

Addiction, Hope, and Recovery in Tolkien's the Lord of the Rings

Submission ID	3004169
Submission Type	Workshop
Topic	Addiction- Substance Use Disorders: Identifying, Diagnosing, Treating, and/or Managing
Status	Submitted
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Participant(s)	Lisa Terris (Chairperson), James Berry (Presenter), Lisa Terris (Presenter)

SUBMISSION DETAILS

Workshop Summary The workshop will be divided into 4 major sections, examining key passages of The Lord of the Rings and analyzing characters and their behaviors in the context of trauma and addiction. Tolkien's personal experience as a "trench writer" in the wake of World War I informed his perspective on how addiction and despair affect characters like Frodo and Gollum. Highlighting key narrative arcs, such as Frodo's burden of the One Ring and Gollum's obsessive greed for the One Ring, this study analyzes addiction's psychological, spiritual, and social dimensions, including the erosion of self, relational fallout, social isolation, and stigma. Utilizing Tolkien's definition of hope as trust, supplemented by Alcoholics Anonymous' 12 Steps, and as illustrated in Aragorn's march against the Black Gate, this study demonstrates that hope enables a sense of purpose as a result of relational connection. This study thus argues that 1) hope and purpose are antidotes to despair, 2) relational connection is essential to recovery, and 3) compassion is a necessary component in moral judgment. Combining the expertise of a leading addiction psychiatrist and neuromodulation researcher with that of an internationally known Tolkien scholar, this interdisciplinary session engages literature, psychology, and addiction science to examine J.R.R. Tolkien's portrayal of addiction in the context of trauma, despair, and human connection. This in-depth examination of a literary narrative, as informed by current sociological and scientific literature, aims to illuminate the human condition, enhance empathy, and inform clinical practice regarding substance use disorders.

Workshop Interaction and Engagement Methods Other

Interactive Plan Description Presentation (45 minutes)
Guided Group Analysis (15 minutes for each question – 45 total)

Discussion Questions:

1. Which of the themes found in Tolkien's narrative do you believe most resonate with your patient population?
2. How can you envision employing the relevant themes to help your patients, trainees and the

public better understand addiction and recovery processes?

3. What other examples of art and literature can you consider as a tool to engage the imagination in regards to understanding and teaching addiction and recovery?

Divide participants into small groups

- Allow for small group discussion for each question (5 minutes)
- Bring back to the larger group to discuss (10 minutes)
- Do this for each discussion question (15 minutes total for each question)

Interactive Discussion as a large group

- Reconvene after each small group discussion and have each group share key insights.
- Facilitate a broader discussion on the spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions of addiction in Tolkien's narrative.
- Lead a reflective exercise where attendees connect themes in Tolkien's work to contemporary issues in addiction psychiatry and recovery.
- Prompt attendees to share parallels between the narrative's portrayal of recovery and real-world strategies (e.g., the role of community, hope, or purpose).

Closing Reflection

- Summarize the insights from the workshop.
- Pose final questions for thought:
 1. How does Tolkien's narrative change the way we view addiction and recovery?
 2. What lessons can we apply in clinical, literary, or personal contexts?

Writing Educational Learning Objectives

Please list at least three (3) brief learning objectives below.

Learning Objective 1 Analyze literary depictions of addiction to understand its psychological and social dimensions.

Learning Objective 2 Identify parallels between Tolkien's themes of recovery and contemporary

Learning Objective 3 Engage in interdisciplinary dialogue to enhance empathy and clinical practice