leader and sustains a stab wound to his shoulder, in which a piece of the Morgul blade is left behind and slowly tried to work its way to his heart. At this first injury, many of his companions fear for the worst and expect that he will be killed by this wound. (Tolkien, 239-63) However, he does gain a temporary healing of this wound at the house of Elrond. The Elven medicine works and gives him a sense of recovery. Time reveals that this recovery is at best partial, and at worst, all but illusory.

This shoulder wound of Frodo's reacts every time he is in grave danger from a very close Nazgûl, as well as on the anniversary of the wound's infliction. Frodo is never completely free of the wound, and it never truly heals. The same holds true for his other two wounds: the sting or bite of Shelob, and the loss of his finger, bitten off by Gollum in his final, desperate attempt to reclaim The One Ring.

It is this phenomenon that drives Frodo to cross the sea and join with the Elves in the Havens at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. He has no other hope or expectation of attaining a true healing peace. He has given all he could to Middle-earth and there is nothing left for him there but a life of reliving the pain again and again. No one could blame him for seeking peace towards the end of his journeys.

This is not a new concept, however, that Tolkien has utilized here. He was a medieval scholar himself and was, of course, very familiar with the Arthurian legends. This sort of wound that can never heal is seen in the Arthurian legends in many characters, including Sir Lancelot and the Fisher King. The latter is the one who sounds most like Frodo. Again we have an individual who goes out into battle to do good for the salvation of his people. Is that not Frodo's role? And this individual receives injuries that will never heal. In the case of the Fisher King, he is maimed on the field of battle by a javelin wound through both thighs. He now can neither fight nor work, but spends his time fishing from a boat in the river. (De Troyes, 416) And his wounds never truly heal. He does not necessarily experience the

same recurring opening of the wounds, but his never give the impression of healing, either.

For the Fisher King, there is the possibility of healing, however. But he must depend on an outside source for such healing, much as Frodo must depend upon a last journey over the sea to the West for his own final healing. The Fisher King must bear witness to a Grail Knight asking in regard to three wonders seen within his halls: the bleeding lance, the Grail, and a silver platter that are all paraded through the main hall. Asking after these would cure the Fisher King and make him whole once again. (De Troyes, 420) It may reasonably be said that in the king's healing, his people are likewise healed.

This theme also applies to Frodo's story. To be able to heal his land, Middle-earth, he must endure these wounds as rites of passage along his journey. But for his faithful companion, Samwise Gamgee, to be "cured" of the traumas of their journeys, Frodo must leave and set his course toward his final cure. It is only then that Sam can settle down in Bag End with Rosie and actually raise his family and lead the life he was meant to live in the Shire. For Sam to be whole, Frodo must be cured, must leave and complete his portion of the adventure. The torch can then be passed.

Tolkien borrowed much from ancient texts that he studied as he wrote his Middle-earth creations. He created for himself, and for us, a new mythology with which to work, explaining in some measure why the world works the way it does. (R. Helms, 153) He wanted to show us a world in which evil could be set right, but also that it still costs and we have to decide if we are willing to pay that price. Frodo did so, as did the Fisher King, as they both tried to do right by their lands and people, giving all that they had, ultimately, to do so.

Many have made comparisons of both these characters to the image of Christ, sacrificing Himself for the salvation of all people. (Crabbe, 239) In a manner of speaking, this comparison may be supportable. All three give of themselves to the utmost degree in order to set things right. However, Frodo waivers in his commitment. Frodo is the one who freezes on the precipice of the Cracks of Doom and decides he will not part with The One Ring. He is a reluctant hero as he loses his finger, with The One Ring, into the depths as his rival, Gollum, makes a last ditch effort to salvage his precious. And like the Fisher King, he depends on another less worthy than himself to complete the journey. Frodo must have the assistance of Gollum, and the Fisher King must wait upon Percival to ask his questions. Both are at the mercy of others in the end for their tasks to come full circle.

But in the mean time, they must wait, and wait they do, the Fisher King fishing and Frodo bumping around, making his haphazard way up Mount Doom, carried for part of the distance on Sam's back. And in the end, it happens. The unwitting aide arrives and does his part to help bring all to conclusion. And the two heroes are left with their never-ending wounds to nurse along with the knowledge of what their sacrifices have purchased. "I have tried to heal the Shire, and it has been healed, but not for me." (Tolkien, 309) Frodo recognizes that there is little left for him in the Shire because of this, and he must choose to leave, as his predecessor Bilbo also chooses to leave for his own well being. Together, the two will travel to their final healing destination, where they will finally be able to be whole once more. Tolkien has given Frodo two quests at this point, the second of which is much more difficult for him to attain than the first. The first is the destruction of The One Ring, but his second quest is for his healing. And to be able to go on that quest, he must once more leave family and friends behind in the Shire, this time for good. But his salvation lies on the other side, so he must go and does find the courage to do so.

Frodo bears his wounds and scars well, not trying to burden any with his ailments and always thinking of how his affairs affect those for whom he cares. That is something we all strive toward in our lives. We all find our own ways of dealing with it. Some sail off into the sunset, some fish for their contentment, and then there are those of us who are still trying to figure out what to do and how to wear our badges of honor and courage. But we all have them, and we all carry them, some more gracefully than others. And we all have our wounds unhealed that we carry and must face in our own time.

Note: Some readers will quite reasonably have sensed applicability of the themes of this essay to the hero of the Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling. It is certainly true that he sustained a wound, mani-

fest as a lightning bolt scar on his forehead, which causes him pain when the author of the wound, Lord Voldemort, is active or seeking him. However, the Harry Potter series is as yet incomplete, and it is not possible, other than by conjecture, to draw complete analogies to Frodo, the Fisher King, or Christ relative to the themes of this essay. For this reason, despite the author's fondness for Harry Potter, he has been excluded, at least for the nonce. Once the Potter saga is complete, the reader will have opportunity to judge whether he in fact was capable of sacrifice analogous to the other figures discussed here, and whether he in fact attains any sort of healing.

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