

# Scouring the Shire: Panoptic Power and Community Healing in Foucault's 'Panopticism' and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

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The image of Jeremy Bentham's 'panoptic prison,' made famous by Michel Foucault's prolific chapter on 'Panopticism' from *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, is one that has often been applied to the pages of *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>1</sup> The Panopticon is 'a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen' (Foucault, 'Panopticism', p. 203). It is a 'mechanism that automatizes and disindividualizes power' so as to establish permanent surveillance and assure the 'automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 'Panopticism', p. 201, 203). In its essence, the Panopticon is the perfect prison: a central tower rests in the middle of a vast, circular room overlooking the many cells of the prisoners. The prisoners are always visible, but they cannot see into the central tower. Over time, the prisoners assume they are always being watched and therefore come to monitor themselves. In the Panopticon, the central guard in the tower needs not exercise any physical control or punishment (if he is even there at all), because the system begins to run itself. The prisoners never know if or when they are being watched, so they come to assume they are always being watched. As Foucault insists, 'visibility is a trap' ('Panopticism', p. 203). Consider the great eye of Sauron as the perfect encapsulation of the unseen overseer Bentham envisions in his original conception: a menace forever looming, an invisible threat assumed to be standing guard at any given time in a centralised tower at the middle of a circular prison. Perhaps what makes Sauron such a grand enemy and still one of the most sinister antagonists in English literature is the fact that readers never actually see him; he is always alluded to, always feared, and yet never physically present. As Jonathan Witt and Jay W. Richards point out, were Sauron 'to repossess the ring that grants invisibility and magnified power, his goal of overseeing all while remaining unseen would be complete – the panopticon observer perfected' (p. 88). Patrick Curry also points out that, like the goal of establishing a singular form of governing power as a by-product of the Panopticon, Sauron's desire is 'one empire, ruled by one logic in accordance with one Will' and that the precise nature of that kind of power is only important insofar as it is secondary to 'its intended monism, universalism, and homogeneity' (pp. 145-6). Forms of institutional standardisation, as Foucault points out, lead to established norms and powerful forms of hegemony. It is through this process that, as Ji-Won Ohm asserts, 'power is more

economically exercised by imposing surveillance rather than the costly exemplary punishments' (p. 15). The Panoptic structure is one that sees all, governs all, and ultimately, dominates all, as those within the confines of the structure are not only the prisoners, but the prison guards, helping to monitor and surveil their fellow man and themselves.

This essay would like to consider Foucault's discussion of discipline and power through the accumulation of men and capital in his section on the formation of disciplinary society and economic processes, as it applies to the pages of *The Lord of the Rings*. Specifically, as the nature of power in the chapter 'The Scouring of the Shire' appears diffuse and self-perpetuating, one can see how the Panopticon functions on the communal level, entrapping the Hobbits and confronting them with an industrialised wasteland, characterised by, as Shippey notes, the 'vices of modernity... a kind of restless ingenuity, skill without purpose' and 'bulldozing for the sake of change' (p. 171). First, this essay will focus on reading Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as a novel concerned with panoptic forms of power. This is most clearly highlighted in two of the final chapters of *The Return of the King*, 'Homeward Bound' and 'The Scouring of the Shire.' Specifically, the forms of panoptic power present disciplinary and controlling structures inseparable from modes of production and 'usefulness' that come with the rise of capitalist industrialisation run rampant in the Shire. Additionally, in establishing this reading of Tolkien's work through the lens of Foucault's 'Panopticism,' the aim of this essay is to rethink the way in which the hegemonic and boundless panoptic structures of power are overcome, literally evaporated, beginning with the destruction of Saruman. While Foucault ends his chapter on Panopticism with no hope for escape from the structure of our own prisons and the 'mechanisms of discipline' that we are bound to, Tolkien points to a way out. His answer does not only come with re-establishing the rightful king of Gondor. Though the role of the benevolent caretaker king is central to Tolkien's conception of monarchical rule, the King's return does not save the Shire from itself in the short term.<sup>2</sup> Instead, Tolkien's answer to the problem of the Panopticon first comes from within the community. While the panoptic structure binds those inside it, it simultaneously isolates, as those same individuals grow to fear neighbours as well as a looming authority so often coupled with threats of violence. However, in re-establishing close communal ties and filling in the cracks created by Panopticism's

isolating effects, the hobbits disengage from the systems of power and dissolve the ‘faceless gaze,’ which has all but turned the Shire into an insular and authoritarian model of discipline and surveillance. Tolkien emphasises healing, care-taking, and intimate communal connection as a way to move outside of the panoptic prison.

As has already been noted, the Panopticon of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* is best emblemised in the images of towers that spawn ‘swarming’ power and self-surveillance (Foucault, ‘Panopticism’, p. 205). One might apply this ‘seeing machine’ to the Shire at the end of *RK*, which has become very ‘un-Shirelike’ as observed by the four returning hobbits (*RK*, VI, viii). Despite Frodo’s explanation that the ‘Dark Tower has fallen, and there is a King in Gondor’ to one of the ‘ruffians’ now occupying the Shire, he is met with laughs and insolence (*RK*, VI, viii). The returning Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin encounter hobbits who ‘seemed ill at ease’ as if ‘some rule or other was being broken’ (*RK*, VI, viii). Despite the angry pleas and evident consternation of the returning heroes, the resident hobbits are reluctant to admit them back into Hobbiton, which has been surrounded by a ‘great spiked gate’ – ‘A hush fell on the hobbits beyond the gate. “It won’t do no good talking that way,” said one. “He’ll get to hear of it. And if you make so much noise, you’ll awake the Chief’s big man”’ (*RK*, VI, viii). The hobbits encounter ‘mobile attentions ever on the alert’ (Foucault, ‘Panopticism’, p. 214) and the resident hobbits appear largely to govern themselves in fear of spectral, disciplinary force. Titles like ‘the Chief,’ ‘the Boss,’ and ‘Sharkey’ are all that is known about the elusive, authoritarian bodies now in power over the residents of the Shire. When Merry asks who Sharkey is, another resident hobbit explains that ‘it was about last harvest, end o’ September maybe, that we first heard of him. We’ve never seen him, but he’s up at Bag End; and he’s the real Chief now, I guess’ (*RK*, VI, viii).

It is worth noting early on that the returning hobbits refuse to acknowledge these new titles, and instead, address their neighbours with their real names like ‘Lotho’ and ‘Bill Ferny,’ suggesting their resistance to these new forms of institutionalised anonymity wrapped up in panoptic forms of power. If the rest of the Shire has fallen subject to the Panopticon, then Merry, Pippin, Sam, and Frodo are spared from that fall and remain a part of a different sphere, undoubtedly due to their already having faced this kind of panoptic power before in the face of Sauron’s domination, a far worse threat than anything they could expect to deal with in the Shire; they are wise to this game, and seem, at least initially, unable to take it seriously. The returning hobbits threaten, scoff, and even scale the new spiked gate in defiance of the gatekeepers. Following initial interactions, Sam exclaims,

All right, all right... That’s quite enough. I don’t want to hear no more. No welcome, no beer, no smoke, and a lot of rules an orc-talk instead. I hoped to have a rest, but I can see there’s work and trouble ahead. (*RK*, VI, viii)

Their initial annoyance, however, gives way to a deeper understanding of the trouble that has taken hold of the Shire. Their expectations for the hallmarks of hobbitry like food, drink, pipe-weed, and a warm bed, are no longer offered. The stark dissonance between the returning hobbits’ expectations and the reality they confront is demonstrative of the two separate spheres now currently at odds. While the rest of the Shire has fallen to surveillance, domination, and repression, indicators of the Panopticon’s presence, the four returning hobbits stand apart and encapsulate the qualities of community, which they intend to restore in the Shire. However, before turning to a more thorough examination of the process of communal renewal, it is worth spending more time unpacking the ways in which the panoptic structure has taken hold of the Shire.

One must first consider the system of policing and monitoring in Hobbiton. As is made clear at the beginning of the chapter by Hob Hayward and Bill Ferny, the elusive ‘Sharkey’ does little to exercise control directly, as the hobbits have mostly taken to monitoring themselves (*RK*, VI, viii). Additionally, the location of the figure of Sharkey is at Bag End, which occupies the top of The Hill in Hobbiton, commanding a view of much of the rest of the community; however, he is never actually seen. Even with the destruction of the great gaze of Sauron, the permeating and ‘swarming’ authority enacted by the ‘faceless gaze’ is still quite clearly present here in the Shire. As Jay Atkins mentions in his work on distributionism and economics in the Shire, ‘Sharkey, the new ruler of the Shire, administers orders to the “ruffians” who, in turn, give orders to commoners’ (p. 25). The overseers themselves, of course, are not exempt from the gaze either. As the panoptic force grows in the Shire, the observational impulse is subsumed into the individual, and under the inspecting gaze, ‘each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself’ thus ensuring that power is ‘exercised continuously’ (Foucault, ‘The Eye of Power’, p. 4). It is through the process of diffuse surveillance that we are reminded of the disconnected, vaguely authoritarian, and menacing sense of disciplinary, ‘militarized hierarchy’ that ‘disconnects Sharkey from the local culture, which Tolkien finds dangerous’ (Atkins, p. 25). The disconnect of an unseen oppressor coupled with hierarchical systems of power, which lead to ‘hierarchical surveillance’ (Foucault, ‘Panopticism’, p. 220) is the reality one faces upon entering a very alien Shire, marked by fear, oppression, and, as will be revealed, images of grotesque industrialism.

What is perhaps even more important to note upon entering Hobbiton is the way in which the Shire aligns with a version of Foucault’s history that traces many of the roots of the panoptic model of power to capitalism’s basic needs: subjection, manpower, and technology. It is also in the model of the Shire at the end of *RK* that provides a better picture of Tolkien’s scepticism about any system that can

lead to domination of will or dehumanisation through the diffusion of disciplining and subjugating power. Foucault provides an overview of the way this model of authority changes in history with the rise of capitalism:

If the economic take-off of the West began with the techniques that made possible the accumulation of capital, it might perhaps be said that the methods for administering the accumulation of men Panopticism made possible a political take-off in relation to the traditional, ritual, costly, violent forms of power, .... In fact, the two processes – the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital – cannot be separated; it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them...Each makes the other possible and necessary; each provides a model for the other. (Foucault, 'Panopticism', pp. 220-1)

Capitalism, as is made clear in the preceding passage, does not rise as a result of the need for a system of monitoring. However, it thrives in a panoptic structure and becomes part of the two-prongs of the system. Each of these systems, capitalism and Panopticism, helps to sustain each other and are co-dependent as one provides a framework for the other. The issue of discipline becomes the major problem for a society with a growing population during the rise of capitalism. However, the panoptic structure is a new machine capable of putting to productive use those in the new system. In Foucault's reading, each hand feeds the other. The disciplinary, 'military' methods in the panoptic structure provide the base for capitalism to thrive, while the accumulation of capital in growing capitalist systems that value efficiency, 'separation, coordination and supervision' provide a way for societies to deal with growing populations (Foucault, 'Panopticism', p. 221). As alluded to earlier, it is interesting that in the above passage, as is the case with the rest of Foucault's reading of the panoptic system, there is no apparent way out once panoptic industrial-capitalist structure takes hold.

It is important to note that Foucault does not go so far as to say that capitalism is the inherent problem. He does however, conclude by stating that '[t]he growth of a capitalist economy gave rise to the specific modality of disciplinary power', which places blame on a system that embodies many of the features necessary to sustain the model of Panopticism (Foucault, 'Panopticism', p. 221). As much as capitalism is presented as a major, systemic issue in Foucault's equation, its ability to 'divide labour' and follow the plan mapped out by the power structures in the 'schemata of power' is what is truly troubling, and where Tolkien and Foucault appear to agree most distinctly. To be clear, it is not that Tolkien appears to view capitalism as evil, nor is it likely that he would necessarily view capitalism as an inherent, corrupting power unique to itself. In fact, Tolkien's own idealised Shire boasts an economic system difficult to define. As scholars like Steven Kelly<sup>3</sup> point out, the Shire is undoubtedly an anachronism, blending medieval fairy-tale with 19th

century industrialism in a quasi-capitalist, pre-industrial system that produces only what it needs in an agrarian system, and yet somehow boasts the ability to produce commodities like waist-coats, clocks, and tobacco. However, like Foucault, it appears that Tolkien is afraid of what wide-spread, exploitive industrial-capitalism has the power to do. It is the essence of capitalism to feed, and be fed by, the structures of disciplinary and hegemonic power of the panoptic structure in society that makes it dangerous. While the structure of surveillance and discipline thrives, so too does the system that accumulates capital. The system of industrial capitalism can precipitate the rise of panoptic power, and when this happens, the two become permanently dependent on each other to sustain themselves. No doubt, Tolkien's well-documented<sup>4</sup> fears regarding destructive industrialisation and governmental oversight are something one must bear in mind when considering this reading.

By the end of *RK*, the reader is presented with numerous scenes of outright destruction in the idyllic agrarian landscape of the Shire, encapsulating the kinds of destructive power that come with this new form of authority and panoptic control. The destruction and reappropriation of the Shire for industrial capitalist means, however, appears to be a direct result of the diffuse power structures taking hold of the land. Industrialisation is not the root cause of the downfall of the Shire and the unhappiness of its people. Instead, the text suggests that this is due to both the isolation and alienation that come with the panoptic structure and, even more powerfully, from the willingness of some of the Shire's own residents to invest themselves in this new system. Before entering the Shire, the returning hobbits hear from the usually loquacious and jovial Butterbur, now subdued, who explains that the people of the Shire 'stay at home mostly and keep their doors barred' and warns that it 'isn't safe on the road and nobody goes far and folk lock up early. We have to keep watchers all round the fence and put a lot of men on the gates at nights' (*RK*, VI, vii). Later, another resident hobbit recounts the rigorous and exploitive system that has upended the usual harvest:

We grows a lot of food, but we don't rightly know what becomes of it. It's all these 'gatherers' and 'sharers', I reckon, going round counting and measuring and taking off to storage. They do more gathering than sharing, and we never see most of the stuff again. (*RK*, VI, viii)

These opening sequences provide some of Tolkien's most complex views of diffuse, hierarchical, and exploitive power in the novel. Systematic 'counting and measuring' followed by control and manipulation by a vague, decentralised force are evident. Thus, the reader enters Foucault's 'plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies' (Foucault, 'Panopticism', p. 198).

Additionally, as seen in Foucault's model, the most powerful forms of the panoptic structure are embedded in some of the industrial-capitalist constructs, which have been adopted by the Shire's most opportunistic inhabitants. Pimple, for example, is an early sign of the rise of this exploitive form of capitalism in the Shire:

He'd funny ideas, had Pimple. Seems he wanted to own everything himself, and then order other folk about...he was always grabbing more, though where he got the money was a mystery...He'd already bought Sandyman's mill before he came to Bag End, seemingly. (*RK*, VI, viii)

Pimple's 'funny ideas' are rooted in early, albeit simplified, forms of industrial capitalism. He wishes to own more and in doing so, dominate more. It is later revealed that Pimple, who takes control of the mill,<sup>5</sup> 'brought in a lot o' dirty-looking Men to build a bigger [mill] and fill it full o' wheels and outlandish contraptions...Pimple's idea was to grind more and faster, or so he said' (*RK*, VI, viii). Pimple's work in the mill is rooted in the domination and exploitation of 'dirty-looking Men' and, as is noted by the end of the passage by Cotton, 'I don't believe that fool of a Pimple's behind all this. It's Sharkey, I say' (*RK*, VI, viii). Capitalism enters its infant stages in the form of exploitive industrialisation and comes in conjunction with the panoptic force, which embeds itself in the culture, symbolised, in this case, with a reference to the vague, authoritarian power of 'Sharkey.'

These examples from the novel form an important pattern. As the destruction of community and intimacy becomes more and more apparent, the sense of isolation, discipline, and control take hold with the rise of industrial capitalism. One section that encapsulates this process fully occurs during Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin's journey to Bag End:

The great chimney rose up before them; and as they drew near the old village across the Water, through rows of new mean houses along each side of the road, they saw the new mill in all its frowning and dirty ugliness: a great brick building straddling the stream, which it fouled with a steaming and stinking outflow. All along the Bywater Road every tree had been felled. As they crossed the bridge and looked up the hill they gasped...The Old Grange on the west side had been knocked down, and in its place taken by rows of tarred sheds...Bagshot row was a yawning sand and gravel quarry. Bag End up beyond could not be seen for a clutter of large huts. (*RK*, VI, viii)

The preceding passage summarises the transition from the sleepy agrarian system of the familiar and communal often associated with the 'idyllic life uncluttered by the excesses of modern big city capitalism' (Richards and Witt, p. 198) to the industrial, orderly, and visible. Where trees and homes once dotted the landscape, there are now 'rows of new mean houses' and 'tarred sheds.' The 'meanness' and sterility of the new structures create an imposing

orderliness that the hobbits find ugly and daunting. The trees are cut down, leading to a greater sense of exposure. There is now a 'yawning sand and gravel quarry' which creates a sense of vast openness, emptiness, and visibility to contrast the once cosy and lush landscape. There are clusters of 'large huts,' which obscure any direct view of Bag End at the top of the Hill, now occupied by the elusive Sharkey. The entire passage is punctuated by the physically imposing 'great chimney' which looms over all.

The image of community being fractured at the hands of the Panopticon is made even more overtly manifest at the destruction of the Party Tree and the interaction between Sam and Ted Sandyman, who praises the changes in the Shire. 'They've cut it down...They've cut down the Party Tree!' observes Sam upon approaching the 'lopped and dead' tree in the field (*RK*, VI, viii). The Party Tree long stood as a symbol for community and togetherness and with its destruction, the encroaching power has struck its final and most detrimental blow, causing Sam to 'burst into tears' upon witnessing the ruin. Sandyman, a Hobbit who owns a mill and recognises the approaching changes in the Shire as advantageous from a venture capitalist perspective, approaches the distraught Sam. He is a 'surlly hobbit,' 'grimy-faced' and 'black-handed,' immediately suggesting his association with the destructive industrialisation that has taken root. His appearance and subsequent dialogue cause a distinct separation and aversion between the hobbits who look on, scowling: "Don't 'ee like it, Sam?" he sneered. "But you always was soft. I thought you'd gone off in one o' them ships you used to prattle about, sailing, sailing. What d'you want to come back for? We've work to do in the Shire now'" (*RK*, VI, viii). Sandyman's language is immediately divisive as it seeks to create separation between himself and Sam. There is 'work to do in the Shire now' Sandyman expounds, alluding to the processes of industrialisation that have become the new norm. Sandyman's 'work' requires the destruction of life to create sterile, ordered, and isolated structures, and his oppositional language furthers the effects of isolation that comes with the encroaching panoptic power. Even his name, 'Sandyman,' harkens to the 'yawning sand and gravel quarry,' symbolising sterility and non-growth.

The greatest issue at this point in *RK*, however, comes with the hegemonic complexities of the panoptic structure that are rooted in the apparent impossibility of escape. The Panopticon is a structure so securely threaded in society that liberation seems futile, because the very notion of escape necessitates a distinction between the residents of the community and the structures which contain and govern them. In the Panopticon, these structures are omnipresent; they function automatically and nearly invisibly. It is a 'cruel, ingenious cage' and 'its functioning... must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use' (Foucault, 'Panopticism,' p. 205). The Panopticon's power lies within its ability to operate as a driving force, a way

of negotiating and defining power between people and institutions so seamlessly that it tricks one into believing it to be the only avenue, the only way for operating societally. Foucault points to the very structures of modern societal institutions to prove his point: ‘The practice of placing individuals under “observation” is a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures...is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?’ (Foucault, ‘Panopticism’, pp. 227-8). Our ‘factories, schools, barracks, hospitals’ all resemble prisons because Panopticism is our governing process. Panopticism leads to the way we organise society around us and is ultimately the foundation of the way we think. Sandyman appears to fall victim to this ideological framework first, as one who already finds himself engrossed in the industrial capitalist mindset.

Luckily for the returning hobbits, all hope is not yet lost. If there is an antidote to the malady of Panopticism, Tolkien places it within the structure of community care and healing. Jane Chance suggests that ‘the maintenance of society is best advanced by the caretaker and the gardener, those who nurture others and continue the work of the family or nation’ (p. 22). By extension, the community of caretakers is a community in which those healers, ‘in their role of understanding and tolerating individual differences within the community...empower both the individual and society, or, together, the social network’ (Chance, p. 22). One might also consider the field of ‘care ethics’ in this regard, as representative of a space distinctly opposed to the panoptic and industrial-capitalist forces that seek to divide communal spaces. Nel Noddings’ discussion of care ethics<sup>6</sup> posits that relational ethics are ‘rooted in and dependent on natural caring’ as ‘he or she calls on a sense of obligation in order to stimulate natural caring’ (p. 219). Virginia Held also discusses the notion of community care as a community grapples with its value system. Upon the four hobbits’ return to the Shire, they are quickly overcome by the sense that the Shire has had a new value system forced upon it, one marked by industrialisation, and, as Patrick Curry characterises it, ‘fascist thuggery and forced modernization’ (p. 41), which has largely blasted away its idyllic pastoral and communal spaces. Names are replaced with vague and sinister titles and the very landscape has started to become a wasteland, directly tied to the residents of Hobbiton who have become more insular and detached. The intimate sense of care that comes from the communal space has fallen away:

We can understand how a caring community will sustain and validate the efforts of caring persons, and how much more difficult it is for persons to cultivate caring relations when the messages from the ‘community’ promote, instead, the values of egoism, competition, and the victory of the fittest. (Held, p. 43)

Clearly, when the Shire falls to acidic forms of industrial capitalism and the panoptic structure, intimate communal

and personal relationships suffer, and thus even the natural landscape, emblematic of the hobbits’ sense of community (best encapsulated in the Party Tree) suffers as well in a kind of pathetic fallacy.

This reading certainly rings true regarding the crisis faced by the returning hobbits in ‘The Scouring of the Shire’ chapter, as they seek to restore community and healing to a Shire that has been pulled apart in its implementation of panoptic models of power. Importantly, the returning hobbits consistently refer to the encroaching ordering and industrialising of the Shire as ‘disorder,’ which suggests that the minds of Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin have not yet succumbed to the panoptic models of thought that have already enmeshed other fellow hobbits like Pimple and Sandyman. Bag End stinks of ‘filth and disorder’ upon their arrival and ensuing confrontation with Saruman, and great waggons stand in ‘disorder in a field beaten bare of grass’ (*RK*, VI, viii). The hobbits do not see this ordering and industrialising as a way to improve the otherwise sleepy and rural Shire. They sense the inherent totalising power embedded in the newly organised and developed landscape. ‘Wake our people! They hate all this, you can see,’ exclaims Merry, rallying his fellow hobbits upon his return (*RK*, VI, viii). His perceptions of what society should be are founded on intimate community relations, which are of course contrary to the growing panoptic and industrial models that have gripped the Shire.

It is important to note at this point that the Shire, and the community relations therein, are not perfect, nor do they appear intended to be. The hobbits live in communities that are Tolkien’s idyllic representations of an ancient and idealised space in England; however, gossip, grudges, and petty theft of the Shire are not markers of some inherent and insidious evil within the structure depicted at the end of the novel. These instances, instead, appear to showcase the minor pockmarks of human nature. Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, Sancho Proudfoot, and even Ted Sandyman are not evil. Instead, they are flawed like all hobbits and, by extension, all Men. No doubt, this is something Tolkien, as a Catholic and one who identified as a ‘*Hobbit* (in all but size)’ would have attested to (*Letters* 213). The real evil for Tolkien is not in gossip, petty crime, or other small acts of human greed and selfishness, but in domination of will. This would seem to also include murder, as Frodo attests that ‘[n]o hobbit has ever killed another on purpose in the Shire’ (*RK*, VI, viii). As Richards and Witt point out, in one of his letters, Tolkien claims that:

The most improper job of any man, even saints (who at any rate were at least unwilling to take it on), is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity. (*Letters* 64)

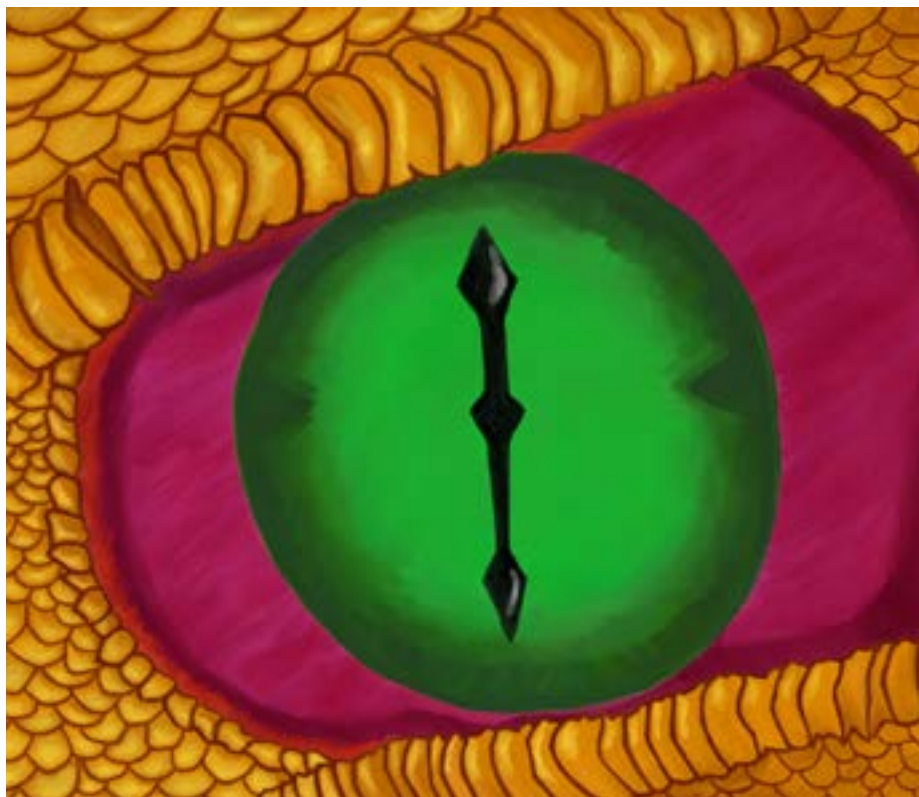
They go on to add that ‘[w]ith the Shire, Tolkien had created a society after his own heart,’ the good with the bad (Richards and Witt, p. 271).

By the end of the *RK*, the returning hobbits insight a

rebellion among their fellow community members and overthrow Saruman, who is betrayed (literally stabbed in the back) by his lackey Grima Wormtongue, thus further emphasising the notion that '[e]vil shall slay the wicked' (Psalm 34:21) and that evil always contains the seeds of its own undoing. All the while, several important occurrences surrounding the actions of the healer and caretaker Frodo are provided. '[I]t is evidently high time that the family dealt with him and put him in his place,' Frodo exclaims at the entrance to Hobbiton upon hearing of the elusive 'Chief' who has come to occupy Bag End (RK, VI, viii). While at this point in the chapter, Frodo has not entirely registered the severity of the crisis currently faced by the people of the Shire, this early proclamation frames the coming events in the chapter. The 'family,' and by extension the community,<sup>7</sup> is crucial to the reading of this essay, as it will become vital to the destruction of the panoptic stronghold.

Frodo consistently demonstrates his desire for peace and healing in the Shire upon his arrival and must remind Sam, Merry, and Pippin of their inherent connection to a now altered and insular hobbit community.

He does so by establishing a binary, in which the communal and familial stand apart from the panoptic. 'Remember' explains Frodo, that '[t]here is to be no slaying of hobbits, not even if they have gone over to the other side. Really gone over, I mean...nobody is to be killed at all, if it can be helped' (RK, VI, viii). The hobbits, as previously mentioned, have no problem recognising that the rest of the community has become a kind of 'disordered' ordering, in which affronting sterilisation has replaced a more intimate way of life. The 'other side,' as Frodo describes it, is not so simply a kind of evil or 'dark side,' but rather a side in which fear of retribution, surveillance, and punishment govern one's actions. It is fear of a faceless and nameless 'Chief' that leads to the hobbits' initial refusal to admit the returning heroes into Hobbiton in the first place. Frodo is consistently attuned to this problem and recognises that



the answer to defeating the encroaching structure cannot solely come in the form of a violent overthrow, but also through communal reconciliation and healing.

The panoptic structure culminates in the physical destruction of the landscape, the building of factories, and the presence of Sharkey's men, but first and foremost, the Panopticon is a system, a governing form of surveillance and ordering that is interiorised, a form of 'machinery that no one owns' (Foucault, 'The Eye of Power', p. 5). The 'Battle of the Bywater,' the ousting of Sharkey's men, and even the death of Saruman are means to treat the symptoms that have run amok throughout the Shire, but violent revolution on the part of the hobbits cannot ultimately save the Shire from the Panopticon. As Shippey notes, "'The Scouring of the Shire'" gives a reminder that

the loss and damage of wars do not end with victory parades, but drag on in drabness and poverty' (p. 168). The overthrow of Sharkey's regime is the first critical and brutal step following the rest of the necessary violence that the free peoples of Middle-earth must

take to liberate themselves from the threat of authoritarian despots and tyrants. However, following the overthrow, the true healing must begin. As initial, principal healer, Frodo 'had not drawn his sword, and his chief part had been to prevent the hobbits in their wrath' (RK, VI, viii). He recognises that the healing of the Shire must utilise a force like that of the panoptic. Community healing must disperse itself outward through the actions, or in this case, the inaction of Frodo and its people, to counter the swarming nature of panoptic discipline and surveillance. Panoptic power slowly seeps into Hobbiton; therefore, to be dispatched, it must be slowly and carefully evaporated.

In the final conversation with Saruman, Frodo explains 'I have already done much that you will find it hard to mend or undo in your lives' (RK, VI, viii). Saruman recognises the difficulty in removing the structure he helped to unleash

upon the Shire. It is a generalising, institutionalising power and a system of discipline and surveillance that cannot be removed with violent overthrow alone. As Foucault reminds us, '[w]hat generalizes the power to punish...is the regular extension, the infinitely minute web of panoptic techniques' ('Panopticism', p. 224). Saruman laughs while confronting Frodo and the rest of the hobbits because he knows that his physical ousting will not be enough to undo his work. It 'does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine: in the absence of the director, his family, his friends, his visitors, even his servants' (Foucault, 'Panopticism', p. 202). Frodo goes so far as to acknowledge this point, while maintaining the peace when he warns his fellow hobbits not to believe Saruman because '[h]e has lost all power, save his voice that can still daunt you and deceive you, if you let it' (*RK*, VI, viii). There need not be any actual power contained within Saruman's being at all, as the illusion of authority can be enough to sustain and perpetuate the panoptic system of power.

Saruman's being cast aside in the final moments of the chapter and then ultimately betrayed and murdered by Grima Wormtongue capture two final important elements. The first is the beginning of the evaporation of the panoptic structure as community returns to the Shire with the death of Saruman. His spirit, nothing more than wisps of white smoke following his murder, rises up and looks West towards Arda, hoping for a return to his own community; however, he is denied entry and thus dissolves into nothingness; 'a grey mist gathered' around Saruman's body and rose 'slowly to a great height like smoke from a fire...For a moment it wavered, looking to the West; but out of the West came a cold wind, and it bent way, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing' (*RK*, VI, viii). In this moment, Saruman's hold over the Shire is revealed to be more artifice than actual. His authority is bound to the impression of surveillance and discipline, which is really a literal smokescreen. The panoptic hold, following the reuniting of the community, is now, like Saruman's spirit, as thin as air. Having been denied a return to his own community, he dissipates into nothing.

The second element revealed in this scene is Frodo's actualisation of the role of healer and caretaker of the community, which must continue to rebuild following its dissolution of panoptic power. Frodo does not wish for Saruman to be slain in this moment and instead hopes that he may find redemption. Additionally, Frodo tells Grima that he 'need not follow [Saruman]' and offers him food, rest, and community until he is willing to go his separate way (*RK*, VI, viii). In this scene, Frodo actualises the role of caretaker in his community and seeks to heal and unite to undermine the work the panoptic has done. Unlike the panoptic force, which disempowers and insulates, the caretaker is healer of the community and 'empower[s] both the individual and society' (Chance, p. 22). The community structure is the only match for the panoptic forces as it is, in its essence, also a dispersed and

decentralised structure; however, while the Panopticon dominates, isolates, and orders, the community seeks to provide freedom, care, and intimacy that is not based in a desire to dominate or control. The solution is also far from a quick fix. Despite the casting out of Saruman's men and the return of the king to the throne, there is still much healing to be done from within the communal body. As Sam reminds us at the end of the chapter, 'I shan't call it the end, till we've cleared up the mess...And that'll take a lot of time and work' (*RK*, VI, viii). The total dissolution of the panoptic force will take the hard and deliberate efforts of the community working together; healing takes time.

It is important to remember, too, that Frodo is not a sovereign and his ability to unite and reform community is a power that comes from within the community itself. Despite his earlier explanations that the 'Dark Tower has fallen and there is a king in Gondor,' the rightful king of Gondor can do nothing in the promise of his presence alone to discontinue the panoptic forces at work in the Shire. The ability to upset the panoptic structure cannot come from a hierarchical and totalised symbol of regal and authoritative power, since this is not the way panoptic power works. As we are reminded in Foucault's 'The Eye of Power,' 'no one can or may occupy the role that the King had in the old system, that is as the source of power and justice' (p. 5). He goes on to state that, 'power is arranged as a machine working by a complex system of cogs and gears...no reliance can be placed on a single individual' (p. 5). While bizarre to consider the 'return of the king' as less significant in the re-establishing of the rightful order in the Shire, one must not forget that Tolkien places special emphasis on the power of self-sovereignty and community. The return of the rightful king of Gondor is certainly a critical step towards establishing peace and balance in Middle Earth; however, one should not forget how *RK* ends. What healing begins with Frodo and the rest of the returning hobbits, ends with the figure who best encapsulates caretaking: the gardener hero. As Chance points out, Sam Gamgee, the 'everyman,' serves as the final note to the slow return of community and healing in the Shire, years after the fall of Sauron, the start of Aragorn's reign, and Frodo's departure. The gardener 'has returned to his castle – to love, safety, nourishment, his family.' Sam is 'home again, as Tolkien the orphan always understood the true power of the most loving community' (Chance, p. 108). In ending a tale as epic in scale as *The Lord of the Rings* with a humble, yet poignant glimpse of Sam seated at his dinner table, with Rosie greeting his return and his daughter Elanor on his lap, Sam punctuates the real return of community and family. Sam is our best encapsulation of the community at large, finally renewed and at peace with itself following the dispersion of the panoptic industrial complex, perhaps giving new meaning to his final words, 'Well, I'm back.'

Notes

- 1 See Jes Battis' 'Gazing Upon Sauron: Hobbits, Elves, And The Queering Of The Postcolonial Optic,' H.F. Ramos' 'Sauron's panopticon: Power and surveillance in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*' and Cherylynn Silva's 'One Ring to Rule Them All: Power and Surveillance in the Film Adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*,' in addition to sources cited in the essay that deal with panoptic power in Tolkien.
- 2 Jonathan Witt and Jay W. Richards point out in their chapter entitled 'The Free Peoples and the Master of Middle-Earth' that the importance of self-sovereignty is sustained in Aragorn's decision never to enter The Shire, after being crowned king, out of his respect for its freedom and self-governance. The King 'has a crucial role to play in this picture of ordered liberty, but Tolkien emphasizes the indispensable role of the citizen as well' (Richards and Witt, *The Hobbit Party*, p. 175).
- 3 See Kelly's discussion of economic anomalies in *The Lord of the Rings* and commodity fetishism in the form of pipe-weed in 'Breaking the Dragon's Gaze: Commodity Fetishism in Tolkien's Middle-earth.'
- 4 See letters 52 'From a letter to Christopher Tolkien 29 November 1943' and 131 'To Milton Waldman' on fears regarding issues of industrialization, destruction, and government overreach.
- 5 There is long-standing symbolism associated with the 'Mill' as being a place of economic and moral corruption in the Middle Ages. This is famously embodied in Chaucer's Miller character in *The Canterbury Tales*.
- 6 Noddings' full discussion of relational ethics, which are an essential framework for understanding principles of human relations in a vast scope of human interpersonal experiences, can be found in her article 'An Ethic of Caring and Its Implications for Instructional Arrangements.'
- 7 Hobbiton and many of the other hobbit communities are, by and large, intimately connected through close family ties. Famously, in the case of the Tooks and Bagginses for example, Bilbo is remarkably 'Tookish' at points throughout *The Hobbit*, despite being a Baggins on his father's side. Family traits become indicators of the intimate and familial nature of the community in which naming, family trees, and communal celebrations intertwine with family festivities. *FR*, of course, opens with a large community celebration for Bilbo's birthday. For more on hobbit familial and communal relations, see letter 214 To A. C. Nunn in Tolkien's *Letters*.

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